

**ESSAYS, MORAL AND  
ENTERTAINING ON THE VARIOUS  
FACULTIES  
AND PASSIONS OF THE HUMAN  
MIND; IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649245222

Essays, moral and entertaining on the various faculties and passions of the human mind; In two volumes. Vol. II by Edward Clarendon

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Cover @ 2017

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**EDWARD CLARENDON**

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BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE  
EDWARD, EARL OF CLARENDON.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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LONDON:

RE-PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, ORME, AND  
BROWN, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

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1815.

# ESSAYS

## MORAL AND ENTERTAINING.

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ON AN ACTIVE AND ON A CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE,  
AND WHEN AND WHY THE ONE OUGHT TO BE  
PREFERRED BEFORE THE OTHER.—(CONTINUED.)

WE have prosecuted our inquisition into a contemplative life, what is meant by it, and what it cannot mean, what fruit it may bear, and what fruit it can never bear, far enough; and therefore it is time to proceed to as strict an enquiry into the nature and function of that active life that we would have preferred before it; of which we can hardly take a view, without frequent reflections upon the defects which are inseparable from the other, and the benefits that must necessarily attend or accompany this. The first and the greatest objection that is made against it, is the perpetual temptations it exposes a man to, and the great difficulty to preserve innocence in the pursuit of a busy and solicitous life; that the industry of it is common-

ly founded upon ambition, which, how proud and insolent soever it is in its own nature, stoops to the basest offices, to the most sordid applications of flattery, to the grossest and most uningenuous importunities of the most worthless men, if they are able to contribute to his preferment. If activity be not transported with this vice, which by the way may be industrious and innocent too, and is naturally rather a spur to virtuous designs, than an incitation to low and vile thoughts, it is still subservient to some other as corrupt an end; it proceeds from covetousness, a love of money, and desire to be rich, which is a passion of that unlimited and insatiable extent, that it devours all that is in its way, and yields to all dishonourable condescensions that it may devour, and is always unrestrained from any prescription of decency and generosity, or by the most severe rules of justice itself. Should this restless inclination to action take up its habitation in a mind so rarely fortified by the principles of virtue, that it cannot be corrupted by those predominant passions which work upon vulgar constitutions; whose ambition is to be great for no other reason than that he may be able to make other men good, and to suppress the infectious vices of the age; who hath no other appetite of money than that he may dispose it to charitable and generous purposes; it will still be liable, even from the contagion of the company, from which it

cannot be severed, to impressions of vanity and levity and incogitancy, which usher the way to other temptations, at least introduce an inquietude into a mind well prepared against more violent invasions. And if a man under all these assaults, and in all these conflicts, remains unhurt, retains the vigour and beauty of his integrity, which will be no less than a miraculous preservation in this pursuit, it is yet much more than an even wager that the very fame and reputation of his virtue and innocence may raise such a storm of envy and malice in the breasts of unrighteous men, as may oppress him in the noblest attempt, and utterly destroy him in the safest port, and leave his good name and memory torn with as many ghastly wounds, as his body or his fortune: to which shall be only added, that history or experience hath transmitted the memory of very few men to us who have been notoriously prosperous in the transactions of the world, and long possessed that station, whose characters have not retained the mention of some extraordinary vice or infirmity, as well as of many notable virtues, as if those strong flights could not be made without the assistance of some iniquity. Whereas the contemplative life is secure from all those or the like waves and billows; that retreat enjoys a perpetual calm; the contemplative man is never disturbed with ambition, because he knows not



what it is, otherwise than in books, which hath supplied him with antidotes against that poison; he is superior to any temptation from the love of money, because he needs it not, nor knows what to do with it if he had it: he hath in the dark volumes of philosophers made a discovery of that heap of passions and appetites, which lie in wait to assault human nature in all the several functions of life and insults of fortune; and when he discerns the strong opposition made, and the glorious conquests obtained by those heathen philosophers, by the mere supplies which reason and their natural faculties suggested to them, he then considers what other advantages he hath from Christianity, which enables him at once to despise and laugh at the provocations, without any exaltation in the triumph.

Let this privation of understanding go for wisdom, and this stupid absence of guilt stand for uprightnes, yet it complies not with the obligation and end of the creation of man, who is not sent into the world only to have a being, to breathe till nature extinguisheth that breath, and reduces that miserable creature to the nothing he was before: he is sent upon an errand, and to do the business of life; he hath faculties given him to judge between good and evil, to cherish and foment the first motions he feels towards the one, and to subdue the first temptations to the other; he hath not

acted his part in doing no harm : his duty is not only to do good and to be innocent himself, but to propagate virtue, and to make others better than they would otherwise be. Indeed, an absence of folly is the first hopeful prologue towards the obtaining wisdom ; yet he shall never be wise who knows not what folly is, nor, it may be, commendably and judiciously honest, without having taken some view of the quarters of iniquity : since true virtue pre-supposeth an election, a declining somewhat that is ill, as well as the choice of what is good. Our senses are given us to judge by, and have their proper objects, which they are the sole judges of ; nor is it lawful to imprison those senses, that they may not be conversant with their objects, nor to abate their edge, and extinguish the acuteness, which is the perfection of them, lest their objects, how natural and proper soever, may have some operation upon them to their prejudice : a man may hear too much, and see more than he hath a mind to see, but no man ever saw too well, or heard too well ; and no sense was ever reformed by being deprived of its object, from the malignity whereof he hath other guards and remedies to secure him. A man would deserve little comfort in this world, or in the world that is to come, who would chuse to be blind, that he may be without those strugglings which some beau-

tiful objects may raise or kindle within him ; when a chaste eye hath a brightness about it, that dispels and disperses those rays which would dazzle and perplex it ; and the unnatural attempt to extinguish a sense or passion, rather than to subdue it, is usually rewarded by the prevalence of a grosser temptation ; and the lasciviousness that could not get entrance at the eye, makes a breach into the ear in loose and effeminate tunes, and kindles and fans all those desires into a flame, that the nobler sense would have resisted. To be without wishes, or without appetite, is the property of a carcase, not of a man ; who is not more a reasonable, than an active creature ; whose first testimony that he hath a soul, is the noise he makes ; and there cannot be a worse omen in the birth of any child, than its silence ; and it were to be wished, that those instances only might condemn people to a contemplative life, into which silence is the principal ingredient, and should be taken for the best prognostic. The world is a field, in which man is to learn and to labour to be wise and to be valiant, that he may have foresight and courage enough to encounter and subdue temptations, not to hope to fly from them ; at least not to fly out of the field, or farther than to recover breath to renew and continue the contention : they who prescribe famine to correct the luxury of the appetite,