

## OF BASHFULNESS.

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1. SOME plants there are, in their own nature wild and barren, and hurtful to seed and garden-sets, which yet among able husbandmen pass for infallible signs of a rich and promising soil. In like manner, some passions of the mind not good in themselves yet serve as first shoots and promises of a disposition which is naturally good, and also capable of much improvement by cultivation. Among these I rank bashfulness, the subject of our present discourse; no ill sign indeed, but the cause and occasion of a great deal of harm. For the bashful oftentimes run into the same enormities as the most hardened and impudent, with this difference only, that the former feel a regret for such miscarriages, but the latter take a pleasure and satisfaction therein. The shameless person is without sense of grief for his baseness, and the bashful is in distress at the very appearance of it. For bashfulness is only modesty in the excess, and is aptly enough named *δυσωρία* (*the being put out of countenance*), since the face is in some sense confused and dejected with the mind. For as that grief which casts down the eyes is termed dejection, so that kind of modesty which cannot look another in the face is called bashfulness. The orator, speaking of a shameless fellow, said he carried harlots, not virgins, in his eyes; \* on the other hand, the sheepishly bashful be-

\* *Ὁ κόραξ ἀλλὰ πόρναις.* Κόρη means either *maiden* or *the pupil of the eye.* (G.)

trays no less the effeminacy and softness of his mind in his looks, palliating his weakness, which exposes him to the mercy of impudence, with the specious name of modesty. Cato indeed was wont to say of young persons, he had a greater opinion of such as were subject to color than of those that looked pale; teaching us thereby to look with greater apprehension on the heinousness of an action than on the reprimand which might follow, and to be more afraid of the suspicion of doing an ill thing than of the danger of it. However, too much anxiety and timidity lest we may do wrong is also to be avoided; because many men have become cowards and been deterred from generous undertakings, no less for fear of calumny and detraction than by the danger or difficulty of such attempts.

2. While therefore we must not suffer the weakness in the one case to pass unnoticed, neither must we abet or countenance invincible impudence in the other, such as is reported of Anaxarchus, —

Whose dog-like carriage and effrontery,  
Despising infamy, out-faced disgrace.

A convenient mien between both is rather to be endeavored after, by repressing the over impudent, and animating the too meek temper. But as this kind of cure is difficult, so is the restraining such excesses not without danger; for as a gardener, in stubbing up some wild or useless bushes, makes at them carelessly with his spade, or burns them off the ground, but in dressing a vine, or grafting an apple, or pruning an olive, carries his hand with the greatest wariness and deliberation, that he may not unluckily injure the tree; so a philosopher, in removing envy, that useless and untractable plant, or covetousness or immoderate love of pleasure from the mind of youth, may cut deep safely, and make a large scar; but if he be to apply his discourse to some more sensible or delicate part, such as the restraining excess of

bashfulness, it lies upon him to be very careful not to cut off or eradicate modesty with the contrary vice. For nurses who too often wipe away the dirt from their infants are apt to tear their flesh and put them to pain. And in like manner we must not so far extirpate all bashfulness in youth as to leave them careless or impudent; but as those that pull down private houses adjoining to the temples of the Gods prop up such parts as are contiguous to them, so in undermining bashfulness, due regard is to be had to adjacent modesty, good nature, and humanity. And yet these are the very qualities by which bashfulness insinuates itself and becomes fixed in a man, flattering him that he is good-natured, courteous, and civil, and has common sense, and that he is not obstinate and inexorable. The Stoics, therefore, in their discourses of modesty, distinguish all along betwixt that and bashfulness, leaving not so much as ambiguity of terms for a pretence to the vice. However, asking their good leave, we shall make bold to use such words indifferently in either sense; or rather we shall follow the example of Homer, whose authority we have for it, that

Much harm oft-times from modesty befalls,  
Much good oft-times.\*

And it was not done amiss of him to make mention of the hurtfulness of it first, because modesty becomes profitable only through reason, which cuts off what is superfluous and leaves a just mean behind.

3. In the first place, therefore, the bashful man must be persuaded and satisfied that that distemper of the mind is prejudicial to him, and that nothing which is so can be eligible. And withal, he must be cautious how he suffers himself to be cajoled and led by the nose with the titles of courteous or sociable, in exchange for those of grave,

great, and just; nor like Pegasus in Euripides, who, when Bellerophon mounted him,

With trembling stooped more than his lord desired,\*

must he debase himself and yield to all who make their addresses to him, for fear of appearing hard and ungentle.

It is recorded of Bocchoris, king of Egypt, a man of a very cruel nature, that the goddess Isis sent a kind of a serpent (called aspis), which winding itself about his head cast a shadow over him from above, and was a means to him of determining causes according to equity. But bashfulness, on the contrary, happening upon remiss and spiritless tempers, suffers them not to express their dislike of any thing or to argue against it, but perverts many times the sentence of arbitrators, and stops the mouths of skilful pleaders, forcing them often to act and speak contrary to their conviction. And the most reckless man will always tyrannize and domineer over such a one, forcing his bashfulness by his own strength of impudence. Upon this account it is that bashfulness, like a low piece of soft ground, can make no resistance and decline no encounter but is exposed to the meanest actions and vilest passions. But, above all, this is the worst guardian of raw and inexperienced youth. For, as Brutus said, he seems to have had but an ill education that has not learned to deny any thing. And no better overseer is it of the marriage-bed or the woman's apartment; as the repentant lady in Sophocles accuses the spark that had debauched her, —

Thy tongue, thy flattering tongue prevailed.†

So this vice, happening upon a disposition inclinable to debauchery, prepares and opens the way, and leaves all things easy and accessible to such as are ready to prefer their wicked designs. Presents and treats are irresistible baits for common mercenary creatures; but importunity,

\* Eurip. Bellerophon, Frag. 311.

† Sophocles, Frag. 772.

befriended with bashfulness on their side, has sometimes undone the modestest women. I omit what inconveniences this kind of modesty occasions, when it obliges men to lend their money to such whose credit is blown upon in the world, or to give bail for those they dare not trust; we do this, it is true, with an ill-will, and in our heart reflect upon that old saying, Be bail, and pay for it, yet cannot make use of it in our practice.

4. How many this fault has ruined, it is no easy thing to recount. Creon in the play gave a very good lesson for others to follow, when he told Medea, —

'Tis better now to brave thy direst hate,  
Than curse a foolish easiness too late.\*

Yet afterwards, being wrought upon through his bashfulness to grant her but one day longer, he ruined himself and family by it. For the same reason, some, suspecting designs against them of murder or poisoning, have neglected to provide for their safety. Thus Dion could not be ignorant of the treachery of Callippus, yet thought it unfit to entertain such thoughts of his pretended friend and guest, and so perished. So again, Antipater, the son of Cassander, having entertained Demetrius at supper, and being engaged by him for the next night, because he was unwilling to distrust one who had trusted him, went, and had his throat cut after supper. Polysperchon had promised Cassander for an hundred talents to murder Hercules, the son of Alexander by Barsine. Upon this he invites him to sup; but the young man, having some suspicion of the thing, pretends himself indisposed. Polysperchon coming to him said: Sir, above all things endeavor after your father's courteous behavior and obliging way to his friends, unless haply you look on us with suspicion as if we were compassing your health. The young man out of mere modesty was prevailed upon to go, and

\* Eurip. Medea, 290.

was strangled as he sat at meat. It is not therefore (as some will have us believe) insignificant or ridiculous, but on the contrary very wise advice, which Hesiod gives, —

Welcome a friend, but never call thy foe.\*

Be not bashful and mealy-mouthed in refusing him that you are satisfied has a pique against you; but never reject him that seemeth to put his trust in you. For if you invite, you must expect to be invited again; and some time or other your entertainment will be repaid you, if bashfulness have once softened or turned the edge of that diffidence which ought to be your guard.

5. To the end therefore that we may get the better of this disease, which is the cause of so many evils, we must make our first attempts (as our custom is in other things) upon matters of no great difficulty. As, if one drink to you after you have taken what is sufficient, be not so foolishly modest to do violence to your nature, but rather venture to pass the glass. Another, it may be, would tempt you to play at dice while drinking; be not over-persuaded into a compliance, for fear of being the subject of his drollery, but reply with Xenophanes, when Lasus of Hermione called him coward because he refused to play at dice: Yes, said he, I confess myself the greatest coward in the world, for I dare not do an ill thing. Again, you light upon an impertinent talker, that sticks upon you like a burr; don't be bashful, but break off the discourse, and pursue your business. These evasions and repulses, whereby our resolution and assurance are exercised in matters of less moment, will accustom us to it by degrees in greater occasions. And here it will be but seasonable to give you a passage, as it is recorded of Demosthenes. The Athenians having one time been moved to send succors to Harpalus, and themselves to engage in a war against Alexander, it happened that Philoxenus, Alexander's admiral,

\* Hesiod, Works and Days, 342

unexpectedly arrived on their coast; and the people being so astonished as to be speechless for very fear, Demosthenes cried out: How would they endure the sun, who are not able to look against a lamp! Or how would you comport yourself in weightier concerns, while your prince or the people had an awe over you, if you cannot refuse a glass of wine when an acquaintance offers it, or turn off an impertinent babbler, but suffer the eternal trifier to walk over you without telling him, Another time, good sir, at present I am in haste.

6. Besides all this, the exercising such a resolution is of great use in praising others. If one of my friend's harpers play lewdly, or a comedian he has hired at a great rate murder a piece of Menander in the acting, although the vulgar clap their hands and admire, I think it no moroseness or ill-breeding to sit silently all the while, without servilely joining in the common applauses contrary to my judgment. For if you scruple to deal openly with him in these cases, what will you do, should he repeat to you an insipid composition of his own, or submit to your revisal a ridiculous oration? You will applaud, of course, and enter yourself into the list of common parasites and flatterers! But how then can you direct him impartially in the greatest administrations of his life? how be free with him where he fails in any duties of his trust or marriage, or neglects the offices incumbent on him as a member of the community? I must confess, I cannot by any means approve of the reply Pericles made to a friend who besought him to give false evidence, and that too upon oath, when he thus answered: As far as the altar I am wholly at your service. Methinks he went too far. But he that has long before accustomed himself not to commend any thing against his judgment, or applaud an ill voice, or seem pleased with indecent scurrilities, will never suffer things to come to that issue; nor will any one be so bold

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