

The Epistle to the Reader.

not to envy them ; Since they afford thee an Opportunity of the like Diversion, if thou wilt make use of thy own Thoughts in reading: 'Tis to them, if they are thy own, that I refer my self : But if they are taken upon Trust from others, 'tis no great Matter what they are, they not following Truth, but some meaner Consideration : and 'tis not worth while to be concerned, what he says or thinks, who says or thinks only as he is directed by another. If thou judgest for thy self, I know thou wilt judge candidly ; and then I shall not be harmed or offended, whatever be thy Censure. For though it be certain, that there is nothing in this Treatise of whose Truth I am not persuaded ; yet I consider my self as liable to Mistakes, as I can think thee ; and know that this Book must stand or fall with thee, not by any Opinion I have of it, but thy own. If thou findest little in it new or instructive to thee, thou art not to blame me for it. It was not meant for those that had already mastered this Subject, and made a through Acquaintance with their own Understandings ; but for my own Information, and the Satisfaction of a few Friends, who acknowledged themselves not to have sufficiently considered it. Were it fit to trouble thee with the History of this Essay, I should tell thee that five or six Friends meeting at my Chamber, and discoursing on a Subject very remote from this, found themselves quickly at a stand, by the Difficulties that rose on every side. After we had a while puzzled our selves, without coming any nearer a Resolution of those Doubts which perplexed us, it came into my Thoughts, that we took a wrong course ; and that before we set our selves upon Enquiries of that Nature, it was necessary to examine our own Abilities, and see what Objects our Understandings were, or were not fitted to deal with. This I proposed to the Company, who all readily assented ; and thereupon it was agreed, that this should be our first Enquiry, Some hasty and undigested Thoughts , on a Subject I had never before considered, which I set down against our next Meeting, gave the first entrance into this Discourse, which having been thus begun by Chance , was continued by Intreaty ; written by incoherent parcels ; and, after long intervals of neglect, resum'd again, as my Humour or Occasions permitted ; and at last, in a retirement, where an Attendance on my Health gave me leisure, it was brought into that order thou now seest it.

This discontinued way of writing may have occasioned, besides others, two contrary Faults, viz. that too little, and too much may be said in it. If thou findest any thing wanting, I shall be glad, that what I have writ, gives thee any Desire that I should have gone farther : If it seems too much to thee, thou must blame the Subject ; for when I first put Pen to Paper, I thought all I should have to say on this Matter, would have been contained in one sheet of Paper ; but the farther