



Of ACTIVE and RETIRED LIFE.

A N

E P I S T L E to H. C. Esq;

*Meo quidem judicio neuter culpandus, alter dum expetit
debitos titulos, dum alter mavult videri contempisse.*

PLIN. Ep.

By WILLIAM MELMOTH, Esq;

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Y E S, you condemn those sages too refin'd,
That gravely lecture ere they know mankind;
Who whilst ambition's fiercer fires they blame,
Would damp each useful spark that kindles fame.

'Tis in false estimates the folly lies;
The passion's blameless, when the judgment's wise.

In vain philosophers with warmth contest,
Life's secret shade, or open walk is best:
Each has its separate joys, and each its use:
This calls the patriot forth, and that the muse.
Hence not alike to all the species, heav'n
An equal thirst of publick fame has given:
Patrius it forms to shine in action great;
While Decio's talents best adorn retreat.

If where Pierian maids delight to dwell,
 The haunts of silence, and the peaceful cell,
 Had, fair Astræa! been thy Talbot's choice,
 Could list'ning crowds now hang upon his voice?
 And thou, blest maid, might'st long have wept in vain
 The distant glories of a second reign,
 In exile doom'd yet ages to complain. }

Were high ambition still the power confess'd
 That rul'd with equal sway in every breast,
 Say where the glories of the sacred nine?
 Where Homer's verse sublime, or, Milton, thine?
 Nor thou, sweet bard! who "turn'd the tuneful art,
 "From sound to sense, from fancy to the heart."
 Thy lays instructive to the world hadst giv'n,
 Nor greatly justified the laws of heav'n.

Let satire blast with ev'ry mark of hate,
 The vain aspirer, or dishonest great,
 Whom love of wealth, or wild ambition's sway
 Push forward, still regardless of the way;
 High and more high who aim with restless pride,
 Where neither reason, nor fair virtue guide:
 And him, the wretch, who labors on with pain,
 For the low lucre of an useless gain,
 (Wise but to get, and active but to save)
 May scorn deserv'd still follow to the grave.
 But he who fond to raise a splendid name,
 On life's ambitious height would fix his fame,

In active arts, or vent'rous arms would shine,
 Yet shuns the paths which virtue bids decline ;
 Who dignifies his wealth by gen'rous use,
 To raise th' oppress'd, or merit to produce—
 Shall reason's voice impartial e'er condemn
 The glorious purpose of so wise an aim ?

Where virtue regulates this just desire,
 'Twere dang'rous folly to suppress its fire.
 Say, whence could fame supply, (its force unknown)
 Her roll illustrious of fair renown ?
 What laurels prompt the hero's useful rage ?
 What prize the patriot's weighty toils engage ?
 Each publick passion bound to endless frost,
 Each deed of social worth for ever lost.

O ! may the Muse inspire the love of praise,
 Raise the bright passion, but with judgment raise !
 For this she oft has tun'd her sacred voice,
 Call'd forth the patriot, and approv'd his choice ;
 Bid him the steep ascent to honor take,
 Nor till the summit gain'd, her paths forsake.

Yet not success alone true fame attends ;
 He too shall reach it who but well intends.
 See 'midst the vanquish'd virtuous, ^a Falkland lies ;
 His gen'rous efforts vain, and vain his sighs ;
 Yet true to merit faithful records tell,
 To distant ages how the patriot fell :

^a He was killed in the civil wars : see his character at large in Clarendon's history.

Blest youth ! insur'd the sweetest voice of praise,
 Who lives approv'd in Pope's unrival'd lays.

Grave precepts fleeting notions may impart,
 But bright example best instructs the heart :
 Then look on Patrius, let his conduct shew
 From active life what various blessings flow.
 In him a just ambition stands confess'd ;
 It warms, but not inflames, his equal breast.
 See him in senates act the patriot's part,
 Truth on his lips, the publick at his heart ;
 There neither fears can awe, nor hopes controul,
 The honest purpose of his steady soul.
 No mean attachments e'er seduced his tongue
 To gild the cause his heart suspected wrong ;
 But deaf to envy, faction, spleen, his voice
 Joins here or there, as reason guides his choice.
 To one great point his faithful labors tend,
 And all his toils in Britain's interest end.
 To him each neighbour safe refers his claim,
 The right he settles, and abates the flame.
 Nor arts nor worth to Patrius sue in vain,
 Nor unreliev'd the injur'd e'er complain.
 For him the hand unseen, are pray'rs prefer'd,
 And grateful vows in distant temples heard ;
 Like nature's blessings to no part confin'd,
 His well-pois'd bounty reaches all mankind,
 That insolence of wealth, the pomp of state
 Which crowds the mansions of the vainly great,
 Flies far the limits of his modest gate. }

Just what is elegantly useful's there ;
 Of aught beyond he scorns th' unworthy care ;
 Nor wou'd, for all the trim that pride can show,
 One single act of social aid forego ;
 For this he labors to improve his store,
 For this he wishes to enlarge his pow'r ;
 This is his life's great purpose, end, and aim :
 Such true ambition is, and worthy fame.

How different Rapax spent his worthless hour !
 With treasure indigent, a slave with pow'r :
 Large sums o'erlooking, still intent on more,
 He wasted, not enjoy'd, his tasteless store.
 His growing greatness rais'd his hopes the high'r,
 And fan'd his restless pride's increasing fire,
 'Twas thus amidst prosperity he pin'd ;
 For what can fill the false-ambitious mind ?
 With all the honors that his prince cou'd give,
 With all the wealth his av'rice cou'd receive,
 'Midst outward opulence, but inward care,
 Reproach and want was all he left his heir.

'Tis true, the patriot well deserves his fame,
 And from his country just applause may claim.
 But what avails it to the world beside,
 That Brutus bravely stab'd, or Curtius dy'd ?
 While Tully's merit, unconfin'd to place,
 Diffuses blessings down thro' all our race ;
 Remotest times his learned labors reach,
 And Rome's great moralist e'en now shall teach.

Averse to publick noise, ambition's strife,
 And all the splendid ills of busy life,
 Thro' latent paths, unmark'd by vulgar eye,
 Are there who wish to pass unheeded by?
 Whom calm retirement's sacred pleasures move,
 The hour contemplative, or friend they love;
 Yet not by spleen, or superstition led,
 Forbear ambition's giddy heights to tread;
 Who not inglorious spend their peaceful day,
 Whilst science, lovely star! directs their way?
 Flows there not something good from such as these?
 No useful product from the men of ease?
 And shall the Muse no social merit boast?
 Are all her vigils to the publick lost?
 Tho' noisy pride may scorn her silent toil,
 Fair are the fruits which bless her happy soil:
 There every plant of useful produce grows,
 There science sprang, and thence instruction flows;
 There true philosophy erects her school,
 There plans her problem, and there forms her rule;
 There every seed of every art began,
 And all that eases life, and brightens man.

'Twas hence great Newton, mighty genius! soar'd,
 And all creation's wond'rous range explor'd.
 Far as th' Almighty stretch'd his utmost line,
 He pierc'd in thought, and view'd the vast design.
 Too long had darker ages fought in vain
 The secret scheme of nature to explain;

Too long had truth escap'd each sage's eye,
 Or faintly shone thro' vain philosophy.
 Each shapely offspring of her feeble thought,
 A darker veil o'er genuine science brought ;
 Still stubborn facts o'erthrew their fruitless toil ;
 For truth and fiction who shall reconcile ?
 But Britain's sons a surer guide pursue ;
 Tread safe the maze, since Newton gave the clue:
 Where-e'er he turn'd true Science rear'd her head,
 While far before her puzzled Ign'rance fled :
 From each blest truth these noble ends he draws,
 Use to mankind, and to their God applause.
 Taught by his rules secure the merchant rides,
 When threat'ning seas roll high their dreadful tides ;
 And either India speeds her precious stores,
 'Midst various dangers safe to Britain's shores.
 Long as those orbs he weigh'd shall shed their rays,
 His truth shall guide us, and shall last his praise.

Yet if so just the fame, the use so great,
 Systems to poise, and spheres to regulate ;
 To teach the secret well-adapted force,
 That steers of countless orbs th' unvaried course ;
 Far brighter honors wait the nobler part,
 To balance manners, and conduct the heart.
 Order *without* us, what imports it seen,
 If all is restless anarchy within ?

Fir'd by this thought great Ashley, gen'rous sage,
 Plan'd in sweet leifure his ^a instructive page.
 Not orbs he weighs, but marks, with happier skill,
 The scope of actions and the poise of will :
 In fair proportion here describ'd we trace
 Each mental beauty, and each moral grace ;
 Each useful passion taught, its tone design'd
 In the nice concord of a well-tun'd mind.
 Does mean self-love contract each social aim ?
 Here publick transports shall thy soul inflame.
 Virtue and Deity supremely fair,
 Too oft delineated with looks severe,
 Resume their native smiles and graces here :
 Sooth'd into love relenting foes admire,
 And warmer raptures every friend inspire.

Such are the fruits which from retirement spring ;
 These blessings ease and learned leifure bring.

Yet of the various tasks mankind employ,
 'Tis sure the hardest, leifure to enjoy.
 For one who knows to taste this godlike blifs,
 What countless swarms of vain pretenders mis ?
 Tho' each dull plodding thing, to ape the wise,
 Ridiculously grave, for leifure sighs,
 (His boasted wish from busy scenes to run)
 Grant him that leifure, and the fool's undone.

^a See the *Characteristicks*, particularly the enquiry concerning *Virtue and the Moralists*.

The gods, to curse poor Demea, heard his vow,
 And business now no more contracts his brow :
 Nor real cares, 'tis true, perplex his breast,
 But thousand fancied ills his peace molest :
 The slightest trifles solid sorrows prove,
 And the longling'ring wheel of life scarce seems to move.

Useless in business, yet unfit for ease,
 Nor skill'd to mend mankind, nor form'd to please,
 Such spurious animals of worthless race
 Live but the publick burthen and disgrace :
 Like mean attendants on life's stage are seen,
 Drawn forth to fill, but not conduct the scene.

The mind not taught to think, no useful store
 To fix reflection, dreads the vacant hour.
 Turn'd on its self its num'rous wants are seen,
 And all the mighty void that lies within
 Yet cannot wisdom stamp our joys complete ;
 'Tis conscious virtue crowns the blest retreat.
 Who feels not that, the private path must shun,
 And fly to publick view t' escape his own ;
 In life's gay scenes uneasy thoughts suppress,
 And lull each anxious care in dreams of peace.
 'Midst foreign objects not employ'd to roam,
 Thought, sadly active, still corrodes at home :
 A serious moment breaks the false repose,
 And guilt in all its naked horror shows.

He who would know retirement's joy refin'd
 The fair recess must seek with cheerful mind :

No Cynick's pride, no bigot's heated brain,
 No frustrate hope, nor love's fantastick pain,
 With him must enter the sequester'd cell,
 Who means with pleasing solitude to dwell ;
 But equal passions let his bosom rule,
 A judgment candid, and a temper cool,
 Enlarg'd with knowledge, and in conscience clear,
 Above life's empty hopes, and death's vain fear.
 Such he must be who greatly lives alone ;
 Such Portio is, in crowded scenes unknown.
 For publick life with every talent born,
 Portio far off retires with decent scorn ;
 Tho' without business never unemploy'd,
 And life, as more at leisure, more enjoy'd :
 For who like him can various science taste,
 His mind shall never want an endless feast,
 In his blest ev'ning walk may'st thou, may I,
 Oft friendly join in sweet society ;
 Our lives like his in one smooth current flow,
 Nor swell'd with tempest, nor too calmly flow,
 Whilst he like some great sage of Rome or Greece,
 Shall calm each rising doubt and speak us peace,
 Correct each thought, each wayward wish controul,
 And stamp with every virtue all the soul.

Ah ! how unlike is Umbrio's gloomy scene,
 Estrang'd from all the cheerful ways of men !
 There superstition works her baneful pow'r,
 And darkens all the melancholy hour.

Unnumber'd fears corrode and haunt his breast,
 With all that whim or ign'rance can suggest.
 In vain for him kind nature pours her sweets ;
 The visionary faint no joy admits,
 But seeks with pious spleen fantastick woes,
 And for heav'n's sake heav'n's offer'd good foregoes.

Whate'er's our choice we still with pride prefer,
 And all who deviate, vainly think must err :
 Clodio in books and abstract notions lost,
 Sees none but knaves and fools in honor's post ;
 Whilst Syphax, fond on fortune's sea to sail,
 And boldly drive before the flatt'ring gale,
 (Forward her dang'rous ocean to explore,)
 Condemns as cowards those who make the shore.
 Not so my friend impartial, — man he views
 Useful in what he shuns as what pursues ;
 Sees different turns to gen'ral good conspire,
 The hero's passion and the poet's fire ;
 Each figure plac'd in nature's wise design,
 With true proportion and exactest line :
 Sees lights and shades unite in due degree,
 And form the whole with fairest symmetry.

