

philosophy, nor a thousandth part of so important to human happiness, I must confess I dread Homer, especially as the companion of youth. The humane and gentle virtues are certainly the greatest charms and sweetest of life. And I suppose sir, you would hardly think of sending your sons to Achilles to learn these.

‘I agree he has too much revenge in his composition.’

‘Yes sir, when painted in the colors which Homer’s glowing fancy lend, what youth but must run the most imminent risk of catching a spark of bad fire from such a blaze as he throws on his pictures.’

‘Why this, though an uncommon view of the subject, is I confess, an ingenious one, Mr. Franklin, but surely, ’tis overstrained.’

‘Not at all, sir; we are told, from good authority, that it was the reading of Homer that first put it into the head of Alexander the Great to become a hero; and after him of Charles XII. What millions of creatures have been slaughtered by these two great butchers is not known; but still probably not a tythe of what have perished in duels, between individuals for pride and revenge nursed by reading Homer.

‘Well, sir,’ replied the governor, ‘I have never heard the prince of bards treated in this way before. You must certainly be singular in your charges against Homer.

‘I ask your pardon, sir; I have the honour to think of Homer exactly as did the great philosopher of antiquity; I mean Plato, who strictly forbade the reading of Homer to his republic. And yet Plato was a heathen. I don’t boast of myself as a christian; and yet I am shocked at the inconsistency of Latin and Greek teachers (generally Christians and Divines too) who can one day put Homer into the hands of their pupils, and in the midst of their recitations can stop them short to point out the divine beauties and solemnities which the poet gives to his hero in the bloody work of slaughtering the Trojans; and the next day take them to church to hear a discourse from Christ on the blessedness of meekness and forgiveness. No wonder that hot livered young men, thus educated should despise meekness as mere cowards’ virtue, and think nothing so glorious as fighting duels and blowing out brains.’

Here the governor came to a pause like a gamester at his last trump. But perceiving that Ben cast his eye on a splendid copy of Pope, he suddenly seized that as a fine opportunity to turn the conversation. So stepping up, he placed his hand on his shoulder, and in a very familiar manner, said:—

‘Well Mr. Franklin, there’s an author that I am sure you will not quarrel with; an author that I think you’ll pronounce faultless.’

‘Why, sir,’ replied Ben, ‘I entertain a most exalted opinion of Pope, but, sir, I think he is not without his faults.’

‘It would puzzle you, I suspect, Mr. Franklin, as keen a critic as you are, to point out one.’

‘Well, sir,’ answered Ben, hastily turning to the place, ‘what do you think of Pope’s

Immodest words admit of no defence.

For want of decency is want of sense.’

‘I see no fault there,’