

**BON-MOTS OF THE
EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649185177

Bon-mots of the eighteenth century by Walter Jerrold

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

WALTER JERROLD

**BON-MOTS OF THE
EIGHTEENTH
CENTURY**

BON-MOTS OF THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.





Johnson

SRL URU

"A penetrating wit hath an air of divination.

—LA ROCHEFOUCAULT.

*"True wit is nature to advantage dress'd
Oft thought before, but ne'er so well express'd."*

—POPE.

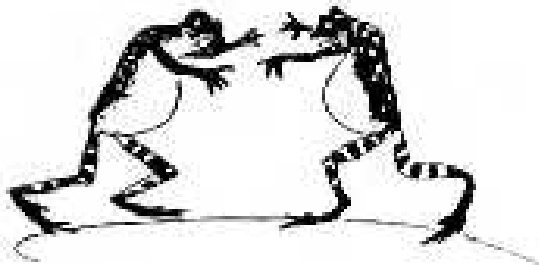
*"Wit may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of concuria visus—a combination of dissimilar images or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike."—*JOHNSON.

*"Nothing is so much admired, and so little understood as wit."—*ADAMSON.

*"Tell me, oh tell, what kind of thing is wit,
Thou who master art of it?
A thousand different shapes it bears,
Comely in thousand shapes appears,
Yonder we see it plain: and here 'tis none,
Like spirits, in a place, we know not how."*

—COWLEY.

*"Were we, in fine, obliged ever to talk like philosophers, assigning dry reasons for every thing, and dropping grave sentences upon all occasions, would it not much deaden human life, and make ordinary conversation exceedingly to languish?"—*BARROW.



INTRODUCTION.

"NOTHING," said Addison, in beginning the fifty-eighth *Spectator*, "Nothing is so much admired and so little understood as wit." To the Essayist the word meant very much the same thing as it does to us, although its significance has somewhat narrowed within the past hundred and eighty-five years. A "man of wit" of the eighteenth century was not necessarily of the same type as a "man of wit" of the nineteenth, but in the following pages we are not concerned with all men of wit of the eighteenth century, only with those of them who manifested in their conversation the possession of that volatile quality. In other words, we are concerned with witty things spoken rather than written. The object has been to gather together a representative collection of the "Bon-Mots of the Eighteenth Century" and of the recorded conversational witticisms of all sorts and conditions of men. It is not by any means pretended that this small volume enshrines *all* the conversational

good things recorded from the reign of William of Orange to that of the third of the Georges, nor is it even pretended that all the brilliant repartees of Eskine, the solemn retorts of Johnson, the neat *wits* of Chesterfield, are to be found herein. The preparation of such a complete collection would be a well-nigh endless task, and though it would be by no means difficult to make a larger volume than this, to do so would be to thwart the end in view—that of providing a small companionable collection.

The plan pursued in earlier volumes of this series, of giving contemporary descriptions of the wits, of attempting to show them in their habit as they lived, cannot be followed here, where in place of two, some hundred and fifty wits are represented. I have, therefore, thought it would not be uninteresting, instead of showing what those who lived in the eighteenth century had to say of their men of wit, to give some indications of their philosophical flounderings after a definition of wit itself. As Addison said, it is but little understood, — yet every person of average intelligence knows what is wit, though he knows not what wit is.

Beauty, poetry, wit—they simply elude definition. We may cite examples saying that face or picture is beautiful, those lines are poetry, that retort is wit, but yet we cannot satisfactorily say why each is what it obviously is. Many are the writers who have essayed a de-

inition of the elusive quality—letters three do form its name—but a brief yet comprehensive description of what is meant is yet to seek. Nought but itself can be its parallel. We may, with Archbishop Tillotson, entirely beg the question, and call wit "a very commendable Quality"; we may follow the lead of a philosopher, John Locke, and call it an assemblage of congruous ideas; we may vaguely term it "a series of high and exalted sentiments" with Sir Richard Blackmore, or a *concordia discors* with the great lexicographer; but in the end we are left very much where we started, strong in the knowledge that wit is—wit.

We have, indeed, a kind of *concordia discors* in the following strainings after the apparently unattainable, yet far be it from the compiler to suggest that the assemblage of ideas constitutes a witty introduction. The dates after the various definer's names are in all cases those of the author's death, and we will begin with two writers who died before the close of the seventeenth century.

ISAAC BARROW (1677): But first it may be demanded what the thing we speak of is, or what this facetiousness doth import? To which question I might reply as Democritus did to him that asked the definition of a man—" 'Tis that which we all see and know;" anyone better apprehends what it is by acquaintance than I