

CLEANTE

ORGON.

Brother, your language savors of impiety.
Too much free-thinking's made your faith unsteady,
And as I've warned you many times already,
'Twill get you into trouble before you're through.
CLÉANTE.

So, I've been told before by dupes like you:
Being blind, you'd have all others blind as well;
The clear-eyed man you call an infidel,
And he who sees through humbug and pretense
Is charged, by you, with want of reverence.
Spare me your warnings, Brother; I have no fear
Of speaking out, for you and Heaven to hear,
Against affected zeal and pious knavery.
There's true and false in piety, as in bravery,
And just as those whose courage shines the most
In battle, are the least inclined to boast,
So those whose hearts are truly pure and lowly
Don't make a flashy show of being holy.
There's a vast difference, so it seems to me,
Between true piety and hypocrisy:
How do you fail to see it, may I ask?
Is not a face quite different from a mask?
Cannot sincerity and cunning art,
Reality and semblance, be told apart?
Are scarecrows just like men, and do you hold
That a false coin is just as good as gold?
Ah, Brother, man's a strangely fashioned creature
Who seldom is content to follow Nature,
But recklessly pursues his inclination
Beyond the narrow bounds of moderation,
And often, by transgressing Reason's laws,
Perverts a lofty aim or noble cause.
A passing observation, but it applies.
ORGON.

I see, dear Brother, that you're profoundly wise;

You harbor all the insight of the age.
You are our one clear mind, our only sage,
The era's oracle, its Cato too,
And all mankind are fools compared to you.
CLÉANTE.

Brother, I don't pretend to be a sage,
Nor have I all the wisdom of the age.
There's just one insight I would dare to claim:
I know that true and false are not the same;
And just as there is nothing I more revere
Than a soul whose faith is steadfast and sincere,
Nothing that I more cherish and admire
Than honest zeal and true religious fire,
So there is nothing that I find more base
Than specious piety's dishonest face—
Than these bold mountebanks, these histrios
Whose impious mummeries and hollow shows
Exploit our love of Heaven, and make a jest
Of all that men think holiest and best;
These calculating souls who offer prayers
Not to their Maker, but as public wares,
And seek to buy respect and reputation
With lifted eyes and sighs of exaltation;
These charlatans, I say, whose pilgrim souls
Proceed, by way of Heaven, toward earthly goals,
Who weep and pray and swindle and extort,
Who preach the monkish life, but haunt the court,
Who make their zeal the partner of their vice—
Such men are vengeful, sly, and cold as ice,
And when there is an enemy to defame
They cloak their spite in fair religion's name,
Their private spleen and malice being made
To seem a high and virtuous crusade,
Until, to mankind's reverent applause,
They crucify their foe in Heaven's cause.
Such knaves are all too common; yet, for the wise,

True piety isn't hard to recognize,
And, happily, these present times provide us
With bright examples to instruct and guide us.
Consider Ariston and Périandre;
Look at Oronte, Alcidamas, Clitandre;
Their virtue is acknowledged; who could doubt it?
But you won't hear them beat the drum about it.
They're never ostentatious, never vain,
And their religion's moderate and humane;
It's not their way to criticize and chide:
They think censoriousness a mark of pride,
And therefore, letting others preach and rave,
They show, by deeds, how Christians should behave.
They think no evil of their fellow man,
But judge of him as kindly as they can.
They don't intrigue and wangle and conspire;
To lead a good life is their one desire;
The sinner wakes no rancorous hate in them;
It is the sin alone which they condemn;
Nor do they try to show a fiercer zeal
For Heaven's cause than Heaven itself could feel.
These men I honor, these men I advocate
As models for us all to emulate.
Your man is not their sort at all, I fear:
And, while your praise of him is quite sincere,
I think that you've been dreadfully deluded.

ORGON.

Now then, dear Brother, is your speech concluded?

CLÉANTE.

Why, yes.

ORGON.

Your servant, Sir.

(He turns to go.)

CLÉANTE.

No, Brother; wait.

There's one more matter. You agreed of late
That young Valère might have your daughter's hand.

ORGON.

I did.

CLÉANTE.

And set the date, I understand.

ORGON.

Quite so.

CLÉANTE.

You've now postponed it; is that true?

ORGON.

No doubt.

CLÉANTE.

The match no longer pleases you?

ORGON.

Who knows?

CLÉANTE.

D'you mean to go back on your word?

ORGON.

I won't say that.

CLÉANTE.

Has anything occurred

Which might entitle you to break your pledge?

ORGON.

Perhaps.

CLÉANTE.

Why must you hem, and haw, and hedge?

The boy asked me to sound you in this affair...

ORGON.

It's been a pleasure.

CLÉANTE.

But what shall I tell Valère?

ORGON.

Whatever you like.

CLÉANTE.

But what have you decided?

What are your plans?

ORGON.

I plan, Sir, to be guided

By Heaven's will

CLÉANTE.

Come, Brother, don't talk rot.

You've given Valère your word; will you keep it, or not?

ORGON.

Good day.

CLÉANTE.

This looks like poor Valère's undoing;

I'll go and warn him that there's trouble brewing.

ACT II SCENE ONE

ORGON, MARIANE

ORGON.

Mariane.

MARIANE.

Yes, Father?

ORGON.

A word with you; come here.

MARIANE.

What are you looking for?

ORGON. (*Peering into a small closet.*)

Eavesdroppers, dear.

I'm making sure we shan't be overheard.

Someone in there could catch our every word.

Ah, good, we're safe: Now, Mariane, my child,

You're a sweet girl who's tractable and mild,

Whom I hold dear, and think most highly of.

MARIANE.

I'm deeply grateful, Father, for your love.

ORGON.

That's well said, Daughter; and you can repay me

If, in all things, you'll cheerfully obey me.

MARIANE.

To please you, Sir, is what delights me best.

ORGON.

Good, good. Now, what d'you think of Tartuffe, our guest?