

Temperance and Tensions: 'Frayltie & Fears'

'And though wee may not preach by words, . . . yet wee may preach by our Actions. . . . Our example may perhaps hearten on some others.'¹

Earlier attempts to preach by words in the form of a publishable gospel harmony and a translation of Valdes had disappointed the hopes that Nicholas Ferrar had invested in them. He had not, however, lost his ambitious aim to make Little Gidding 'a Light on a Hill', a pattern for an age he was convinced needed such patterns. He had a message for his contemporaries and an instrument to hand by which to convey it. Temperance was the message and the Little Academy, reconstituted in October 1632 under Mary Collet Ferrar's leadership, provided the means of clarifying the message and mobilising the participants to become the hoped-for preaching example. A detailed consideration of this temperance project will reveal not only the specific diet that was prescribed but also the essential role of voluntarism that all concerned acknowledged was essential for effective action. Formal and written consent, Mary Collet Ferrar declared, was vital because it would 'more solemnly oblige them, who agree[,] & more seriously & plainly represent their true condition and Estate to them, who shall refuse this subscription'.² Gone was her uncle's earlier concern that no stigma should attach to those who declined to participate in night vigils. Not surprisingly, this uncompromising attitude subsequently produced tensions within the family and brought the Little Academy to an unhappy end, not before, however, their example had been celebrated anonymously in print. These tensions were further complicated by the actions of that thoroughly unwilling and disgruntled member of the

household, John's unhappy wife Bathsheba, who would have been a very unlikely participant either in the temperance enterprise or any other of the special projects.

That temperance should be the focus of this effort was no accident. It had long been vital, as we have seen, to both George Herbert and Ferrar and a significant part of their collaborative efforts in 1632. Ferrar defined temperance as simply eating 'only to necessity of nature and conveniency of employment, so as we may the better perform that which God calls us to the performance of'.³ Readings about holy men of the early church and their austerities that his tutor Augustine Lindsell had recommended were an early inspiration reinforced by the advice of Dr William Butler, an eminent Cambridge physician as well as a Fellow of Clare and a personal friend, who told him that he could only hope to preserve his health 'through a spare diet, and great temperance all your life long'.⁴ George Herbert too had suffered from repeated illness and believed he owed his recovery to a rigorously spare diet, perhaps that very diet he had discovered in Luigi Cornaro's little treatise on the subject.⁵ He also included advice in *The Country Parson* on proper diet and the superiority of herbal remedies to 'physick'.⁶ Since both men felt that they owed their lives to their practice of temperance, it was not surprising that they wished to persuade a wider audience of its value both spiritual and physical by providing both spiritual and practical advice on its pursuit.⁷ For that purpose Ferrar emphasised as especially important Valdes's doctrine of mortification and Herbert sent his translation of Cornaro's treatise to Little Gidding.

Herbert's translation was a seed that fell upon prepared ground, for some in the Little Gidding household had already experimented with a restricted diet.⁸ Cornaro provided a systematic programme that the family could readily implement once they were committed to doing so. Reinforcement came soon after when the group encountered *Hygiasticon*, a work by the Belgian Jesuit Leonard Lessius. Lessius knew Cornaro's book, indeed published it together with his own very much longer and more systematic treatment of what for Cornaro was an autobiographical exercise. When and how Ferrar first discovered Lessius is unknown. The book was published in Louvain in 1613, the year Ferrar began his Continental travels, and he could have acquired a copy during his travels. In that case he would already have known of Cornaro's book before Herbert sent his translation. It is also possible, however, that Herbert made the initial discovery of both authors if his copy of Cornaro came from *Hygiasticon*. Whatever the sequence of discovery between Herbert and Ferrar, the family, once aware of Lessius, called for a translation of his book as well and Ferrar responded readily to

their request. From these works the family took their model of a temperate diet. What did Cornaro and Lessius there prescribe as temperate?

Luigi Cornaro (1468-1566), a Venetian nobleman whose 98-year lifespan was itself eloquent testimony to the efficacy of his version of temperance, developed his dietary routine out of medical necessity rather than religious vocation. As a young man he had indulged himself in the rich diet and lavish lifestyle possible for one of his rank. By the time he had reached 40 he had suffered for some 5 years with gout, abdominal pains, and continual fever and thirst. His physicians had told him during those 5 years that he should eat bland foods and in small quantities but he had ignored that unpalatable advice. Finally, however, when they confronted him with the stark alternatives of temperance or death, he set about implementing the former by experimenting with a variety of foods to establish which ones and in what quantities best suited him. In a very short time he found himself quite well and resolved to adhere to this routine for the rest of his life. What he presented in his book was not a list of approved and forbidden food and drink. He was clear that everyone must discover these specifics for himself because each individual's needs and reactions varied. What he did insist on were quantities, which were to be measured very precisely. He allowed himself daily twelve ounces of 'meat' (bread, eggs, flesh, and broth) and fourteen ounces of drink.⁹ Only once, when he was about seventy-eight, he allowed friends to talk him into increases of two ounces in each category. He promptly fell ill and only recovered when he reverted to his original quantities. Nor was change of diet alone sufficient; temperance also required avoiding excesses of temperature, sexual activity, and strong emotions such as hatred and melancholy. He concluded with an enthusiastic account of the vigorous life he continued, at eighty-three, to live, enjoying the company of friends and grandchildren, supervising improvements on his estates, interesting himself in books, art, and architecture.¹⁰

Unlike the layman Cornaro, the Jesuit Lessius in *Hygiasticon* emphasised not only the medical but also the religious value of temperance, both as a general Christian virtue and also as a special benefit to priests that would enable them better to perform their priestly office. Otherwise, however, he followed Cornaro's recommendations very closely though the tone of his book is rather more impersonal and sober and it is longer. He elaborated seven rules for establishing appropriate amounts of food and drink for a temperate diet appropriate to different kinds of work, concluding that Cornaro's twelve and fourteen ounce portions of meat and drink were best for those of a sedentary life.¹¹ He also recommended exercise as part of a

balanced regimen of temperance and offered as examples shadow-boxing while holding small weights in each hand or tossing and catching a bar or stool for a quarter to half an hour before meals. 'These are Exercises, which many grave & worthy men, even Cardinalls themselves, do use (and that not undecently) in their Chambers'.¹²

If this was the pattern that the Ferrars were following during Christmas 1632, they had indeed set themselves a hard task to compensate with their stories for such meagre rations.¹³ Before the Little Academy could even begin to consider such a project, however, it had to be rescued from the moribund condition into which it had fallen by the summer of 1632. If its revival were the 'great design' about which Ferrar and his nieces wrote in July, then several more months had to elapse before they formally attempted it. When the meeting for reconstitution finally took place on St. Luke's Day (18 October), there was certainly considerable though general talk of sins to repent and difficulties to overcome both within the family circle and in the outside world.¹⁴ The initial covenant of 1631 with which the Little Academy had launched its first series of meetings had by the beginning of 1632 clearly broken down and required renewal. Maintaining momentum in a voluntary society was patently not an easy task even in as well ordered a household as Little Gidding. John Ferrar in his character as 'Guardian' made an eloquent plea to 'rise again in our hopes, in our resolutions, in our endeavours And let us doe it together by bonds of mutual Promise, of mutual encouragement, and of mutual Assistance'.¹⁵

A fortnight later on All Saints' Day came a change of leadership when the group unanimously chose Mary Collet Ferrar to take her grandmother's place with the name no longer of 'Chief' but now of 'Mother'.¹⁶ She proved an effective leader. The Academy's participants had during the previous Christmas season accepted old Mrs. Ferrar's proposal that they forego the usual holiday games and entertainments in favour of edifying stories.¹⁷ Now her granddaughter took this idea further when she explicitly declared her intention of making story-telling 'serve for Christmas Cheere. . . . It must bee a very sober table that a virgin sitts at the head of, and simple cakes that are of her providing.' Her sister, 'Cheerful' (probably Hester), immediately applauded this resolve and announced that 'There's no doubt, then, but my Law will gett passage when it comes to the question.'¹⁸ She would have to wait, however, until Advent was well underway to put her question to the group.

During the third week of Advent, which in 1632 would have been 16-22 December, Hester requested a special meeting of the Academy with the plea that 'Necessitie' would brook no further delay. Mary

agreed arguing that unless Hester's case for a different kind of Christmas carried the day the family would have to start making their conventional 'Christmas provisions'. Hester promptly dubbed such provisions 'Carnal Excesses & spiritual prejudices, that corrupt the Body, defile the soul, & wast the Estate.'¹⁹ There followed a lengthy and vigorous debate spelling out how conventional 'good cheer' wrought these disastrous effects and should therefore not be part of the Christian life at Christmas or indeed any other time. This session differed from the usual story-telling pattern of the Academy for the group kept to the impersonal topic and attacked in analytic fashion questions such as the meaning of the biblical phrase 'being given to wine'.²⁰

At the outset Mary, echoing her uncle's stress on practical, incremental steps in the pursuit of 'perfection' through temperance, suggested that the participants concentrate on a single goal, to increase God's grace within themselves, and to demonstrate how temperance would promote that goal. The group took it in turn to make an explicit verbal commitment to that goal, a step that all agreed was important because 'everyone, whom it concernes, should actually expresse their Agreements in the Foundation, before wee goe forward with the Building'.²¹ Achieving that agreement Mary Collet Ferrar declared merited 'a Red Letter in our Calendar' and should promptly be followed up by confirmation in writing.²² Thus the group constituted itself a voluntary society with a mission to preach by action and example.

Hester then proceeded to make her case for temperance and against 'good cheer', an argument in more general terms than the specific programmes of Cornaro and Lessius. She prefaced it with an apology that she was only repeating ideas taught her by others (her uncle Nicholas almost certainly). Mary, however, assured her that she had every right to call this knowledge her own 'Since you have made it trebly your own by understanding, by Assent, & by so Learning it, as you are able to communicate it to others.'²³ Indeed, a little later, when Margaret offered herself as a devil's advocate to present arguments against temperance that Hester could rebut, Hester accepted with particular alacrity because, she declared, that was the way she herself had been taught.²⁴ Mary put as a question to Hester, 'And how then can it be, that there should be such an opposition & overthrow of Wisdome & vertue by Satietie & Good Cheere'. That question framed the entire remainder of the discussion in which the rest of the group joined.²⁵ Advocates of that good cheer produced by feasting and drinking claimed it promoted friendship, facilitated business, and inspired poetry and other arts. As Hester and her companions examined these claims, however, they

concluded that indulging in more than moderate amounts of food and drink had just the opposite effects. It impaired the judgment in business affairs, made the mind dull and lethargic because all bodily energies were directed to digestion rather than thought, and worst of all it encouraged lust, which when frustrated took the form of slander and backbiting, the very opposite of friendship. As a first step the group discussed what constituted 'food' and 'drink'. Wine and 'Dainties', particularly spices, savories and sweets (these latter categories included lemons and oranges, raisins and candied fruits) came under intensive scrutiny. They concluded that none of them were properly 'drink' or 'food' because they neither quenched thirst nor provided nourishment. Wine therefore should rather be classified as a medicine, following St. Paul's dictum of taking a little wine for thy stomach's sake, and used as sparingly as medicine would be. John Ferrar, as Guardian, did offer here a little demur, declaring 'It is a pleasant Medicine, if it be a Medicine'.²⁶ Dainties, having no biblical sanction for their consumption even in modest quantities, could be abandoned altogether though no one said so in this record of the proceedings. The family did, however, explicitly agree to cut out those 'superfluous excesses of Christmas cheare', spices and fruit.²⁷

The group then moved to consider in some detail those intangible but certainly no less evil consequences of gluttony and excesses of wine, namely slander and backbiting. Folk who committed such sins, they concluded, might be motivated sometimes by straightforward malice but other times by a desire to curry favor with one person through attacks on others. Still worse than the aggressors were those who listened to such attacks with relish and paraded this behaviour as a virtue because they could claim to be comforters of victims. One could legitimately reveal another's faults, the members of the Academy concluded, only if one were motivated by a sincere desire to reform them or to prevent them from causing harm.²⁸ John Ferrar announced his resolve on this point neither to tell tales about others nor listen to them, an audience being essential to a slanderer. Those who were eager listeners to such gossip were as culpable as the speakers and responsible for many evils including rebellious children, conspiring servants and insubordinate wives, the latter an evil of which John himself had vivid experience.²⁹ Arthur Woodnoth also reiterated this point a month or so later when he resolved in January 1633 to close his ears to slanders.³⁰

Hester, an energetic and forthright activist in this matter, had early in the discussion urged her companions to stop merely talking about notable people who renounced worldly pleasures and start following their good

examples. To this summons Mary added that the group could preach by actions where they could not preach by sermons:

‘& perhaps that Real kind of Instruction [that] hath in all Ages beene the most forcible, is in this the most Necessarie. Where there are many Masters but few guides. A Dearth of Patterns in an exuberance of Rules’.³¹

Here was a mission statement for their voluntary society that John Ferrar seconded in the hope that the family’s example would ‘in the end spread abroad’.³²

By the time these sessions had ended and Christmas had actually arrived, the pattern for the new, temperate mode of celebration at Gidding was in place. If the Mapletofts’ later comments are any indication, it was based on the Cornaro measured diet.³³ After its intense and analytical Advent discussion, the Little Academy returned to its more usual storying format. Mary opened the first Christmastide session with comments to Hester about the hard task they faced, ‘double to that which was last yeare enjoyed’. Substituting stories for games was only exchanging one mental pleasure for another; using them to compensate for short and plain rations was of a different order of magnitude. They agreed, however, that the right attitude could make even the plainest fare seem ambrosial, particularly when good stories provided ‘dainties’ for the mind. Hester’s choice of story, taken from ‘Mr. Fox[e]’, might seem somewhat ambivalent here, being an account with much grisly detail of the grilling of St. Laurence! Her remark that “‘St. Laurence is rost meat for our soules to feed on”’ suggests the basis for her choice.³⁴ The Ferrars’ Christmas menus were, as Mary reported, of limited and measured quantity and simplest quality: ‘two dishes, and those but plaine ones neither, Mutton and Veale (for I heare of no others provisions)’.³⁵

While Mary and Hester took the lead in convincing the members of the Little Academy to adopt this strenuous pattern of temperance, Ferrar strove to widen the circle of participants to include those in his Web of Friendship. During the Advent week when the Academy’s discussions were taking place, he wrote to Arthur Woodnoth in terms aimed to inspire his cousin to become a partner in the ‘great design’.

‘lett us sett our designe and desyres where they cannot fayle else double will bee our misery to consume our selves not onely in corruptible things but in meere trifles. . . . Lett us vindicate ourselves from this misery and begin to live indeed – every hower otherwise bestowed is Lost if not worse. – Lett it bee therefore yf you will an agreement to this purpose between you

and mee thus[,] since the whole frame of what wee intend is to much to bee sett doune at once and requires much Length of tyme perhapps[,] that wee will at least every weeke present each other with some peice that wee have finished. . . one conclusion at least and communicate each with other[.] I tell you what by Gods grace wee have already established[,] to cutt of[f] all the superfluous excesses belonging to Christmas cheere spice fruite – And to pass the festivall with sobriety as belongs to a spiritual good tyme – This wee thanke God [we have] agreed and concluded and shall be I hope shortly ratifyde after the strongest manner Pr[a]y for us that wee may goe on stedfast in this good [work] & increasing in others’³⁶

The passage makes clear Ferrar’s pastoral and pedagogical methods that his niece Mary had also employed with the Little Academy: participants must take active responsibility for decisions and follow a systematic programme of practicable steps to pursue their goal. They were not to express their enthusiasm in wild flights of emotion and overambitious austerities. He was subsequently to advise a similar step-by-step approach to Joshua Mapletoft during his desperate illness.³⁷ It was a style not unlike that of St. Francis de Sales with his ‘affections and resolutions’ and ‘little nosegays of devotion’ designed to recall a morning’s meditation to mind during the remainder of the day.³⁸

The approach certainly worked with Arthur Woodnoth, who responded promptly in a letter dated 22 December: ‘By Gods Grace I will Endeavor to Turne away or Close my Eyes from all Corporall objects the vision whereof may indispose my soule from Spirituall’.³⁹ His surviving letters from January 1633 through March continue to present ‘resolutions’ which include eschewing ‘unprofitable discourse’, closing his eyes to ‘Dazzling objects’ and his ears to ‘the sullferr of Evill & slanderous reports’, avoiding wasted time by identifying a purpose in all his actions, not wanting more of this world’s goods than would help him in the next, stepping toward temperance by not satisfying any appetites in ways contrary to God’s will.⁴⁰ The earlier of these resolutions with their echo of the Academy’s lengthy delineation of the evils of slander and backbiting promoted by ‘good cheer’ suggest that Ferrar had kept Woodnoth informed of the Academy’s discussions. Woodnoth also referred in early January to a letter from Joshua Mapletoft to Nicholas that contained ‘the weight of so many excellent rules & resolutions’.⁴¹ Given Mapletoft’s later comment about Psalmody and Temperance and his requests for advice and detailed accounts of his and

Su's diet, that letter could very well have been his and his wife's response to a letter similar to the one Ferrar sent to Woodnoth telling of the Academy's resolutions and discussions. The Mapletofts, despite some delay and initial reservations from Joshua, certainly took up the invitation to participate.

Although they doubtless already knew of the family's temperance discussions and austere Christmas at the end of 1632, their surviving direct comments on matters of diet only begin in the following October. Susanna wrote on the 3rd to her sister Mary, first thanking her for the wonderful care she was taking of Susanna's daughter, who had evidently stayed on at Gidding. She then went on to declare herself in better health than she had ever been since coming to Margaretting, a benefit she attributed to 'my dyet which I find doth agree with my body both for quallity & quant[it]ye much better than that I used before.'⁴² A week later came Joshua's long letter to Ferrar, which included his remark that psalmody and temperance were characteristic features of the family's life.⁴³ He also enclosed a detailed account of his and Susanna's diet for a month for Ferrar's comment and advice, adding that they would set about following it as soon as they had his reply. Joshua added at another point a list of seven relevant questions covering such matters as appropriate quantities for both himself and his wife, proper proportions to maintain between solid and liquid food, whether those proportions should vary when he travelled as opposed to when he was at home and studying, whether rice eaten on its own was permissible without limit 'unto moderate Satiety' and when gingerbread should be taken at breakfast. Such a range of queries and especially the concern for quantities suggests that the Mapletofts were proposing to follow the Cornaro/Lessius pattern. At the end of the month he added a further request for advice on any modifications Susanna should make to her diet if, as she suspected, she were pregnant.⁴⁴

Despite these detailed questions about quantities and the month's sample diet he had sent to Ferrar in the previous October, he wrote in the following March to his sisters-in-law Mary and Anna that he as yet was

rather indeed a well wisher to those that be Temperate then an observer of Temperance wherof my necessity of the helpe of physick att so unseasonable a time is evidence sufficient to convince me.

He remained convinced of the value of temperance, a conviction strengthened by Mary and Anna's testimony both of its value to soul and body and of the ease with which they had been able to follow the strict diet; his remarks here echo T.S.'s preface to *Hygiasticon*.⁴⁵ What has hindered him thus far has been 'so many occasions to call me abroad as I could

not hitherto intende the taking of a iust tryall as now ere long I hope I shall'.⁴⁶ His wife's subsequent letter to her sisters indicated that the family at Gidding had celebrated a second austere Christmas in 1633. She had been with them for the holiday but confessed that she had not since leaving Gidding eaten by weight or drunk by measure. She hoped, nevertheless, that she had approximated the appropriate quantities reasonably closely. Although she was pregnant she still maintained a routine of one proper meal at noon and simply a 'posset' at supper, which does not sound overly generous in the circumstances. She thanked her sisters for their good advice and a 'token', perhaps a copy of *Hygiasticon*.⁴⁷

Joshua's brother Robert in Cambridge had also taken up Ferrar's invitation to participate. His situation as a Fellow resident in his college (Pembroke) presented special problems with diet. After his visit to Gidding sometime in February or early March 1634, he described his difficulties in observing the diet during Lent. The food served in college during this season of fasting was 'lighter of digestion and less nutritive' and he had often had to take more than the prescribed fourteen ounces in order to 'give satisfaction to a good stomach (such as mine is)'. He hoped in the coming week to get greater certainty and control over quantity and was cheered to find that fish, which he had not eaten for three years, he could now readily tolerate. The regimen clearly took a toll on his energy level, however, for he remarked that 'I am full of what I might write, but already weary with writing this litle'. He also continued to have difficulty with early rising; he had been dismayed to find himself sleeping eight or nine hours at a stretch when he had hoped to rise at three and get on with memorisation of the Epistles. He concluded his letter with the hope that he would see Ferrar about 14 April when their mutual friends, Rev. Timothy Thurscross and his wife, and Rev. Edward [sic: should be Edmund] Duncon proposed to set out for Gidding and he evidently planned to join them there.⁴⁸

The day after Robert wrote thus of his trials Ferrar drafted a letter to Joshua in Margaretting in which he rejoiced to hear that Joshua was coming to Gidding. In response to Joshua's confession to Mary and Anna Collet that he had not yet made a proper trial of the temperance diet Ferrar took great care to assure him that the choice was his. Despite his obvious wish for Joshua's participation and his certainty that God would provide Joshua sufficient strength for the task, he would not want him to undertake greater hazards than he was willing to risk.

But yf you bee other ways perswaded or not willing to run the
perrils and Incumbrances that n[e]cessarily will attend it[,]
For without suffering you cannot bee that Instrument of soe

much good to me and other[s,] I shall by Gods grace[,] without abatement of Love or empeachment of the exercise of this duty to you ward[,] . . . free you from any farther intermedling⁴⁹

Ferrar was here reiterating earlier comments on the importance of free choice for effective participation in spiritual and educational projects. At the same time he was not above putting pressure on Joshua with such a loaded statement of his position that made opting out look like moral and spiritual cowardice. Perhaps, however, Ferrar knew Joshua well enough to sense that a ‘challenge’ such as this was the only way to bolster his courage sufficiently for him to take a plunge he wanted but feared to attempt. Subsequent letters suggest that he did indeed enlist in the ranks of the temperate. During the summer, however, he showed the first symptoms of that grave illness which nearly carried him off during the following winter and which called forth from Ferrar, as we have seen earlier, not merely counsel on physical matters of diet but on larger questions of spiritual health.⁵⁰

Committed members of the family, including the Mapletofts, thus continued to follow the prescribed regimen through 1633 while Ferrar was preparing *Hygiasticon* for the press. As was his wont he did not put his name either to the book’s preface or to the translation itself, but there can be no doubt that he was ‘T.S.’, the putative author of the preface. In it he described a family (unnamed) that had tried the diet and had found it both easy and beneficial.⁵¹ He also took care, as he had done with Valdes, to acknowledge that while both Cornaro and Lessius were Roman Catholics, this fact in no way invalidated their views on temperance. In addition to this preface various of his friends added laudatory poems to the published volume, testimony to the wider circle whose support Ferrar hoped to enlist. Among the named contributors were Richard Crashaw, Peter Gunning, Barnabas Oley, and J[probably John] Jackson, an excerpt from whose work *Ecclesiastes* (1628) was later incorporated into the Pentateuch Harmony made for Prince Charles in 1641-2.⁵² There was also a poem, attributed to ‘S.J.’, in the ‘echo’ format used by George Herbert. Whether, however, any of them also attempted to follow Lessius’s and Cornaro’s regimen is not indicated.

How many in the family persevered during this time and how rigorously they kept to the prescribed amounts of food and drink we do not know though Su Mapletoft’s comment on measured quantities suggests that at least some of them made a conscientious effort to do so.⁵³ How beneficial the diet proved to be over the longer term is questionable in light of Ferrar’s letter of January 1633/4 reporting to Joshua Mapletoft that Mary

had suffered ‘discomposure’ as a result of excessive dieting and he himself had been ill with a ‘scurvy’.⁵⁴ His mother eventually decided that the family’s ‘mortifications’ were excessive and a threat particularly to her son Nicholas’s life and health. For her he dutifully modified his austerities until her death in late spring of 1634, but to friends who echoed his mother’s concern he insisted that a return to conventional patterns of living would be the death of him.⁵⁵

Although he and some others, including the Mapletofts, continued to follow the measured diet while *Hygiasticon* was in preparation during 1633, the zeal of others had faltered after the Little Academy held its final Christmastide session on Holy Innocents Day (28 December 1632). The meeting closed with a proposal from the leader, Mary Collet Ferrar, that the group should conclude its meeting with the season’s customary gift giving. The request evidently took the group by surprise, but Mary declared herself confident that every member of the group could find in their memorised ‘store’ an appropriate story to offer as a gift that would be both beneficial and useful. Each participant had a particular ‘store’ from which to draw: Hester’s (Cheerful) was Temperance, she having been the initiator of the Advent discussion of this topic; Anna’s (Patient) was Sobriety; Margaret’s (Affectionate) was Industry; Susanna Collet’s (Moderator) was Education; John Ferrar’s (Guardian) was Charity. The recipient of the first round of gifts was to be ‘our good cozen and Guest’, who had accepted the group’s ‘frugal entertainment’ and thoroughly approved of temperance. Who this might be becomes clearer, though still ambiguous, only with added clues from the later account.

Since the cousin and guest was described as approving and practicing temperance, Hester was the obvious one to produce a story on this topic out of her ‘store’. Her offering concerned a holy man in Alexandria, who had striven through much mortification to attain purity of heart. He reproved a priest whom he saw coming out of a tavern but the priest pointed out to him that the purity of heart that the priest had and that Jesus required did not consist in the doing or abstaining from particular actions. The holy man was then horrified to realise that despite all his mortifications he had not himself attained to such purity. Mention of taverns led to further accounts from John Ferrar of the evils of taverns and examples of dreadful things done under the influence of drink. Susanna Collet picked up the tavern theme from there and, as befitted one whose ‘store’ was education, offered to the cousin and guest a preliminary gift in the form of a precept to her son, probably Ferrar Collet then aged 15. She commanded him never to go into a tavern and to say to any who tried to

persuade him that his mother had forbidden it. With that firm injunction the session somewhat abruptly ended leaving most of the promised gifts to the cousin and guest undelivered and the Little Academy on the verge of collapse.

What we know of what happened from that time until the revival of a much-altered version of the Little Academy at least two years later depends on a rather enigmatic and anonymous account of the sort Ferrar favoured. Whether this penchant for anonymity and ambiguity that he had revealed earlier reflected modesty or tact or some darker or more devious urge for secrecy or control is impossible to say, but it was clearly a recurrent characteristic of his personality. Whatever his motives for anonymity, only he could have written an account that gave in revealing detail the impact of the temperance programme on the family and on the relationships among its individual members.

As soon as that final session had finished and the 'cousin and guest' (also described as a 'young man') had received the first of his gifts, he proceeded to apply Susanna's precept to himself by seeking out his own mother to request that she lay on him the same prohibition about entering a tavern. His mother was described as a 'grave matron . . . addicted to piety' who had memorised the entire psalter after she was sixty. Mary Woodnoth Ferrar was noted for such characteristics and must be the most plausible candidate for the mother in this account. And if she was the mother, then Ferrar became the likeliest candidate for the 'cousin and guest' and the 'young man' who received the earlier gift despite the fact that he was at that point forty years old and the head of the Gidding household.⁵⁶

As the story moved on, this 'young man' became first the 'Practitioner' and later the 'Compositor'. Once he had taken his vow about taverns, the narrator of this introductory passage (sometimes lapsing into the first person but more usually writing about the Practitioner in the third person) proceeded to extol the benefits of temperance in the pursuit of 'perfection', one of Ferrar's favourite themes. Though the final outcome of the family's experiment and example was beyond human knowledge, the Practitioner, its leader, had already received from his 'Regular Diet' health, wisdom, and honour and those who did likewise could anticipate similar benefits. From lesser virtues like temperance that were, with divine help, within human powers, one could move toward 'perfection' and the redemption that is not within our power and is the highest reward of all.⁵⁷ God's rewards were not only certain but appropriate to a man's wishes and expectations because God would adjust those wishes and expectations to match the reward He provided. The Practitioner's reward moved beyond health, wisdom and

honour to the mystical experience of ‘real Wealth, Glorie & Delight’ whilst ‘these spiritual raptures are in the Flowing-course & Tide’, a reward indeed appropriate to the translator of Valdes.⁵⁸

Although the Practitioner’s rewards made members of the Little Academy want to resume their sessions, their initial attempts never succeeded though the Practitioner would not reveal why they failed. Nearly two years elapsed before wishes finally culminated in a decision to implement this revival as a gift to the Practitioner because of his kindness and service to a ‘Common Friend and Brother’. The narrative’s chronology, however, is far from clear, which makes it difficult to determine what this service was and to whom it was given. An interval of nearly two years would place this action in the autumn of 1634 at which time Ferrar was indeed providing counsel and comfort to Joshua Mapletoft in his worsening illness. But if, as the account implies, the decision to revive the group as a present to the Practitioner preceded the death of Mary Woodnoth Ferrar in April 1634, then Ferrar’s earlier service would more plausibly have been the posthumous publication of *The Temple* and Hygiasticon for his friend and brother George Herbert. That timing, however, would have placed the decision considerably earlier than the ‘nearly two years’ specified. More probably there were two different decisions, one before and one after Mary Ferrar’s death, the latter occurring in late 1634 or possibly early 1635. The first, in late 1633 or early 1634, had rapidly stalled because of unspecified ‘inconquerable difficulties’ that the Practitioner, now in his role as ‘Compositor’, would have had to address. They included those difficulties, which included ‘the Rectification of those Affections, which were most disordered amongst themselves’.⁵⁹

Clearly the household during this two-year period had experienced considerable turbulence. The effort to practice temperance and set an example to the world had proved costly to family harmony. A letter of Susanna Collet points to possible issues, not all of which directly involved temperance, which might have produced disordered affections. It also suggests how the Compositor set about the work of rectification.

To my Brother Nicholas, caused upon some speeches about his inditing of Letters, for divers in the house, and also for some Exceptions taken for saying somewhat about the stories & other things.

As you desire a free, so I make no doubt but a briefe declaration will give you satisfaction in those two things wherein you require an Answer. . . . [First, she has no problem with his

drafting of letters for others and has been grateful for his help when she requested it]. . . . For the matter of storying [the Little Academy's practice], I have accounted the most part of them to be delivered by way of Relation of the Actions & opinions of good & Virtuous men and women, and such as for the Substance ought to be taken for patterns of Imitation, and so for all other passages that are intermingled with them & do heartily desire that whatever is contain[e]d in them, that is the will or command of God, that we in our own particular should do, we may both consent & conform unto in all points: For any corporal Exercise there is none imposed, nor as I conceive, expected from Me, but what I both may & do willingly performe & therefore I shall not need to say any more to that.⁶⁰

Ferrar here resorted to that favourite device we have seen him use earlier of asking people to put down their views in writing. Susanna evidently felt secure in her position in the family and prepared to be frank with her brother; Ferrar was probably not likely to try to pressure his much older sister. Others, not surprisingly, did not share that sense of security though no other letters comparable to hers survive. Clearly there had been criticism of Ferrar's practice of composing letters for others to sign, as we have seen him do earlier for his nieces to send their sister in Margaretting. Who the critics were and what were the grounds of their objections unfortunately remain hidden. Some, though not Susanna Collet, also evidently had felt pressured to do more by way of 'corporal exercises' than they wished. These exercises probably reflected the zeal of at least some in the Little Academy to promote the Cornaro diet. Mary Collet Ferrar's earlier comment that the refusal to sign up to the plan would show the unwilling 'their condition & Estate' suggests the possibility that the enthusiasts had taxed the backsliders with unflattering views of their 'true condition'.⁶¹ The tensions implied in these comments could well have been strong enough to persist and influence, as Margaret Aston has postulated, their choice of martyrdoms from Foxe's print to incorporate into a composite picture for King Charles's harmony of 1635.⁶²

Another heartfelt but more mysterious letter, also undated but written in her own hand during a difficult time, came from his mother to Nicholas:

My good sone it greveth me that ther should be any deaffarence betw[e]ne you and me I pray god it maye no longer be so for it brynges no comfort to me but the contrary I bese[e]ch you doo not think that it is for want of my love to your persone nor dislyk

of your Iud[g]ment but myne owne wekenes and want of true understanding what god requires of me . . . let this suffyes that I doo pourpous and entend by godes assistance not only to consent but to lyke of such orders as you shaule set downe tendyng to the good of this fammyly in generauill and I will by godes healpe doo what is in my powr to mantayne them and if I fayll it shaul no[t] be of porpouse nor willingly but of wekness

Your weke and unworthy mother Mary farrar⁶³

What this difference was one can only speculate. Perhaps since his mother was said to have regarded her son's vigils and austerities as excessive and asked him to moderate them, that issue or the effect that vigils and dieting were having on others in the family might have prompted her remarks.⁶⁴ What the letter does make entirely clear, however, is that ultimately she was prepared to defer to her son.

There were other difficulties that would probably have contributed to 'disordered affections' during 1633 and early 1634. A letter from Arthur Woodnoth to Ferrar in August 1633 wished him success with an unspecified but difficult project he was then working on.⁶⁵ John Ferrar became involved in ongoing and no doubt costly litigation over the will of Timothy Sheppard, Thomas's brother.⁶⁶ The most dramatic cases of 'disordered affections', however, involved Ferrar's uncharacteristic but vehement quarrel with cousin Arthur over the publication of *The Temple* and two heated and less readily resolved quarrels between John and his wife Bathsheba, about which John sought Nicholas's advice.⁶⁷

Bathsheba had caused trouble on previous occasions. First had come her letter to the mother of Martha, Thomas Collet's young wife, claiming that Martha was being kept at Little Gidding against her will.⁶⁸ Next she tried a different tactic, namely escape to London where she still had resident relatives. She went up with her husband to London in 1630 and again in March 1631, probably for John Junior's birth. By June John had returned to the country but she lingered in town, a separation that caused anxiety to the family. Nicholas, himself now in London, cast about for a way to get her and her child back to Gidding. One possibility was to enlist the help of his sister Susanna, who was in Essex helping at her daughter's confinement. The snag with proposing that the two sisters-in-law return to Gidding together, Ferrar acknowledged, was that Bathsheba might have to be asked to delay her departure to accommodate Susanna, and such a request would 'prove matter of evill Consequence every way'. Even if Bathsheba wanted nothing so much as an excuse to remain in

London, he implied, the mere fact that the family had requested it would make her resist.⁶⁹

By July she was still there and Susanna tried to take a hand directly. She sent one of her sons to call on Bathsheba and suggest that the two of them travel back together, to which Bathsheba had replied that she had not yet fixed a date for her return but feared it would be too soon for Susanna safely to leave her daughter and the new infant. Undaunted by what would seem a pretty transparent evasion, Susanna protested that her daughter was recovering so well that she could leave anytime. Bathsheba had only to let her know the date she had chosen in time for Susanna to get up to London and join her.⁷⁰ No further exchanges reveal how the manoeuvring progressed, but a hint from another source suggested that Bathsheba was still delaying her departure in October.⁷¹ Not only were the two sisters-in-law not close; Bathsheba was also not open to suggestions from anyone else in the family except possibly her mother-in-law.

Another of Bathsheba's lines of resistance was keeping as much control as possible over her two younger children's upbringing. Although her elder son, Nicholas, was already 'lost' to his uncle's influence, at least little Virginia and John could still be 'hers'. Such efforts, not surprisingly, produced some of the sharpest conflicts with her husband. In September 1633 they had a heated quarrel in the wake of which Nicholas advised John to confess to God (though not apparently directly to Bathsheba herself) his sin of using 'Lofty or bitter language' and promise amendment in future. Bathsheba for her part must acknowledge John's God-given authority over the children's upbringing as well as his patience in the face of her attacks. She was hardly likely to find that advice palatable, particularly coming from Nicholas. One night a couple of months later she staged a more dramatic scene in which she refused to sleep in the conjugal bed and insisted she would instead sleep on a bed in her child's nursery. She objected to the 'undecent' hours at which the servants came into their room, probably to wake John for prayers, and more prosaically to the coldness of the room itself. John's immediate efforts to remedy these complaints failed to satisfy her for she never did return to their bed that night. They must presently have patched up some sort of truce, for sleeping separately defied every accepted convention and expectation of marriage.⁷²

In the face of such domestic turbulence it was small wonder that Ferrar reported to Joshua Mapletoft early in 1634 that niece Mary and brother John and he himself had been ill and that he had had more to bear in recent weeks than ever before. Without his temperate diet, he averred, he would never have managed to sustain his work as he had successfully done.⁷³