

## OF HEARING.

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### *The Introduction.*

1. I HAVE sent, Nicander, the reflections of some spare hours concerning Hearing, digested into the following short essay, that being out of the hands of governors and come to man's estate, you may know how to pay a proper attention to those who would advise you. For that libertinism which some wild young fellows, for want of more happy education, mistake for liberty, subjects them to harder tyrants than their late tutors and masters, even to their own vicious inclinations, which, as it were, break loose upon them. And as Herodotus observes of women, that they put off modesty with their shift,\* so some young men lay aside with the badges of minority all the sense of shame or fear, and divested of the garment of modesty which sat so well upon them are covered with insolence. But you, who have often heard that to follow God and to obey reason are all one, cannot but believe that men of best sense in passing from minority to manhood do not throw off the government, but simply change their governor. In the room of some mercenary pedant, they receive that divine guide and governor of human life, reason, under whose subjection alone men are properly said to live in freedom. For they only live at their own will who have learned to will as they ought; and that freedom of will which appears in unconstrained appetites and unreasonable actions is mean and narrow, and accompanied with much repentance.

\* Herod. I. 8.

2 For as newly naturalized citizens who were entire strangers and aliens are apt to disrelish many administrations of the government ; while those who have previously lived in the country, bred up under the constitution and acquainted with it, act without difficulty in their several stations, well satisfied with their condition ; in like manner, a man should for a long time have been bred up in philosophy, and accustomed from his earliest years to receive his lessons and instruction mingled with philosophic reason, that so he may come at last as a kind and familiar friend to philosophy, which alone can array young men in the perfect manly robes and ornaments of reason. Therefore, I believe, some directions concerning hearing will not be ill received by you.

*Remarks about Hearing in general.*

Of this Theophrastus affirms, that it is the most sensitive of all the senses. For the several objects of sight, tasting, and feeling do not excite in us so great disturbances and alterations as the sudden and frightful noises which assault us only at the ears. Yet in reality this sense is more rational than sensitive. For there are many organs and other parts of the body which serve as avenues and inlets to the soul to give admission to vice ; there is but one passage of virtue into young minds, and that is by the ears, provided they be preserved all along free from the corruptions of flattery and untainted with lewd discourses. For this reason Xenocrates was of opinion that children ought to have a defence fitted to their ears rather than fencers or prize-players, because the ears only of the latter suffered by the blows, but the morals of the former were hurt and maimed by words. Not that he thereby recommended deafness, or forbade that they should be suffered to hear at all ; but he advised only that debauchery might be kept out, till better principles, like so many guardians appointed

by philosophy, had taken charge of that part which is so liable to be drawn aside and corrupted by discourse. And Bias of old, being ordered by Amasis to send him the best and withal the worst part of the sacrifice, sent the tongue; because the greatest benefits and disadvantages are derived to us thereby. Thus again many diverting themselves with children touch their ears, bidding them return the like again; by which they seem to intimate to them that such best deserve their love and esteem whose obligations enter at the ears. This is evident, that he that has lain fallow all his days, without tasting instruction, will not only prove barren and unfruitful of virtue, but very inclinable to vice; for an uncultivated mind, like untilled ground, will soon be overrun with weeds. For if that violent propensity of the mind to pleasure, and jealousy of all that carries any show of pain, — which proceed not from external causes or received prejudices, but are the natural springs of evil affections and infinite diseases of the mind, — are suffered to take their course, and not restrained, or diverted some other way by wholesome instructions, there can be no beast so savage that it may not be called tame and civilized in respect of such a man.

*More General Rules about Hearing.*

3. Since then it appears that hearing is of so great use and no less danger to young men, I think it a very commendable thing for such a one to reflect continually with himself, and consult often with others, how he may hear with benefit. And in this particular we may observe many to have been mistaken, that they practise speaking before they have been used enough to hearing. Speaking they think will require some study and attention, but hearing cannot be a thing of any difficulty. Those indeed who play the game of tennis learn at the same time how to throw and how to catch the ball; but in the exercise of

the tongue, we ought to practise how to talk well before we pretend to return, as conception and retention of the foetus precede childbirth. When fowls let fall wind-eggs, it is usually said that they are the rudiments of imperfect fruits which will never quicken and have life ; and when young men either hear not at all or retain not what they hear, their discourse comes from them altogether as useless and full of wind,

And vain and unregarded turns to air.

In filling one vessel from another, they take care to incline and turn it so that nothing be spilled, and that it may be really filling and not emptying ; but they think it not worth the heeding to regulate their attention and apply themselves with advantage to a speaker, that nothing of importance may fall beside or escape them. Yet, what is beyond comparison ridiculous, if they happen upon any one who has a knack at describing an entertainment or a show, or can relate his dream well, or give an handsome account of a quarrel between himself and another, such a one they hear with the greatest attention, they court him to proceed, and importune him for every circumstance. Whereas, let another call them about him for any thing useful, to exhort to what is decent or reprehend what is irregular, or to make up a quarrel, they have not temper enough to away with it, but they fight with all their might to put him down by argument, if they are able, or if not, they haste away to more agreeable fopperies ; as if their ears, like faulty earthen vessels, might be filled with any thing but what is useful or valuable. But as jockeys take great care in breeding horses to bring them to rein right and endure the bit, so such as have the care of educating children should breed them to endure hearing, by allowing them to speak little and hear much. And Spintharus, speaking in commendation of Epaminondas, says he scarce

ever met with any man who knew more and spoke less. Some again make the observation, that Nature has given every man two ears and but one tongue, as a secret intimation that he ought to speak less than he hears.

*Directions concerning Attention.*

4. Well then, silence is at all times a singular ornament of a youth, but especially if he does not interrupt the speaker nor carp and except at every thing he says, but patiently expects the conclusion, though his discourse be none of the best; and when he has done, if he does not presently come over him with an objection, but (as Aeschines directs) allows time to add, if he please, to what has been said, or to alter, or retract. Whereas such as turn too suddenly upon a speaker neither hear nor are heard themselves, but senselessly chatter to one another, and sin against the laws and rules of decorum. But he that brings along with him a modest and unwearied attention has this advantage, that whatever is beneficial in the discourse he makes his own, and he more readily discovers what is false or impertinent, appearing all the while a friend to truth rather than to squabbling or rashness. Therefore it was not ill said, that such as design to infuse goodness into the minds of youth must first exclude thence pride and self-conceit more carefully than we squeeze air out of bladders which we wish to fill with something useful; because, while they are puffed up with arrogance, there is no room to admit any thing else.

5. Thus again, envy and detraction and prejudice are in no case good, but always a great impediment to what is so; yet nowhere worse than when they are made the bosom-friends and counsellors of a hearer, because they represent the best things to him as unpleasant and impertinent, and men in such circumstances are pleased with any thing rather than what deserves their applause. Yet he that

grieves at the wealth, glory, or beauty of any is but simply envious, for he repines only at the good of others ; but he that is ill-natured to a good speaker is an enemy to his own happiness. For discourse to an hearer, like light to the eye, is a great benefit, if he will make the best use of it. Envy in all other instances carries this pretence with it, that it is to be referred to the depraved and ungovernable affections of the mind, but that which is conceived against a speaker arises from an unjust presumption and vain-glorious affectation of praise.

In such a case, the man has not leisure to attend to what he hears ; his soul is in continual hurry and disturbance, at one time examining her own habits and endowments, if any way inferior to the speaker ; anon, watching the behavior and inclination of others, if inclined to praise or admire his discourse ; disordered at the praise and enraged at the company, if he meet with any encouragement. She easily lets slip and willingly forgets what has been said, because the remembrance is a pain and vexation to her ; she hears what is to come with a great deal of uneasiness and concern, and is never so desirous that the speaker should hasten to an end, as when he discourses best. After all is over, she considers not what was said, but has respect only to the common vogue and disposition of the audience ; she avoids and flies like one distracted such as seem to be pleased, and herds among the censorious and perverse. If she finds nothing to pervert, then she puts forward other speakers, who (as she asserts) have spoken better and with greater force of argument on the same subject. Thus, by abusing and corrupting what was said, she defeats the use and effect of it on herself.

6. He therefore who comes to hear must for the time come to a kind of truce and accommodation with vain-glory, and preserve the same evenness and cheerfulness of humor he would bring with him if he were invited to a

festival entertainment or the first-fruits' sacrifice, applauding the orator's power when he speaks to the purpose, and where he fails receiving kindly his readiness to communicate what he knows and to persuade others by what wrought upon himself. Where he comes off with success, he must not impute it to chance or peradventure, but attribute all to study and diligence and art, not only admiring but studiously emulating the like; where he has done amiss, he must pry curiously into the causes and origin of the mistake. For what Xenophon says of discreet house-keepers, that they make an advantage of their enemies as well as their friends, is in some sort true of vigilant and attentive hearers, who reap no less benefit from an ill than a good orator. For the meanness and poverty of a thought, the emptiness and flatness of an expression, the unseasonableness of a figure, and the impertinence of falling into a foolish ecstasy of joy or commendation, and the like, are better discovered by a by-stander than by the speaker himself. Therefore his oversight or indiscretion must be brought home to ourselves, that we may examine if nothing of the same kind has skulked there and imposed on us all the while. For there is nothing in the world more easy than to discover the faults of others; but it is done to no effect if we do not make it useful to ourselves in correcting and avoiding the like failures. When therefore you animadvert upon other men's miscarriages, forget not to put that question of Plato to yourself, Am not I such another? We must trace out our own way of writing in the discourses of other men, as in another's eyes we see the reflection of our own; that we may learn not to be too free in censuring others, and may use more circumspection ourselves in speaking. To this design the following method of comparison may be very instrumental; if upon our return from hearing we take what seemed to us not well or sufficiently handled, and attempt it afresh ourselves, endeavor

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