



MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Samuel Thomas



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*Magis est hominis errare: Nullius nisi insipientis, perseverare in errore.*

I R,

**H**AVING treated of *Philosophical Doubting*, in my Third Lecture, I shall this Day recommend it again to my Readers, and attempt to shew the Reasonableness and the Necessity of it, in other ( and perhaps more familiar ) Lights; that the Plainest Capacity be capable to apprehend the great Advantages of this Position of Mind; without which we can never be thoroughly convinced of any Truths, that are not *Self-Evident*.

desire the Lovers of Truth and Sincerity, to consider that no Man, of common Reflection, can be Unblamable in Opinions, who put them upon Trust, and never enquire of their Validity. In order to be fully persuaded of Truth of an Opinion, ( without which Perswasion it can never be justifiable to embrace it, ) Common Sense requires should not neglect the Proper and Ordinary Methods of Information; Now all Information comes by Enquiry; and Enquiry comes by Doubting. He that is positive can Doubt; and consequently cuts himself off from the Possibility of being Informed: Neither ought he, that never Doubted, to be Positive.

OF Truths which are *Self-Evident*, the Number is but small; whereas the Variety of Truths, that require Examination and Reasoning, before they can be rightly apprehended, is Infinite. Besides, through Prejudice or Negligence, many Notions are taken for *Self-Evident Truths*, which upon an impartial Examination, would prove manifest Fallacies: And this Deception is the main Source of the most popular Errors. Therefore an honest Man cannot be too much upon his Guard, by accustoming himself to a Habit of Doubting. Let him remember, that he lives in a degenerate Age, and that he is besieged on every Side with Errors: that he should therefore Garrison his Mind, and keep a constant Watch within Himself, so as to give no Admittance to new Opinions, before he takes a strict Account of them; neither to harbour old Ones, which, upon being question'd, cannot give sufficient Assurance of their Truth.

I am sensible that this Lesson about Doubting, cannot be learnt without great Difficulty by Persons, who are grown Old in Obstinacy and Prejudice, who have perhaps Borrowed all their Opinions upon Credit; and who if they were to be

judged by Right Reason, and call'd upon to give an Account of the Methods, by which they came by their Stock of Notions, perhaps would not be found to be rightly possessed of any One of their Favorite Tenents. But I hope the more Ingenuous, who generally speaking are the more Youthful Readers, who have not yet laid in their Provision of Opinions for Life, may be perswaded to be Cautious in their Choice; not to Lumber up their Understandings with old-fashioned Trumpery, on one Hand; nor to be fond of every New-fangled Toy on the Other: But to select such a Set of Furniture as shall be at once Useful and Ornamental, and never grow out of Fashion amongst wise Men.

THE RE are Persons, who have as great a Facility in Doubting, as Others have in Believing: The One affect Singularity; the Other Popularity. Whereas the Man who THINKS FREELY, whose Heart is set upon Truth, Doubts only in order to be Certain; removes his Doubts by Doubting; and Believes or Disbelieves a Proposition, in Proportion to the Evidences, that appear to him for it or against it. The Extremis of Credulity and Incredulity, do often proceed from an equal Positiveness of Temper. And the only Cure for these Two Imperfections in the Understanding is a Rational Doubting; such as will make Us wary in Receiving New Opinions, and not unwilling to part with old Ones.

THE RE is as great a Libertinism of Mind in Believing without a reasonable Conviction, as in Disbelieving upon precarious Suppositions and unwarrantable Surmizes. An Over-Forwardness to Assent to Opinions, is a Prostitution of our Understanding: And an Over-Backwardness to Doubt, implies a Distrust of the Truth of our Perswasion, or at least a Consciousness of our Inability to defend it. A Truth is no Truth to Him, who believes it Implicitly, and never enquires into the Reasons, upon which it is founded: And an Error is not chargeable as an Error to the Man, who (after due Pains to be rightly inform'd,) takes it for a Truth.

THE RE are Opinions, which have prevailed in the World through many Ages, and are received almost Universally; and yet may be far from being True. There may likewise be Opinions which may be very New and very Singular; and yet may be as far from being False. So that neither the Antiquity nor Universality of the One, nor the Novelty