

1700

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

William Congreve

Congreve, William (1670-1729) - English dramatist who is generally considered the master of the British comedy of manners. He was a fellow student of Jonathan Swift at Trinity College in Dublin. *The Way of the World* (1700) - Now considered his greatest work, this play was so poorly received in 1700 that Congreve resolved to write no more for the stage. The plot revolves around Mirabell, a witty gentleman, and Millamant, the equally witty coquette he wishes to marry.

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THE WAY OF THE WORLD

Audire est operae pretium, procedere recte
Qui moechis non vultis.

HORAT. Lib. i. Sat. 2.

Metuat, doti deprensa.

Ibid.

COMMENDATORY VERSES

To Mr. CONGREVE, occasioned by his Comedy called
“The Way of the World.”

WHEN pleasure’s falling to the low delight,
In the vain joys of the uncertain sight;
No sense of wit when rude spectators know,
But in distorted gesture, farce and show;
How could, great author, your aspiring mind
Dare to write only to the few refined?
Yet though that nice ambition you pursue,
‘Tis not in Congreve’s power to please but few.
Implicitly devoted to his fame,
Well-dressed barbarians know his awful name.
Though senseless they’re of mirth, but when they laugh,
As they feel wine, but when, till drunk, they quaff.
On you from fate a lavish portion fell
In every way of writing to excel.
Your muse applause to Arabella brings,
In notes as sweet as Arabella sings.

Whene'er you draw an undissembled woe,
With sweet distress your rural numbers flow:
Pastora's the complaint of every swain,
Pastora still the echo of the plain!
Or if your muse describe, with warming force,
The wounded Frenchman falling from his horse;
And her own William glorious in the strife,
Bestowing on the prostrate foe his life:
You the great act as generously rehearse,
And all the English fury's in your verse.
By your selected scenes and handsome choice,
Ennobled Comedy exalts her voice;
You check unjust esteem and fond desire,
And teach to scorn what else we should admire:
The just impression taught by you we bear,
The player acts the world, the world the player;
Whom still that world unjustly disesteems,
Though he alone professes what he seems.
But when your muse assumes her tragic part,
She conquers and she reigns in every heart:
To mourn with her men cheat their private woe,
And generous pity's all the grief they know.

The widow, who, impatient of delay,
From the town joys must mask it to the play,
Joins with your Mourning Bride's resistless moan,
And weeps a loss she slighted when her own:
You give us torment, and you give us ease,
And vary our afflictions as you please.
Is not a heart so kind as yours in pain,
To load your friends with cares you only feign;
Your friends in grief, composed yourself, to leave?
But 'tis the only way you'll e'er deceive.
Then still, great sir, your moving power employ,
To lull our sorrow, and correct our joy.

RICHARD STEELE.
EARL OF MONTAGUE

To the Right Honourable
RALPH, EARL OF MONTAGUE, &c.

MY LORD,

Whether the world will arraign me of vanity or not, that I have presumed to dedicate this comedy to your Lordship, I am yet in doubt; though, it may be, it is some degree of vanity even to doubt of it. One who

has at any time had the honour of your Lordship's conversation, cannot be supposed to think very meanly of that which he would prefer to your perusal; yet it were to incur the imputation of too much sufficiency, to pretend to such a merit as might abide the test of your Lordship's censure.

Whatever value may be wanting to this play while yet it is mine, will be sufficiently made up to it when it is once become your Lordship's; and it is my security that I cannot have overrated it more by my dedication, than your Lordship will dignify it by your patronage.

That it succeeded on the stage, was almost beyond my expectation; for but little of it was prepared for that general taste which seems now to be predominant in the palates of our audience.

Those characters which are meant to be ridiculed in most of our comedies, are of fools so gross, that, in my humble opinion, they should rather disturb than divert the well-natured and reflecting part of an audience; they are rather objects of charity than contempt; and instead of moving our mirth, they ought very often to excite our compassion.

This reflection moved me to design some characters which should appear ridiculous, not so much through a natural folly (which is incorrigible, and therefore not proper for the stage) as through an affected wit; a wit, which at the same time that it is affected, is also false. As there is some difficulty in the formation of a character of this nature, so there is some hazard which attends the progress of its success upon the stage; for many

come to a play so overcharged with criticism, that they very often let fly their censure, when through their rashness they have mistaken their aim. This I had occasion lately to observe; for this play had been acted two or three days, before some of these hasty judges could find the leisure to distinguish betwixt the character of a Witwoud and a Truewit.

I must beg your Lordship's pardon for this digression from the true course of this epistle; but that it may not seem altogether impertinent, I beg that I may plead the occasion of it, in part of that excuse of which I stand in need, for recommending this comedy to your protection. It is only by the countenance of your Lordship, and the few so qualified, that such who wrote with care and pains can hope to be distinguished; for the prostituted name of poet promiscuously levels all that bear it.

Terence, the most correct writer in the world, had a Scipio and a Laelius, if not to assist him, at least to support him in his reputation; and notwithstanding his extraordinary merit, it may be their countenance was not more than necessary.

The purity of his style, the delicacy of his turns, and the justness of his characters, were all of them beauties which the greater part of his audience were incapable of tasting; some of the coarsest strokes of Plautus, so severely censured by Horace, were more likely to affect the multitude; such who come with expectation to laugh at the last act of a play, and are

better entertained with two or three unseasonable jests, than with the artful solution of the fable.

As Terence excelled in his performances, so had he great advantages to encourage his undertakings; for he built most on the foundations of Menander; his plots were generally modelled, and his characters ready drawn to his hand. He copied Menander, and Menander had no less light in the formation of his characters, from the observations of Theophrastus, of whom he was a disciple; and Theophrastus, it is known, was not only the disciple, but the immediate successor of Aristotle, the first and greatest judge of poetry. These were great models to design by- and the further advantage which Terence possessed, towards giving his plays the due ornaments of purity of style and justness of manners, was not less considerable, from the freedom of conversation which was permitted him with Laelius and Scipio, two of the greatest and most polite men of his age. And indeed the privilege of such a conversation is the only certain means of attaining to the perfection of dialogue.

If it has happened in any part of this comedy, that I have gained a turn of style or expression more correct, or at least, more corrigible, than in those which I have formerly written, I must, with equal pride and gratitude, ascribe it to honour of your Lordship's admitting me into your conversation, and that of a society where everybody else was so well worthy of you, in your retirement last summer from the town; for it was immedi-

ately after that this comedy was written. If I have failed in my performance, it is only to be regretted, where there were so many, not inferior either to a Scipio or a Laelius, that there should be one wanting equal in capacity to a Terence.

If I am not mistaken, poetry is almost the only art which has not yet laid claim to your Lordship's patronage. Architecture and painting, to the great honour of our country, have flourished under your influence and protection. In the mean time, poetry, the eldest sister of all arts, and parent of most, seems to have resigned her birthright, by having neglected to pay her duty to your Lordship, and by permitting others of a later extraction, to prepossess that place in your esteem to which none can pretend a better title. Poetry, in its nature, is sacred to the good and great; the relation between them is reciprocal, and they are ever propitious to it. It is the privilege of poetry to address to them, and it is their prerogative alone to give it protection.

This received maxim is a general apology for all writers who consecrate their labours to great men; but I could wish at this time, that this address were exempted from the common pretence of all dedications; and that I can distinguish your Lordship even among the most deserving, so this offering might become remarkable by some particular instance of respect, which should assure your Lordship, that I am, with all due sense of

your extreme worthiness and humanity, my Lord, your Lordship's most
obedient, and most obliged humble servant,

WILL. CONGREVE.

PROLOGUE

SPOKEN BY MR. BETTERTON

Of those few fools who with ill stars are curst,
Sure scribbling fools, called poets, fare the worst:
For they're a sort of fools which Fortune makes,
And after she has made 'em fools, forsakes.
With Nature's oafs 'tis quite a different case,
For Fortune favours all her idiot-race.
In her own nest the cuckoo-eggs we find,
O'er which she broods to hatch the changeling-kind.
No portion for her own she has to spare,
So much she dotes on her adopted care.

Poets are bubbles, by the town drawn in,
Suffered at first some trifling stakes to win;
But what unequal hazards do they run!
Each time they write they venture all they've won:
The squire that's buttered still, is sure to be undone.
This author heretofore has found your favour;

But pleads no merit from his past behaviour.
To build on that might prove a vain presumption,
Should grants, to poets made, admit resumption:
And in Parnassus he must lose his seat,
If that be found a forfeited estate.

He owns with toil he wrought the following scenes;
But, if they're naught, ne'er spare him for his pains:
Damn him the more; have no commiseration
For dulness on mature deliberation,
He swears he'll not resent one hissed-off scene,
Nor, like those peevish wits, his play maintain,
Who, to assert their sense, your taste arraign.
Some plot we think he has, and some new thought;
Some humour too, no farce; but that's a fault.
Satire, he thinks, you ought not to expect;
For so reformed a town who dares correct?
To please, this time, has been his sole pretence,
He'll not instruct, lest it should give offence.
Should he by chance a knave or fool expose,
That hurts none here, sure here are none of those:
In short, our play shall (with your leave to show it)

Give you one instance of a passive poet,
Who to your judgments yields all resignation;
So save or damn, after your own discretion.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MEN

FAINALL, in love with MRS. MARWOOD.

MIRABELL, in love with MRS. MILLAMANT.

WITWOUD,

Followers of Mrs. Millamant.

PETULANT,

SIR WILFULL WITWOUD, half Brother to WITWOUD,

and Nephew to LADY WISHFORT.

WAITWELL, Servant to MIRABELL.

WOMEN

LADY WISHFORT, Enemy to MIRABELL,

for having falsely pretended love to her.

MRS. MILLAMANT, a fine Lady, Niece to LADY WISHFORT,
and loves MIRABELL.

MRS. MARWOOD, Friend to MR. FAINALL, and likes
MIRABELL.

MRS. FAINALL, Daughter to LADY WISHFORT,
and Wife to FAINALL, formerly Friend to MIRABELL.

FOIBLE, Woman to LADY WISHFORT.

MINCING. Woman to MRS. MILLAMANT.

BETTY, Waiting-maid at a Chocolate-house.

PEG, Maid to LADY WISHFORT.

Coachmen, Dancers, Footmen, and Attendants.

ACT I

SCENE I

A Chocolate House

MIRABELL and FAINALL, rising from cards, BETTY waiting.

MIR

You are a fortunate man, Mr. Fainall!

FAIN

Have we done?

MIR

What you please: I'll play on to entertain you.

FAIN

No, I'll give you your revenge another time, when you are not so indifferent; you are thinking of something else now, and play too negligently; the coldness of a losing gamester lessens the pleasure of the winner. I'd no more play with a man that slighted his ill fortune than I'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation.

MIR

You have a taste extremely delicate, and are for refining on

your pleasures.

FAIN

Prithee, why so reserved? Something has put you out of humour.

MIR

Not at all: I happen to be grave to day, and you are gay; that's all.

FAIN

Confess, Millamant and you quarrelled last night after I left you; my fair cousin has some humours that would tempt the patience of a Stoic. What, some coxcomb came in, and was well received by her, while you were by?

MIR

Witwoud and Petulant; and what was worse, her aunt, your wife's mother, my evil genius: or to sum up all in her own name, my old Lady Wishfort came in.

FAIN

O there it is then! She has a lasting passion for you, and with reason.- What, then my wife was there?

MIR

Yes, and Mrs. Marwood, and three or four more, whom I never saw

before. Seeing me, they all put on their grave faces, whispered one another; then complained aloud of the vapours, and after fell into a profound silence.

FAIN

They had a mind to be rid of you.

MIR

For which reason I resolved not to stir. At last the good old lady broke through her painful taciturnity with an invective against long visits. I would not have understood her, but Millamant joining in the argument, I rose, and, with a constrained smile, told her, I thought nothing was so easy as to know when a visit began to be troublesome. She reddened, and I withdrew, without expecting her reply.

FAIN

You were to blame to resent what she spoke only in compliance with her aunt.

MIR

She is more mistress of herself than to be under the necessity of such a resignation.

FAIN

What! though half her fortune depends upon her marrying with my lady's approbation?

MIR

I was then in such a humour, that I should have been better pleased if she had been less discreet,

FAIN

Now, I remember, I wonder not they were weary of you; last night was one of their cabal nights; they have 'em three times a-week, and meet by turns at one another's apartments, where they come together like the coroner's inquest, to sit upon the murdered reputations of the week. You and I are excluded; and it was once proposed that all the male sex should be excepted; but somebody moved that, to avoid scandal, there might be one man of the community; upon which motion Witwoud and Petulant were enrolled members.

MIR

And who may have been the foundress of this sect? My Lady Wishfort, I warrant, who publishes her detestation of mankind; and full of the vigour of fifty-five, declares for a friend and ratafia; and let posterity shift for itself, she'll breed no

more.

FAIN

The discovery of your sham addresses to her, to conceal your love to her niece, has provoked this separation; had you dissembled better, things might have continued in the state of nature.

MIR

I did as much as man could, with any reasonable conscience; I proceeded to the very last act of flattery with her, and was guilty of a song in her commendation. Nay, I got a friend to put her into a lampoon, and compliment her with the imputation of an affair with a young fellow, which I carried so far, that I told her the malicious town took notice that she was grown fat of a sudden; and when she lay in of a dropsy, persuaded her she was reported to be in labour. The devil's in't, if an old woman is to be flattered further, unless a man should endeavour downright personally to debauch her; and that my virtue forbade me. But for the discovery of this amour I am indebted to your friend, or your wife's friend, Mrs. Marwood.

FAIN

What should provoke her to be your enemy, unless she has made

you advances which you have slighted? Women do not easily forgive omissions of that nature.

MIR

She was always civil to me till of late.- I confess I am not one of those coxcombs who are apt to interpret a woman's good manners to her prejudice, and think that she who does not refuse 'em everything, can refuse 'em nothing.

FAIN

You are a gallant man, Mirabell; and though you may have cruelty enough not to satisfy a lady's longing, you have too much generosity not to be tender of her honour. Yet you speak with an indifference which seems to be affected, and confesses you are conscious of a negligence.

MIR

You pursue the argument with a distrust that seems to be unaffected, and confesses you are conscious of a concern for which the lady is more indebted to you than is your wife.

FAIN

Fy, fy, friend! if you grow censorious I must leave you.- I'll look upon the gamesters in the next room.

MIR

Who are they?

FAIN

Petulant and Witwoud.- (To BETTY) Bring me some chocolate.
(Exit)

MIR

Betty, what says your clock?

BET

Turned of the last canonical hour, sir. (Exit)

MIR

How pertinently the jade answers me!- (Looking on his watch.)- Ha! almost one o'clock!- O, y'are come!

Enter Footman.

Well, is the grand affair over? You have been something tedious.

FOOT

Sir, there's such coupling at Pancras, that they stand behind one another, as 'twere in a country dance. Ours was the last

couple to lead up; and no hopes appearing of despatch; besides, the parson growing hoarse, we were afraid his lungs would have failed before it came to our turn; so we drove round to Duke's-place; and there they were rivetted in a trice.

MIR

So, so, you are sure they are married.

FOOT

Married and bedded, sir; I am witness.

MIR

Have you the certificate?

FOOT

Here it is, sir.

MIR

Has the tailor brought Waitwell's clothes home, and the new liveries?

FOOT

Yes, sir.

MIR

That's well. Do you go home again, d'ye hear, and adjourn the consummation till further orders. Bid Waitwell shake his ears.

and Dame Partlet rustle up her feathers, and meet me at one o'clock by Rosamond's Pond, that I may see her before she returns to her lady; and as you tender your ears be secret.

(Exeunt)

ACT I

SCENE II

The same

MIRABELL, FAINALL, and BETTY.

FAIN

Joy of your success, Mirabell; you look pleased.

MIR

Ay; I have been engaged in a matter of some sort of mirth, which is not yet ripe for discovery. I am glad this is not a cabal night. I wonder, Fainall, that you who are married, and of consequence should be discreet, will suffer your wife to be of such a party.

FAIN

Faith, I am not jealous. Besides, most who are engaged are women and relations; and for the men, they are of a kind too

contemptible to give scandal.

MIR

I am of another opinion. The greater the coxcomb, always the more the scandal: for a woman, who is not a fool, can have but one reason for associating with a man who is one.

FAIN

Are you jealous as often as you see Witwoud entertained by Millamant?

MIR

Of her understanding I am, if not of her person.

FAIN

You do her wrong; for, to give her her due, she has wit.

MIR

She has beauty enough to make any man think so; and complaisance enough not to contradict him who shall tell her so.

FAIN

For a passionate lover, methinks you are a man somewhat too discerning in the failings of your mistress.

MIR

And for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a lover: for

I like her with all her faults; nay, like her for her faults.
Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her;
and those affectations which in another woman would be odious,
serve but to make her more agreeable. I'll tell thee, Fainall,
she once used me with that insolence, that in revenge I took her
to pieces; sifted her, and separated her failings; I studied
'em, and got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large, that I was
not without hopes one day or other to hate her heartily: to
which end I so used myself to think of 'em, that at length,
contrary to my design and expectation, they gave me every hour
less and less disturbance; till in a few days it became habitual
to me to remember 'em without being displeas'd. They are now
grown as familiar to me as my own frailties; and in all
probability, in a little time longer, I shall like 'em as well.

FAIN

Marry her, marry her! be half as well acquainted with her
charms, as you are with her defects, and my life on't, you are
your own man again.

MIR

Say you so?

FAIN

Ay, ay, I have experience: I have a wife, and so forth.

Enter Messenger.

MES

Is one Squire Witwoud here?

BET

Yes, what's your business?

MES

I have a letter for him, from his brother Sir Wilfull, which I am charged to deliver into his own hands.

BET

He's in the next room, friend- that way.
(Exit Messenger)

MIR

What, is the chief of that noble family in town, Sir Wilfull Witwoud?

FAIN

He is expected to-day. Do you know him?

MIR

I have seen him. He promises to be an extraordinary person; I think you have the honour to be related to him.

FAIN

Yes; he is half brother to this Witwoud by a former wife, who was sister to my Lady Wishfort, my wife's mother. If you marry Millamant, you must call cousins too.

MIR

I had rather be his relation than his acquaintance.

FAIN

He comes to town in order to equip himself for travel.

MIR

For travel! why, the man that I mean is above forty.

FAIN

No matter for that; 'tis for the honour of England, that all Europe should know we have blockheads of all ages.

MIR

I wonder there is not an act of parliament to save the credit of the nation, and prohibit the exportation of fools.

FAIN

By no means; 'tis better as 'tis. 'Tis better to trade with a little loss, than to be quite eaten up with being over-stocked.

MIR

Pray, are the follies of this knight-errant, and those of the squire his brother, anything related?

FAIN

Not at all; Witwoud grows by the knight, like a medlar grafted on a crab. One will melt in your mouth, and t'other set your teeth on edge; one is all pulp, and the other all core.

MIR

So one will be rotten before he be ripe, and the other will be rotten without ever being ripe at all.

FAIN

Sir Wilfull is an odd mixture of bashfulness and obstinacy. But when he's drunk he's as loving as the monster in the Tempest, and much after the same manner. To give t'other his due, he has something of good-nature, and does not always want wit.

MIR

Not always: but as often as his memory fails him, and his common-place of comparisons. He is a fool with a good memory, and some few scraps of other folks' wit. He is one whose conversation can never be approved, yet it is now and then to be endured. He has indeed one good quality, he is not exceptious; for he so passionately affects the reputation of understanding raillery, that he will construe an affront into a jest; and call downright rudeness and ill language, satire and fire.

FAIN

If you have a mind to finish his picture, you have an opportunity to do it at full length. Behold the original!

Enter WITWOUD.

WIT

Afford me your compassion, my dears! pity me, Fainall!
Mirabell, pity me!

MIR

I do from my soul.

FAIN

Why, what's the matter?

WIT

No letters for me, Betty?

BET

Did not a messenger bring you one but now, sir?

WIT

Ay, but no other?

BET

No, sir.

WIT

That's hard, that's very hard.- A messenger! a mule, a beast of burden! he has brought me a letter from the fool my brother, as heavy as a panegyric in a funeral sermon, or a copy of commendatory verses from one poet to another: and what's worse, 'tis as sure a forerunner of the author, as an epistle dedicatory.

MIR

A fool, and your brother, Witwoud!

WIT

Ay, ay, my half brother. My half brother he is, no nearer upon honour.

MIR

Then 'tis possible he may be but half a fool.

WIT

Good, good, Mirabell, le drole! good, good; hang him, don't let's talk of him.- Fainall, how does your lady? Gad, I say anything in the world to get this fellow out of my head. I beg pardon that I should ask a man of pleasure, and the town, a question at once so foreign and domestic. But I talk like an old maid at a marriage; I don't know what I say: but she's the best woman in the world.

FAIN

'Tis well you don't know what you say, or else your commendation would go near to make me either vain or jealous.

WIT

No man in town lives well with a wife but Fainall.- Your judgment, Mirabell.

MIR

You had better step and ask his wife, if you would be credibly informed.

WIT

Mirabell?

MIR

Ay.

WIT

My dear, I ask ten thousand pardons;- gad, I have forgot what I was going to say to you!

MIR

I thank you heartily, heartily.

WIT

No, but pritheee excuse me:- my memory is such a memory.

MIR

Have a care of such apologies, Witwoud; for I never knew a fool but he affected to complain, either of the spleen or his memory.

FAIN

What have you done with Petulant?

WIT

He's reckoning his money- my money it was.- I have no luck to-day.

FAIN

You may allow him to win of you at play: for you are sure to be too hard for him at repartee; since you monopolise the wit that is between you, the fortune must be his of course.

MIR

I don't find that Petulant confesses the superiority of wit to be your talent, Witwoud.

WIT

Come, come, you are malicious now, and would breed debates.- Petulant's my friend, and a very honest fellow, and a very pretty fellow, and has a smattering- faith and troth, a pretty deal of an odd sort of a small wit: nay, I'll do him justice. I'm his friend, I won't wrong him neither.- And if he had any judgment in the world, he would not be altogether contemptible. Come, come, don't detract from the merits of my friend.

FAIN

You don't take your friend to be over-nicely bred?

WIT

No, no, hang him, the rogue has no manners at all, that I must own:- no more breeding than a bum-bailiff, that I grant you:- 'tis pity, faith; the fellow has fire and life.

MIR

What, courage?

WIT

Hum, faith I don't know as to that, I can't say as to that- Yes, faith, in a controversy, he'll contradict anybody.

MIR

Though 'twere a man whom he feared, or a woman whom he loved.

WIT

Well, well, he does not always think before he speaks;- we have all our failings: you are too hard upon him, you are, faith. Let me excuse him- I can defend most of his faults, except one or two: one he has, that's the truth on't; if he were my brother, I could not acquit him:- that, indeed, I could wish were otherwise.

MIR

Ay, marry, what's that, Witwoud?

WIT

O pardon me!- expose the infirmities of my friend!- No, my dear, excuse me there.

FAIN

What, I warrant he's unsincere, or 'tis some such trifle.

WIT

No, no; what if he be? 'tis no matter for that, his wit will excuse that: a wit should no more be sincere, than a woman constant; one argues a decay of parts, as t'other of beauty.

MIR

Maybe you think him too positive?

WIT

No, no, his being positive is an incentive to argument, and keeps up conversation.

FAIN

Too illiterate?

WIT

That! that's his happiness:- his want of learning gives him

the more opportunities to show his natural parts.

MIR

He wants words?

WIT

Ay: but I like him for that now; for his want of words gives me the pleasure very often to explain his meaning.

FAIN

He's impudent?

WIT

No, that's not it.

MIR

Vain?

WIT

No.

MIR

What! he speaks unseasonable truths sometimes, because he has not wit enough to invent an evasion?

WIT

Truths! ha! ha! ha! no, no; since you will have it,- I mean, he

never speaks truth at all,- that's all. He will lie like a chambermaid, or a woman of quality's porter. Now that is a fault.

Enter Coachman.

COACH

Is Master Petulant here, mistress?

BET

Yes.

COACH

Three gentlewomen in a coach would speak with him.

FAIN

O brave Petulant! three!

BET

I'll tell him.

COACH

You must bring two dishes of chocolate and a glass of cinnamon-water. (Exeunt BETTY and Coachman)

WIT

That should be for two fasting strumpets, and a bawd troubled

with the wind. Now you may know what the three are.

MIR

You are very free with your friend's acquaintance.

WIT

Ay, ay, friendship without freedom is as dull as love without enjoyment, or wine without toasting. But to tell you a secret, these are trulls whom he allows coach-hire, and something more, by the week, to call on him once a-day at public places.

MIR

How!

WIT

You shall see he won't go to 'em, because there's no more company here to take notice of him.- Why this is nothing to what he used to do:- before he found out this way, I have known him call for himself.

FAIN

Call for himself! what dost thou mean?

WIT

Mean! why he would slip you out of this chocolate-house, just when you had been talking to him- as soon as your back was

turned- whip he was gone!- then trip to his lodging, clap on a hood and scarf, and a mask, slap into a hackney-coach, and drive hither to the door again in a trice, where he would send in for himself; that I mean, call for himself, wait for himself; nay, and what's more, not finding himself, sometimes leave a letter for himself.

MIR

I confess this is something extraordinary.- I believe he waits for himself now, he is so long a-coming: Oh! I ask his pardon.

Enter PETULANT and BETTY.

BET

Sir, the coach stays.

PET

Well, well;- I come.- 'Sbud, a man had as good be a professed midwife, as a professed whoremaster, at this rate! to be knocked up and raised at all hours, and in all places. Pox on 'em, I won't come!- D'ye hear, tell 'em I won't come:- let 'em snivel and cry their hearts out.

FAIN

You are very cruel, Petulant.

PET

All's one, let it pass:- I have a humour to be cruel.

MIR

I hope they are not persons of condition that you use at this rate.

PET

Condition! condition's a dried fig, if I am not in humour!- By this hand, if they were your- a- a- your what d'ye-call-'ems themselves, they must wait or rub off, if I want appetite.

MIR

What d'ye-call-'ems! what are they, Witwoud?

WIT

Empresses, my dear:- by your what-d'ye-call-'ems he means sultana queens.

PET

Ay, Roxolanas.

MIR

Cry you mercy!

FAIN

Witwoud says they are-

PET

What does he say th'are?

WIT

I? fine ladies, I say.

PET

Pass on, Witwoud.- Hark'ee, by this light his relations:- two co-heiresses his cousins, and an old aunt, who loves caterwauling better than a conventicle.

WIT

Ha! ha! ha! I had a mind to see how the rogue would come off.-
Ha! ha! ha! gad, I can't be angry with him, if he had said they
were my mother and my sisters.

MIR

No!

WIT

No; the rogue's wit and readiness of invention charm me. Dear
Petulant.

BET

They are gone, sir, in great anger.

PET

Enough, let 'em trundle. Anger helps complexion, saves paint.

FAIN

This continence is all dissembled; this is in order to have
something to brag of the next time he makes court to Millamant,
and swear he has abandoned the whole sex for her sake.

MIR

Have you not left off your impudent pretensions there yet? I
shall cut your throat some time or other, Petulant, about that

business.

PET

Ay, ay, let that pass- there are other throats to be cut.

MIR

Meaning mine, sir?

PET

Not I- I mean nobody- I know nothing:- but there are uncles and nephews in the world- and they may be rivals- what then! all's one for that.

MIR

How! hark'ee, Petulant, come hither:- explain, or I shall call your interpreter.

PET

Explain! I know nothing.- Why, you have an uncle, have you not, lately come to town, and lodges by my Lady Wishfort's?

MIR

True.

PET

Why, that's enough- you and he are not friends; and if he should marry and have a child, you may be disinherited, ha?

MIR

Where hast thou stumbled upon all this truth?

PET

All's one for that, why then say I know something.

MIR

Come, thou art an honest fellow, Petulant, and shalt make love to my mistress, thou sha't, faith. What hast thou heard of my uncle?

PET

I? nothing I. If throats are to be cut, let swords clash!
snug's the word, I shrug and am silent.

MIR

Oh, raillery, raillery! Come, I know thou art in the women's secrets.- What, you're a cabalist; I know you stayed at Millamant's last night, after I went. Was there any mention made of my uncle or me? tell me. If thou hadst but good-nature equal to thy wit, Petulant, Tony Witwoud, who is now thy competitor in fame, would show as dim by thee as a dead whiting's eye by a pearl of orient; he would no more be seen by thee, than Mercury is by the sun. Come, I'm sure thou wo't tell me.

PET

If I do, will you grant me common sense then for the future?

MIR

Faith, I'll do what I can for thee, and I'll pray that Heaven may grant it thee in the meantime.

PET

Well, hark'ee. (MIRABELL and PETULANT talk apart)

FAIN

Petulant and you both will find Mirabell as warm a rival as a lover.

WIT

Pshaw! pshaw! that she laughs at Petulant is plain. And for my part, but that it is almost a fashion to admire her, I should-hark'ee- to tell you a secret, but let it go no further- between friends, I shall never break my heart for her.

FAIN

How!

WIT

She's handsome; but she's a sort of an uncertain woman.

FAIN

I thought you had died for her.

WIT

Umh- no-

FAIN

She has wit.

WIT

'Tis what she will hardly allow anybody else:- now, demme, I should hate that, if she were as handsome as Cleopatra. Mirabell is not so sure of her as he thinks for.

FAIN

Why do you think so?

WIT

We stayed pretty late there last night, and heard something of an uncle to Mirabell, who is lately come to town- and is between him and the best part of his estate. Mirabell and he are at some distance, as my Lady Wishfort has been told; and you know she hates Mirabell worse than a quaker hates a parrot, or than a fishmonger hates a hard frost. Whether this uncle has seen Mrs. Millamant or not, I cannot say, but there were items of such a

treaty being in embryo; and if it should come to life, poor Mirabell would be in some sort unfortunately fobbed, i'faith.

FAIN

'Tis impossible Millamant should hearken to it.

WIT

Faith, my dear, I can't tell; she's a woman, and a kind of humourist.

MIR

And this is the sum of what you could collect last night?

PET

The quintessence. Maybe Witwoud knows more, he staid longer:- besides, they never mind him; they say anything before him.

MIR

I thought you had been the greatest favourite.

PET

Ay, tete-a-tete, but not in public, because I make remarks.

MIR

You do?

PET

Ay, ay; pox, I'm malicious, man! Now he's soft you know; they are not in awe of him- the fellow's well-bred; he's what you call a what-d'ye-call-'em, a fine gentleman; but he's silly withal.

MIR

I thank you, I know as much as my curiosity requires.
Fainall, are you for the Mall?

FAIN

Ay, I'll take a turn before dinner.

WIT

Ay, we'll walk in the Park; the ladies talked of being there.

MIR

I thought you were obliged to watch for your brother Sir Wilfull's arrival.

WIT

No, no; he comes to his aunt's, my lady Wishfort. Pox on him! I shall be troubled with him too; what shall I do with the fool?

PET

Beg him for his estate, that I may beg you afterwards: and so

have but one trouble with you both.

WIT

O rare Petulant! thou art as quick as fire in a frosty morning;
thou shalt to the Mall with us, and we'll be very severe.

PET

Enough, I'm in a humour to be severe.

MIR

Are you? pray then walk by yourselves: let not us be accessory
to your putting the ladies out of countenance with your
senseless ribaldry, which you roar out aloud as often as they
pass by you; and when you have made a handsome woman blush,
then
you think you have been severe.

PET

What, what! then let 'em either show their innocence by not
understanding what they hear, or else show their discretion by
not hearing what they would not be thought to understand.

MIR

But hast not thou then sense enough to know that thou oughtest
to be most ashamed thyself, when thou hast put another out of

countenance?

PET

Not I, by this hand!- I always take blushing either for a sign of guilt, or ill-breeding.

MIR

I confess you ought to think so. You are in the right, that you may plead the error of your judgment in defence of your practice.

Where modesty's ill-manners, 'tis but fit
That impudence and malice pass for wit.

(Exeunt)

ACT II

SCENE I

St. James's Park

MRS. FAINALL and MRS. MARWOOD.

MRS. FAIN

Ay, ay, dear Marwood, if we will be happy, we must find the means in ourselves, and among ourselves. Men are ever in extremes; either doating or averse. While they are lovers, if they have fire and sense, their jealousies are insupportable; and when they cease to love (we ought to think at least) they loath; they look upon us with horror and distaste; they meet us like the ghosts of what we were, and as such, fly from us.

MRS. MAR

True, 'tis an unhappy circumstance of life, that love should ever die before us; and that the man so often should outlive the lover. But say what you will, 'tis better to be left, than never to have been loved. To pass our youth in dull indifference, to refuse the sweets of life because they once must leave us, is as preposterous as to wish to have been born old, because we one day must be old. For my part, my youth may

wear and waste, but it shall never rust in my possession.

MRS. FAIN

Then it seems you dissemble an aversion to mankind, only in compliance to my mother's humour?

MRS. MAR

Certainly. To be free; I have no taste of those insipid dry discourses, with which our sex of force must entertain themselves, apart from men. We may affect endearments to each other, profess eternal friendships, and seem to doat like lovers; but 'tis not in our natures long to persevere. Love will resume his empire in our breasts; and every heart, or soon or late, receive and re-admit him as its lawful tyrant.

MRS. FAIN

Bless me, how have I been deceived! why you profess a libertine.

MRS. MAR

You see my friendship by my freedom. Come, be sincere, acknowledge that your sentiments agree with mine.

MRS. FAIN

Never!

MRS. MAR

You hate mankind?

MRS. FAIN

Heartily, inveterately.

MRS. MAR

Your husband?

MRS. FAIN

Most transcendently; ay, though I say it, meritoriously.

MRS. MAR

Give me your hand upon it.

MRS. FAIN

There

MRS. MAR

I join with you; what I have said has been to try you.

MRS. FAIN

Is it possible? dost thou hate those vipers, men?

MRS. MAR

I have done hating 'em, and am now come to despise 'em;
the next thing I have to do, is eternally to forget 'em.

MRS. FAIN

There spoke the spirit of an Amazon, a Penthesilea!

MRS. MAR

And yet I am thinking sometimes to carry my aversion further.

MRS. FAIN

How?

MRS. MAR

Faith, by marrying; if I could but find one that loved me very well, and would be thoroughly sensible of ill usage, I think I should do myself the violence of undergoing the ceremony.

MRS. FAIN

You would not make him a cuckold?

MRS. MAR

No; but I'd make him believe I did, and that's as bad.

MRS. FAIN

Why, had not you as good do it?

MRS. MAR

Oh! if he should ever discover it, he would then know the

worst, and be out of his pain; but I would have him ever to continue upon the rack of fear and jealousy.

MRS. FAIN

Ingenious mischief! would thou wert married to Mirabell.

MRS. MAR

Would I were!

MRS. FAIN

You change colour.

MRS. MAR

Because I hate him.

MRS. FAIN

So do I; but I can hear him named. But what reason have you to hate him in particular?

MRS. MAR

I never loved him; he is, and always was, insufferably proud.

MRS. FAIN

By the reason you give for your aversion, one would think it dissembled; for you have laid a fault to his charge, of which his enemies must acquit him.

MRS. MAR

Oh then, it seems, you are one of his favourable enemies!
Methinks you look a little pale, and now you flush again.

MRS. FAIN

Do I? I think I am a little sick o' the sudden.

MRS. MAR

What ails you?

MRS. FAIN

My husband. Don't you see him? He turned short upon me
unawares, and has almost overcome me.

Enter FAINALL and MIRABELL.

MRS. MAR

Ha! ha! ha! he comes opportunely for you.

MRS. FAIN

For you, for he has brought Mirabell with him.

FAIN

My dear!

MRS. FAIN

My soul!

FAIN

You don't look well to-day, child.

MRS. FAIN

D'ye think so?

MIR

He is the only man that does, madam.

MRS. FAIN

The only man that would tell me so at least; and the only man from whom I could hear it without mortification.

FAIN

O my dear, I am satisfied of your tenderness; I know you cannot resent anything from me; especially what is an effect of my concern.

MRS. FAIN

Mr. Mirabell, my mother interrupted you in a pleasant relation last night; I would fain hear it out.

MIR

The persons concerned in that affair have yet a tolerable reputation.- I am afraid Mr. Fainall will be censorious.

MRS. FAIN

He has a humour more prevailing than his curiosity, and will willingly dispense with the hearing of one scandalous story, to avoid giving an occasion to make another by being seen to walk with his wife. This way, Mr. Mirabell, and I dare promise you will oblige us both.

(Exeunt Mrs. FAINALL and MIRABELL)

FAIN

Excellent creature! Well, sure if I should live to be rid of my wife, I should be a miserable man.

MRS. MAR

Ay!

FAIN

For having only that one hope, the accomplishment of it, of consequence, must put an end to all my hopes; and what a wretch is he who must survive his hopes! Nothing remains when that day comes, but to sit down and weep like Alexander, when he wanted other worlds to conquer.

MRS. MAR

Will you not follow 'em?

FAIN

Faith, I think not.

MRS. MAR

Pray let us; I have a reason.

FAIN

You are not jealous?

MRS. MAR

Of whom?

FAIN

Of Mirabell.

MRS. MAR

If I am, is it inconsistent with my love to you that I am tender of your honour?

FAIN

You would intimate, then, as if there were a fellow-feeling between my wife and him.

MRS. MAR

I think she does not hate him to that degree she would be thought.

FAIN

But he, I fear, is too insensible.

MRS. MAR

It may be you are deceived.

FAIN

It may be so. I do now begin to apprehend it.

MRS. MAR

What?

FAIN

That I have been deceived, madam, and you are false.

MRS. MAR

That I am false! what mean you?

FAIN

To let you know I see through all your little arts.- Come, you both love him; and both have equally dissembled your aversion. Your mutual jealousies of one another have made you clash till you have both struck fire. I have seen the warm confession reddening on your cheeks, and sparkling from your eyes.

MRS. MAR

You do me wrong.

FAIN

I do not. 'Twas for my ease to oversee and wilfully neglect the gross advances made him by my wife; that by permitting her to be engaged, I might continue unsuspected in my pleasures; and take you oftener to my arms in full security. But could you think, because the nodding husband would not wake, that e'er the

watchful lover slept?

MRS. MAR

And wherewithal can you reproach me?

FAIN

With infidelity, with loving another, with love of Mirabell.

MRS. MAR

'Tis false! I challenge you to show an instance that can confirm your groundless accusation. I hate him.

FAIN

And wherefore do you hate him? he is insensible, and your resentment follows his neglect. An instance! the injuries you have done him are a proof: your interposing in his love. What cause had you to make discoveries of his pretended passion? to undeceive the credulous aunt, and be the officious obstacle of his match with Millamant?

MRS. MAR

My obligations to my lady urged me; I had professed a friendship to her; and could not see her easy nature so abused by that dissembler.

FAIN

What, was it conscience then? Professed a friendship! O the pious friendships of the female sex!

MRS. MAR

More tender, more sincere, and more enduring, than all the vain and empty vows of men, whether professing love to us, or mutual faith to one another.

FAIN

Ha! ha! ha! you are my wife's friend too.

MRS. MAR

Shame and ingratitude! do you reproach me? you, you upbraid me? Have I been false to her, through strict fidelity to you, and sacrificed my friendship to keep my love inviolate? And have you the baseness to charge me with the guilt, unmindful of the merit? To you it should be meritorious, that I have been vicious: and do you reflect that guilt upon me, which should lie buried in your bosom?

FAIN

You misinterpret my reproof. I meant but to remind you of the slight account you once could make of strictest ties, when set in competition with your love to me.

MRS. MAR

'Tis false, you urged it with deliberate malice! 'twas spoken in scorn, and I never will forgive it.

FAIN

Your guilt, not your resentment, begets your rage. If yet you loved, you could forgive a jealousy: but you are stung to find you are discovered.

MRS. MAR

It shall be all discovered. You too shall be discovered; be sure you shall. I can but be exposed.- If I do it myself I shall prevent your baseness.

FAIN

Why, what will you do?

MRS. MAR

Disclose it to your wife; own what has passed between us.

FAIN

Frenzy!

MRS. MAR

By all my wrongs I'll do't!- I'll publish to the world the injuries you have done me, both in my fame and fortune! With

both I trusted you, you bankrupt in honour, as indigent of wealth.

FAIN

Your fame I have preserved: your fortune has been bestowed as the prodigality of your love would have it, in pleasures which we both have shared. Yet, had not you been false, I had ere this repaid it- 'tis true- had you permitted Mirabell with Millamant to have stolen their marriage, my lady had been incensed beyond all means of reconciliation: Millamant had forfeited the moiety of her fortune; which then would have descended to my wife;- and wherefore did I marry, but to make lawful prize of a rich widow's wealth, and squander it on love and you?

MRS. MAR

Deceit and frivolous pretence!

FAIN

Death, am I not married? What's pretence? Am I not imprisoned, fettered? Have I not a wife? nay a wife that was a widow, a young widow, a handsome widow; and would be again a widow, but that I have a heart of proof, and something of a constitution to bustle through the ways of wedlock and this world! Will you yet

be reconciled to truth and me?

MRS. MAR

Impossible. Truth and you are inconsistent: I hate you,
and shall for ever.

FAIN

For loving you?

MRS. MAR

I loathe the name of love after such usage; and next to
the guilt with which you would asperse me, I scorn you most.
Farewell!

FAIN

Nay, we must not part thus.

MRS. MAR

Let me go.

FAIN

Come, I'm sorry.

MRS. MAR

I care not- let me go- break my hands, do- I'd leave 'em
to get loose.

FAIN

I would not hurt you for the world. Have I no other hold to keep you here?

MRS. MAR

Well, I have deserved it all.

FAIN

You know I love you.

MRS. MAR

Poor dissembling!- O that- well, it is not yet-

FAIN

What? what is it not? what is it not yet? It is not yet too late-

MRS. MAR

No, it is not yet too late;- I have that comfort.

FAIN

It is, to love another.

MRS. MAR

But not to loathe, detest, abhor mankind, myself, and the whole treacherous world.

FAIN

Nay, this is extravagance.- Come, I ask your pardon- no tears-
I was to blame, I could not love you and be easy in my doubts.
Pray forbear- I believe you; I'm convinced I've done you wrong;
and any way, every way will make amends. I'll hate my wife yet
more, damn her! I'll part with her, rob her of all she's worth,
and we'll retire somewhere, anywhere, to another world. I'll
marry thee- be pacified.- 'Sdeath, they come, hide your face,
your tears;- you have a mask, wear it a moment. This way, this
way- be persuaded.(Exeunt)

ACT II

SCENE II/

The same

MIRABELL and Mrs. FAINALL.

MRS. FAIN

They are here yet.

MIR

They are turning into the other walk.

MRS. FAIN

While I only hated my husband, I could bear to see him;
but since I have despised him, he's too offensive.

MIR

O you should hate with prudence.

MRS. FAIN

Yes, for I have loved with indiscretion.

MIR

You should have just so much disgust for your husband, as may
be sufficient to make you relish your lover.

MRS. FAIN

You have been the cause that I have loved without bounds,
and would you set limits to that aversion of which you have been
the occasion? why did you make me marry this man?

MIR

Why do we daily commit disagreeable and dangerous actions? to
save that idol, reputation. If the familiarities of our loves
had produced that consequence of which you were apprehensive,
where could you have fixed a father's name with credit, but on
a husband? I knew Fainall to be a man lavish of his morals, an
interested and professing friend, a false and a designing lover;
yet one whose wit and outward fair behaviour have gained a
reputation with the town enough to make that woman stand ex-
cused
who has suffered herself to be won by his addresses. A better
man ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse
had not answered to the purpose. When you are weary of him you
know your remedy.

MRS. FAIN

I ought to stand in some degree of credit with you,
Mirabell.

MIR

In justice to you, I have made you privy to my whole design, and put it in your power to ruin or advance my fortune.

MRS. FAIN

Whom have you instructed to represent your pretended uncle?

MIR

Waitwell, my servant.

MRS. FAIN

He is an humble servant to Foible my mother's woman, and may win her to your interest.

MIR

Care is taken for that- she is won and worn by this time. They were married this morning.

MRS. FAIN

Who?

MIR

Waitwell and Foible. I would not tempt my servant to betray me by trusting him too far. If your mother, in hopes to ruin me, should consent to marry my pretended uncle, he might, like Mosca

in the Fox, stand upon terms; so I made him sure beforehand.

MRS. FAIN

So if my poor mother is caught in a contract, you will discover the imposture betimes; and release her by producing a certificate of her gallant's former marriage?

MIR

Yes, upon condition that she consent to my marriage with her niece, and surrender the moiety of her fortune in her possession.

MRS. FAIN

She talked last night of endeavouring at a match between Millamant and your uncle.

MIR

That was by Foible's direction, and my instruction, that she might seem to carry it more privately.

MRS. FAIN

Well, I have an opinion of your success; for I believe my lady will do anything to get a husband; and when she has this, which you have provided for her, I suppose she will submit to anything to get rid of him.

MIR

Yes, I think the good lady would marry anything that resembled a man, though 'twere no more than what a butler could pinch out of a napkin.

MRS. FAIN

Female frailty! we must all come to it, if we live to be old, and feel the craving of a false appetite when the true is decayed.

MIR

An old woman's appetite is depraved like that of a girl- 'tis the green sickness of a second childhood; and, like the faint offer of a latter spring, serves but to usher in the fall, and withers in an affected bloom.

MRS. FAIN

Here's your mistress.

Enter Mrs. MILLAMANT, WITWOUD, and MINCING.

MIR

Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders; ha, no, I cry her mercy!

MRS. FAIN

I see but one poor empty sculler; and he tows her woman
after him.

MIR [To Mrs. MILLAMANT.]

You seem to be unattended, madam- you used
to have the beau monde throng after you; and a flock of gay fine
perukes hovering round you.

WIT

Like moths about a candle.- I had like to have lost my
comparison for want of breath.

MRS. MIL

O I have denied myself airs to-day, I have walked as fast
through the crowd.

WIT

As a favourite just disgraced; and with as few followers.

MRS. MIL

Dear Mr. Witwoud, truce with your similitudes; for I'm as
sick of 'em-

WIT

As a physician of a good air.- I cannot help it, madam, though

'tis against myself.

MRS. MIL

Yet, again! Mincing, stand between me and his wit.

WIT

Do, Mrs. Mincing, like a screen before a great fire.- I confess
I do blaze to-day, I am too bright.

MRS. FAIN

But, dear Millamant, why were you so long?

MRS. MIL

Long! Lord, have I not made violent haste; I have asked
every living thing I met for you; I have inquired after you, as
after a new fashion.

WIT

Madam, truce with your similitudes.- No, you met her husband,
and did not ask him for her.

MRS. MIL

By your leave, Witwoud, that were like inquiring after an
old fashion, to ask a husband for his wife.

WIT

Hum. a hit! a hit! a palpable hit! I confess it.

MRS. FAIN

You were dressed before I came abroad.

MRS. MIL

Ay, that's true.- O but then I had- Mincing, what had I?
why was I so long?

MIN

O mem, your la'ship stayed to peruse a packet of letters.

MRS. MIL

O ay, letters- I had letters- I am persecuted with
letters- I hate letters- Nobody knows how to write letters, and
yet one has 'em, one does not know why. They serve one to pin up
one's hair.

WIT

Is that the way? Pray, madam, do you pin up your hair with all
your letters? I find I must keep copies.

MRS. MIL

Only with those in verse, Mr. Witwoud, I never pin up my
hair with prose.- I think I tried once, Mincing.

MIN

O mem, I shall never forget it.

MRS. MIL

Ay, poor Mincing tift and tift all the morning.

MIN

Till I had the cramp in my fingers, I'll vow, mem: and all to no purpose. But when your la'ship pins it up with poetry, it sits so pleasant the next day as anything, and is so pure and so crips.

WIT

Indeed, so crips?

MIN

You're such a critic, Mr. Witwoud.

MRS. MIL

Mirabell, did you take exceptions last night? O ay, and went away.- Now I think on't I'm angry- no, now I think on't I'm pleased- for I believe I gave you some pain.

MIR

Does that please you?

MRS. MIL

Infinitely; I love to give pain.

MIR

You would affect a cruelty which is not in your nature; your true vanity is in the power of pleasing.

MRS. MIL

Oh I ask you pardon for that- one's cruelty is one's power; and when one parts with one's cruelty, one parts with one's power; and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly.

MIR

Ay, ay, suffer your cruelty to ruin the object of your power, to destroy your lover- and then how vain, how lost a thing you'll be! Nay, 'tis true: you are no longer handsome when you've lost your lover; your beauty dies upon the instant; for beauty is the lover's gift; 'tis he bestows your charms- your glass is all a cheat. The ugly and the old, whom the looking-glass mortifies, yet after commendation can be flattered by it, and discover beauties in it; for that reflects our praises, rather than your face.

MRS. MIL

O the vanity of these men!- Fainall, d'ye hear him? If

they did not commend us, we were not handsome! Now you must know

they could not commend one, if one was not handsome. Beauty the lover's gift!- Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases; and then, if one pleases, one makes more.

WIT

Very pretty. Why, you make no more of making of lovers, madam, than of making so many card-matches.

MRS. MIL

One no more owes one's beauty to a lover, than one's wit to an echo. They can but reflect what we look and say; vain empty things if we are silent or unseen, and want a being.

MIR

Yet to those two vain empty things you owe the two greatest pleasures of your life.

MRS. MIL

How so?

MIR

To your lover you owe the pleasure of hearing yourselves
praised; and to an echo the pleasure of hearing yourselves talk.

WIT

But I know a lady that loves talking so incessantly, she won't
give an echo fair play; she has that everlasting rotation of
tongue, that an echo must wait till she dies, before it can
catch her last words.

MRS. MIL

O fiction!- Fainall, let us leave these men.

MIR

Draw off Witwoud. (Aside to Mrs. FAINALL)

MRS. FAIN

Immediately.- I have a word or two for Mr. Witwoud.
[Exeunt Mrs. FAINALL and WITWOUD.]

MIR

I would beg a little private audience too.- You had the tyranny
to deny me last night; though you knew I came to impart a secret
to you that concerned my love.

MRS. MIL

You saw I was engaged.

MIR

Unkind! You had the leisure to entertain a herd of fools; things who visit you from their excessive idleness; bestowing on your easiness that time which is the incumbrance of their lives. How can you find delight in such society? It is impossible they should admire you, they are not capable: or if they were, it should be to you as a mortification; for sure to please a fool is some degree of folly.

MRS. MIL

I please myself:- besides, sometimes to converse with fools is for my health.

MIR

Your health! is there a worse disease than the conversation of fools?

MRS. MIL

Yes, the vapours; fools are physic for it, next to assafoetida.

MIR

You are not in a course of fools?

MRS. MIL

Mirabell, if you persist in this offensive freedom, you'll displease me.- I think I must resolve, after all, not to have you:- we shan't agree.

MIR

Not in our physic, it may be.

MRS. MIL

And yet our distemper, in all likelihood, will be the same; for we shall be sick of one another. I shan't endure to be reprimanded nor instructed: 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults- I can't bear it. Well, I won't have you, Mirabell- I'm resolved- I think- you may go.- Ha! ha! ha! what would you give, that you could help loving me?

MIR

I would give something that you did not know I could not help it.

MRS. MIL

Come, don't look grave then. Well, what do you say to me?

MIR

I say that a man may as soon make a friend by his wit, or a fortune by his honesty, as win a woman by plain-dealing and sincerity.

MRS. MIL

Sententious Mirabell!- Prithee, don't look with that violent and inflexible wise face, like Solomon at the dividing of the child in an old tapestry hanging.

MIR

You are merry, madam, but I would persuade you for a moment to be serious.

MRS. MIL

What, with that face? no, if you keep your countenance, 'tis impossible I should hold mine. Well, after all, there is something very moving in a love-sick face. Ha! ha! ha!- well, I won't laugh, don't be peevish- Heigho' now I'll be melancholy, as melancholy as a watch-light. Well, Mirabell, if ever you will win me woo me now.- Nay, if you are so tedious, fare you well;- I see they are walking away.

MIR

Can you not find in the variety of your disposition one moment-

MRS. MIL

To hear you tell me Foible's married, and your plot like to speed;- no.

MIR

But how came you to know it?

MRS. MIL

Without the help of the devil, you can't imagine; unless she should tell me herself. Which of the two it may have been I will leave you to consider; and when you have done thinking of that, think of me. (Exit)

MIR

I have something more.- Gone!- Think of you? to think of a whirlwind, though't were in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation; a very tranquillity of mind and mansion. A fellow that lives in a windmill, has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman. There is no point of the compass to which they cannot turn, and by which they are not turned; and by one as well as another; for motion, not method, is their occupation. To know this, and yet

continue to be in love, is to be made wise from the dictates of reason, and yet persevere to play the fool by the force of instinct.- Oh, here come my pair of turtles!- What, billing so sweetly! is not Valentine's day over with you yet?

Enter WAITWELL and FOIBLE.

Sirrah, Waitwell, why sure you think you were married for your own recreation, and not for my conveniency.

WAIT

Your pardon, sir. With submission, we have indeed been solacing in lawful delights; but still with an eye to business, sir. I have instructed her as well as I could. If she can take your directions as readily as my instructions, sir, your affairs are in a prosperous way.

MIR

Give you joy, Mrs. Foible.

FOIB

O las, sir, I'm so ashamed!- I'm afraid my lady has been in a thousand inquietudes for me. But I protest, sir, I made as much haste as I could.

WAIT

That she did indeed, sir. It was my fault that she did not make more.

MIR

That I believe.

FOIB

But I told my lady as you instructed me, sir, that I had a prospect of seeing Sir Rowland your uncle; and that I would put her ladyship's picture in my pocket to show him; which I'll be sure to say has made him so enamoured of her beauty, that he burns with impatience to lie at her ladyship's feet, and worship the original.

MIR

Excellent Foible! matrimony has made you eloquent in love.

WAIT

I think she has profited, sir, I think so.

FOIB

You have seen Madam Millamant, sir?

MIR

Yes.

FOIB

I told her, sir, because I did not know that you might find an opportunity; she had so much company last night.

MIR

Your diligence will merit more- in the mean time-

[Gives money.]

FOIB

O dear sir, your humble servant!

WAIT

Spouse.

MIR

Stand off, sir, not a penny!- Go on and prosper, Foible:- the lease shall be made good, and the farm stocked, if we succeed.

FOIB

I don't question your generosity, sir: and you need not doubt of success. If you have no more commands, sir, I'll be gone; I'm sure my lady is at her toilet, and can't dress till I come.- O dear, I'm sure that [Looking out] was Mrs. Marwood that went by in a mask! If she has seen me with you I'm sure she'll tell my lady. I'll make haste home and prevent her. Your servant, sir.-

B'w'y, Waitwell.

(Exit)

WAIT

Sir Rowland, if you please.- The jade's so pert upon her preferment she forgets herself.

MIR

Come, sir, will you endeavour to forget yourself, and transform into Sir Rowland?

WAIT

Why, sir, it will be impossible I should remember myself.-
Married, knighted, and attended all in one day! 'tis enough to
make any man forget himself. The difficulty will be how to
recover my acquaintance and familiarity with my former self, and
fall from my transformation to a reformation into Waitwell. Nay,
I shan't be quite the same Waitwell neither; for now, I remember
me, I'm married, and can't be my own man again.
Ay there's my grief; that's the sad change of life,
To lose my title, and yet keep my wife.

(Exeunt)

ACT III

SCENE I

A Room in LADY WISHFORT'S House

LADY WISHFORT at her toilet, PEG waiting.

LADY WISH

Merciful! no news of Foible yet?

PEG

No, madam.

LADY WISH

I have no more patience.- If I have not fretted myself
till I am pale again, there's no veracity in me! Fetch me the
red- the red, do you hear, sweetheart?- An arrant ash-colour, as
I am a person! Look you how this wench stirs! Why dost thou not
fetch me a little red? didst thou not hear me, Mopus?

PEG

The red ratafia does your ladyship mean, or the cherry-brandy?

LADY WISH

Ratafia, fool! no, fool. Not the ratafia, fool- grant me
patience!- I mean the Spanish paper, idiot- complexion.

darling. Paint, paint, paint, dost thou understand that,
changeling, dangling thy hands like bobbins before thee? Why
dost thou not stir, puppet? thou wooden thing upon wires!

PEG

Lord, madam, your ladyship is so impatient!- I cannot come at
the paint, madam; Mrs. Foible has locked it up, and carried the
key with her.

LADY WISH

A pox take you both!- fetch me the cherry-brandy then.

[Exit PEG.]

I'm as pale and as faint, I look like Mrs.
Qualm-sick, the curate's wife, that's always breeding.- Wench,
come, come, wench, what art thou doing? sipping, tasting?- Save
thee, dost thou not know the bottle?

Re-enter PEG with a bottle and china cup.

PEG

Madam, I was looking for a cup.

LADY WISH

A cup, save thee! and what a cup hast thou brought!- Dost

thou take me for a fairy, to drink out of an acorn? Why didst thou not bring thy thimble? Hast thou ne'er a brass thimble clinking in thy pocket with a bit of nutmeg?- I warrant thee. Come, fill, fill!- So- again.- [Knocking at the door].- See who that is.- Set down the bottle first- here, here, under the table.- What, wouldst thou go with the bottle in thy hand, like a tapster? As I am a person, this wench has lived in an inn upon the road, before she came to me, like Maritornes the Asturian in Don Quixote!- No Foible yet?

PEG

No, madam; Mrs. Marwood.

LADY WISH

Oh, Marwood; let her come in.- Come in, good Marwood.

Enter Mrs. MARWOOD.

MRS. MAR

I'm surprised to find your ladyship in dishabille at this time of day.

LADY WISH

Foible's a lost thing; has been abroad since morning, and never heard of since.

MRS. MAR

I saw her but now, as I came masked through the park, in conference with Mirabell.

LADY WISH

With Mirabell!- You call my blood into my face, with mentioning that traitor. She durst not have the confidence! I sent her to negotiate an affair, in which, if I'm detected, I'm undone. If that wheedling villain has wrought upon Foible to detect me, I'm ruined. O my dear friend, I'm a wretch of wretches if I'm detected.

MRS. MAR

O madam, you cannot suspect Mrs. Foible's integrity!

LADY WISH

Oh, he carries poison in his tongue that would corrupt integrity itself! If she has given him an opportunity, she has as good as put her integrity into his hands. Ah, dear Marwood, what's integrity to an opportunity?- Hark! I hear her!- dear friend, retire into my closet, that I may examine her with more freedom.- You'll pardon me, dear friend; I can make bold with you.- There are books over the chimney.- Quarles and Prynne, and "The Short View of the Stage," with Bunyan's works, to entertain

you.

[To PEG.]

Go, you thing, and send her in.

[Exeunt Mrs. MARWOOD and PEG.]

Enter FOIBLE.

LADY WISH

O Foible, where hast thou been? what hast thou been doing?

FOIB

Madam, I have seen the party.

LADY WISH

But what hast thou done?

FOIB

Nay, 'tis your ladyship has done, and are to do; I have only promised. But a man so enamoured- so transported!- Well, here it is, all that is left; all that is not kissed away.- Well, if worshipping of pictures be a sin- poor Sir Rowland, I say.

LADY WISH

The miniature has been counted like;- but hast thou not

betrayed me, Foible? hast thou not detected me to that faithless Mirabell?- What hadst thou to do with him in the Park? Answer me, has he got nothing out of thee?

FOIB[Aside.]

So the devil has been beforehand with me. What shall I say?

[Aloud.]

Alas, madam, could I help it, if I met that confident thing? was I in fault? If you had heard how he used me, and all upon your ladyship's account, I'm sure you would not suspect my fidelity. Nay, if that had been the worst, I could have borne; but he had a fling at your ladyship too; and then I could not hold; but i'faith I gave him his own.

LADY WISH

Me? what did the filthy fellow say?

FOIB

O madam! 'tis a shame to say what he said- with his taunts and his fleers, tossing up his nose. Humph! (says he) what, you are a hatching some plot (says he), you are so early abroad, or catering (says he), ferreting some disbanded officer, I

warrant.- Half-pay is but thin subsistence (says he);- well,
what pension does your lady propose? Let me see (says he), what,
she must come down pretty deep now, she's superannuated (says
he) and-

LADY WISH

Odds my life, I'll have him, I'll have him murdered! I'll
have him poisoned! Where does he eat?- I'll marry a drawer to
have him poisoned in his wine. I'll send for Robin from Locket's
immediately.

FOIB

Poison him! poisoning's too good for him. Starve him, madam, starve him; marry Sir Rowland, and get him disinherited. Oh you would bless yourself to hear what he said!

LADY WISH

A villain! superannuated!

FOIB

Humph (says he), I hear you are laying designs against me too (says he), and Mrs. Millamant is to marry my uncle (he does not suspect a word of your ladyship); but (says he) I'll fit you for that. I warrant you (says he) I'll hamper you for that (says he); you and your old frippery too (says he); I'll handle you-

LADY WISH

Audacious villain! handle me; would he durst!- Frippery! old frippery! was there ever such a foul-mouthed fellow? I'll be married to-morrow, I'll be contracted to-night.

FOIB

The sooner the better, madam.

LADY WISH

Will Sir Rowland be here, sayest thou? when, Foible?

FOIB

Incontinently, madam. No new sheriff's wife expects the return of her husband after knighthood with that impatience in which Sir Rowland burns for the dear hour of kissing your ladyship's hand after dinner.

LADY WISH

Frippery! superannuated frippery! I'll frippery the villain; Ill reduce him to frippery and rags! a tatterdemalion! I hope to see him hung with tatters, like a Long-lane pent-house or a gibbet thief. A slander-mouthed railer! I warrant the spendthrift prodigal's in debt as much as the million lottery, or the whole court upon a birthday. I'll spoil his credit with his tailor. Yes, he shall have my niece with her fortune, he shall.

FOIB

He! I hope to see him lodge in Ludgate first, and angle into Blackfriars for brass farthings with an old mitten.

LADY WISH

Ay, dear Foible; thank thee for that, dear Foible. He has put me out of all patience. I shall never recompose my features to receive Sir Rowland with any economy of face. This wretch has

fretted me that I am absolutely decayed. Look, Foible.

FOIB

Your ladyship has frowned a little too rashly, indeed, madam.
There are some cracks discernible in the white varnish.

LADY WISH

Let me see the glass.- Cracks, sayest thou?- why, I am
errantly flayed- I look like an old peeled wall. Thou must
repair me, Foible, before Sir Rowland comes, or I shall never
keep up to my picture.

FOIB

I warrant you, madam, a little art once made your picture like
you; and now a little of the same art must make you like your
picture. Your picture must sit for you, madam.

LADY WISH

But art thou sure Sir Rowland will not fail to come? or
will he not fail when he does come? Will he be importunate,
Foible, and push? For if he should not be importunate, I shall
never break decorums:- I shall die with confusion, if I am
forced to advance.- Oh no, I can never advance!- I shall swoon
if he should expect advances. No, I hope Sir Rowland is better
bred than to put a lady to the necessity of breaking her forms.

I won't be too coy, neither.- I won't give him despair- but a little disdain is not amiss; a little scorn is alluring.

FOIB

A little scorn becomes your ladyship.

LADY WISH

Yes, but tenderness becomes me best- a sort of dyingness- you see that picture has a sort of a- ha, Foible! a swimmingness in the eye- yes, I'll look so- my niece affects it; but she wants features. Is Sir Rowland handsome? Let my toilet be removed- I'll dress above. I'll receive Sir Rowland here. Is he handsome? Don't answer me. I won't know: I'll be surprised, I'll be taken by surprise.

FOIB

By storm, madam, Sir Rowland's a brisk man.

LADY WISH

Is he! O then he'll importune, if he's a brisk man. I shall save decorums if Sir Rowland importunes. I have a mortal terror at the apprehension of offending against decorums. O I'm glad he's a brisk man. Let my things be removed, good Foible.

(Exit)

Enter Mrs. FAINALL.

MRS. FAIN

O Foible, I have been in a fright, lest I should come too late! That devil Marwood saw you in the Park with Mirabell, and I'm afraid will discover it to my lady.

FOIB

Discover what, madam!

MRS. FAIN

Nay, nay, put not on that strange face, I am privy to the whole design, and know that Waitwell, to whom thou wert this morning married, is to personate Mirabell's uncle, and as such, winning my lady, to involve her in those difficulties from which Mirabell only must release her, by his making his conditions to have my cousin and her fortune left to her own disposal.

FOIB

O dear madam, I beg your pardon. It was not my confidence in your ladyship that was deficient; but I thought the former good correspondence between your ladyship and Mr. Mirabell might have hindered his communicating this secret.

MRS. FAIN

Dear Foible, forget that.

FOIB

O dear madam, Mr. Mirabell is such a sweet, winning gentleman- but your ladyship is the pattern of generosity.- Sweet lady, to be so good! Mr. Mirabell cannot choose but be grateful. I find your ladyship has his heart still. Now, madam, I can safely tell your ladyship our success; Mrs. Marwood had told my lady; but I warrant I managed myself; I turned it all for the better. I told my lady that Mr. Mirabell railed at her; I laid horrid things to his charge, I'll vow; and my lady is so incensed that she'll be contracted to Sir Rowland to-night, she says; I warrant I worked her up, that he may have her for asking for, as they say of a Welsh maidenhead.

MRS. FAIN

O rare Foible!

FOIB

I beg your ladyship to acquaint Mr. Mirabell of his success. I would be seen as little as possible to speak to him:- besides, I believe Madam Marwood watches me.- She has a month's mind; but I

know Mr. Mirabell can't abide her.- John!- (Calls) remove my lady's toilet.- Madam, your servant: my lady is so impatient, I fear she'll come for me if I stay.

MRS. FAIN.

I'll go with you up the back-stairs, lest I should meet her.

(Exeunt)

ACT III

SCENE II

Lady WISHFORT'S Closet

Mrs. MARWOOD.

MRS. MAR

Indeed, Mrs. Engine, is it thus with you? are you become a go-between of this importance? yes, I shall watch you. Why this wench is the passe-partout, a very master-key to everybody's strong-box. My friend Fainall, have you carried it so swimmingly? I thought there was something in it; but it seems 'tis over with you. Your loathing is not from a want of appetite, then, but from a surfeit. Else you could never be so cool to fall from a principal to be an assistant; to procure for him! a pattern of generosity that, I confess. Well, Mr. Fainall, you have met with your match.- O man, man! woman, woman! the devil's an ass: if I were a painter, I would draw him like an idiot, a driveller with a bib and bells: man should have his head and horns, and woman the rest of him. Poor simple fiend!- "Madam Marwood has a month's mind, but he can't abide her."- 'Twere better for him you had not been his confessor in that

affair, without you could have kept his counsel closer. I shall not prove another pattern of generosity: he has not obliged me to that with those excesses of himself! and now I'll have none of him. Here comes the good lady, panting ripe; with a heart full of hope, and a head full of care, like any chemist upon the day of projection.

Enter Lady WISHFORT.

LADY WISH

O dear, Marwood, what shall I say for this rude forgetfulness?- but my dear friend is all goodness.

MRS. MAR

No apologies, dear madam, I have been very well entertained.

LADY WISH

As I'm a person, I am in a very chaos to think I should so forget myself:- but I have such an olio of affairs, really I know not what to do.- Foible!-

[Calls.]

I expect my nephew, Sir

Wilfull, every moment too.- Why, Foible!- He means to travel for improvement.

MRS. MAR

Methinks Sir Wilfull should rather think of marrying than travelling at his years. I hear he is turned of forty.

LADY WISH

O he's in less danger of being spoiled by his travels- I am against my nephew's marrying too young. It will be time enough when he comes back, and has acquired discretion to choose for himself.

MRS. MAR

Methinks Mrs. Millamant and he would make a very fit match. He may travel afterwards. 'Tis a thing very usual with young gentlemen.

LADY WISH

I promise you I have thought on't- and since 'tis your judgment, I'll think on't again. I assure you I will; I value your judgment extremely. On my word, I'll propose it.

Enter FOIBLE.

LADY WISH

Come, come, Foible- I had forgot my nephew will be here before dinner:- I must make haste.

FOIB

Mr. Witwoud and Mr. Petulant are come to dine with your ladyship.

LADY WISH

O dear, I can't appear till I'm dressed.- Dear Marwood, shall I be free with you again, and beg you to entertain 'em? I'll make all imaginable haste. Dear friend, excuse me.

(Exeunt)

ACT III

SCENE III

A Room in Lady WISHFORT'S House

Mrs. MARWOOD, Mrs. MILLAMANT, and MINCING.

MRS. MIL

Sure never anything was so unbred as that odious man!-
Marwood, your servant.

MRS. MAR

You have a colour; what's the matter?

MRS. MIL

That horrid fellow, Petulant, has provoked me into a
flame:- I have broken my fan.- Mincing, lend me yours; is not
all the powder out of my hair?

MRS. MAR

No. What has he done?

MRS. MIL

Nay, he has done nothing; he has only talked- nay, he has
said nothing neither; but he has contradicted everything that
has been said. For my part, I thought Witwoud and he would have

quarrelled.

MIN

I vow, mem, I thought once they would have fit.

MRS. MIL

Well, 'tis a lamentable thing, I swear, that one has not the liberty of choosing one's acquaintance as one does one's clothes.

MRS. MAR

If we had that liberty, we should be as weary of one set of acquaintance, though never so good, as we are of one suit though never so fine. A fool and a doily stuff would now and then find days of grace, and be worn for variety.

MRS. MIL

I could consent to wear 'em, if they would wear alike; but fools never wear out- they are such drap de Berri things! without one could give 'em to one's chambermaid after a day or two.

MRS. MAR

'Twere better so indeed. Or what think you of the playhouse? A fine gay glossy fool should be given there, like a

new masking habit, after the masquerade is over, and we have done with the disguise. For a fool's visit is always a disguise; and never admitted by a woman of wit, but to blind her affair with a lover of sense. If you would but appear bare-faced now, and own Mirabell, you might as easily put off Petulant and Witwoud as your hood and scarf. And indeed, 'tis time, for the town has found it; the secret is grown too big for the pretence. 'Tis like Mrs. Primly's great belly; she may lace it down before, but it burnishes on her hips. Indeed, Millamant, you can no more conceal it, than my Lady Strammel can her face; that goodly face, which in defiance of her Rhenish wine tea, will not be comprehended in a mask.

MRS. MIL

I'll take my death, Marwood, you are more censorious than a decayed beauty, or a discarded toast.- Mincing, tell the men they may come up.- My aunt is not dressing here; their folly is less provoking than your malice.

[Exit MINCING.]

The town has found it! what has it found? That Mirabell loves me is no more a secret, than it is a secret that you discovered it to my aunt, or than the reason why you discovered it is a secret.

MRS. MAR

You are nettled.

MRS. MIL

You're mistaken. Ridiculous!

MRS. MAR

Indeed, my dear, you'll tear another fan, if you don't mitigate those violent airs.

MRS. MIL

O silly! ha! ha! ha! I could laugh immoderately. Poor Mirabell! his constancy to me has quite destroyed his complaisance for all the world beside. I swear, I never enjoined it him to be so coy- If I had the vanity to think he would obey me, I would command him to show more gallantry- 'tis hardly well-bred to be so particular on one hand, and so insensible on the other. But I despair to prevail, and so let him follow his own way. Ha! ha! ha! pardon me, dear creature, I must laugh, ha! ha! ha! though I grant you 'tis a little barbarous, ha! ha! ha!

MRS. MAR

What pity 'tis so much fine raillery, and delivered with so significant gesture, should be so unhappily directed to miscarry!

MRS. MIL

Ha! dear creature, I ask your pardon- I swear I did not mind you.

MRS. MAR

Mr. Mirabell and you both may think it a thing impossible, when I shall tell him by telling you-

MRS. MIL

O dear, what? for it is the same thing if I hear it- ha!
ha! ha!

MRS. MAR

That I detest him, hate him, madam.

MRS. MIL

O madam, why so do I- and yet the creature loves me, ha!
ha! ha! how can one forbear laughing to think of it.- I am a sibyl if I am not amazed to think what he can see in me. I'll take my death, I think you are handsomer- and within a year or two as young- if you could but stay for me, I should overtake you- but that cannot be.- Well, that thought makes me melancholic.- Now, I'll be sad.

MRS. MAR

Your merry note may be changed sooner than you think.

MRS. MIL

D'ye say so? Then I'm resolved I'll have a song to keep up my spirits.

Re-enter MINCING.

MIN

The gentlemen stay but to comb, madam, and will wait on you.

MRS. MIL

Desire Mrs.- that is in the next room to sing the song I would have learned yesterday.- You shall hear it, madam- not that there's any great matter in it- but 'tis agreeable to my humour.

SONG

Love's but the frailty of the mind,
When 'tis not with ambition joined;
A sickly flame, which, if not fed, expires,
And feeding, wastes in self-consuming fires.

'Tis not to wound a wanton boy

Or amorous youth, that gives the joy;
But 'tis the glory to have pierced a swain,
For whom inferior beauties sighed in vain.

Then I alone the conquest prize,
When I insult a rival's eyes:
If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see
That heart, which others bleed for, bleed for me.

Enter PETULANT and WITWOUD.

MRS. MIL

Is your animosity composed, gentlemen?

WIT

Raillery, raillery, madam; we have no animosity- we hit off a little wit now and then, but no animosity.- The falling-out of wits is like the falling out of lovers:- we agree in the main, like treble and bass.- Ha, Petulant?

PET

Ay, in the main- but when I have a humour to contradict-

WIT

Ay, when he has a humour to contradict, then I contradict too.

What, I know my cue. Then we contradict one another like two battledores; for contradictions beget one another like Jews.

PET

If he says black's black- if I have a humour to say 'tis blue- let that pass- all's one for that. If I have a humour to prove it, it must be granted.

WIT

Not positively must- but it may- it may.

PET

Yes, it positively must, upon proof positive.

WIT

Ay, upon proof positive it must; but upon proof presumptive it only may.- That's a logical distinction now, madam.

MRS. MAR

I perceive your debates are of importance, and very learnedly handled.

PET

Importance is one thing, and learning's another, but a debate's a debate, that I assert.

WIT

Petulant's an enemy to learning; he relies altogether on his parts.

PET

No, I'm no enemy to learning; it hurts not me.

MRS. MAR

That's a sign indeed it's no enemy to you.

PET

No, no, it's no enemy to anybody but them that have it.

MRS. MIL

Well, an illiterate man's my aversion: I wonder at the impudence of any illiterate man to offer to make love.

WIT

That I confess I wonder at too.

MRS. MIL

Ah! to marry an ignorant that can hardly read or write!

PET

Why should a man be any further from being married, though he can't read, than he is from being hanged? The ordinary's paid for setting the psalm, and the parish-priest for reading the

ceremony. And for the rest which is to follow in both cases, a man may do it without book- so all's one for that.

MRS. MIL

D'ye hear the creature?- Lord, here's company, I'll be gone.

(Exit)

Enter Sir WILFULL WITWOUD in a riding dress, followed by Footman.

WIT

In the name of Bartlemew and his fair, what have we here?

MRS. MAR

'Tis your brother, I fancy. Don't you know him?

WIT

Not I.- Yes, I think it is he- I've almost forgot him; I have not seen him since the Revolution.

FOOT(To Sir WILFULL)

Sir, my lady's dressing. Here's company; if you please to walk in, in the mean time.

SIR WIL

Dressing! what, it's but morning here, I warrant, with you

in London; we should count it towards afternoon in our parts,
down in Shropshire.- Why then, belike, my aunt han't dined yet,
ha, friend?

FOOT

Your aunt, sir?

SIR WIL

My aunt, sir! yes, my aunt, sir, and your lady, sir; your
lady is my aunt, sir.- Why, what dost thou not know me, friend?
why then send somebody hither that does. How long hast thou
lived with thy lady, fellow, ha?

FOOT

A week, sir; longer than anybody in the house, except my
lady's woman.

SIR WIL

Why then belike thou dost not know thy lady, if thou seest
her, ha, friend?

FOOT

Why, truly, sir, I cannot safely swear to her face in a
morning, before she is dressed. 'Tis like I may give a shrewd
guess at her by this time.

SIR WIL

Well, prithee try what thou canst do; if thou canst not guess, inquire her out, dost hear, fellow? and tell her, her nephew, Sir Wilfull Witwoud, is in the house.

FOOT

I shall, sir.

SIR WIL

Hold ye, hear me, friend; a word with you in your ear; prithee who are these gallants?

FOOT

Really, sir, I can't tell; here come so many here, 'tis hard to know 'em all.

(Exit)

SIR WIL

Oons, this fellow knows less than a starling; I don't think a' knows his own name.

MRS. MAR

Mr. Witwoud, your brother is not behindhand in forgetfulness- I fancy he has forgot you too.

WIT

I hope so- the devil take him that remembers first, I say.

SIR WIL

Save you, gentlemen and lady!

MRS. MAR

For shame, Mr. Witwoud; why don't you speak to him?- And you, sir.

WIT

Petulant, speak.

PET

And you, sir.

SIR WIL

No offence, I hope.

(Salutes MRS. MARWOOD)

MRS. MAR

No sure, sir.

WIT

This is a vile dog, I see that already. No offence! ha! ha! ha!
To him; to him, Petulant, smoke him.

PET

It seems as if you had come a journey, sir; hem, hem.

[Surveying him round.]

SIR WIL

Very likely, sir, that it may seem so.

PET

No offence, I hope, sir.

WIT

Smoke the boots, the boots; Petulant, the boots: ha! ha! ha!

SIR WIL

May be not, sir; thereafter, as 'tis meant, sir.

PET

Sir, I presume upon the information of your boots.

SIR WIL

Why, 'tis like you may, sir: if you are not satisfied with the information of my boots, sir, if you will step to the stable, you may inquire further of my horse, sir.

PET

Your horse, sir! your horse is an ass, sir!

SIR WIL

Do you speak by way of offence, sir?

MRS. MAR

The gentleman's merry, that's all sir.-

[Aside.]

S'life, we shall have a quarrel betwixt an horse and an ass before they find one another out.

[Aloud.]

You must not take anything amiss from your friends, sir. You are among your friends here, though it may be you don't know it.- If I am not mistaken, you are Sir Wilfull Witwoud.

SIR WIL

Right, lady; I am Sir Wilfull Witwoud, so I write myself; no offence to anybody, I hope; and nephew to the Lady Wishfort of this mansion.

MRS. MAR

Don't you know this gentleman, sir?

SIR WIL

Hum! what, sure 'tis not- yea by'r Lady, but 'tis- s'heart, I know not whether 'tis or no- yea, but 'tis, by the Wrekin. Brother Anthony! what Tony, i' faith! what, dost thou not know me? By'r Lady, nor I thee, thou art so becravated, and so beperiwigged.- S'heart, why dost not speak? art thou overjoyed?

WIT

Odso, brother, is it you? your servant, brother.

SIR WIL

Your servant! why yours, sir. Your servant again- s'heart,

and your friend and servant to that- and a- and a- flap-dragon
for your service, sir! and a hare's foot and a hare's scut for
your service, sir! an you be so cold and so courtly.

WIT

No offence, I hope, brother.

SIR WIL

S'heart, sir, but there is, and much offence!- A pox, is
this your inns o' court breeding, not to know your friends and
your relations, your elders and your betters?

WIT

Why, brother Wilfull of Salop, you may be as short as a
Shrewsbury-cake, if you please. But I tell you 'tis not modish
to know relations in town: you think you're in the country,
where great lubberly brothers slabber and kiss one another when
they meet, like a call of serjeants- 'tis not the fashion here;
'tis not indeed, dear brother.

SIR WIL

The fashion's a fool; and you're a fop, dear brother.
S'heart, I've suspected this- by'r Lady, I conjectured you were
a fop, since you began to change the style of your letters, and
write on a scrap of paper gilt round the edges, no bigger than a

subpoena. I might expect this when you left off, "Honoured brother;" and "hoping you are in good health," and so forth- to begin with a "Rat me, knight, I'm so sick of a last night's debauch"- 'ods heart, and then tell a familiar tale of a cock and a bull, and a whore and a bottle, and so conclude.- You could write news before you were out of your time, when you lived with honest Pimple Nose the attorney of Furnival's Inn- you could entreat to be remembered then to your friends round the Wrekin. We could have gazettes, then, and Dawks's Letter, and the Weekly Bill, till of late days.

PET

S'lfe, Witwoud, were you ever an attorney's clerk? of the family of the Furnival? Ha! ha! ha!

WIT

Ay, ay, but that was but for a while: not long, not long. Pshaw! I was not in my own power then;- an orphan, and this fellow was my guardian; ay, ay, I was glad to consent to that, man, to come to London: he had the disposal of me then. If I had not agreed to that, I might have been bound 'prentice to a felt-maker in Shrewsbury; this fellow would have bound me to a maker of fells.

SIR WIL

S'heart, and better than to be bound to a maker of fops;
where, I suppose, you have served your time; and now you may set
up for yourself.

MRS. MAR

You intend to travel, sir, as I'm informed.

SIR WIL

Belike I may, madam. I may chance to sail upon the salt
seas, if my mind hold.

PET

And the wind serve.

SIR WIL

Serve or not serve, I shan't ask licence of you, sir; nor
the weathercock your companion: I direct my discourse to the
lady, sir.- 'Tis like my aunt may have told you, madam- yes, I
have settled my concerns, I may say now, and am minded to see
foreign parts. If an how that the peace holds, whereby that is,
taxes abate.

MRS. MAR

I thought you had designed for France at all adventures.

SIR WIL

I can't tell that; 'tis like I may, and 'tis like I may not. I am somewhat dainty in making a resolution- because when I make it I keep it. I don't stand shill I, shall I, then; if I say't, I'll do't; but I have thoughts to tarry a small matter in town, to learn somewhat of your lingo first, before I cross the seas. I'd gladly have a spice of your French as they say, whereby to hold discourse in foreign countries.

MRS. MAR

Here's an academy in town for that use.

SIR WIL

There is? 'Tis like there may.

MRS. MAR

No doubt you will return very much improved.

WIT

Yes, refined, like a Dutch skipper from a whale fishing.

Enter Lady WISHFORT and FAINALL.

LADY WISH

Nephew, you are welcome.

SIR WIL

Aunt, your servant.

FAIN

Sir Wilfull, your most faithful servant.

SIR WIL

Cousin Fainall, give me your hand.

LADY WISH

Cousin Witwoud, your servant; Mr. Petulant, your servant- nephew, you are welcome again. Will you drink anything after your journey, nephew; before you eat? dinner's almost ready.

SIR WIL

I'm very well, I thank you, aunt- however, I thank you for your courteous offer. S'heart I was afraid you would have been in the fashion too, and have remembered to have forgot your relations. Here's your cousin Tony, belike, I mayn't call him brother for fear of offence.

LADY WISH

O, he's a railleur, nephew- my cousin's a wit: and your great wits always rally their best friends to choose. When you

have been abroad, nephew, you'll understand raillery better.

(FAINALL and Mrs. MARWOOD talk apart)

SIR WIL

Why then let him hold his tongue in the mean time; and rail when that day comes.

Enter MINCING.

MIN

Mem, I am come to acquaint your la'ship that dinner is impatient.

SIR WIL

Impatient! why then belike it won't stay till I pull off my boots.- Sweetheart, can you help me to a pair of slippers?- My man's with his horses, I warrant.

LADY WISH

Fy, fy, nephew! you would not pull off your boots here?-
Go down into the hall- dinner shall stay for you.- My nephew's a little unbred, you'll pardon him, madam.- Gentlemen, will you walk?- Marwood-

MRS. MAR

I'll follow you, madam- before Sir Wilfull is ready.

(Exeunt all but Mrs. MARWOOD and FAINALL)

FAIN

Why then, Foible's a bawd, an arrant, rank, matchmaking bawd: and I, it seems, am a husband, a rank husband; and my wife a very arrant, rank wife- all in the way of the world. 'Sdeath, to be a cuckold by anticipation, a cuckold in embryo! sure I was born with budding antlers, like a young satyr, or a citizen's child. 'Sdeath! to be out-witted- to be out-jilted- out-matrimony'd!- If I had kept my speed like a stag, 'twere somewhat,- but to crawl after, with my horns, like a snail, and be outstripped by my wife- 'tis scurvy wedlock.

MRS. MAR

Then shake it off you have often wished for an opportunity to part- and now you have it. But first prevent their plot- the half of Millamant's fortune is too considerable to be parted with, to a foe, to Mirabell.

FAIN

Damn him! that had been mine- had you not made that fond

discovery- that had been forfeited, had they been married. My wife had added lustre to my horns by that increase of fortune; I could have worn 'em tipped with gold, though my forehead had been furnished like a deputy-lieutenant's hall.

MRS. MAR

They may prove a cap of maintenance to you still, if you can away with your wife. And she's no worse than when you had her- I dare swear she had given up her game before she was married.

FAIN

Hum! that may be.

MRS. MAR

You married her to keep you; and if you can contrive to have her keep you better than you expected, why should you not keep her longer than you intended.

FAIN

The means, the means.

MRS. MAR

Discover to my lady your wife's conduct; threaten to part with her!- my lady loves her, and will come to any composition

to save her reputation. Take the opportunity of breaking it, just upon the discovery of this imposture. My lady will be enraged beyond bounds, and sacrifice niece, and fortune, and all, at that conjuncture. And let me alone to keep her warm; if she should flag in her part, I will not fail to prompt her.

FAIN

Faith, this has an appearance.

MRS. MAR

I'm sorry I hinted to my lady to endeavour a match between Millamant and Sir Wilfull: that may be an obstacle.

FAIN

Oh, for that matter, leave me to manage him: I'll disable him for that; he will drink like a Dane; after dinner, I'll set his hand in.

MRS. MAR

Well, how do you stand affected towards your lady?

FAIN

Why, faith, I'm thinking of it.- Let me see- I am married already, so that's over:- my wife has played the jade with me- well, that's over too:- I never loved her, or if I had, why that

would have been over too by this time:- jealous of her I cannot be, for I am certain; so there's an end of jealousy:- weary of her I am, and shall be- no, there's no end of that- no, no, that were too much to hope. Thus far concerning my repose; now for my reputation. As to my own, I married not for it, so that's out of the question;- and as to my part in my wife's- why, she had parted with her's before; so bringing none to me, she can take none from me; 'tis against all rule of play, that I should lose to one who has not wherewithal to stake.

MRS. MAR

Besides, you forget, marriage is honourable.

FAIN

Hum, faith, and that's well thought on; marriage is honourable as you say; and if so, wherefore should cuckoldom be a discredit, being derived from so honourable a root?

MRS. MAR

Nay, I know not; if the root be honourable, why not the branches?

FAIN

So, so, why this point's clear- well, how do we proceed?

MRS. MAR

I will contrive a letter which shall be delivered to my lady at the time when that rascal who is to act Sir Rowland is with her. It shall come as from an unknown hand- for the less I appear to know of the truth, the better I can play the incendiary. Besides, I would not have Foible provoked if I could help it- because you know she knows some passages- nay, I expect all will come out- but let the mine be sprung first, and then I care not if I am discovered.

FAIN

If the worst come to the worst- I'll turn my wife to grass- I have already a deed of settlement of the best part of her estate; which I wheedled out of her; and that you shall partake at least.

MRS. MAR

I hope you are convinced that I hate Mirabell now; you'll be no more jealous?

FAIN

Jealous! no- by this kiss- let husbands be jealous; but let the lover still believe; or if he doubt, let it be only to endear his pleasure, and prepare the joy that follows, when he

proves his mistress true. But let husbands' doubts convert to endless jealousy; or if they have belief, let it corrupt to superstition and blind credulity. I am single, and will herd no more with 'em. True, I wear the badge, but I'll disown the order. And since I take my leave of 'em I care not if I leave 'em a common motto to their common crest:-
All husbands must or pain or shame endure;
The wise too jealous are, fools too secure.

(Exeunt)

ACT IV

SCENE I

A Room in Lady WISHFORT'S House

Lady WISHFORT and FOIBLE.

LADY WISH

Is Sir Rowland coming, sayest thou, Foible? and are things in order?

FOIB

Yes, madam, I have put wax lights in the sconces, and placed the footmen in a row in the hall, in their best liveries, with the coachman and postillion to fill up the equipage.

LADY WISH

Have you pulvilled the coachman and postillion, that they may not stink of the stable when Sir Rowland comes by?

FOIB

Yes, madam.

LADY WISH

And are the dancers and the music ready, that he may be entertained in all points with correspondence to his passion?

FOIB

All is ready, madam.

LADY WISH

And- well- and how do I look, Foible?

FOIB

Most killing well, madam.

LADY WISH

Well, and how shall I receive him? in what figure shall I give his heart the first impression? there is a great deal in the first impression. Shall I sit?- no, I won't sit- I'll walk- ay, I'll walk from the door upon his entrance: and then turn full upon him- no, that will be too sudden. I'll lie- ay, I'll lie down- I'll receive him in my little dressing-room, there's a couch- yes, yes, I'll give the first impression on a couch.- I won't lie neither, but loll and lean upon one elbow: with one foot a little dangling off, jogging in a thoughtful way- yes- and then as soon as he appears, start, ay, start and be surprised, and rise to meet him in a pretty disorder- yes- O, nothing is more alluring than a levee from a couch, in some confusion:- it shows the foot to advantage, and furnishes with blushes, and recomposing airs beyond comparison. Hark! there's

a coach.

FOIB

'Tis he, madam.

LADY WISH

O dear!- Has my nephew made his addresses to Millamant? I ordered him.

FOIB

Sir Wilfull is set in to drinking, madam,. in the parlour.

LADY WISH

Odds my life, I'll send him to her. Call her down, Foible; bring her hither. I'll send him as I go- when they are together, then come to me, Foible, that I may not be too long alone with Sir Rowland.

(Exit)

Enter MRS. MILLAMANT and MRS. FAINALL.

FOIB

Madam, I stayed here, to tell your ladyship that Mr. Mirabell has waited this half hour for an opportunity to talk with you: though my lady's orders were to leave you and Sir Wilfull

together. Shall I tell Mr. Mirabell that you are at leisure?

MRS. MIL

No,- what would the dear man have? I am thoughtful, and would amuse myself- bid him come another time.

“There never yet was woman made
Nor shall but to be cursed.”

[Repeating, and walking about.]

That’s hard.

MRS. FAIN

You are very fond of Sir John Suckling to-day,
Millamant, and the poets.

MRS. MIL

He? Ay, and filthy verses- so I am.

FOIB

Sir Wilfull is coming, madam. Shall I send Mr. Mirabell away?

MRS. MIL

Ay, if you please, Foible, send him away- or send him
hither- just as you will, dear Foible.- I think I’ll see

him- shall I? ay, let the wretch come.

(Exit FOIBLE)

“Thyrsis, a youth of the inspired train.”

[Repeating.

Dear Fainall, entertain Sir Wilfull- thou hast philosophy to undergo a fool, thou art married and hast patience- I would confer with my own thoughts.

MRS. FAIN

I am obliged to you, that you would make me your proxy in this affair; but I have business of my own.

Enter Sir WILFULL.

MRS. FAIN

O Sir Wilfull, you are come at the critical instant.
There's your mistress up to the ears in love and contemplation;
pursue your point now or never.

SIR WIL

Yes; my aunt will have it so- I would gladly have been encouraged with a bottle or two, because I'm somewhat wary at

first before I am acquainted.

(This while MILLAMANT walks about repeating to herself.)

But I hope, after a time, I shall break
my mind- that is, upon further acquaintance- so for the present,
cousin, I'll take my leave- if so be you'll be so kind to make
my excuse, I'll return to my company-

MRS. FAIN

O fy, Sir Wilfull! what, you must not be daunted.

SIR WIL

Daunted! no, that's not it, it is not so much for that- for
if so be that I set on't, I'll do't. But only for the present,
'tis sufficient till further acquaintance, that's all- your
servant.

MRS. FAIN

Nay, I'll swear you shall never lose so favourable an opportunity, if I can help it. I'll leave you together, and lock the door.

(Exit)

SIR WIL

Nay, nay, cousin.- I have forgot my gloves- what d'ye do?- S'heart, a'has locked the door indeed, I think- nay, Cousin Fainall, open the door- pshaw, what a vixen trick is this?- Nay, now a'has seen me too.- Cousin, I made bold to pass through as it were- I think this door's enchanted!

MRS. MIL (Repeating)

"I prithee spare me, gentle boy,
Press me no more for that slight toy."

SIR WIL

Anan? Cousin, your servant.

MRS. MIL (Repeating)

“That foolish trifle of a heart.” Sir Wilfull!

SIR WIL

Yes- your servant. No offence, I hope, cousin.

MRS. MIL (Repeating)

“I swear it will not do its part,
Though thou dost thine, employest thy power and art.”
Natural, easy Suckling!

SIR WIL

Anan? Suckling! no such suckling, neither, cousin, nor
stripling: I thank Heaven, I’m no minor.

MRS. MIL

Ah, rustic, ruder than Gothic!

SIR WIL

Well, well, I shall understand your lingo one of these
days, cousin; in the meanwhile I must answer in plain English.

MRS. MIL

Have you any business with me, Sir Wilfull?

SIR WIL

Not at present, cousin- yes I make bold to see, to come and

know if that how you were disposed to fetch a walk this evening, if so be that I might not be troublesome, I would have sought a walk with you.

MRS. MIL

A walk! what then?

SIR WIL

Nay, nothing- only for the walk's sake, that's all.

MRS. MIL

I nauseate walking; 'tis a country diversion; I loathe the country, and everything that relates to it.

SIR WIL

Indeed! ha! look ye, look ye, you do? Nay, 'tis like you may- here are choice of pastimes here in town, as plays and the like; that must be confessed indeed.

MRS. MIL

Ah l'etourdi! I hate the town too.

SIR WIL

Dear heart, that's much- ha! that you should hate 'em both! ha! 'tis like you may; there are some can't relish the town, and others can't away with the country- 'tis like you may be one of

those, cousin.

MRS. MIL

Ha! ha! ha! yes, 'tis like I may.- You have nothing further to say to me?

SIR WIL

Not at present, cousin.- 'Tis like when I have an opportunity to be more private- I may break my mind in some measure- I conjecture you partly guess- however, that's as time shall try- but spare to speak and spare to speed, as they say.

MRS. MIL

If it is of no great importance, Sir Wilfull, you will oblige me to leave me; I have just now a little business-

SIR WIL

Enough, enough, cousin: yes, yes, all a case- when you're disposed: now's as well as another time; and another time as well as now. All's one for that- yes, yes, if your concerns call you, there's no haste; it will keep cold, as they say.- Cousin, your servant- I think this door's locked.

MRS. MIL

You may go this way, sir.

SIR WIL

Your servant; then with your leave I'll return to my company.

(Exit)

MRS. MIL

Ay, ay; ha! ha! ha!

“Like Phoebus sung the no less amorous boy.”

Enter MIRABELL.

MIR.

“Like Daphne she, as lovely and as coy.”

Do you lock yourself up from me, to make my search more curious? Or is this pretty artifice contrived to signify that here the chase must end, and my pursuits be crowned? For you can fly no further.

MRS. MIL

Vanity! no- I'll fly, and be followed to the last moment.

Though I am upon the very verge of matrimony, I expect you should solicit me as much as if I were wavering at the grate of a monastery, with one foot over the threshold. I'll be solicited to the very last, nay, and afterwards.

MIR

What, after the last?

MRS. MIL

Oh, I should think I was poor and had nothing to bestow, if I were reduced to an inglorious ease, and freed from the agreeable fatigues of solicitation.

MIR

But do not you know, that when favours are conferred upon instant and tedious solicitation, that they diminish in their value, and that both the giver loses the grace, and the receiver lessens his pleasure?

MRS. MIL

It may be in things of common application; but never sure in love. Oh, I hate a lover that can dare to think he draws a moment's air, independent of the bounty of his mistress. There is not so impudent a thing in nature, as the saucy look of an assured man, confident of success. The pedantic arrogance of a very husband has not so pragmatical an air. Ah! I'll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure.

MIR

Would you have 'em both before marriage? or will you be

contented with the first now, and stay for the other till after
grace?

MRS. MIL

Ah! don't be impertinent.- My dear liberty, shall I leave
thee? my faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid
you then adieu? Ay-h adieu- my morning, thoughts, agreeable
wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye douceurs, ye sommeils du
matin, adieu?- I can't can't do't, 'tis more than impossible-
positively, Mirabell, I'll lie abed in a morning as long as I
please.

MIR

Then I'll get up in a morning as early as I please.

MRS. MIL

Ah! idle creature, get up when you will- and d'ye hear, I
won't be called names after I'm married; positively I won't be
called names.

MIR

Names!

MRS. MIL

Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love,

sweetheart, and the rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar- I shall never bear that-good Mirabell, don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks, like my Lady Fadler and Sir Francis: nor go to Hyde-park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers, and then never to be seen there together again; as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together; but let us be very strange and well-bred: let us be as strange as if we had been married a great while; and as well-bred as if we were not married at all.

MIR

Have you any more conditions to offer? Hitherto your demands are pretty reasonable.

MRS. MIL

Trifles!- As liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces on your part; to wear what I please; and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance: or to be

intimate with fools, because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please; dine in my dressing-room when I'm out of humour, without giving a reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

MIR

Your bill of fare is something advanced in this latter account.- Well, have I liberty to offer conditions- that when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarged into a husband?

MRS. MIL

You have free leave; propose your utmost, speak and spare not.

MIR

I thank you.- Imprimis then, I covenant, that your acquaintance be general that you admit no sworn confidant, or intimate of your own sex; no she friend to screen her affairs under your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No

decoy duck to wheedle you a fop-scrambling to the play in a mask- then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you think you shall be found out- and rail at me for missing the play, and disappointing the frolic which you had to pick me up, and prove my constancy.

MRS. MIL

Detestable imprimis! I go to the play in a mask!

MIR

Item, I article, that you continue to like your own face, as long as I shall: and while it passes current with me, that you endeavour not to new-coin it. To which end, together with all vizards for the day, I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled-skins, and I know not what- hogs' bones, hares' gall, pig-water, and the marrow of a roasted cat. In short, I forbid all commerce with the gentlewoman in what d'ye call it court. Item, I shut my doors against all bawds with baskets, and pennyworths of muslin, china, fans, atlases, etc.- Item, when you shall be breeding-

MIL

Ah! name it not.

MIR

Which may be presumed with a blessing on our endeavours.

MRS. MIL

Odious endeavours!

MIR

I denounce against all strait lacing, squeezing for a shape, till you mould my boy's head like a sugar-loaf, and instead of a man child, make me father to a crooked billet. Lastly, to the dominion of the tea-table I submit- but with proviso, that you exceed not in your province; but restrain yourself to native and simple tea-table drinks, as tea, chocolate, and coffee: as likewise to genuine and authorised tea-table talk- such as mending fashions, spoiling reputations, railing at absent friends, and so forth- but that on no account you encroach upon the men's prerogative, and presume to drink healths, or toast fellows; for prevention of which I banish all foreign forces, all auxiliaries to the tea-table, as orange-brandy, all aniseed, cinnamon, citron, and Barbadoes waters, together with ratafia, and the most noble spirit of clary- but for cowslip wine, poppy water, and all dormitives, those I allow.- These provisos admitted, in other things I may prove a tractable and complying

husband.

MRS. MIL.

O horrid provisos! filthy strong-waters! I toast fellows!
odious men! I hate your odious provisos.

MIR

Then we are agreed! shall I kiss your hand upon the contract?
And here comes one to be a witness to the sealing of the deed.

Enter Mrs. FAINALL.

MRS. MIL

Fainall, what shall I do? shall I have him? I think I must
have him.

MRS. FAIN

Ay, ay, take him, take him, what should you do?

MRS. MIL

Well then- I'll take my death I'm in a horrid fright-
Fainall, I shall never say it- well- I think- I'll endure you.

MRS. FAIN

Fy! fy! have him, have him, and tell him so in plain
terms: for I am sure you have a mind to him.

MRS. MIL

Are you? I think I have- and the horrid man looks as if he thought so too- well, you ridiculous thing you, I'll have you- I won't be kissed, nor I won't be thanked- here kiss my hand though.- So, hold your tongue now, don't say a word.

MRS. FAIN

Mirabell, there's a necessity for your obedience;- you have neither time to talk nor stay. My mother is coming; and in my conscience if she should see you, would fall into fits, and maybe not recover time enough to return to Sir Rowland, who, as Foible tells me, is in a fair way to succeed. Therefore spare your ecstasies for another occasion, and slip down the back-stairs, where Foible waits to consult you.

MRS. MIL

Ay, go, go. In the mean time I suppose you have said something to please me.

MIR

I am all obedience.

(Exit)

MRS. FAIN

Yonder Sir Wilfull's drunk, and so noisy that my mother has been forced to leave Sir Rowland to appease him; but he answers her only with singing and drinking- what they may have done by this time I know not; but Petulant and he were upon quarrelling as I came by.

MRS. MIL

Well, if Mirabell should not make a good husband, I am a lost thing,- for I find I love him violently.

MRS. FAIN

So it seems; for you mind not what's said to you.- If you doubt him, you had best take up with Sir Wilfull.

MRS. MIL

How can you name that superannuated lubber? foh!

Enter WITWOUD.

MRS. FAIN

So, is the fray made up, that you have left 'em?

WIT

Left 'em? I could stay no longer- I have laughed like ten christnings- I am tipsy with laughing- if I had stayed any

longer I should have burst,- I must have been let out and pieced in the sides like an unsized camlet.- Yes, yes, the fray is composed; my lady came in like a noli prosequi, and stopped the proceedings.

MRS. MIL

What was the dispute?

WIT

That's the jest; there was no dispute. They could neither of 'em speak for rage, and so fell a sputtering at one another like two roasting apples.

Enter PETULANT, drunk.

WIT

Now, Petulant, all's over, all's well. Gad, my head begins to whim it about- why dost thou not speak? thou art both as drunk and as mute as a fish.

PET

Look you, Mrs. Millamant- if you can love me, dear nymph- say it- and that's the conclusion- pass on, or pass off- that's all.

WIT

Thou hast uttered volumes, folios, in less than decimo sexto,
my dear Lacedemonian. Sirrah, Petulant, thou art an epitomiser
of words.

PET

Witwoud- you are an annihilator of sense.

WIT

Thou art a retailer of phrases; and dost deal in remnants of
remnants, like a maker of pincushions- thou art in truth
(metaphorically speaking) a speaker of shorthand.

PET

Thou art (without a figure) just one half of an ass, and
Baldwin yonder, thy half-brother, is the rest.- A Gemini of
asses split would make just four of you.

WIT

Thou dost bite, my dear mustard-seed; kiss me for that.

PET

Stand off!- I'll kiss no more males- I have kissed your twin
yonder in a humour of reconciliation, till he

[Hiccups]

rises upon my stomach like a radish.

MRS. MIL

Eh! filthy creature! what was the quarrel?

PET

There was no quarrel- there might have been a quarrel.

WIT

If there had been words enow between 'em to have expressed provocation, they had gone together by the ears like a pair of castanets.

PET

You were the quarrel.

MRS. MIL

Me!

PET

If I have a humour to quarrel, I can make less matters conclude premises.- If you are not handsome, what then, if I have a humour to prove it? If I shall have my reward, say so; if not, fight for your face the next time yourself- I'll go sleep.

WIT

Do. wrap thysel up like a wood-louse. and dream revenge- and

hear me, if thou canst learn to write by to-morrow morning, pen me a challenge.- I'll carry it for thee.

PET

Carry your mistress's monkey a spider!- Go flea dogs, and read romances!- I'll go to bed to my maid.

(Exit)

MRS. FAIN

He's horridly drunk.- How came you all in this pickle?

WIT

A plot! a plot! to get rid of the night- your husband's advice; but he sneaked off.

ACT IV

SCENE II

The Dining-room in Lady WISHFORT'S House

*Sir WILFULL drunk, Lady WISHFORT, WITWOUD, Mrs. MILLAMANT,
and Mrs. FAINALL.*

LADY WISH

Out upon't, out upon't! At years of discretion, and
comport yourself at this rantipole rate!

SIR WIL

No offence, aunt.

LADY WISH

Offence! as I'm a person, I'm ashamed of you- foh! how
you stink of wine! D'ye think my niece will ever endure such a
Borachio! you're an absolute Borachio.

SIR WIL

Borachio?

LADY WISH

At a time when you should commence an amour, and put your

best foot foremost-

SIR WIL

S'heart, an you grutch me your liquor, make a bill- give me
more drink, and take my purse-

(Sings)

“Prithee fill me the glass,
Till it laugh in my face,
With ale that is potent and mellow;
He that whines for a lass,
Is an ignorant ass,
For a bumper has not its fellow.”

But if you would have me marry my cousin- say the word, and I'll
do't- Wilfull will do't, that's the word- Wilfull will do't,
that's my crest- my motto I have forgot.

LADY WISH

My nephew's a little overtaken, cousin- but 'tis with
drinking your health.- O' my word you are obliged to him.

SIR WIL

In vino veritas, aunt.- If I drunk your health to-day,

cousin- I am a Borachio. But if you have a mind to be married, say the word, and send for the piper; Wilfull will do't. If not, dust it away, and let's have t'other round.- Tony!- Odds heart, where's Tony!- Tony's an honest fellow; but he spits after a bumper, and that's a fault.

(Sings)

“We'll drink, and we'll never ha' done,
Put the glass then around with the sun, boys,
Let Apollo's example invite us;
For he's drunk every night,
And that makes him so bright,
That he's able next morning to light us.”

The sun's a good pimple, an honest soaker; he has a cellar at your Antipodes. If I travel, aunt, I touch at your Antipodes.- Your Antipodes are a good, rascally sort of topsy-turvy fellows: if I had a bumper, I'd stand upon my head and drink a health to 'em.- A match or no match, cousin with the hard name?- Aunt, Wilfull will do't. If she has her maidenhead, let her look to't; if she has not, let her keep her own counsel in the meantime, and cry out at the nine months' end.

MRS. MIL

Your pardon, madam, I can stay no longer- Sir Wilfull grows very powerful. Eh! how he smells! I shall be overcome, if I stay.- Come, cousin.

(Exeunt Mrs. MILLAMANT and Mrs. FAINALL)

LADY WISH

Smells! he would poison a tallow-chandler and his family! Beastly creature, I know not what to do with him!- Travel, quotha! ay, travel, travel, get thee gone, get thee gone, get thee but far enough, to the Saracens, or the Tartars, or the Turks!- for thou art not fit to live in a Christian commonwealth, thou beastly Pagan!

SIR WIL

Turks, no; no Turks, aunt: your Turks are infidels, and believe not in the grape. Your Mahometan, your Mussulman, is a dry stinkard- no offence, aunt. My map says that your Turk is not so honest a man as your Christian. I cannot find by the map that your Mufti is orthodox- whereby it is a plain case, that orthodox is a hard word, aunt, and [Hiccups] Greek for claret.-
(Sings)

“To drink is a Christian diversion,

Unknown to the Turk or the Persian:
Let Mahometan fools
Live by heathenish rules,
And be damned over tea-cups and coffee.
But let British lads sing,
Crown a health to the king,
And a fig for your sultan and sophy!"

Ah Tony!

Enter FOIBLE, who whispers to Lady WISHFORT.

LADY WISH (Aside to FOIBLE)

Sir Rowland impatient? Good lack!
what shall I do with this beastly tumbrel?

[Aloud.]

Go lie down and sleep, you sot!- or, as I'm a person, I'll have you
bastinadoed with broomsticks.- Call up the wenches.

SIR WIL

Ahey! wenches, where are the wenches?

LADY WISH

Dear Cousin WitWoud, get him away, and you will bind me to you inviolably. I have an affair of moment that invades me with some precipitation- you will oblige me to all futurity.

WIT

Come, knight.- Pox on him, I don't know what to say to him.- Will you go to a cock-match?

SIR WIL

With a wench, Tony! Is she a shakebag, sirrah? Let me bite your cheek for that.

WIT

Horrible! he has a breath like a bag-pipe!- Ay, ay; come, will you march, my Salopian?

SIR WIL

Lead on, little Tony- I'll follow thee, my Anthony, my Tantony, sirrah, thou shalt be my Tantony, and I'll be thy pig.

(Sings)

“And a fig for your sultan and sophy.”

(Exeunt Sir WILFULL and WITWOUD)

LADY WISH

This will never do. It will never make a match- at least before he has been abroad.

Enter WAITWELL, disguised as Sir ROWLAND.

LADY WISH

Dear Sir Rowland, I am confounded with confusion at the retrospection of my own rudeness!- I have more pardons to ask than the pope distributes in the year of jubilee. But I hope, where there is likely to be so near an alliance, we may unbend the severity of decorums, and dispense with a little ceremony.

WAIT

My impatience, madam, is the effect of my transport; and till I have the possession of your adorable person, I am tantalised on the rack; and do but hang, madam, on the tenter of expectation.

LADY WISH

You have an excess of gallantry, Sir Rowland, and press things to a conclusion with a most prevailing vehemence.- But a day or two for decency of marriage-

WAIT

For decency of funeral, madam! The delay will break my heart- or, if that should fail, I shall be poisoned. My nephew will get an inkling of my designs, and poison me- and I would willingly starve him before I die- I would gladly go out of the world with that satisfaction.- That would be some comfort to me, if I could but live so long as to be revenged on that unnatural viper!

LADY WISH

Is he so unnatural, say you? Truly I would contribute much both to the saving of your life, and the accomplishment of your revenge.- Not that I respect myself, though he has been a perfidious wretch to me.

WAIT

Perfidious to you!

LADY WISH

O Sir Rowland, the hours that he has died away at my feet, the tears that he has shed, the oaths that he has sworn, the palpitations that he has felt, the trances and the tremblings, the ardours and the ecstacies, the kneelings and the risings, the heart-heavings and the hand-gripings, the pangs and the pathetic regards of his protesting eyes!- Oh, no memory can

register!

WAIT

What, my rival! is the rebel my rival?- a' dies.

LADY WISH

No, don't kill him at once, Sir Rowland, starve him gradually, inch by inch.

WAIT

I'll do't. In three weeks he shall be barefoot; in a month out at knees with begging an alms.- He shall starve upward and upward, till he has nothing living but his head, and then go out in a stink like a candle's end upon a save-all.

LADY WISH

Well, Sir Rowland, you have the way- you are no novice in the labyrinth of love- you have the clue.- But as I am a person, Sir Rowland, you must not attribute my yielding to any sinister appetite, or indigestion of widowhood; nor impute my complacency to any lethargy of continence- I hope you do not think me prone to any iteration of nuptials-

WAIT

Far be it from me-

LADY WISH

If you do, I protest I must recede- or think that I have made a prostitution of decorums; but in the vehemence of compassion, and to save the life of a person of so much importance-

WAIT

I esteem it so.

LADY WISH

Or else you wrong my condescension.

WAIT

I do not, I do not!

LADY WISH

Indeed you do.

WAIT

I do not, fair shrine of virtue!

LADY WISH

If you think the least scruple of carnality was an ingredient.-

WAIT

Dear madam, no. You are all camphor and frankincense, all chastity and odour.

LADY WISH

Or that-

Enter FOIBLE.

FOIB

Madam, the dancers are ready; and there's one with a letter, who must deliver it into your own hands.

LADY WISH

Sir Rowland, will you give me leave? Think favourably, judge candidly, and conclude you have found a person who would suffer racks in honour's cause, dear Sir Rowland, and will wait on you incessantly.

(Exit)

WAIT

Fy, fy!- What a slavery have I undergone! Spouse, hast thou any cordial; I want spirits.

FOIB

What a washy rogue art thou, to pant thus for a quarter of an hour's lying and swearing to a fine lady!

WAIT

Oh, she is the antidote to desire! Spouse, thou wilt fare the worse for't- I shall have no appetite to iteration of nuptials this eight-and-forty hours.- By this hand I'd rather be a chairman in the dog-days- than act Sir Rowland till this time tomorrow!

Re-enter Lady WISHFORT, With a letter.

LADY WISH

Call in the dancers.- Sir Rowland, we'll sit, if you please, and see the entertainment.

[A Dance.]

Now, with your permission, Sir Rowland, I will peruse my letter.- I would open it in your presence, because I would not make you uneasy. If it should make you uneasy, I would burn it.- Speak, if it does- but you may see the superscription is like a woman's hand.

FOIB [Aside to WAITWELL.]

By Heaven! Mrs. Marwood's, I know it.- My heart aches- get it from her.

WAIT

A woman's hand! no, madam, that's no woman's hand, I see that already. That's somebody whose throat must be cut.

LADY WISH

Nay, Sir Rowland, since you give me a proof of your passion by your jealousy, I promise you I'll make a return, by a frank communication.- You shall see it- we'll open it together- look you here.- [Reads.]- "Madam, though unknown to you"- Look you there, 'tis from nobody that I know- "I have that honour for your character, that I think myself obliged to let you know you are abused. He who pretends to be Sir Rowland, is a cheat and a rascal."- Oh Heavens! what's this?

FOIB [Aside.]

Unfortunate! all's ruined!

WAIT

How, how, let me see, let me see!-

[Reads.]

“A rascal, and disguised and suborned for that imposture,”- O villainy! O villainy!- “by the contrivance of-”

LADY WISH

I shall faint, I shall die, oh!

FOIB [Aside to WAITWELL.]

Say ‘tis your nephew’s hand- quickly, his plot, swear it, swear it!

WAIT

Here’s a villain! madam, don’t you perceive it, don’t you see it?

LADY WISH

Too well, too well! I have seen too much.

WAIT

I told you at first I knew the hand.- A woman’s hand! The rascal writes a sort of a large hand; your Roman hand- I saw there was a throat to be cut presently. If he were my son, as he is my nephew, I’d pistol him!

FOIB

O treachery!- But are you sure, Sir Rowland, it is his writing?

WAIT

Sure! am I here? do I live? do I love this pearl of India? I have twenty letters in my pocket from him in the same character.

LADY WISH

How!

FOIB

O what luck it is, Sir Rowland, that you were present at this juncture!- This was the business that brought Mr. Mirabell disguised to Madam Millamant this afternoon. I thought something was contriving when he stole by me and would have hid his face.

LADY WISH

How, how!- I heard the villain was in the house indeed; and now I remember, my niece went away abruptly, when Sir Wilfull was to have made his addresses.

FOIB

Then, then, madam, Mr. Mirabell waited for her in her chamber! but I would not tell your ladyship to discompose you when you were to receive Sir Rowland.

WAIT

Enough, his date is short.

FOIB

No, good Sir Rowland, don't incur the law.

WAIT

Law! I care not for law. I can but die, and 'tis in a good cause.- My lady shall be satisfied of my truth and innocence, though it cost me my life.

LADY WISH

No, dear Sir Rowland, don't fight; if you should be killed I must never show my face; or hanged- O, consider my reputation, Sir Rowland!- No, you shan't fight- I'll go in and examine my niece; I'll make her confess. I conjure you, Sir Rowland, by all your love, not to fight.

WAIT

I am charmed, madam, I obey. But some proof you must let me give you; I'll go for a black box, which contains the writings of my whole estate, and deliver them into your hands.

LADY WISH

Ay, dear Sir Rowland, that will be some comfort, bring
the black box.

WAIT

And may I presume to bring a contract to be signed this night?
may I hope so far?

LADY WISH

Bring what you will; but come alive, pray come alive.
Oh, this is a happy discovery!

WAIT

Dead or alive I'll come- and married we will be in spite of
treachery; ay, and get an heir that shall defeat the last
remaining glimpse of hope in my abandoned nephew. Come, my
buxom widow:
Ere long you shall substantial proofs receive,
That I'm an errant knight-

FOIB [Aside.]

Or errant knave.

[Exeunt].

ACT V

SCENE I

*A Room in Lady WISHFORT'S House
Lady WISHFORT and FOIBLE.*

LADY WISH

Out of my house, out of my house, thou viper! thou serpent, that I have fostered! thou bosom traitress, that I raised from nothing!- Begone! begone! begone!- go! go!- That I took from washing of old gauze and weaving of dead hair, with a bleak blue nose over a chafing-dish of starved embers, and dining behind a traverse rag, in a shop no bigger than a birdcage!- Go, go! starve again, do, do!

FOIB

Dear madam, I'll beg pardon on my knees.

LADY WISH

Away! out! out!- Go, set up for yourself again!- Do, drive a trade, do, with your three-pennyworth of small ware, flaunting upon a packthread, under a brandy-seller's bulk, or against a dead wall by a ballad-monger! Go, hang out an old

Frisoneer gorget, with a yard of yellow colberteen again.
Do; an old gnawed mask, two rows of pins, and a child's fiddle;
a glass necklace with the beads broken, and a quilted nightcap
with one ear. Go, go, drive a trade!- These were your
commodities, you treacherous trull! this was the merchandise
you dealt in when I took you into my house, placed you next
myself, and made you governante of my whole family! You have
forgot this, have you, now you have feathered your nest?

FOIB

No, no, dear madam. Do but hear me, have but a moment's
patience, I'll confess all. Mr. Mirabell seduced me; I am not
the first that he has wheedled with his dissembling tongue; your
ladyship's own wisdom has been deluded by him; then how should
I, a poor ignorant, defend myself? O madam, if you knew but what
he promised me, and how he assured me your ladyship should
come
to no damage!- Or else the wealth of the Indies should not have
bribed me to conspire against so good, so sweet, so kind a lady
as you have been to me.

LADY WISH

No damage! What, to betray me, and marry me to a

cast-servingman! to make me a receptacle, an hospital for a decayed pimp! No damage! O thou frontless impudence, more than a big-bellied actress!

FOIB

Pray, do but hear me, madam; he could not marry your ladyship, madam.- No, indeed, his marriage was to have been void in law, for he was married to me first, to secure your ladyship. He could not have bedded your ladyship; for if he had consummated with your ladyship, he must have run the risk of the law, and been put upon his clergy.- Yes, indeed, I inquired of the law in that case before I would meddle or make.

LADY WISH

What then, I have been your property, have I? I have been convenient to you, it seems!- While you were catering for Mirabell, I have been broker for you! What, have you made a passive bawd of me?- This exceeds all precedent; I am brought to fine uses, to become a botcher of second-hand marriages between Abigails and Andrews!- I'll couple you!- Yes, I'll baste you together, you and your Philanderer!. I'll Duke's place you, as I am a person! Your turtle is in custody already: you shall coo in the same cage, if there be a constable or warrant in the parish.

[Exit]

FOIB

Oh that ever I was born! Oh that I was ever married!- A bride!- ay, I shall be a Bridewell-bride.- Oh!

Enter Mrs. FAINALL.

MRS. FAIN

Poor Foible, what's the matter?

FOIB

O madam, my lady's gone for a constable. I shall be had to a

justice, and put to Bridewell to beat hemp. Poor Waitwell's gone to prison already.

MRS. FAIN

Have a good heart, Foible; Mirabell's gone to give security for him. This is all Marwood's and my husband's doing.

FOIB

Yes, yes; I know it, madam: she was in my lady's closet, and overheard all that you said to me before dinner. She sent the letter to my lady; and that missing effect, Mr. Fainall laid this plot to arrest Waitwell, when he pretended to go for the papers; and in the meantime Mrs. Marwood declared all to my lady.

MRS. FAIN

Was there no mention made of me in the letter? My mother does not suspect my being in the confederacy? I fancy Marwood has not told her, though she has told my husband.

FOIB

Yes, madam; but my lady did not see that part; we stifled the letter before she read so far,- Has that mischievous devil told Mr. Fainall of your ladyship then?

MRS. FAIN

Ay, all's out- my affair with Mirabell- everything discovered. This is the last day of our living together, that's my comfort.

FOIB

Indeed, madam; and so 'tis a comfort if you knew all;- he has been even with your ladyship, which I could have told you long enough since, but I love to keep peace and quietness by my goodwill. I had rather bring friends together, than set 'em at distance: but Mrs. Marwood and he are nearer related than ever their parents thought for.

MRS. FAIN

Sayest thou so, Foible? canst thou prove this?

FOIB

I can take my oath of it, madam; so can Mrs. Mincing. We have had many a fair word from Madam Marwood, to conceal something that passed in our chamber one evening when you were at Hyde-park; and we were thought to have gone a-walking, but we went up unawares;- though we were sworn to secrecy too. Madam Marwood took a book and swore us upon it, but it was but a book

of poems. So long as it was not a bible-oath, we may break it with a safe conscience.

MRS. FAIN

This discovery is the most opportune thing I could wish.- Now, Mincing!

Enter MINCING.

MIN

My lady would speak with Mrs. Foible, mem. Mr. Mirabell is with her; he has set your spouse at liberty, Mrs. Foible, and would have you hide yourself in my lady's closet till my old lady's anger is abated. Oh, my old lady is in a perilous passion at something Mr. Fainall has said; he swears, and my old lady cries. There's a fearful hurricane, I vow. He says, mem, how that he'll have my lady's fortune made over to him, or he'll be divorced.

MRS. FAIN

Does your lady or Mirabell know that?

MIN

Yes, mem; they have sent me to see if Sir Wilfull be sober, and to bring him to them. My lady is resolved to have him, I think,

rather than lose such a vast sum as six thousand pounds.- O
come, Mrs. Foible, I hear my old lady.

MRS. FAIN

Foible, you must tell Mincing that she must prepare to
vouch when I call her.

FOIB

Yes, yes, madam.

MIN

O yes, mem, I'll vouch anything for your ladyship's service, be
what it will.

ACT V

SCENE II

Another Room in Lady WISHFORT'S House

Mrs. FAINALL, Lady WISHFORT, and Mrs. MARWOOD.

LADY WISH

O my dear friend, how can I enumerate the benefits that I have received from your goodness! To you I owe the timely discovery of the false vows of Mirabell; to you I owe the detection of the impostor Sir Rowland. And now you are become an intercessor with my son-in-law, to save the honour of my house, and compound for the frailties of my daughter. Well, friend, you are enough to reconcile me to the bad world, or else I would retire to deserts and solitudes, and feed harmless sheep by groves and purling streams. Dear Marwood, let us leave the world, and retire by ourselves and be shepherdesses.

MRS. MAR

Let us first despatch the affair in hand, madam. We shall have leisure to think of retirement afterwards. Here is one who

is concerned in the treaty.

LADY WISH

Oh daughter, daughter! is it possible thou shouldst be my child, bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh, and, as I may say, another me, and yet transgress the most minute particle of severe virtue? Is it possible you should lean aside to iniquity, who have been cast in the direct mould of virtue? I have not only been a mould but a pattern for you, and a model for you, after you were brought into the world.

MRS. FAIN

I don't understand your ladyship.

LADY WISH

Not understand! Why, have you not been naught? have you not been sophisticated? Not understand! here I am ruined to compound for your caprices and your cuckoldoms. I must pawn my
plate and my jewels, and ruin my niece, and all little enough-

MRS. FAIN

I am wronged and abused, and so are you. 'Tis a false accusation, as false as hell, as false as your friend there, ay, or your friend's friend, my false husband.

MRS. MAR

My friend, Mrs. Fainall! your husband my friend! what do you mean?

MRS. FAIN

I know what I mean, madam, and so do you; and so shall the world at a time convenient.

MRS. MAR

I am sorry to see you so passionate, madam. More temper would look more like innocence. But I have done. I am sorry my zeal to serve your ladyship and family should admit of misconstruction, or make me liable to affronts. You will pardon me, madam, if I meddle no more with an affair in which I am not personally concerned.

LADY WISH

O dear friend, I am so ashamed that you should meet with such returns!,

[To Mrs. FAINALL.]

You ought to ask pardon on your knees, ungrateful creature! she deserves more from you than all your life can accomplish.

[To Mrs. MARWOOD.]

Oh, don't leave me destitute in this perplexity!- no, stick to me, my good genius.

MRS. FAIN

I tell you, madam, you are abused.- Stick to you! ay, like a leech, to suck your best blood- she'll drop off when she's full. Madam, you shan't pawn a bodkin, nor part with a brass counter, in composition for me. I defy 'em all. Let 'em prove their aspersions; I know my own innocence, and dare stand a trial.

[Exit.]

LADY WISH

Why, if she should be innocent, if she should be wronged after all, ha?- I don't know what to think;- and I promise you her education has been unexceptionable- I may say it; for I chiefly made it my own care to initiate her very infancy in the rudiments of virtue, and to impress upon her tender years a young odium and aversion to the very sight of men:- ay, friend, she would ha' shrieked if she had but seen a man, till she was in her teens. As I am a person 'tis true;- she was never

suffered to play with a male child, though but in coats; nay, her very babies were of the feminine gender. Oh, she never looked a man in the face but her own father, or the chaplain, and him we made a shift to put upon her for a woman, by the help of his long garments, and his sleek face, till she was going in her fifteen.

MRS. MAR

'Twas much she should be deceived so long.

LADY WISH

I warrant you, or she would never have borne to have been catechised by him and have heard his long lectures against singing and dancing, and such debaucheries; and going to filthy plays, and profane music-meetings, where the lewd trebles squeak nothing but bawdy, and the basses roar blasphemy. Oh, she would have swooned at the sight or name of an obscene play-book!- and can I think, after all this, that my daughter can be naught? What, a whore? and thought it excommunication to set her foot within the door of a playhouse! O dear friend, I can't believe it, no, no! as she says, let him prove it, let him prove it.

MRS. MAR

Prove it, madam! What, and have your name prostituted in a

public court! yours and your daughter's reputation worried at the bar by a pack of bawling lawyers! To be ushered in with an O yes of scandal; and have your case opened by an old fumbling lecher in a quoif like a man-midwife; to bring your daughter's infamy to light; to be a theme for legal punsters and quibblers by the statute; and become a jest against a rule of court, where there is no precedent for a jest in any record- not even in doomsday-book; to discompose the gravity of the bench, and provoke naughty interrogatories in more naughty law Latin; while the good judge, tickled with the proceeding, simpers under a grey beard, and fidgets off and on his cushion as if he had swallowed cantharides, or sat upon cow-itch!-

LADY WISH

Oh, 'tis very hard!

MRS. MAR

And then to have my young revellers of the Temple take notes, like 'prentices at a conventicle; and after talk it over again in commons, or before drawers in an eating-house.

LADY WISH

Worse and worse!

MRS. MAR

Nay, this is nothing; if it would end here 'twere well.
But it must, after this, be consigned by the short-hand writers
to the public press; and from thence be transferred to the
hands, nay into the throats and lungs of hawkers, with voices
more licentious than the loud flounder-man's: and this you must
hear till you are stunned; nay, you must hear nothing else for
some days.

LADY WISH

Oh, 'tis insupportable! No, no, dear friend, make it up,
make it up; ay, ay, I'll compound. I'll give up all, myself and
my all, my niece and her all- anything, everything for
composition.

MRS. MAR

Nay, madam, I advise nothing, I only lay before you, as a
friend, the inconveniences which perhaps you have overseen. Here
comes Mr. Fainall; if he will be satisfied to huddle up all in
silence, I shall be glad. You must think I would rather
congratulate than condole with you.

Enter FAINALL.

LADY WISH

Ay, ay, I do not doubt it, dear Marwood; no, no, I do not doubt it.

FAIN

Well, madam; I have suffered myself to be overcome by the importunity of this lady your friend; and am content you shall enjoy your own proper estate during life, on condition you oblige yourself never to marry, under such penalty as I think convenient.

LADY WISH

Never to marry!

FAIN

No more Sir Rowlands;- the next imposture may not be so timely detected.

MRS. MAR

That condition, I dare answer, my lady will consent to without difficulty; she has already but too much experienced the perfidiousness of men.- Besides, madam, when we retire to our pastoral solitude we shall bid adieu to all other thoughts.

LADY WISH

Ay, that's true; but in case of necessity, as of health,
or some such emergency-

FAIN

Oh, if you are prescribed marriage, you shall be considered; I
will only reserve to myself the power to choose for you. If your
physic be wholesome, it matters not who is your apothecary.
Next, my wife shall settle on me the remainder of her fortune,
not made over already; and for her maintenance depend entirely
on my discretion.

LADY WISH

This is most inhumanly savage; exceeding the barbarity of
a Muscovite husband.

FAIN

I learned it from his Czarish majesty's retinue, in a winter
evening's conference over brandy and pepper, amongst other
secrets of matrimony and policy, as they are at present
practised in the northern hemisphere. But this must be agreed
unto, and that positively. Lastly, I will be endowed, in right
of my wife, with that six thousand pounds, which is the moiety
of Mrs. Millamant's fortune in your possession; and which she

has forfeited (as will appear by the last will and testament of your deceased husband, Sir Jonathan Wishfort) by her disobedience in contracting herself against your consent or knowledge; and by refusing the offered match with Sir Wilfull Witwoud, which you, like a careful aunt, had provided for her.

LADY WISH

My nephew was non compos, and could not make his addresses.

FAIN

I come to make demands- I'll hear no objections.

LADY WISH

You will grant me time to consider?

FAIN

Yes, while the instrument is drawing, to which you must set your hand till more sufficient deeds can be perfected: which I will take care shall be done with all possible speed. In the meantime I'll go for the said instrument, and till my return you may balance this matter in your own discretion.

[Exit.]

LADY WISH

This insolence is beyond all precedent, all parallel;
must I be subject to this merciless villain?

MRS. MAR

'Tis severe indeed, madam, that you should smart for your
daughter's wantonness.

LADY WISH

'Twas against my consent that she married this barbarian,
but she would have him, though her year was not out.- Ah! her
first husband, my son Languish, would not have carried it thus.
Well, that was my choice, this is hers: she is matched now with
a witness.- I shall be mad!- Dear friend, is there no comfort
for me? must I live to be confiscated at this rebelrate?- Here
come two more of my Egyptian plagues too.

Enter Mrs. MILLAMANT, and SIR WILFULL WITWOUD.

SIR WIL

Aunt, your servant.

LADY WISH

Out, caterpillar, call not me aunt! I know thee not!

SIR WIL

I confess I have been a little in disguise, as they say.-
S'heart! and I'm sorry for't. What would you have? I hope I have
committed no offence, aunt- and if I did I am willing to make
satisfaction; and what can a man say fairer? If I have broke
anything I'll pay for't, an it cost a pound. And so let that
content for what's past, and make no more words. For what's to
come, to pleasure you I'm willing to marry my cousin. So pray
let's all be friends, she and I are agreed upon the matter
before a witness.

LADY WISH

How's this, dear niece? have I any comfort? can this be true?

MRS. MIL

I am content to be a sacrifice to your repose, madam and
to convince you that I had no hand in the plot, as you were
misinformed, I have laid my commands on Mirabell to come in
person, and be a witness that I give my hand to this flower of
knighthood: and for the contract that passed between Mirabell
and me, I have obliged him to make a resignation of it in your
ladyship's presence;- he is without, and waits your leave for
admittance.

LADY WISH

Well, I'll swear I am something revived at this testimony of your obedience; but I cannot admit that traitor.- I fear I cannot fortify myself to support his appearance. He is as terrible to me as a gorgon; if I see him I fear I shall turn to stone, and petrify incessantly.

MRS. MIL

If you disoblige him, he may resent your refusal, and insist upon the contract still. Then 'tis the last time he will be offensive to you.

LADY WISH

Are you sure it will be the last time?- If I were sure of that- shall I never see him again?

MRS. MIL

Sir Wilfull, you and he are to travel together, are you not?

SIR WIL

S'heart, the gentleman's a civil gentleman, aunt, let him come in; why, we are sworn brothers and fellow-travellers.- We are to be Pylades and Orestes, he and I.- He is to be my interpreter in foreign parts. He has been over-seas once

already; and with proviso that I marry my cousin, will cross 'em
once again, only to bear me company.- S'heart, I'll call him
in,- an I set on't once, he shall come in; and see who'll hinder
him.

[Goes to the door and hems.]

MRS. MAR

This is precious fooling, if it would pass; but I'll know
the bottom of it.

LADY WISH

O dear Marwood, you are not going.

MRS. MAR

Not far, madam; I'll return immediately.

[Exit.]

Enter MIRABELL.

SIR WIL

Look up, man, I'll stand by you; 'sbud an she do frown, she can't kill you;- besides- harkee, she dare not frown desperately, because her face is none of her own. S'heart, an she should, her forehead would wrinkle like the coat of a cream-cheese; but mum for that, fellow-traveller.

MIR

If a deep sense of the many injuries I have offered to so good a lady, with a sincere remorse, and a hearty contrition, can but obtain the least glance of compassion, I am too happy.- Ah, madam, there was a time!- but let it be forgotten- I confess I have deservedly forfeited the high place I once held of sighing at your feet. Nay, kill me not, by turning from me in disdain.- I come not to plead for favour;- nay, not for pardon; I am a suppliant only for pity- I am going where I never shall behold you more-

SIR WIL

How, fellow-traveller! you shall go by yourself then.

MIR

Let me be pitied first, and afterwards forgotten.- I ask no more.

SIR WIL

By'r lady, a very reasonable request, and will cost you nothing, aunt! Come, come, forgive and forget, aunt; why you must, an you are a Christian.

MIR

Consider, madam, in reality, you could not receive much prejudice; it was an innocent device; though I confess it had a face of guiltiness,- it was at most an artifice which love contrived;- and errors which love produces have ever been accounted venial. At least think it is punishment enough, that I have lost what in my heart I hold most dear, that to your cruel indignation I have offered up this beauty, and with her my peace and quiet; nay, all my hopes of future comfort.

SIR WIL

An he does not move me, would I may never be o' the quorum!- an it were not as good a deed as to drink, to give her to him again, I would I might never take shipping!- Aunt, if you don't forgive quickly, I shall melt, I can tell you that. My contract went no farther than a little mouth-glue, and that's hardly dry;- one doleful sigh more from my fellow-traveller, and 'tis dissolved.

LADY WISH

Well, nephew, upon your account- Ah, he has a false insinuating tongue!- Well, sir, I will stifle my just resentment at my nephew's request.- I will endeavour what I can to forget,- but on proviso that you resign the contract with my niece immediately.

MIR

It is in writing, and with papers of concern; but I have sent my servant for it, and will deliver it to you, with all acknowledgments for your transcendent goodness.

LADY WISH [Aside.]

Oh, he has witchcraft in his eyes and tongue!- When I did not see him, I could have bribed a villain to his assassination; but his appearance rakes the embers which have so long lain smothered in my breast.

ACT V

SCENE III

The same

*Lady WISHFORT, Mrs. MILLAMANT, Sir WILFULL,
MIRABELL, FAINALL, and Mrs. MARWOOD.*

FAIN

Your date of deliberation, madam, is expired. Here is the instrument; are you prepared to sign?

LADY WISH

If I were prepared, I am not impowered. My niece exerts a lawful claim, having matched herself by my direction to Sir Wilfull.

FAIN

That sham is too gross to pass on me- though 'tis imposed on you, madam.

MRS. MIL

Sir, I have given my consent.

MIR

And, sir, I have resigned my pretensions.

SIR WIL

And, sir, I assert my right; and will maintain it in defiance of you, sir, and of your instrument. S'heart, an you talk of an instrument, sir, I have an old fox by my thigh that shall hack your instrument of ram vellum to shreds, sir!- it shall not be sufficient for a mittimus or a tailor's measure. Therefore withdraw your instrument, sir, or by'r lady, I shall draw mine.

LADY WISH

Hold, nephew, hold!

MRS. MIL

Good Sir Wilfull, respite your valour.

FAIN

Indeed! Are you provided of your guard, with your single beef-eater there? but I'm prepared for you, and insist upon my first proposal. You shall submit your own estate to my management, and absolutely make over my wife's to my sole use, as pursuant to the purport and tenor of this other covenant.- I suppose, madam, your consent is not requisite in this case; nor,

Mr. Mirabell, your resignation; nor, Sir Wilfull, your right.-
You may draw your fox if you please, sir, and make a bear-garden
flourish somewhere else; for here it will not avail. This, my
Lady Wishfort, must be subscribed, or your darling daughter's
turned adrift, like a leaky hulk, to sink or swim, as she and
the current of this lewd town can agree.

LADY WISH

Is there no means, no remedy to stop my ruin? Ungrateful
wretch! dost thou not owe thy being, thy subsistence, to my
daughter's fortune?

FAIN

I'll answer you when I have the rest of it in my possession.

MIR

But that you would not accept of a remedy from my hands- I own
I have not deserved you should owe any obligation to me; or else
perhaps I could advise-

LADY WISH

O what? what? to save me and my child from ruin, from
want, I'll forgive all that's past; nay, I'll consent to
anything to come, to be delivered from this tyranny.

MIR

Ay, madam; but that is too late, my reward is intercepted. You have disposed of her who only could have made me a compensation for all my services; but be it as it may, I am resolved I'll serve you! you shall not be wronged in this savage manner.

LADY WISH

How! dear Mr. Mirabell, can you be so generous at last! But it is not possible. Harkee, I'll break my nephew's match; you shall have my niece yet, and all her fortune, if you can but save me from this imminent danger.

MIR

Will you? I'll take you at your word. I ask no more. I must have leave for two criminals to appear.

LADY WISH

Ay, ay, anybody, anybody!

MIR

Foible is one, and a penitent.

Enter Mrs. FAINALL, FOIBLE, and MINCING.

MRS. MAR

O my shame!

[MIRABELL and Lady WISHFORT go to Mrs. FAINALL and FOIBLE.]

These corrupt things are brought hither to expose me.

[To FAINALL].

FAIN

If it must all come out, why let 'em know it; 'tis but the way of the world. That shall not urge me to relinquish or abate one tittle of my terms; no, I will insist the more.

FOIB

Yes, indeed, madam, I'll take my Bible oath of it.

MIN

And so will I, mem.

LADY WISH

O Marwood, Marwood, art thou false? my friend deceive me!
hast thou been a wicked accomplice with that profligate man?

MRS. MAR

Have you so much ingratitude and injustice to give credit against your friend, to the aspersions of two such mercenary

trulls?

MIN

Mercenary, mem? I scorn your words. 'Tis true we found you and Mr. Fainall in the blue garret; by the same token, you swore us to secrecy upon Messalina's poems. Mercenary! No, if we would have been mercenary, we should have held our tongues; you would have bribed us sufficiently.

FAIN

Go, you are an insignificant thing!- Well, what are you the better for this; is this Mr. Mirabell's expedient? I'll be put off no longer.- You thing, that was a wife, shall smart for this! I will not leave thee wherewithall to hide thy shame; your body shall be naked as your reputation.

MRS. FAIN

I despise you, and defy your malice- you have aspersed me wrongfully- I have proved your falsehood- go you and your treacherous- I will not name it, but starve together- perish!

FAIN

Not while you are worth a groat, indeed, my dear.- Madam, I'll be fooled no longer.

LADY WISH

Ah, Mr. Mirabell, this is small comfort, the detection of this affair.

MIR

Oh, in good time- your leave for the other offender and penitent to appear, madam.

Enter WAITWELL with a box of writings.

LADY WISH

O Sir Rowland!- Well, rascal!

WAIT

What your ladyship pleases. I have brought the black box at last, madam.

MIR

Give it me.- Madam, you remember your promise.

LADY WISH

Ay, dear sir.

MIR

Where are the gentlemen?

WAIT

At hand, sir, rubbing their eyes- just risen from sleep.

FAIN

'Sdeath, what's this to me? I'll not wait your private concerns.

Enter PETULANT and WITWOUD.

PET

How now? What's the matter? whose hand's out?

WIT

Heyday! what, are you all got together, like players at the end of the last act?

MIR

You may remember, gentlemen, I once requested your hands as witnesses to a certain parchment.

WIT

Ay, I do, my hand I remember- Petulant set his mark.

MIR

You wrong him, his name is fairly written, as shall appear.-
You do not remember, gentlemen, anything of what that parchment

contains?

[Undoing the box].

WIT

No.

PET

Not I; I writ, I read nothing.

MIR

Very well, now you shall know.- Madam, your promise.

LADY WISH

Ay, ay, sir, upon my honour.

MIR

Mr. Fainall, it is now time that you should know, that your lady, while she was at her own disposal, and before you had by your insinuations wheedled her out of a pretended settlement of the greatest part of her fortune-

FAIN

Sir! pretended!

MIR

Yes, sir. I say that this lady while a widow, having it seems

received some cautions respecting your inconstancy and tyranny of temper, which from her own partial opinion and fondness of you she could never have suspected- she did, I say, by the wholesome advice of friends, and of sages learned in the laws of this land, deliver this same as her act and deed to me in trust, and to the uses within mentioned. You may read if you please-

[Holding out the parchment]

though perhaps what is written on the back may serve your occasions.

FAIN

Very likely, sir. What's here?- Damnation!

[Reads.]

"A deed of conveyance of the whole estate real of Arabella Languish, widow, in trust to Edward Mirabell."- Confusion!

MIR

Even so, sir; 'tis the Way of the World, sir, of the widows of the world. I suppose this deed may bear an elder date than what you have obtained from your lady.

FAIN

Perfidious fiend! then thus I'll be revenged.

[Offers to run at Mrs. FAINALL.]

SIR WIL

Hold, sir! now you may make your bear-garden flourish somewhere else, sir.

FAIN

Mirabell, you shall hear of this, sir, be sure you shall.- Let me pass, oaf!

[Exit.]

MRS. FAIN

Madam, you seem to stifle your resentment; you had better give it vent.

MRS. MAR

Yes, it shall have vent- and to your confusion; or I'll perish in the attempt.

[Exit.]

LADY WISH

O daughter. daughter! 'tis plain thou hast inherited thv

mother's prudence.

MRS. FAIN

Thank Mr. Mirabell, a cautious friend, to whose advice all is owing.

LADY WISH

Well, Mr. Mirabell, you have kept your promise- and I must perform mine.- First, I pardon, for your sake, Sir Rowland there, and Foible; the next thing is to break the matter to my nephew- and how to do that-

MIR

For that, madam, give yourself no trouble; let me have your consent. Sir Wilfull is my friend; he has had compassion upon lovers, and generously engaged a volunteer in this action, for our service; and now designs to prosecute his travels.

SIR WIL

S'heart, aunt, I have no mind to marry. My cousin's a fine lady, and the gentleman loves her, and she loves him, and they deserve one another; my resolution is to see foreign parts- I have set on't- and when I'm set on't I must do't. And if these two gentlemen would travel too, I think they may be spared.

PET

For my part, I say little- I think things are best off or on.

WIT

I'gad, I understand nothing of the matter; I'm in a maze yet,
like a dog in a dancing-school.

LADY WISH

Well, sir, take her, and with her all the joy I can give
you.

MRS. MIL

Why does not the man take me? would you have me give
myself to you over again?

MIR

Ay, and over and over again;

[Kisses her hand.]

I would have you as often as possibly I can. Well, Heaven grant I
love you not too well, that's all my fear.

SIR WIL

S'heart, you'll have time enough to toy after you're
married; or if you will toy now, let us have a dance in the mean

time, that we who are not lovers may have some other employment besides looking on.

MIR

With all my heart, dear Sir Wilfull. What shall we do for music?

FOIB

O sir, some that were provided for Sir Rowland's entertainment are yet within call.

[A Dance.]

LADY WISH

As I am a person, I can hold out no longer;- I have wasted my spirits so to-day already, that I am ready to sink under the fatigue; and I cannot but have some fears upon me yet, that my son Fainall will pursue some desperate course.

MIR

Madam, disquiet not yourself on that account; to my knowledge his circumstances are such he must of course comply. For my part, I will contribute all that in me lies to a reunion; in the mean time, madam,

[To Mrs. FAINALL.]

let me before these witnesses restore to you this deed of trust; it
may be a means, well-managed, to make you live easily together.
From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed;
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed;
For each deceiver to his cost may find,
That marriage-frauds too oft are paid in kind.

[Exeunt omnes.]

EPILOGUE

SPOKEN BY MRS. BRACEGIRDLE

After our Epilogue this crowd dismisses,
I'm thinking how this play'll pulled to pieces.
But pray consider, ere you doom its fall,
How hard a thing 'twould be to please you all.
There are some critics so with spleen diseased,
They scarcely come inclining to be pleased:
And sure he must have more than mortal skill,
Who pleases any one against his will.
Then all bad poets we are sure are foes,
And how their number's swelled, the town well knows:
In shoals I've marked 'em judging in the pit;
Though they're, on no pretence, for judgment fit,
But that they have been damned for want of wit.
Since when, they by their own offences taught,
Set up for spies on plays, and finding fault.
Others there are whose malice we'd prevent;
Such who watch plays with scurrilous intent
To mark out who by characters are meant.

And though no perfect likeness they can trace,
Yet each pretends to know the copied face.
These with false glosses feed their own ill nature,
And turn to libel what was meant a satire.
May such malicious fops this fortune find,
To think themselves alone the fools designed:
If any are so arrogantly vain,
To think they singly can support a scene,
And furnish fool enough to entertain.
For well the learned and the judicious know
That satire scorns to stoop so meanly low,
As any one abstracted fop to show.
For, as when painters form a matchless face,
They from each fair one catch some different grace;
And shining features in one portrait blend,
To which no single beauty must pretend;
So poets oft do in one piece expose
Whole belles-assemblies of coquettes and beaux.

THE END