**NO. 13. SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 1721. *The Arts of misleading the People by Sounds. (Trenchard)***[**↩**](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/trenchard-catos-letters-vol-1-november-5-1720-to-june-17-1721-lf-ed#toc)

Sir,

In surveying the state of the world, one is often at a great loss, whether to ascribe the political misery of mankind to their own folly and credulity, or to the knavery and impudence of their pretended managers. Both these causes, in all appearance, concur to produce the same evil; and if there were no bubbles, there would be no sharpers.

There must certainly be a vast fund of stupidity in human nature, else men would not be caught as they are, a thousand times over, by the same snare; and while they yet remember their past misfortunes, go on to court and encourage the causes to which they were owing, and which will again produce them.

I will own, however, that government makes more fools, and more wise men, than nature makes; and the difference between nation and nation, in point of virtue, sagacity, and arms, arises not from the different genius of the people; which, making very small allowances for the difference of climate, would be the same under the same regulations; but from the different genius of their political constitutions: The one, perhaps, making common sense dangerous, and enquiries criminal; cowing the spirits of men, and rebuking the sallies of virtue; while the other, at the same time, encourages the improvement of the understanding, rewards the discovery of truth, and cultivates, as a virtue, the love of liberty and of one's country.

Yet even in countries where the highest liberty is allowed, and the greatest light shines, you generally find certain men, and bodies of men, set apart to mislead the multitude; who are ever abused with words, ever fond of the worst of things recommended by good names, and ever abhor the best things, and the most virtuous actions, disfigured by ill names. One of the great arts, therefore, of cheating men, is, to study the application and misapplication of sounds—a few loud words rule the majority, I had almost said, the whole world.

Thus we have heard from our fathers, and seen in our own days, that contemptible insects, born in poverty, educated by charity, and often from cleaning their masters' shoes, preferred unexpectedly and undeservedly to offices and preferments in the Church, have had the front to call themselves the Church itself, and every one its enemy, who despised their meanness, exposed their reverend knavery, and laughed at their grimace.

And thus we have been told of the times, and some men now living remember to have seen them, when unworthy men, who, by faction and treachery, by mean compliances with power, or by insolently daring of authority, having raised themselves to wealth and honours, and to the power of betraying some considerable trust, have had the provoking sauciness to call themselves the government, and their own rogueries his then Majesty's measures; and the next thing was, to pronounce all those enemies to his then Majesty, who would endeavour to rescue their abused King and sinking country out of their devouring and polluted claws.

In King Charles I's time, the great Earl of Strafford and little Archbishop Laud told the nation, that his Majesty's measures were, governing without Parliaments, a power without reserve in the state, a flaming popish hierarchy in the Church, absolute and abject submission in the people, and a barbarian army of Irish papists to support and insure all these worthy measures. But the untimely death of one of these offenders, and the imprisonment of the other, broke all those fine measures.

In the reign of Charles II Pensionary Parliaments, a general depravation of manners, guards increased into armies, and popish religion and a popish successor, popish leagues and Protestant wars, were called by wicked men his Majesty's measures; and all honest men and good subjects were called his Majesty's enemies: And, when that prince saw that these measures of his ministry created endless jealousies to his people, and endless uneasiness to himself, and when he resolved to take other measures of his own, it is thought that they put a short end to all his measures.

When King James came to the crown, though, setting bigotry apart, he had some royal virtues, being a prince of industry and good oeconomy; yet he suffered himself to be governed by a set of sycophants, many of them as foolish as they were mischievous. The establishment of bare-faced Romish popery in the Church, and a lawless tyranny in the prince, became then his Majesty's measures; the ministers, who advised and promoted them, called themselves the government; and whoever opposed his reason, his honesty, and his publick spirit, against those traitors to the publick, was charged with flying in the face of the government, and opposing his Majesty's measures. In what these measures ended, is well known: They cost his Majesty his kingdoms, and made him an honourable beggar in France all his life for his daily bread.

King William, when he came to the crown, brought with him the hearts, and hands, and the good wishes of every honest man in England; and was supported by these men through a tedious and expensive war, unknown to our ancestors; which, when he had finished, and the exhausted people expected some relaxations from their sufferings, they were given to know by some court parasites that his Majesty's measures was a standing army in time of peace, under the inspection of Parliaments. This unexpected spirit in the court gave such jealousy to those who were best affected to his Majesty's person and government, that with grief I call to mind the difficulties and anxieties which that great prince felt ever afterwards to the end of his reign.

As to Queen Anne, I shall say no more, than that it is shrewdly suspected, that what her Majesty's ministry had the insolence to call her Majesty's measures, broke her Majesty's heart.

Let mankind therefore learn experience from so many misfortunes, and bear no longer to hear the worst things called by the best names; nor suffer hereafter the brightest and most conspicuous virtues of the wisest and most beneficent princes, to be sullied by actions which they do not countenance, nor even know of. Let them not permit the vices of the worst of servants to be laid at the door of the best of masters.

We, in this land, are very sure that we are blessed with the best King in the world, who desires of his people nothing but their own greatness and felicity: A prince, ready to prevent their wishes, and to give them more than their duty ought to suffer them to ask. Let us shew our duty to this our great and benevolent sovereign; let us endeavour to alleviate his cares, and ease him of all ungrateful burdens; let us take upon ourselves the heavy labour of cleansing the Augean stables, and of cutting off all the Hydra's heads at once.

The law tells us, that the King can do no wrong: And, I thank God, we have a King that would not, if he could. But the greatest servants to princes may do wrong, and often have done it; and the representatives of the people have an undoubted right to call them to an account for it.

In truth, every private subject has a right to watch the steps of those who would betray their country; nor is he to take their word about the motives of their designs, but to judge of their designs by the event.

This is the principle of a *Whig,* this the doctrine of liberty; and ’tis as much knavery to deny this doctrine, as it is folly to ridicule it. Some will tell us, that this is setting up the mob for statesmen, and for the censurers of states. The word *mob* does not at all move me, on this occasion, nor weaken the grounds which I go upon. It is certain, that the whole people, who are the publick, are the best judges, whether things go ill or well with the publick. It is true, that they cannot all of them see distant dangers, nor watch the motions, and guess the designs, of neighbouring states: But every cobbler can judge, as well as a statesman, whether he can fit peaceably in his stall; whether he is paid for his work; whether the market, where he buys his victuals, be well provided; and whether a dragoon, or a parish-officer, comes to him for his taxes, if he pay any.

Every man too, even the meanest, can see, in a publick and sudden transition from plenty to poverty, from happiness to distress, whether the calamity comes from war, and famine, and the hand of God; or from oppression, and mismanagement, and the villainies of men. In short, the people often judge better than their superiors, and have not so many biases to judge wrong; and politicians often rail at the people, chiefly because they have given the people occasion to rail: Those ministers who cannot make the people their friends, it is to be shrewdly suspected, do not deserve their friendship; it is certain, that much honesty, and small management, rarely miss to gain it. As temporal felicity is the whole end of government; so people will always be pleased or provoked, as that increases or abates. This rule will always hold. You may judge of their affection, or disaffection, by the burdens which they bear, and the advantages which they enjoy. Here then is a sure standard for the government to judge of the people, and for the people to judge of the government.

Blessed be God, and thanks to our sovereign, who has given us a ministry that makes all these cautions unnecessary; who will baffle all calumny, and remove all suspicion of guilt from themselves (if any such suspicion can be), by being foremost to pursue the guilty; and will, doubtless, take double vengeance upon any in publick authority (if any such can be found), who shall appear to have contributed to our publick misfortunes; and, in fine, will promote and encourage a rigorous and strict enquiry, wherever any suspicion is given that enquiry ought to be made.

Such conduct will disperse our fears, restore our credit, give bread to our poor, make trade and manufacture flourish again; and, in some measure, compensate for all our past evils, by giving us a lasting prospect of our future plenty, peace, and felicity.