

HOW A MAN MAY INOFFENSIVELY PRAISE HIMSELF
WITHOUT BEING LIABLE TO ENVY.

1. HE that talks big and arrogantly of himself, Hercules, is universally condemned as a troublesome and ill-bred companion. But the most, even of those who in words mightily declaim against him, seem to applaud him in their actions. Euripides could say,

If speech grew scarce, and at great rates were sold,
Commend himself what lavish fellow would ?
But since the infinite treasure of the air
Praise gratis yields, none truth or falsehood spare ;
Suffering no damage, though they give their ware.

Yet he often brings in his heroes intolerably boasting, and stuffs their most tragical adventures and passions with improper discourses of themselves. So Pindar declares,

Unseasonably to glory
Makes harmony with fury ;*

but he forbears not to extol his own raptures, which indeed, by the confession of all men, are worthy of the noblest praise.

But those who are crowned for mastery in the games or in the learned combats have others to celebrate their victories, that the people's ears be not grated with the harsh noises of self-applause. And Timotheus is justly censured as unskilfully and irregularly setting forth his conquest of

* Pindar, Olymp. IX. 58.

Phrynus, when he thus proudly boasted it in writing : Happy man wast thou, Timotheus, when the crier proclaimed, ' The Milesian Timotheus hath vanquished the son of Carbo, the soft Ionian poet.'

It is true then, as Xenophon says, The most pleasant sound that a man can hear is his own praise in another's mouth ; but the most odious thing unto others is a man commending himself. For we brand them as impudent who commend themselves, it becoming them to be modest though they were praised by others ; and we account them unjust in arrogating that to themselves which another has the sole propriety of bestowing on them. Besides, if we then are silent, we seem either angry or envious ; but if we second their discourse, we are presently entangled and forced to contribute more than we intended, speaking to men's faces what sounds well only behind their backs ; and so we undertake rather the base work of drudging flattery than any real offices of true honor.

2. Yet, however, there is a time when a statesman may be the subject of his own discourse, and give a free relation of things he has worthily done or said, as well as other truths ; taking care that it be not merely for favor or reputation, but upon some emergent occasion, and especially, when the deeds achieved by him or the parts that be in him be good and honest, then he is not to forbear and say merely that he hath done so or else much like. There is indeed a praise of this kind which bears very excellent and lovely fruit, from whose seeds arise many of the same species very much meliorated and improved. And therefore it is that the wise statesman seeks glory not as the reward or solace of his virtue, nor embraces it merely as the companion of his achievements, but because the being accounted an honorable person and gallant man affords a thousand opportunities of compassing many and more desirable things. For it is easy and delightful to be of use

to those who are apt to believe and love us ; whereas, if a man lie under calumnies and suspicions, he cannot exert his virtue to the benefit of others without committing a kind of violence upon them.

There may also be more reasons than these, which we must enquire into, that, while we endeavor to avert a frivolous and nauseous applauding of ourselves, we chance not to omit that sort which may be truly useful.

3. The praise therefore is vain which a man heaps on himself to provoke others also to praise him, and is chiefly contemptible, as proceeding from an importunate and unseasonable affectation of esteem.

For as they who are ready to die for food are compelled against nature to gnaw off their own flesh, and thus put a miserable end to their famine ; so they who mortally hunger after praise, unless some one afford them a little scantling alms of commendation, do violate the laws of decency, shamelessly endeavoring to supply those wants by an unnatural extolling of themselves.

But when they do not on the bare consideration of themselves hunt applause, but strive to obscure the worth of others, by fighting against their praises and opposing their own works and practices to theirs, they add to their vanity an envious and abhorred baseness. He who thrusts his foot into another's dance is stigmatized with a proverb as a ridiculous and pragmatistical clown ; but upon envy and jealousy to thrust ourselves between the praises of others, or to interrupt the same with our own self praise, is a thing that we ought equally to beware of. Neither should we allow others to praise us at such a time, but frankly yield the honor to those who are then celebrated, if their merit be real ; and though the persons be vicious or unworthy, yet must we not take from them by setting up ourselves ; but rather on the other hand we must reprove the unskilful applauders, and demonstrate their encomiums to be

improperly and dangerously conferred. It is plain that these errors must be avoided.

4. But self-praise is not liable to disgrace or blame when it is delicately handled by way of apology to remove a calumny or accusation. Thus Pericles: But ye are angry at me, a man inferior to none, whether it be in the understanding or interpreting of necessary things; a man who am a lover of my country, and above the meannesses of bribes. For, in speaking with this gallantry of himself, he was not only free from arrogance, vanity, and ambition, but he demonstrated the greatness and spirit of that virtue which could not be dejected itself, and even humbled and tamed the haughtiness of envy. Such men as these will hardly be condemned; but those who would vote against them are won over to their cause, do receive infinite satisfaction, and are agreeably inspirited with this noble boasting, especially if that bravery be steady, and the ground firm on which it stands. This history does frequently discover. For, when the Theban generals accused Pelopidas and Epaminondas that, the time for their office as Boeotarchs being expired, they did not forthwith give up their power, but made an incursion into Laconia and repaired and re-peopled Messene, Pelopidas, submitting himself and making many lowly entreaties, very hardly obtained his absolution; but Epaminondas loftily glorying in those actions, and at last declaring he would willingly be put to death so that they would set up his accusation, "Epaminondas hath wasted Laconia, hath settled Messene, and happily united Arcadia into one state, against our will," they admired him, and the citizens, wondering at the cheerful greatness of his courage, dismissed him with unspeakable pleasantness and satisfaction.

Therefore, when Agamemnon thus reproached Diomedes,

O son of Tydeus! — he whose strength could tame
The bounding steeds, in arms a mighty name, —

Canst thou remote the mingling hosts descry,
With hands inactive and a careless eye?

Sthenelus is not to be much condemned for saying,

Ourselves much greater than our ancestors
We boast;*

for Sthenelus had not been calumniated himself, but he only patronized his abused friend; and so the cause excused that freedom of speech, which seemed otherwise to have something of the glorioso.

But Cicero's magnifying his diligence and prudence in Catiline's trial was not very pleasing to the Romans; yet when Scipio said, they ought not to judge Scipio, who had enstated them in the power of judging all men, they ascended crowned to the Capitol, and sacrificed with him. For Cicero was not necessitated to this, but merely spurred by the desire of glory; while the danger wherein Scipio stood delivered him from envy.

5. Now talking after an high and glorious manner proves advantageous, not only to persons in danger of the law or such like eminent distress, but to those also who are clouded in a dull series of misfortunes; and that more properly than when they appear splendid in the world. For what addition can words make to those who already seem possessed of real glory, and do lie indulging and basking in her beams? But those who at present are incapable of ambition, if they express themselves loftily, seem only to bear up against the storms of Fortune, to undergird the greatness of their souls, and to shun that pity and commiseration which supposes a shipwrecked and forlorn condition. As therefore those who in walking affect a stiffness of body and a stretched-out neck are accounted effeminate and fop-pish, but are commended if in fencing and fighting they keep themselves erect and steady; so the man grappling with ill fortune, if he raise himself to resist her,

* IL. IV. 370 and 405.

Like some stout boxer, ready with his blow,*

and by a bravery of speech transform himself from abject and miserable to bold and noble, is not to be censured as obstinate and audacious, but honored as invincible and great. So, although Homer described Patroclus in the happinesses of his life as smooth and without envy, yet in death he makes him have something of the bravo, and a soldier's gallant roughness :

Had twenty mortals, each thy match in might,
Opposed me fairly, they had sunk in fight.†

So Phocion, though otherwise very mild, after the sentence passed on him, showed the greatness of his mind in many respects ; particularly to one of his fellow-sufferers, who miserably cried out and bewailed his misfortune, What, says he, is it not a pleasure to thee to die with Phocion ?

6. Further, a man of state has not less but greater liberty to speak any thing of himself when his merits are rewarded with injurious and unkind returns. Achilles usually gave the Gods their glory, and spoke modestly in this manner :

Whene'er, by Jove's decree, our conquering powers
Shall humble to the dust Troy's lofty towers.

But when he was unhandsomely reproached and aspersed with contumelies, he added swelling words to his anger, and these in his own applause :

I sacked twelve ample cities on the main ;

and also these :

It was not thus, when, at my sight amazed,
Troy saw and trembled, as this helmet blazed. ‡

For apologies claim a great liberty of speech and boasting, as considerable parts of their defence.

Themistocles also, having been guilty of nothing dis-

* Soph. Trachin. 442.

† Il. XVI. 847.

‡ Il. I. 128 ; IX. 328 ; XVI. 70.

tasteful either in his words or actions, yet perceiving the Athenians glutted with him and beginning to neglect him, forbore not to say: Why, O ye happy people, do ye weary out yourselves by still receiving benefits from the same hands? Upon every storm you fly to the same tree for shelter; yet, when it is fair again, you despoil it of its leaves as you go away.

7. They therefore who are injured usually recount their good actions to the ingrate. And, if they also praise those excellences which others are pleased to condemn, they are not only pardonable but altogether without blame. For it is evident they do not reproach others, but apologize for themselves.

This gave Demosthenes a glorious freedom, yet allayed the offensive brightness of his own praises, which almost everywhere shine through his whole Oration on the Crown, in which he extols those embassies and decrees which were so much objected against him.

8. Not much unlike this is the insinuating delicacy of an antithesis, when a person, being accused for any thing as a crime, demonstrates its opposite to be base and vicious. So Lycurgus, being upbraided by the Athenians for stopping a sycophant's mouth with money, said: And what kind of citizen do you then take me to be, who, having so long managed the affairs of the republic amongst you, am at last found rather to have given than to have received money unjustly? And Cicero, Metellus objecting he had cast more by his evidence against them than ever he had acquitted by his pleading for them, replies: Who therefore will not freely declare that Cicero has more honesty and faith than eloquence? Many expressions of this nature are in Demosthenes; particularly, But who might not justly have slain me, if I had endeavored in word only to sully the honors and glorious titles which the city hath? Or, What, think you, would those vile fellows have said, if,

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