

ies, this constant attention to the rising thought, and development of its results in every direction, necessarily engaged and absorbed his spirit, and made him inattentive and almost insensible to external impressions and common impulses. The stories which are told of his extreme absence of mind, probably refer to the two years during which he was composing his *Principia*, and thus following out a train of reasoning the most fertile, the most complex, and the most important, which any philosopher had ever had to deal with. The magnificent and striking questions which, during this period, he must have had daily rising before him; the perpetual succession of difficult problems of which the solution was necessary to his great object; may well have entirely occupied and possessed him. "He existed only to calculate and to think."²⁵ Often, lost in meditation, he knew not what he did, and his mind appeared to have quite forgotten its connection with the body. His servant reported that, on rising in a morning, he frequently sat a large portion of the day, half-dressed, on the side of his bed; and that his meals waited on the table for hours before he came to take them. Even with his transcendent powers, to do what he did was almost irreconcilable with the common conditions of human life; and required the utmost devotion of thought, energy of effort, and steadiness of will—the strongest character, as well as the highest endowments, which belong to man.

Newton has been so universally considered as the greatest example of a natural philosopher, that his moral qualities, as well as his intellect, have been referred to as models of the philosophical character; and those who love to think that great talents are naturally associated with virtue, have always dwelt with pleasure upon the views given of Newton by his contemporaries; for they have uniformly represented him as candid and humble, mild and good. We may take as an example of the impressions prevalent about him in his own time, the expressions of Thomson, in the Poem on his Death.²⁶

²⁵ Biot.

²⁶ In the same strain we find the general voice of the time. For instance, one of Loggan's "Views of Cambridge" is dedicated "Isaaco Newtono. . . Mathematico, Physico, Chymico consummatissimo; nec minus suavitate morum et candore animi . . . spectabili."

In opposition to the general current of such testimony, we have the complaints of Flamsteed, who ascribes to Newton angry language and harsh conduct in the matter of the publication of the Greenwich Observations, and of Whiston. . . Yet even Flamsteed speaks well of his general disposition. Whiston was himself so weak and prejudiced that his testimony is worth very little.