



AmericasFoundationMT
Presents

Benjamin Franklin's



Mrs. Silence Dogood
Letters

Benjamin Franklin's Mrs. Silence Dogood Letters

Introduction

Starting in April of 1722 a series of letters written by a middle-aged widow named Silence Dogood were published in a Boston newspaper called the New England Courant owned by James Franklin. These letters covered a variety of topics ranging from everyday life in colonial America, poking fun at the hypocrisies of religion, fashion, the persecution of women and the pretentious nature of Harvard College. These letters became very popular, yet no one knew anything about the author like who she was or where she came from. In spite of this many male readers that were so delighted with her writings actually wrote into the paper offering to marry Mrs. Dogood. When in reality Mrs. Silence Dogood never existed, but was the creation of a young sixteen year old Benjamin Franklin. In his early years Benjamin Franklin was quite a mischievous lad and the fifteen child of Josiah Franklin. After 14 letters they suddenly stopped leaving the Boston readers worried and distraught. James Franklin printed an advert to try and find the real Mrs. Silence Dogood and offered thanks to anyone who could do so. Benjamin Franklin revealed to all of Boston including his brother that he was in fact Mrs. Silence Dogood. James Franklin had previously refused to publish any of his brother's writings and was none too happy with his brothers success. The sibling rivalry between the two caused Benjamin Franklin to move to Philadelphia and start his own paper the Pennsylvania Gazette.

April 2, 1722 • Silence Dogood #1

To the Author of the New-England Courant.

Sir,

It may not be improper in the first place to inform your Readers, that I intend once a Fortnight to present them, by the Help of this Paper, with a short Epistle, which I presume will add somewhat to their Entertainment.

And since it is observed, that the Generality of People, now a days, are unwilling either to commend or dispraise what they read, until they are in some measure informed who or what the Author of it is, whether he be poor or rich, old or young, a Scholar or a Leather Apron Man, &c. and give their Opinion of the Performance, according to the Knowledge which they have of the Author's Circumstances, it may not be amiss to begin with a short Account of my past Life and present Condition, that the Reader may not be at a Loss to judge whether or not my Lucubration's are worth his reading.

At the time of my Birth, my Parents were on Ship-board in their Way from London to N. England. My Entrance into this troublesome World was attended with the Death of my Father, a Misfortune, which though' I was not then capable of knowing, I shall never be able to forget; for as he, poor Man, stood upon the Deck rejoicing at my Birth, a merciless Wave entered the Ship, and in one Moment carry' d him beyond Reprieve. Thus, was the first Day which I saw, the last that was seen by my Father; and thus was my disconsolate Mother at once made both a Parent and a Widow.

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When we arrived at Boston (which was not long after) I was put to Nurse in a Country Place, at a small Distance from the Town, where I went to School, and past my Infancy and Childhood in Vanity and Idleness, until I was bound out Apprentice, that I might no longer be a Charge to my Indigent Mother, who was put to hard Shifts for a Living.

My Master was a Country Minister, a pious good-natured young Man, and a Bachelor: he labored with all his Might to instill virtuous and godly Principles into my tender Soul, well knowing that it was the most suitable Time to make deep and lasting Impressions on the Mind, while it was yet untainted with Vice, free and unbiased. He endeavored that I might be instructed in all that Knowledge and Learning which is necessary for our Sex, and denied me no Accomplishment that could possibly be attained in a Country Place; such as all Sorts of Needle-Work, Writing, Arithmetic, &c. and observing that I took a more than ordinary Delight in reading ingenious Books, he gave me the free Use of his Library, which though' it was but small, yet it was well chose, to inform the Understanding rightly, and enable the Mind to frame great and noble Ideas.

Before I had lived quite two Years with this Reverend Gentleman, my indulgent Mother departed this Life, leaving me as it were by myself, having no Relation on Earth within my Knowledge.

I will not abuse your Patience with a tedious Recital of all the frivolous Accidents of my Life, that happened from this Time until I arrived to Years of Discretion, only inform you that I lived a cheerful Country Life, spending my leisure Time either in some innocent Diversion with the neighboring Females, or in some shady Retirement, with the best of Company, Books. Thus I passed away the Time with a Mixture of Profit and Pleasure, having no affliction but what was imaginary, and created in my own Fancy; as nothing is more common with us Women, than to be grieving for nothing, when we have nothing else to grieve for.

As I would not engross too much of your Paper at once, I will defer the Remainder of my Story until my next Letter; in the meantime desiring your Readers to exercise their Patience, and bear with my Humors now and then, because I shall trouble them but seldom. I am not insensible of the Impossibility of pleasing all, but I would not willingly displease any; and for those who will take Offence were none is intended, they are beneath the Notice of Your Humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

April 16, 1722 • Silence Dogood #2

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. II.]

Sir,

Histories of Lives are seldom entertaining, unless they contain something either admirable or exemplar: And since there is little or nothing of this Nature in my own Adventures, I will not

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tire your Readers with tedious Particulars of no Consequence, but will briefly, and in as few Words as possible, relate the most material Occurrences of my Life, and according to my Promise, confine all to this Letter.

My Reverend master who had hitherto remained a Bachelor, (after much meditation on the Eighteenth verse of the Second Chapter of Genesis,) took up a Resolution to marry; and having made several unsuccessful fruitless Attempts on the more topping Sort of our Sex, and being tired with making troublesome Journeys and Visits to no Purpose, he began unexpectedly to cast a loving Eye upon Me, whom he had brought up cleverly to his Hand.

There is certainly scarce any Part of a Man's Life in which he appears more silly and ridiculous, than when he makes his first Onset in Courtship. The awkward Manner in which my Master first discovered his Intentions, made me, in spite of my Reverence to his Person, burst out into an unmannerly Laughter: However, having asked his Pardon, and with much ado composed my Countenance, I promised him I would take his Proposal into serious Consideration, and speedily give him an Answer.

As he had been a great Benefactor (and in a Manner a Father to me) I could not well deny his Request, when I once perceived he was in earnest. Whether it was Love, or Gratitude, or Pride, or all Three that made me consent, I know not; but it is certain, he found it no hard Matter, by the Help of his Rhetoric, to conquer my Heart, and persuade me to marry him.

This unexpected Match was very astonishing to all the Country round about, and served to furnish them with Discourse for a long Time after; some approving it, others disliking it, as they were led by their various Fancies and Inclinations.

We lived happily together in the Height of conjugal Love and mutual Endearments, for near Seven Years, in which Time we added Two likely Girls and a Boy to the Family of the Dogoods: But alas! When my Sun was in its meridian Altitude, inexorable unrelenting Death, as if he had envied my Happiness and Tranquility, and resolved to make me entirely miserable by the Loss of so good an Husband, hastened his Flight to the Heavenly World, by a sudden unexpected Departure from this.

I have now remained in a State of Widowhood for several Years, but it is a State I never much admired, and I am apt to fancy that I could be easily persuaded to marry again, provided I was sure of a good-humored, sober, agreeable Companion: But one, even with these few good Qualities, being hard to find, I have lately relinquished all Thoughts of that Nature.

At present I pass away my leisure Hours in Conversation, either with my honest Neighbor Rusticus and his Family, or with the ingenious Minister of our Town, who now lodges at my House, and by whose Assistance I intend now and then to beautify my Writings with a Sentence or two in the learned Languages, which will not only be fashionable, and pleasing to those who do not understand it, but will likewise be very ornamental.

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I shall conclude this with my own Character, which (one would think) I should be best able to give. Know then, That I am an Enemy to Vice, and a Friend to Virtue. I am one of an extensive Charity, and a great Forgiver of private Injuries: A hearty Lover of the Clergy and all good Men, and a mortal Enemy to arbitrary Government and unlimited Power. I am naturally very jealous for the Rights and Liberties of my Country; and the least appearance of an Encroachment on those invaluable Privileges, is apt to make my Blood boil exceedingly. I have likewise a natural Inclination to observe and reprove the Faults of others, at which I have an excellent Faculty. I speak this by Way of Warning to all such whose Offences shall come under my Cognizance, for I never intend to wrap my Talent in a Napkin. To be brief; I am courteous and affable, good humored (unless I am first provoked,) and handsome, and sometimes witty, but always, Sir, Your Friend and Humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

April 30, 1722 • Silence Dogood #3

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. III.]

Sir,

It is undoubtedly the Duty of all Persons to serve the Country they live in, according to their Abilities; yet I sincerely acknowledge, that I have hitherto been very deficient in this Particular; whether it was for want of Will or Opportunity, I will not at present stand to determine: Let it suffice, that I now take up a Resolution, to do for the future all that lies in my Way for the Service of my Countrymen.

I have from my Youth been indefatigably studious to gain and treasure up in my Mind all useful and desirable Knowledge, especially such as tends to improve the Mind, and enlarge the Understanding: And as I have found it very beneficial to me, I am not without Hopes, that communicating my small Stock in this Manner, by Peace-meal to the Public, may be at least in some Measure useful.

I am very sensible that it is impossible for me, or indeed any one Writer to please all Readers at once. Various Persons have different Sentiments; and that which is pleasant and delightful to one, gives Disgust. He that would (in this Way of Writing) please all, is under a Necessity to make his Themes almost as numerous as his Letters. He must one while be merry and diverting, then more solid and serious; one while sharp and satirical, then (to mollify that) be sober and religious; at one Time let the Subject be Politicks, then let the next Theme be Love: Thus will every one, one Time or other find something agreeable to his own Fancy, and in his Turn be delighted.

According to this Method I intend to proceed, bestowing now and then a few gentle Reproofs on those who deserve them, not forgetting at the same time to applaud those whose Actions merit Commendation. And here I must not forget to invite the ingenious Part of your Readers, particularly those of my own Sex to enter into a Correspondence with me, assuring

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them, that their Condescension in this Particular shall be received as a Favor, and accordingly acknowledged.

I think I have now finished the Foundation, and I intend in my next to begin to raise the Building. Having nothing more to write at present, I must make the usual excuse in such Cases, of being in haste, assuring you that I speak from my Heart when I call myself, The most humble and obedient of all the Servants your Merits have acquired,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

May 14, 1722 • Silence Dogood #4

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. IV.]

Sir,

Discoursing the other Day at Dinner with my Reverend Boarder, formerly mentioned, (whom for Distinction sake we will call by the Name of Clericus,) concerning the Education of Children, I asked his Advice about my young Son William, whether or not I had best bestow upon him Academic Learning, or (as our Phrase is) bring him up at our College: He persuaded me to do it by all Means, using many weighty Arguments with me, and answering all the Objections that I could form against it; telling me withal, that he did not doubt but that the Lad would take his Learning very well, and not idle away his Time as too many there now-a-days do. These Words of Clericus gave me a Curiosity to inquire a little more strictly into the present Circumstances of that famous Seminary of Learning; but the Information which he gave me, was neither pleasant, nor such as I expected.

As soon as Dinner was over, I took a solitary Walk into my Orchard, still ruminating on Clericus's Discourse with much Consideration, until I came to my usual Place of Retirement under the Great Apple-Tree; where having seated myself, and carelessly laid my Head on a verdant Bank, I fell by Degrees into a soft and undisturbed Slumber. My waking Thoughts remained with me in my Sleep, and before I awaked again, I dreamt the following Dream.

I fancied I was travelling over pleasant and delightful Fields and Meadows, and thro' many small Country Towns and Villages; and as I passed along, all Places resounded with the Fame of the Temple of Learning: Every Peasant, who had wherewithal, was preparing to send one of his Children at least to this famous Place; and in this Case most of them consulted their own Purses instead of their Children's Capacities: So that I observed, a great many, yea, the most part of those who were travelling thither, were little better than Dunces and Blockheads. Alas! alas!

At length I entered upon a spacious Plain, in the Midst of which was erected a large and stately Edifice: It was to this that a great Company of Youths from all Parts of the Country were going; so stepping in among the Crowd, I passed on with them, and presently arrived at the Gate.

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The Passage was kept by two sturdy Porters named Riches and Poverty, and the latter obstinately refused to give Entrance to any who had not first gained the Favor of the former; so that I observed, many who came even to the very Gate, were obliged to travel back again as ignorant as they came, for want of this necessary Qualification. However, as a Spectator I gained Admittance, and with the rest entered directly into the Temple.

In the Middle of the great Hall stood a stately and magnificent Throne, which was ascended to by two high and difficult Steps. On the Top of it sat Learning in awful State; she was appareled wholly in Black, and surrounded almost on every Side with innumerable Volumes in all Languages. She seemed very busily employed in writing something on half a Sheet of Paper, and upon Enquiry, I understood she was preparing a Paper, called, The New-England Courant. On her Right Hand sat English, with a pleasant smiling Countenance, and handsomely attired; and on her left were seated several Antique Figures with their Faces veiled. I was considerably puzzled to guess who they were, until one informed me, (who stood beside me,) that those Figures on her left Hand were Latin, Greek, Hebrew, &c. and that they were very much reserved, and seldom or never unveiled their Faces here, and then to few or none, though' most of those who have in this Place acquired so much Learning as to distinguish them from English, pretended to an intimate Acquaintance with them. I then enquired of him, what could be the Reason why they continued veiled, in this Place especially: He pointed to the Foot of the Throne, where I saw Idleness, attended with Ignorance, and these (he informed me) were they, who first veiled them, and still kept them so.

Now I observed, that the whole Tribe who entered into the Temple with me, began to climb the Throne; but the Work proving troublesome and difficult to most of them, they withdrew their Hands from the Plow, and contented themselves to sit at the Foot, with Madam Idleness and her Maid Ignorance, until those who were assisted by Diligence and a terrible Temper, had well-nigh got up the first Step: But the Time drawing nigh in which they could no way avoid ascending, they were fain to crave the Assistance of those who had got up before them, and who, for the Reward perhaps of a Pint of Milk, or a Piece of Plumb-Cake, lent the Lubbers a helping Hand, and sat them in the Eye of the World, upon a Level with themselves.

The other Step being in the same Manner ascended, and the usual Ceremonies at an End, every Beetle-Scull seemed well satisfied with his own Portion of Learning, though' perhaps he was even just as ignorant as ever. And now the Time of their Departure being come, they marched out of Doors to make Room for another Company, who waited for Entrance: And I, having seen all that was to be seen, quitted the hall likewise, and went to make my Observations on those who were just gone out before me.

Some I perceived took to Merchandizing, others to Travelling, some to one Thing some to another, and some to Nothing; and many of them from henceforth, for want of Patrimony, lived as poor as Church Mice, being unable to dig, and ashamed to beg, and to live by their Wits it was impossible. But the most Part of the Crowd went along a large beaten Path, which led to a Temple at the further End of the Plain, called, The Temple of Theology. The Business of those

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who were employed in this Temple being laborious and painful, I wonder' d exceedingly to see so many go towards it; but while I was pondering this Matter in my Mind, I spied Pecunia behind a Curtain, beckoning to them with her Hand, which Sight immediately satisfied me for whose Sake it was, that a great Part of them (I will not say al) traveled that Road. In this Temple I saw nothing worth mentioning, except the ambitious and fraudulent Contrivances of Plagius, who (notwithstanding he had been severely reprehended for such Practices before) was diligently transcribing some eloquent Paragraphs out of Tillotson's Works, &c., to embellish his own.

Now I be thought myself in my Sleep, that it was Time to be at Home, and as I fancied I was travelling back thither, I reflected in my Mind on the extreme Folly of those Parents, who, blind to their Children's Dullness, and insensible of the Solidity of their Skulls, because they think their Purses can afford it, will needs send them to the Temple of Learning, where, for want of a suitable Genius, they learn little more than how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a Room genteelly, (which might as well be acquired at a Dancing-School,) and from whence they return, after Abundance of Trouble and Charge, as great Blockheads as ever, only more proud and self-conceited.

While I was in the midst of these unpleasant Reflections, Clericus (who with a Book in his Hand was walking under the Trees) accidentally awaked me; to him I related my Dream with all its Particulars, and he, without much Study, presently interpreted it, assuring me, That it was a lively Representation of Harvard College, Etcetera. I remain, Sir, Your Humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

May 28, 1722 • Silence Dogood #5

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. V.]

Sir,

I shall here present your Readers with a Letter from one, who informs me that I have begun at the wrong End of my Business, and that I ought to begin at Home, and censure the Vices and Follies of my own Sex, before I venture to meddle with yours: Nevertheless, I am resolved to dedicate this Speculation to the Fair Tribe, and endeavor to show, that Mr. Ephraim charges Women with being particularly guilty of Pride, Idleness, &c. wrongfully, inasmuch as the Men have not only as great a Share in those Vices as the Women, but are likewise in a great Measure the Cause of that which the Women are guilty of. I think it will be best to produce my Antagonist, before I encounter him.

To Mrs. Dogood.

"Madam,

"My Design in troubling you with this Letter is, to desire you would begin with your own Sex first: Let the first Volley of your Resentments be directed against Female Vice; let Female

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Idleness, Ignorance and Folly, (which are Vices more peculiar to your Sex than to ours,) be the Subject of your Satyrs, but more especially Female Pride, which I think is intolerable. Here is a large Field that wants Cultivation, and which I believe you are able (if willing) to improve with Advantage; and when you have once reformed the Women, you will find it a much easier Task to reform the Men, because Women are the prime Causes of a great many Male Enormities. This is all at present from Your Friendly Well-wisher,

Ephraim Censorious"

After Thanks to my Correspondent for his Kindness in cutting out Work for me, I must assure him, that I find it a very difficult Matter to reprove Women separate from the Men; for what Vice is there in which the Men have not as great a Share as the Women? and in some have they not a far greater, as in Drunkenness, Swearing, &c.? And if they have, then it follows, that when a Vice is to be reprov'd, Men, who are most culpable, deserve the most Reprehension, and certainly therefore, ought to have it. But we will wave this Point at present, and proceed to a particular Consideration of what my Correspondent calls Female Vice.

As for Idleness, if I should Quaver, Where are the greatest Number of its Votaries to be found, with us or the Men? it might I believe be easily and truly answered, With the latter. For notwithstanding the Men are commonly complaining how hard they are forced to labor, only to maintain their Wives in Pomp and Idleness, yet if you go among the Women, you will learn, that they have always more Work upon their Hands than they are able to do; and that a Woman's Work is never done, &c. But however, Suppose we should grant for once, that we are generally more idle than the Men, (without making any Allowance for the Weakness of the Sex,) I desire to know whose Fault it is? Are not the Men to blame for their Folly in maintaining us in Idleness? Who is there that can be handsomely Supported in Affluence, Ease and Pleasure by another, that will choose rather to earn his Bread by the Sweat of his own Brows? And if a Man will be so fond and so foolish, as to labor hard himself for a Livelihood, and suffer his Wife in the mean Time to sit in Ease and Idleness, let him not blame her if she does so, for it is in a great Measure his own Fault.

And now for the Ignorance and Folly which he reproaches us with, let us see (if we are Fools and Ignoramus's) whose is the Fault, the Men's or ours. An ingenious Writer, having this Subject in Hand, has the following Words, wherein he lays the Fault wholly on the Men, for not allowing Women the Advantages of Education.

"I have (says he) often thought of it as one of the most barbarous Customs in the World, considering us as a civilized and Christian Country, that we deny the Advantages of Learning to Women. We reproach the Sex every Day with Folly and Impertinence, while I am confident, had they the Advantages of Education equal to us, they would be guilty of less than our selves. One would wonder indeed how it should happen that Women are conversable at all, since they are only beholding to natural Parts for all their Knowledge. Their Youth is spent to teach them to stitch and sew, or make Baubles: They are taught to read indeed, and perhaps to write their Names, or so; and that is the Height of a Woman's Education. And I would but ask any who

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slight the Sex for their Understanding, What is a Man (a Gentleman, I mean) good for that is taught no more? If Knowledge and Understanding had been useless Additions to the Sex, God Almighty would never have given them Capacities, for he made nothing Needless. What has the Woman done to forfeit the Privilege of being taught? Does she plague us with her Pride and Impertinence? Why did we not let her learn, that she might have had more Wit? Shall we upbraid Women with Folly, when 'tis only the Error of this inhumane Custom that hundred them being made wiser."

So much for Female Ignorance and Folly, and now let us a little consider the Pride which my Correspondent thinks is intolerable. By this Expression of his, one would think he is some dejected Swain, tyrannized over by some cruel haughty Nymph, who (perhaps he thinks) has no more Reason to be proud than himself. Alas-a-day! What shall we say in this Case! Why truly, if Women are proud, it is certainly owing to the Men still; for if they will be such Simpletons as to humble themselves at their Feet, and fill their credulous Ears with extravagant Praises of their Wit, Beauty, and other Accomplishments (perhaps where there are none too,) and when Women are by this Means persuaded that they are Something more than humane, what Wonder is it, if they carry themselves haughtily, and live extravagantly. Notwithstanding, I believe there are more Instances of extravagant Pride to be found among Men than among Women, and this Fault is certainly more heinous in the former than in the latter.

Upon the whole, I conclude, that it will be impossible to lash any Vice, of which the Men are not equally guilty with the Women, and consequently deserve an equal (if not a greater) Share in the Censure. However, I exhort both to amend, where both are culpable, otherwise they may expect to be severely handled by Sir, Your Humble Servant,

Silence Dogood.

N.B. Mrs. Dogood has lately left her Seat in the Country, and come to Boston, where she intends to tarry for the Summer Season, in order to complete her Observations of the present reigning Vices of the Town.

June 11, 1722 • Silence Dogood #6

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. VI.]

Sir,

Among the many reigning Vices of the Town which may at any Time come under my Consideration and Reprehension, there is none which I am more inclined to expose than that of Pride. It is acknowledged by all to be a Vice the most hateful to God and Man. Even those who nourish it in themselves, hate to see it in others. The proud Man aspires after Nothing less than an unlimited Superiority over his Fellow-Creatures. He has made himself a King in Soliloquy; fancies himself conquering the World; and the Inhabitants thereof consulting on proper Methods to acknowledge his Merit. I speak it to my Shame, I myself was a Queen from the Fourteenth to the Eighteenth Year of my Age, and governed the World all the Time of my being

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governed by my Master. But this speculative Pride may be the Subject of another Letter: I shall at present confine my Thoughts to what we call Pride of Apparel. This Sort of Pride has been growing upon us ever since we parted with our Homespun Clothes for Fourteen Penny Stuffs, &c. And the Pride of Apparel has begot and nourished in us a Pride of Heart, which portends the Ruin of Church and State. Pride goeth before Destruction, and a haughty Spirit before a Fall: And I remember my late Reverend Husband would often say upon this Text, That a Fall was the natural Consequence, as well as Punishment of Pride. Daily Experience is sufficient to evince the Truth of this Observation. Persons of small Fortune under the Dominion of this Vice, seldom consider their Inability to maintain themselves in it, but strive to imitate their Superiors in Estate, or Equals in Folly, until one Misfortune comes upon the Neck of another, and every Step they take is a Step backwards. By striving to appear rich they become really poor, and deprive themselves of that Pity and Charity which is due to the humble poor Man, who is made so more immediately by Providence.

This Pride of Apparel will appear the more foolish, if we consider, that those airy Mortals, who have no other Way of making themselves considerable but by gorgeous Apparel, draw after them Crowds of Imitators, who hate each other while they endeavor after a Similitude of Manners. They destroy by Example, and envy one another's Destruction.

I cannot dismiss this Subject without some Observations on a particular Fashion now reigning among my own Sex, the most immodest and inconvenient of any the Art of Woman has invented, namely, that of Hoop-Petticoats. By these they are incommoded in their General and Particular Calling, and therefore they cannot answer the Ends of either necessary or ornamental Apparel. These monstrous topsy-turvy Mortar-Pieces, are neither fit for the Church, the Hall, or the Kitchen; and if a Number of them were well mounted on Noddles-Island, they would look more like Engines of War for bombarding the Town, than Ornaments of the Fair Sex. An honest Neighbor of mine, happening to be in Town some time since on a public Day, informed me, that he saw four Gentlewomen with their Hoops half mounted in a Balcony, as they withdrew to the Wall, to the great Terror of the Militia, who (he thinks) might attribute their irregular Volleys to the formidable Appearance of the Ladies Petticoats.

I assure you, Sir, I have but little Hopes of persuading my Sex, by this Letter, utterly to relinquish the extravagant Foolery, and Indication of Immodesty, in this monstrous Garb of theirs; but I would at least desire them to lessen the Circumference of their Hoops, and leave it with them to consider, Whether they, who pay no Rates or Taxes, ought to take up more Room in the King's High-Way, than the Men, who yearly contribute to the Support of the Government. I am, Sir, Your Humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

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June 25, 1722 • Silence Dogood #7

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. VII.]

Sir,

It has been the Complaint of many Ingenious Foreigners, who have travelled amongst us, That good Poetry is not to be expected in New-England. I am apt to Fancy, the Reason is, not because our Countrymen are altogether void of a Poetical Genius, nor yet because we have not those Advantages of Education which other Countries have, but purely because we do not afford that Praise and Encouragement which is merited, when anything extraordinary of this Kind is produced among us: Upon which Consideration I have determined, when I meet with a Good Piece of New-England Poetry, to give it a suitable Encomium, and thereby endeavor to discover to the World some of its Beauty's, in order to encourage the Author to go on, and bless the World with more, and more Excellent Productions.

There has lately appeared among us a most Excellent Piece of Poetry, entitled, An Elegy upon the much Lamented Death of Mrs. Mehitebell Kitel, Wife of Mr. John Kitel of Salem, &c. It may justly be said in its Praise, without Flattery to the Author, that it is the most Extraordinary Piece that ever was wrote in New-England. The Language is so soft and Easy, the Expression so moving and pathetic, but above all, the Verse and Numbers so Charming and Natural, that it is almost beyond Comparison,

The Muse disdains

Those Links and Chains,

Measures and Rules of vulgar Strains,

And o'er the Laws of Harmony a Sovereign Queen she reigns.

I find no English Author, Ancient or Modern, whose Elegies may be compared with this, in respect to the Elegance of Stile, or Smoothness of Rhyme; and for the affecting Part, I will leave your Readers to judge, if ever they read any Lines, that would sooner make them draw their Breath and Sigh, if not shed Tears, than these following.

Come let us mourn, for we have lost a Wife, a Daughter, and a Sister,

Who has lately taken Flight, and greatly we have missed her.

In another Place,

Some little Time before she yielded up her Breath,

She said, I ne'er shall hear one Sermon more on Earth.

She kissed her Husband some little Time before she expired,

Then leaned her Head the Pillow on, just out of Breath and tired.

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But the Threefold Appellation in the first Line a Wife, a Daughter, and a Sister, must not pass unobserved. That Line in the celebrated Watts, Gunston the Just, the Generous, and the Young, is nothing Comparable to it. The latter only mentions three Qualifications of one Person who was deceased, which therefore could raise Grief and Compassion but for One. Whereas the former, (our most excellent Poet) gives his Reader a Sort of an Idea of the Death of Three Persons, viz. a Wife, a Daughter, and a Sister, which is Three Times as great a Loss as the Death of One, and consequently must raise Three Times as much Grief and Compassion in the Reader.

I should be very much strained for Room, if I should attempt to discover even half the Excellency's of this Elegy which are obvious to me. Yet I cannot omit one Observation, which is, that the Author has (to his Honor) invented a new Species of Poetry, which wants a Name, and was never before known. His Muse scorns to be confined to the old Measures and Limits, or to observe the dull Rules of Critics;

Nor Rapin gives her Rules to fly, nor Purcell Notes to sing. Watts.

Now 'tis Pity that such an Excellent Piece should not be dignified with a particular Name; and seeing it cannot justly be called, either Epic, Sapphic, Lyric, or Pindaric, nor any other Name yet invented, I presume it may, (in Honor and Remembrance of the Dead) be called the Kitelic. Thus much in the Praise of Kitelic Poetry.

It is certain, that those Elegies which are of our own Growth, (and our Soil seldom produces any other sort of Poetry) are by far the greatest part, wretchedly Dull and Ridiculous. Now since it is imagined by many, that our Poets are honest, well-meaning Fellows, who do their best, and that if they had but some Instructions how to govern Fancy with Judgment, they would make indifferent good Elegies; I shall here subjoin a Receipt for that purpose, which was left me as a Legacy, (among other valuable Rarities) by my Reverend Husband. It is as follows,

A RECEIPT to make a New-England Funeral ELEGY.

For the Title of your Elegy. Of these you may have enough ready made to your Hands; but if you should choose to make it yourself, you must be sure not to omit the Words *Aetatis Suae*, which will Beautify it exceedingly.

For the Subject of your Elegy. Take one of your Neighbors who has lately departed this Life; it is no great matter at what Age the Party died, but it will be best if he went away suddenly, being Killed, Drowned, or Froze to Death.

Having chosen the Person, take all his Virtues, Excellency's, &c. and if he have not enough, you may borrow some to make up a sufficient Quantity: To these add his last Words, dying Expressions, &c. if they are to be had; mix all these together, and be sure you strain them well. Then season all with a Handful or two of Melancholy Expressions, such as, Dreadful, Deadly, cruel cold Death, unhappy Fate, weeping Eyes, &c. Have mixed all these Ingredients well, put them into the empty Scull of some young Harvard; (but in Case you have ne'er a One at Hand,

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you may use your own,) there let them Ferment for the Space of a Fortnight, and by that Time they will be incorporated into a Body, which take out, and having prepared a sufficient Quantity of double Rhymes, such as, Power, Flower; Quiver, Shiver; Grieve us, Leave us; tell you, excel you; Expeditions, Physicians; Fatigue him, Intrigue him; &c. you must spread all upon Paper, and if you can procure a Scrap of Latin to put at the End, it will garnish it mightily; then having affixed your Name at the Bottom, with a *Moestus Composuit*, you will have an Excellent Elegy.

N.B. This Receipt will serve when a Female is the Subject of your Elegy, provided you borrow a greater Quantity of Virtues, Excellency's, &c. Sir, Your Servant,

Silence Dogood.

p.s. I shall make no other Answer to Hypercarpus's Criticism on my last Letter than this, *Mater me genuit, peperit mox filia matrem.*

July 9, 1722 • Silence Dogood #8

To the Author of the *New-England Courant*. [No. VIII.]

Sir,

I prefer the following Abstract from the *London Journal* to any Thing of my own, and therefore shall present it to your Readers this week without any further Preface.

"Without Freedom of Thought, there can be no such Thing as Wisdom; and no such Thing as public Liberty, without Freedom of Speech; which is the Right of every Man, as far as by it, he does not hurt or control the Right of another: And this is the only Check it ought to suffer, and the only Bounds it ought to know.

"This sacred Privilege is so essential to free Governments, that the Security of Property, and the Freedom of Speech always go together; and in those wretched Countries where a Man cannot call his Tongue his own, he can scarce call any Thing else his own. Whoever would overthrow the Liberty of a Nation, must begin by subduing the Freeness of Speech; a Thing terrible to Public Traitors.

"This Secret was so well known to the Court of King Charles the First, that his wicked Ministry procured a Proclamation, to forbid the People to talk of Parliaments, which those Traitors had laid aside. To assert the undoubted Right of the Subject, and defend his Majesty's legal Prerogative, was called Disaffection, and punished as Sedition. Nay, People were forbid to talk of Religion in their Families: For the Priests had combined with the Ministers to cook up Tyranny, and suppress Truth and the Law, while the late King James, when Duke of York, went avowedly to Mass, Men were fined, imprisoned and undone, for saying he was a Papist: And that King Charles the Second might live more securely a Papist, there was an Act of Parliament made, declaring it Treason to say that he was one.

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"That Men ought to speak well of their Governors is true, while their Governors deserve to be well spoken of; but to do public Mischief, without hearing of it, is only the Prerogative and Felicity of Tyranny: A free People will be showing that they are so, by their Freedom of Speech. "The Administration of Government, is nothing else but the Attendance of the Trustees of the People upon the Interest and Affairs of the People: And as it is the Part and Business of the People, for whose Sake alone all public Matters are, or ought to be transacted, to see whether they be well or ill transacted; so it is the Interest, and ought to be the Ambition, of all honest Magistrates, to have their Deeds openly examined, and publicly scanned: Only the wicked Governors of Men dread what is said of them; *Audivit Tiberius probra queis lacerabitur, atque percussus est.* The public Censure was true, else he had not felt it bitter.

"Freedom of Speech is ever the Symptom, as well as the Effect of a good Government. In old Rome, all was left to the Judgment and Pleasure of the People, who examined the public Proceedings with such Discretion, and censured those who administered them with such Equity and Mildness, that in the space of Three Hundred Years, not five public Ministers suffered unjustly. Indeed whenever the Commons proceeded to Violence, the great Ones had been the Aggressors.

"Guilt only dreads Liberty of Speech, which drags it out of its lurking Holes, and exposes its Deformity and Horror to Daylight. Horatius, Valerius, Cincinnatus, and other virtuous and undesigning Magistrates of the Roman Commonwealth, had nothing to fear from Liberty of Speech. Their virtuous Administration, the more it was examin'd, the more it brightened and gained by Enquiry. When Valerius in particular, was accused upon some slight grounds of affecting the Diadem; he, who was the first Minister of Rome, does not accuse the People for examining his Conduct, but approved his Innocence in a Speech to them; and gave such Satisfaction to them, and gained such Popularity to himself, that they gave him a new Name; *inde cognomen factum Publicolae est;* to denote that he was their Favorite and their Friend. *Latae deinde leges — Ante omnes de provocatione Adversus Magistratus Ad Populum, Livii, lib. 2. Cap. 8.*

"But Things afterwards took another Turn. Rome, with the Loss of its Liberty, lost also its Freedom of Speech; then Men's Words began to be feared and watched; and then first began the poisonous Race of Informers, banished indeed under the righteous Administration of Titus, Narva, Trajan, Aurelius, &c. but encouraged and enriched under the vile Ministry of Sejanus, Tigillinus, Pallas, and Cleander: *Queri libet, quod in secreta nostra non inquirant principes, nisi quos Odimus,* says Pliny to Trajan.

"The best Princes have ever encouraged and promoted Freedom of Speech; they know that upright Measures would defend themselves, and that all upright Men would defend them. Tacitus, speaking of the Reign of some of the Princes abovemention'd, says with Extasy, *Rara Temporum felicitate, ubi sentire quae velis, & quae sentias dicere licet:* A blessed Time when you might think what you would, and speak what you thought.

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"I doubt not but old Spencer and his Son, who were the Chief Ministers and Betrayers of Edward the Second, would have been very glad to have stopped the Mouths of all the honest Men in England. They dreaded to be called Traitors, because they were Traitors. And I dare say, Queen Elizabeth's Walsingham, who deserved no Reproaches, feared none. Misrepresentation of public Measures is easily overthrown, by representing public Measures truly; when they are honest, they ought to be publicly known, that they may be publicly commended; but if they are knavish or pernicious, they ought to be publicly exposed, in order to be publicly detested."
Yours, &c.,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

July 23, 1722 • Silence Dogood #9

To the Author of the New-England Courant. . [No. IX.]

Sir,

It has been for some Time a Question with me, Whether a Commonwealth suffers more by hypocritical Pretenders to Religion, or by the openly Profane? But some late Thoughts of this Nature, have inclined me to think, that the Hypocrite is the most dangerous Person of the Two, especially if he sustains a Post in the Government, and we consider his Conduct as it regards the Public. The first Artifice of a State Hypocrite is, by a few savory Expressions which cost him Nothing, to betray the best Men in his Country into an Opinion of his Goodness; and if the Country wherein he lives is noted for the Purity of Religion, he the more easily gains his End, and consequently may more justly be exposed and detested. A notoriously profane Person in a private Capacity, ruins himself, and perhaps forwards the Destruction of a few of his Equals; but a public Hypocrite every day deceives his betters, and makes them the Ignorant Trumpeters of his supposed Godliness: They take him for a Saint, and pass him for one, without considering that they are (as it were) the Instruments of public Mischief out of Conscience, and ruin their Country for God's sake.

This Political Description of a Hypocrite, may (for ought I know) be taken for a new Doctrine by some of your Readers; but let them consider, that a little Religion, and a little Honesty, goes a great way in Courts. 'Tis not inconsistent with Charity to distrust a Religious Man in Power, though' he may be a good Man; he has many Temptations "to propagate public Destruction for Personal Advantages and Security": And if his Natural Temper be covetous, and his Actions often contradict his pious Discourse, we may with great Reason conclude, that he has some other Design in his Religion besides barely getting to Heaven. But the most dangerous Hypocrite in a Common- Wealth, is one who leaves the Gospel for the sake of the Law: A Man compounded of Law and Gospel, is able to cheat a whole Country with his Religion, and then destroy them under Color of Law: And here the Clergy are in great Danger of being deceived, and the People of being deceived by the Clergy, until the Monster arrives to such Power and Wealth, that he is out of the reach of both, and can oppress the People without their own blind Assistance. And it is a sad Observation, that when the People too late see their Error, yet the

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Clergy still persist in their Encomiums on the Hypocrite; and when he happens to die for the Good of his Country, without leaving behind him the Memory of one good Action, he shall be sure to have his Funeral Sermon stuffed with Pious Expressions which he dropped at such a Time, and at such a Place, and on such an Occasion; than which nothing can be more prejudicial to the Interest of Religion, nor indeed to the Memory of the Person deceased. The Reason of this Blindness in the Clergy is, because they are honorably supported (as they ought to be) by their People, and see nor feel nothing of the Oppression which is obvious and burdensome to everyone else.

But this Subject raises in me an Indignation not to be born; and if we have had, or are like to have any Instances of this Nature in New England, we cannot better manifest our Love to Religion and the Country, than by setting the Deceivers in a true Light, and undeceiving the Deceived, however such Discoveries may be represented by the ignorant or designing Enemies of our Peace and Safety.

I shall conclude with a Paragraph or two from an ingenious Political Writer in the London Journal, the better to convince your Readers, that Public Destruction may be easily carry' d on by hypocritical Pretenders to Religion.

“A raging Passion for immoderate Gain had made Men universally and intensely hard-hearted: They were everywhere devouring one another. And yet the Directors and their Accomplices, who were the acting Instruments of all this outrageous Madness and Mischief, set up for wonderful pious Persons, while they were defying Almighty God, and plundering Men; and they set apart a Fund of Subscriptions for charitable Uses; that is, they mercilessly made a whole People Beggars, and charitably supported a few necessitous and worthless Favorites. I doubt not, but if the Villainy had gone on with Success, they would have had their Names handed down to Posterity with Encomiums; as the Names of other public Robbers have been! We have Historians and Ode Makers now living, very proper for such a Task. It is certain, that most People did, at one Time, believe the Directors to be great and worthy Persons. And an honest Country Clergyman told me last Summer, upon the Road, that Sir John was an excellent public-spirited Person, for that he had beautified his Chancel.

"Upon the whole we must not judge of one another by their best Actions; since the worst Men do some Good, and all Men make fine Professions: But we must judge of Men by the whole of their Conduct, and the Effects of it. Thorough Honesty requires great and long Proof, since many a Man, long thought honest, has at length proved a Knave. And it is from judging without Proof, or false Proof, that Mankind continue Unhappy." I am, Sir, Your humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

Benjamin Franklin's Mrs. Silence Dogood Letters

August 13, 1722 • Silence Dogood #10

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. X.]

Sir,

It has been for some Time a Question with me, Whether a Commonwealth suffers more by hypocritical Pretenders to Religion, or by the openly Profane? But some late Thoughts of this Nature, have inclined me to think, that the Hypocrite is the most dangerous Person of the Two, especially if he sustains a Post in the Government, and we consider his Conduct as it regards the Public. The first Artifice of a State Hypocrite is, by a few savory Expressions which cost him Nothing, to betray the best Men in his Country into an Opinion of his Goodness; and if the Country wherein he lives is noted for the Purity of Religion, he the more easily gains his End, and consequently may more justly be exposed and detested. A notoriously profane Person in a private Capacity, ruins himself, and perhaps forwards the Destruction of a few of his Equals; but a public Hypocrite every day deceives his betters, and makes them the Ignorant Trumpeters of his supposed Godliness: They take him for a Saint, and pass him for one, without considering that they are (as it were) the Instruments of public Mischief out of Conscience, and ruin their Country for God's sake.

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Religion and the Country, than by setting the Deceivers in a true Light, and undeceiving the Deceived, however such Discoveries may be represented by the ignorant or designing Enemies of our Peace and Safety.

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"Upon the whole we must not judge of one another by their best Actions; since the worst Men do some Good, and all Men make fine Professions: But we must judge of Men by the whole of their Conduct, and the Effects of it. Thorough Honesty requires great and long Proof, since many a Man, long thought honest, has at length proved a Knave. And it is from judging without Proof, or false Proof, that Mankind continue Unhappy." I am, Sir, Your humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

August 20, 1722 • Silence Dogood #11

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. XI.]

Sir,

From a natural Compassion to my Fellow-Creatures, I have sometimes been betrayed into Tears at the Sight of an Object of Charity, who by a bear [sic] Relation of his Circumstances, seemed to demand the Assistance of those about him. The following Petition represents in so lively a Manner the forlorn State of a Virgin well stricken in Years and Repentance, that I cannot forbear publishing it at this Time, with some Advice to the Petitioner.

To Mrs. Silence Dogood.

"1. That your Petitioner being puffed up in her younger Years with a numerous Train of Humble Servants, had the Vanity to think, that her extraordinary Wit and Beauty would

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continually recommend her to the Esteem of the Gallants; and therefore as soon as it came to be publicly known that any Gentleman addressed her, he was immediately discarded.

"2. That several of your Petitioners Humble Servants, who upon their being rejected by her, were, to all Appearance in a dying Condition, have since recovered their Health, and been several Years married, to the great Surprise and Grief of your Petitioner, who parted with them upon no other Conditions, but that they should die or run distracted for her, as several of them faithfully promised to do.

"3. That your Petitioner finding herself disappointed in and neglected by her former Adorers, and no new Offers appearing for some Years past, she has been industriously contracting Acquaintance with several Families in Town and Country, where any young Gentlemen or Widowers have resided, and endeavored to appear as conversable as possible before them: She has likewise been a strict Observer of the Fashion, and always appeared well dressed. And the better to restore her decayed Beauty, she has consumed above Fifty Pound's Worth of the most approved Cosmetics. But all won't do.

"Your Petitioner therefore most humbly prays, That you would be pleased to form a Project for the Relief of all those penitent Mortals of the fair Sex, that are like to be punished with their Virginity until old Age, for the Pride and Insolence of their Youth.

"And your Petitioner (as in Duty bound) shall ever pray, &c.

Margaret Aftercast"

Where I endowed with the Faculty of Match-making, it should be improved for the Benefit of Mrs. Margaret, and others in her Condition: But since my extreme Modesty and Taciturnity, forbids an Attempt of this Nature, I would advise them to relieve themselves in a Method of Friendly Society; and that already publish' d for Widows, I conceive would be a very proper Proposal for them, whereby every single Woman, upon full Proof given of her continuing a Virgin for the Space of Eighteen Years, (dating her Virginity from the Age of Twelve,) should be entitled to £500 in ready Cash.

But then it will be necessary to make the following Exceptions.

1. That no Woman shall be admitted into the Society after she is Twenty Five Years old, who has made a Practice of entertaining and discarding Humble Servants, without sufficient Reason for so doing, until she has manifested her Repentance in Writing under her Hand.

2. No Member of the Society who has declared before two credible Witnesses, That it is well known she has refused several good Offers since the Time of her Subscribing, shall be entitled to the £500 when she comes of Age; that is to say, Thirty Years.

3. No Woman, who after claiming and receiving, has had the good Fortune to marry, shall entertain any Company with Encomiums on her Husband, above the Space of one Hour at a

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Time, upon Pain of returning one half the Money into the Office, for the first Offence; and upon the second Offence to return the Remainder. I am, Sir, Your Humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

September 10, 1722 • Silence Dogood #12

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. XII.]

Sir,

It is no unprofitable though' unpleasant Pursuit, diligently to inspect and consider the Manners and Conversation of Men, who, insensible of the greatest Enjoyments of humane Life, abandon themselves to Vice from a false Notion of Pleasure and good Fellowship. A true and natural Representation of any Enormity, is often the best Argument against it and Means of removing it, when the most severe Reprehensions alone, are found ineffectual.

I would in this letter improve the little Observation I have made on the Vice of Drunkenness, the better to reclaim the good Fellows who usually pay the Devotions of the Evening to Bacchus.

I doubt not but moderate Drinking has been improved for the Diffusion of Knowledge among the ingenious Part of Mankind, who want the Talent of a ready Utterance, in order to discover the Conceptions of their Minds in an entertaining and intelligible Manner. 'Tis true, drinking does not improve our Faculties, but it enables us to use them; and therefore I conclude, that much Study and Experience, and a little Liquor, are of absolute Necessity for some Tempers, in order to make them accomplished Orators. Dice. Ponder discovers an excellent Judgment when he is inspired with a Glass or two of Claret, but he passes for a Fool among those of small Observation, who never saw him the better for Drink. And here it will not be improper to observe, That the moderate Use of Liquor, and a well-placed and well regulated Anger, often produce this same Effect; and some who cannot ordinarily talk but in broken Sentences and false Grammar, do in the Heat of Passion express themselves with as much Eloquence as Warmth. Hence it is that my own Sex are generally the most eloquent, because the most passionate. "It has been said in the Praise of some Men, (says an ingenious Author,) that they could talk whole Hours together upon anything; but it must be owned to the Honor of the other Sex, that there are many among them who can talk whole Hours together upon Nothing. I have known a Woman branch out into a long extempore Dissertation on the Edging of a Petticoat, and chide her Servant for breaking a China Cup, in all the Figures of Rhetoric."

But after all it must be considered, that no Pleasure can give Satisfaction or prove advantageous to a reasonable Mind, which is not attended with the Restraints of Reason. Enjoyment is not to be found by Excess in any sensual Gratification; but on the contrary, the immoderate Cravings of the Voluptuary, are always succeeded with Loathing and a palled Appetite. What Pleasure can the Drunkard have in the Reflection, that, while in his Cups, he

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retained only the Shape of a Man, and acted the Part of a Beast; or that from reasonable Discourse a few Minutes before, he descended to Impertinence and Nonsense?

I cannot pretend to account for the different Effects of Liquor on Persons of different Dispositions, who are guilty of Excess in the Use of it. 'Tis strange to see Men of a regular Conversation become rakish and profane when intoxicated with Drink, and yet more surprising to observe, that some who appear to be the most profligate Wretches when sober, become mighty religious in their Cups, and will then, and at no other Time address their Maker, but when they are destitute of Reason, and actually affronting him. Some shrink in the Wetting, and others swell to such an unusual Bulk in their Imaginations, that they can in an Instant understand all Arts and Sciences, by the liberal Education of a little vivifying Punch, or a sufficient Quantity of other exhilarating Liquor.

And as the Effects of Liquor are various, so are the Characters given to its Devourers. It argues some Shame in the Drunkards themselves, in that they have invented numberless Words and Phrases to cover their Folly, whose proper Significations are harmless, or have no Signification at all. They are seldom known to be drunk, though' they are very often boozey, cogey, tipsey, fox'd, merry, mellow, fuddl'd, groatable, Confoundedly cut, See two Moons, are Among the Philistines, In a very good Humor, See the Sun, or, The Sun has shone upon them; they Clip the King's English, are Almost froze, Feverish, In their Altitudes, Pretty well entered, &c. In short, every Day produces some new Word or Phrase which might be added to the Vocabulary of the Tipplers: But I have chosen to mention these few, because if at any Time a Man of Sobriety and Temperance happens to cut himself confoundedly, or is almost froze, or feverish, or accidentally sees the Sun, &c. he may escape the Imputation of being drunk, when his Misfortune comes to be related. I am Sir, Your Humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

September 24, 1722 • Silence Dogood #13

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. XIII.]

Sir,

In Persons of a contemplative Disposition, the most indifferent Things provoke the Exercise of the Imagination; and the Satisfactions which often arise to them thereby, are a certain Relief to the Labor of the Mind (when it has been intensely fixed on more substantial Subjects) as well as to that of the Body.

In one of the late pleasant Moon-light Evenings, I so far indulged in myself the Humor of the Town in walking abroad, as to continue from my Lodgings two or three Hours later than usual, and was pleased beyond Expectation before my Return. Here I found various Company to observe, and various Discourse to attend to. I met indeed with the common Fate of Listeners, (who hear no good of themselves,) but from a Consciousness of my Innocence, received it with a Satisfaction beyond what the Love of Flattery and the Daubing's of a Parasite could produce.

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The Company who rallied me were about Twenty in Number, of both Sexes; and though' the Confusion of Tongues (like that of Babel) which always happens among so many impetuous Talkers, render' d their Discourse not so intelligible as I could wish, I learnt thus much, That one of the Females pretended to know me, from some Discourse she had heard at a certain House before the Publication of one of my Letters; adding, That I was a Person of an ill Character, and kept a criminal Correspondence with a Gentleman who assisted me in Writing. One of the Gallants cleared me of this random Charge, by saying, That though' I wrote in the Character of a Woman, he knew me to be a Man; But, continued he, he has more need of endeavoring a Reformation in himself, than spending his Wit in satirizing others.

I had no sooner left this Set of Ramblers, but I met a Crowd of Tarpolins and their Doxies, linked to each other by the Arms, who ran (by their own Account) after the Rate of Six Knots an Hour, and bent their Course towards the Common. Their eager and amorous Emotions of Body, occasioned by taking their Mistresses in Tow, they called wild Steerage: And as a Pair of them happened to trip and come to the Ground, the Company were called upon to bring to, for that Jack and Betty were founder's. But this Fleet were not less comical or irregular in their Progress than a Company of Females I soon after came up with, who, by throwing their Heads to the Right and Left, at every one who passed by them, I concluded came out with no other Design than to revive the Spirit of Love in Disappointed Bachelors, and expose themselves to Sale to the first Bidder.

But it would take up too much Room in your Paper to mention all the Occasions of Diversion I met with in this Night's Ramble. As it grew later, I observed, that many pensive Youths with down Looks and a slow Pace, would be ever now and then crying out on the Cruelty of their Mistresses; others with a more rapid Pace and cheerful Air, would be swinging their Canes and clapping their Cheeks, and whispering at certain Intervals, I'm certain I shall have her! This is more than I expected! How charmingly she talks! &c.

Upon the whole I conclude, That our Night-Walkers are a Set of People, who contribute very much to the Health and Satisfaction of those who have been fatigued with Business or Study, and occasionally observe their pretty Gestures and Impertinencies. But among Men of Business, the Shoemakers, and other Dealers in Leather, are doubly obliged to them, inasmuch as they exceedingly promote the Consumption of their Ware: And I have heard of a Shoemaker, who being asked by a noted Rambler, Whether he could tell how long her Shoes would last; very prettily answered, That he knew how many Days she might wear them, but not how many Nights; because they were then put to a more violent and irregular Service than when she employed herself in the common Affairs of the House. I am, Sir, Your Humble Servant,

SILENCE DOGOOD.

Benjamin Franklin's Mrs. Silence Dogood Letters

October 8, 1722 • Silence Dogood #14

To the Author of the New-England Courant. [No. XIV.]

Sir,

It often happens, that the most zealous Advocates for any Cause find themselves disappointed in the first Appearance of Success in the Propagation of their Opinion; and the Disappointment appears unavoidable, when their easy Proselytes too suddenly start into Extremes, and are immediately filled with Arguments to invalidate their former Practice. This creates a Suspicion in the more considerate Part of Mankind, that those who are thus given to Change, neither fear God, nor honor the King. In Matters of Religion, he that alters his Opinion on a religious Account, must certainly go through' much Reading, hear many Arguments on both Sides, and undergo many Struggles in his Conscience, before he can come to a full Resolution: Secular Interest will indeed make quick Work with an immoral Man, especially if, notwithstanding the Alteration of his Opinion, he can with any Appearance of Credit retain his Immorality. But, by this Turn of Thought I would not be suspected of Uncharitableness to those Clergymen at Connecticut, who have lately embraced the Established Religion of our Nation, some of whom I hear made their Professions with a Seriousness becoming their Order: However, since they have denied the Validity of Ordination by the Hands of Presbyters, and consequently their Power of Administering the Sacraments, &c. we may justly expect a suitable Manifestation of their Repentance for invading the Priests Office, and living so long in a Corah-like Rebellion. All I would endeavor to show is, That an indiscreet Zeal for spreading an Opinion, hurts the Cause of the Zealot. There are too many blind Zealots among every Denomination of Christians; and he that propagates the Gospel among Rakes and Beaus without reforming them in their Morals, is every whit as ridiculous and impolitic as a Statesman who makes Tools of Idiots and Tale-Bearers.

Much to my present Purpose are the Words of two Ingenious Authors of the Church of England, though' in all Probability they were tainted with Whiggish Principles; and with these I shall conclude this Letter.

"I would (says one) have every zealous Man examine his Heart thoroughly, and, I believe, he will often find that what he calls a Zeal for his Religion, is either Pride, Interest or Ill-nature. A Man who differs from another in Opinion sets himself above him in his own Judgment, and in several Particulars pretends to be the wiser Person. This is a great Provocation to the Proud Man, and gives a keen Edge to what he calls his Zeal. And that this is the Case very often, we may observe from the Behavior of some of the most Zealous for Orthodoxy, who have often great Friendships and Intimacies with vicious immoral Men, provided they do but agree with them in the same Scheme of Belief. The Reason is, because the vicious Believer gives the Precedency to the virtuous Man, and allows the good Christian to be the worthier Person, at the same Time that he cannot come up to his Perfections. This we find exemplified in that trite Passage which we see quoted in almost every System of Ethics, though' upon another Occasion;

—Video meliore proboque

Benjamin Franklin's Mrs. Silence Dogood Letters

Deteriora sequor —

On the contrary, it is certain if our Zeal were true and genuine, we should be much more angry with a Sinner than a Heretic, since there are several Cases which may excuse the latter before his great Judge, but none which can excuse the former."

"I have (says another) found by Experience, that it is impossible to talk distinctly without defining the Words of which we make use. There is not a Term in our Language which wants Explanation so much as the Word Church. One would think when People utter it, they should have in their Minds Ideas of Virtue and Religion; but that important Monosyllable drags all the other Words in the Language after it, and it is made use of to express both Praise and Blame, according to the Character of him who speaks it. By this means it happens, that no one knows what his Neighbor means when he says such a one is for or against the Church. It has happened that he who is seen every Day at Church, has not been counted in the Eye of the World a Churchman; and he who is very zealous to oblige everyone to frequent it but himself, has been a very good Son of the Church. This Prepossession is the best Handle imaginable for Politicians to make use of, for managing the Loves and Hatreds of Mankind to the Purposes to which they would lead them. But this is not a Thing for Fools to meddle with, for they only bring Disesteem upon those whom they attempt to serve, when they unskillfully pronounce Terms of Art. I have observed great Evils arise from this Practice, and not only the Cause of Piety, but also the secular Interest of Clergymen, has extremely suffered by the general unexplained Signification of the Word Church." I am, Sir, Your Humble Servant.

SILENCE DOGOOD