

# The Club At The Trumpet

by [Richard Steele](#) Sheer Lane, February 10.

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Habeo Senectuti magnam Gratiam,  
quae mihi Sermonis aviditatem  
auxit, Potionis et Cibi sustulit —  
Marcus Tullius Cicero (Tully)

"I am much beholden to old age, which has increased my eagerness for conversation in proportion as it has lessened my appetites of hunger and thirst."

After having applied my Mind with more than ordinary Attention to my Studies, it is my usual Custom to relax and unbend it in the Conversation of such as are rather easy than shining Companions. This I find particularly necessary for me before I retire to Rest, in order to draw my Slumbers upon me by Degrees, and fall asleep insensibly. This is the particular Use I make of a Set of heavy honest Men, with whom I have passed many Hours with much Indolence, though not with great Pleasure. Their Conversation is a kind of Preparative for Sleep: It takes the Mind down from its Abstractions, leads it into the familiar Traces of Thought, and lulls it into that State of Tranquility, which is the Condition of a thinking Man when he is but half awake. After this, my Reader will not be surprised to hear the Account which I am about to give of a Club of my own Contemporaries, among whom I pass Two or Three Hours every Evening. This I look upon as taking my first Nap before I go to Bed. The Truth of it is, I should think my self unjust to Posterity, as well as to the Society [at the Trumpet](#) of which I am a Member, did not I in some Part of my Writings give an Account of the Persons among whom I have passed almost a Sixth Part of my Time for these last Forty Years. Our Club consisted originally of Fifteen; but partly by the Severity of the Law in arbitrary Times, and partly by the natural Effects of old Age, we are at present reduced to a Third Part of that Number: In which however we have this Consolation, That the best Company is said to consist of Five Persons. I must confess, besides the afore-mentioned Benefit which I meet with in the Conversation of this select Society, I am not the less pleased with the Company, in that I find my self the greatest Wit among them, and am heard as their Oracle in all Points of Learning and Difficulty.

Sir *Jeoffrey Notch*, who is the oldest of the Club, has been in Possession of the Right-Hand Chair Time out of Mind, and is the only Man among us that has the Liberty of stirring the Fire. This our Foreman is a Gentleman of an ancient Family, that came to a great Estate some Years before he had Discretion, and run it out in Hounds, Horses, and Cock-fighting; for which Reason he looks upon himself as an honest worthy Gentleman who has had Misfortunes in the World, and calls every thriving Man a pitiful Upstart.

Major *Matchlock* is the next Senior, who served in the last Civil Wars, and has all the Battles by Heart. He does not think any Action in Europe worth talking of since the Fight of [Marston-Moor](#) and every Night tells us of his having been knocked off his Horse at the Rising of the *London* Apprentices [in 1647] for which he is in great Esteem amongst us.

Honest old *Dick Reptile* is the Third of our Society: He is a good-natured indolent Man, who speaks little himself, but laughs at our Jokes, and brings his young Nephew along with him, a Youth of Eighteen Years old, to show him good Company, and give him a Taste of the World. This young Fellow sits generally silent; but whenever he opens his Mouth, or laughs at any Thing that passes, he is constantly told by his Uncle after a jocular Manner, "Ay, ay, *Jack*, you young Men think us Fools; but we old Men know you are."

The greatest Wit of our Company, next to my self, is a Bencher of the neighbouring Inn, who in his Youth frequented the Ordinaries about *Charing-Cross*, and pretends to have been intimate with *Jack Ogle*. He has about Ten Distichs of *Hudibras* without Book, and never leaves the Club till he has applied them all. If any modern Wit be mentioned, or any Town Frolick spoken of, he shakes his Head at the Dullness of the present Age, and tells us a story of *Jack Ogle*.

For my own Part, I am esteemed among them, because they see I am something respected by others, though at the same Time I understand by their Behaviour, that I am considered by them as a Man of

a great deal of Learning, but no Knowledge of the World; insomuch that the Major sometimes, in the Height of his Military Pride, calls me the Philosopher: and Sir *Jeoffrey* no longer ago than last Night, upon a Dispute what Day of the Month it was then in *Holland*, pulled his Pipe out of his Mouth, and cried, "What does the Scholar say to it?"

Our Club meets precisely at Six a Clock in the Evening; but I did not come last Night till Half an Hour after Seven, by which Means I escaped the Battle of *Naseby*, which the Major usually begins at about Three Quarters after Six; I found also, that my good Friend the Bencher had already spent Three of his Distichs, and only waiting an Opportunity to hear a Sermon spoken of, that he might introduce *the Couplet* where *a-Stick* rhymes to *Ecclesiastic*. At my Entrance into the Room, they were naming a red Petticoat and a Cloak, by which I found that the Bencher had been diverting them with a Story of *Jack Ogle*.

I had no sooner taken my Seat, but Sir *Jeoffrey*, to show his good Will towards me, gave me a Pipe of his own Tobacco, and stirred up the Fire. I look upon it as a Point of Morality, to be obliged by those who endeavour to oblige me; and therefore in Requit for his Kindness, and to set the Conversation a going, I took the best Occasion I could to put him upon telling us the Story of old *Gantlett*, which he always does with very particular Concern. He traced up his Descent on both Sides for several Generations, describing his Diet and Manner of Life, with his several Battles, and particularly that in which he fell. This *Gantlett* was a Game-Cock, upon whose Head the Knight in his Youth had won Five Hundred Pounds, and lost Two Thousand. This naturally set the Major upon the Account of *Edgehill* Fight, and ended in a Duel of *Jack Ogle's*.

Old *Reptile* was extremely attentive to all that was said, though it was the same he had heard every Night for these Twenty Years, and upon all Occasions winked upon his Nephew to mind what passed.

This many suffice to give the World a Taste of our innocent Conversation, which we spun out till about Ten of the Clock, when my Maid came with a Lanthorn to light me Home. I could not but reflect with my self as I was going out upon the talkative Humour of old Men, and the little Figure which that Part of Life makes in one who cannot employ this natural Propensity in Discourses which would make him venerable. I must own, it makes me very melancholy in Company, when I hear a young Man begin a Story; and have often observed, That one of a Quarter of an Hour long in a Man of Five and twenty, gathers Circumstances every Time he tells it, till it grows into a long *Canterbury* Tale of two Hours by that Time he is Three-score.

The only Way of avoiding such a trifling and frivolous old Age, is, to lay up in our way to it such Stores of Knowledge and Observation as may make us useful and agreeable in our declining Years. The Mind of Man in a long Life will become a Magazine of Wisdom or Folly, and will consequently discharge it self in something impertinent or improving. For which Reason, as there is nothing more ridiculous than an old trifling Story-Teller, so there is nothing more venerable than one who has turned his Experience to the Entertainment and Advantage of Mankind.

In short, we who are in the last Stage of Life, and are apt to indulge our selves in Talk, ought to consider, if what we speak be worth being heard, and endeavour to make our Discourse like that of *Nestor*, which *Homer* compares to the Flowing of Honey for its Sweetness.

I am afraid I shall be thought guilty of this Excess I am speaking of, when I cannot conclude without observing, that Milton certainly thought of this Passage in *Homer*, when in his Description of an eloquent Spirit, he says, *His Tongue dropped Manna*.

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