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Travels into several remote nations of the world

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Chap. II. The Humours and Disposition of the Laputians described. An Account of their Learning. Of the King and his Court. The Author's Reception there. The Inhabitants subject to Fears and ...

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CHAP. II.

The Humours and Dispositions of the Laputians described. An Account of their Learning. Of the King and his Court. The Author's Reception there. The Inhabitants subject to Fears and Disquietudes. An Account of the Women.

T my alighting I was surrounded by a Crowd of People; but those who stood nearest, seemed to be of better Quality. They beheld me with all the Marks and Circumstances of Wonder, neither, indeed was I much in their debt, having never till then seen a Race of Mortals so singular in their Shapes,

Shapes, Habits, and Countenances. Their Heads were all reclined either to the right, or the left ; one of the Eyes turned inward, and the other directly up to the Zenith. Their outward Garments were adorned with the Figures of Suns, Moons, and Stars, interwoven with those of Fiddles, Flutes, Harps, Trumpets, Guittars, Harpsicords, and many more Instruments of Musick, unknown to us in *Europe*. I observed here and there many in the Habit of Servants, with a blown Bladder fasten'd like a Flail to the End of a short Stick, which they carried in their Hands. In each Bladder was a small Quantity of dryed Pease, or little Pebbles, (as I was afterwards informed.) With these Bladders they now and then flapped the Mouths and Ears of those who stood near them, of which Practice I could not then conceive the Meaning : It seems, the Minds of these People are so taken up with intense Speculations, that they neither can speak, nor attend to the Discourses of others, without being

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ing roused by some external Taction upon the Organs of Speech and Hearing; for which reason, those Persons who are able to afford it always keep a *Flapper* (the Original is *Climenole*) in their Family, as one of their Domesticks, nor ever walk abroad or make Visits without him. And the Business of this Officer is, when two or three more Persons are in Company, gently to strike with his Bladder the Mouth of him who is to speak, and the right Ear of him or them to whom the Speaker addresseth himself. This *Flapper* is likewise employed diligently to attend his Master in his Walks, and, upon occasion, to give him a soft Flap on his Eyes, because he is always so wrapped up in Cogitation, that he is in manifest danger of falling down every Precipice, and bouncing his Head against every Post, and in the Streets of jostling others, or being jostled himself into the Kennel.

IT was necessary to give the Reader this Information, without which he would be at the same loss with me, to understand the Proceedings of these People, as they conducted me up the stairs, to the top of the Island, and from thence to the Royal Palace. While we were ascending, they forgot several times what they were about, and left me to my self, till their Memories were again rouzed by their *Flappers*; for they appeared altogether unmoved by the sight of my foreign Habit and Countenance, and by the Shouts of the Vulgar, whose Thoughts and Minds were more disengaged.

AT last we enter'd the Palace, and proceeded into the Chamber of Prefence, where I saw the King seated on his Throne, attended on each side by Persons of Prime Quality. Before the Throne, was a large Table filled with Globes and Spheres, and Mathematical Instruments of all kinds. His Majesty took

took not the least notice of us, although our Entrance was not without sufficient Noise, by the Concourse of all Persons belonging to the Court. But he was then deep in a Problem, and we attended at least an hour, before he could solve it. There stood by him on each side, a young Page, with Flaps in their hands, and when they saw he was at leisure, one of them gently struck his Mouth, and the other his right Ear; at which he started like one awaked on the sudden, and looking towards me, and the Company I was in, recollected the Occasion of our coming, whereof he had been informed before. He spoke some Words, whereupon immediately a young Man with a Flap came up to my Side, and flapt me gently on the right Ear; but I made Signs, as well as I could, that I had no Occasion for such an Instrument; which, as I afterwards found, gave his Majesty and the whole Court a very mean Opinion of my Understanding. The King, as far as I could con-

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jecture,

jecture, asked me several Questions, and I addressed my self to him in all the Languages I had. When it was found, that I could neither understand, nor be understood, I was conducted, by the King's Order, to an Apartment in his Palace, (this Prince being distinguished above all his Predecessors for his Hospitality to Strangers,) where two Servants were appointed to attend me. My Dinner was brought, and four Persons of Quality, whom I remember'd to have seen very near the King's Person, did me the honour to dine with me. We had two Courses, of three Dishes each. In the first Course there was a Shoulder of Mutton, cut into an Æ quilateral Triangle, a Piece of Beef into a Rhomboides, and a Pudding into a Cycloid. The second Course was two Ducks, trussed up into the Form of Fiddles, Sausages and Puddings resembling Flutes and Hautboys, and a Breast of Veal in the shape of a Harp. The Servants cut our Bread into
Cones,

to LAPUTA, &c. 21

Cones, Cylinders, Parallelograms, and several other mathematical Figures.

WHILE we were at Dinner, I made bold to ask the Names of several things in their Language; and those noble Persons, by the assistance of their *Flappers*, delighted to give me Answers, hoping to raise my Admiration of their great Abilities, if I could be brought to converse with them. I was soon able to call for Bread, and Drink, or whatever else I wanted.

AFTER Dinner my Company withdrew, and a Person was sent to me by the King's Order, attended by a *Flapper*. He brought with him Pen, Ink, and Paper, and three or four Books, giving me to understand by Signs, that he was sent to teach me the Language. We sat together four hours, in which time I wrote down a great number of Words in Columns, with the Translations over against them. I likewise made a shift to learn several

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short Sentences. For my Tutor would order one of my Servants to fetch something, or turn about, to make a Bow, to sit, or stand, or walk, and the like. Then I took down the Sentence in writing. He shewed me also in one of his Books, the Figures of the Sun, Moon, and Stars, the Zodiack, the Tropics, and Polar Circles, together with the Denominations of many Figures of Planes and Solids. He gave me the Names and Descriptions of all the musical Instruments, and the general Terms of Art in playing on each of them. After he had left me, I placed all my Words with their Interpretations in Alphabetical Order. And thus in a few days, by the help of a very faithful Memory, I got some insight into their Language.

THE Word, which I interpret the *Flying* or *Floating Island*, is in the Original *Laputa*, whereof I could never learn the true Etymology. *Lap* in the old obsolete Language signifieth *High*,
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and *Untub* a Governour, from which, they say, by Corruption was derived *Laputa* from *Lapuntub*. But I do not approve of this Derivation, which seems to be a little strained. I ventured to offer to the Learned among them a Conjecture of my own, that *Laputa* was *quasi* *Lap outed*, *Lap* signifying properly the Dancing of the Sun-Beams in the Sea, and *outed* a Wing; which, however, I shall not obtrude, but submit to the judicious Reader.

THOSE to whom the King had entrusted me, observing how ill I was clad, ordered a Taylor to come next Morning, and take my Measure for a Suit of Clothes. This Operator did his Office after a different manner from those of his Trade in *Europe*. He first took my Altitude by a Quadrant, and then with Rule and Compasses, described the Dimensions and Out-lines of my whole Body, all which he enter'd upon Paper, and in six days brought my Clothes very ill made, and

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24 A VOYAGE

quite out of shape, by happening to mistake a Figure in the Calculation. But my comfort was, that I observed such Accidents very frequent, and little regarded.

DURING my Confinement for want of Clothes, and by an Indisposition that held me some days longer, I much enlarged my Dictionary; and when I went next to Court, was able to understand many things the King spoke, and to return him some kind of Answers. His Majesty had given Orders that the Island should move North-East and by East, to the Vertical Point over *Lagado*, the Metropolis of the whole Kingdom below upon the firm Earth. It was about ninety Leagues distant, and our Voyage lasted four days and an half. I was not in the least sensible of the progressive Motion made in the Air by the Island. On the second Morning, about eleven a-clock, the King himself in Person, attended by his Nobility, Courtiers,

Courtiers, and Officers, having prepared all their musical Instruments, played on them for three hours without intermission, so that I was quite stunned with the Noise; neither could I possibly guess the Meaning till my Tutor informed me. He said that the People of the Island had their Ears adapted to hear the Musick of the Spheres, which always played at certain Periods, and the Court was now prepared to bear their part in whatever Instrument they most excelled.

IN our Journey towards *Lagado* the capital City, his Majesty ordered that the Island should stop over certain Towns and Villages, from whence he might receive the Petitions of his Subjects. And to this purpose several Packthreads were let down with small Weights at the bottom. On these Packthreads the People strung their Petitions, which mounted up directly like the Scraps of Paper fastned by School-Boys at the end of the String
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that holds their Kite. Sometimes we received Wine and Victuals from below, which were drawn up by Pulleys.

THE Knowledge I had in Mathematicks gave me great Assistance in acquiring their Phrafcology, which depended much upon that Science and Musick; and in the latter I was not unskilled. Their Ideas are perpetually conversant in Lines and Figures. If they would, for example, praise the Beauty of a Woman, or any other Animal, they describe it by Rhombs, Circles, Parallelograms, Ellipses, and other Geometrical Terms, or by Words of Art drawn from Musick, needless here to repeat. I observed in the King's Kitchen all sorts of mathematical and musical Instruments, after the Figures of which they cut up the Joints that were served to his Majesty's Table.

THEIR Houses are very ill built, the Walls bevil, without one Right Angle

Angle in any Apartment ; and this Defect ariseth from the Contempt they bear to practical Geometry, which they despise, as Vulgar and Mechanick, those Instructions they give being too refined for the Intellectuals of their Workmen ; which occasions perpetual Mistakes. And although they are dextrous enough upon a Piece of Paper in the Management of the Rule, the Pencil, and the Divider, yet in the common Actions and Behaviour of Life, I have not seen a more clumsy, aukward, and unhandy People, nor so slow and perplexed in their Conceptions upon all other Subjects, except those of Mathematicks and Musick. They are very bad Reasoners, and vehemently given to Opposition, unless when they happen to be of the right Opinion, which is seldom their Case. Imagination, Fancy, and Invention, they are wholly Strangers to, nor have any Words in their Language by which those Ideas can be expressed ; the whole Compass of their Thoughts
and

and Mind being shut up within the two forementioned Sciences.

MOST of them, and especially those who deal in the Astronomical Part, have great Faith in judicial Astrology, although they are ashamed to own it publickly. But what I chiefly admired, and thought altogether unaccountable, was the strong Disposition I observed in them towards News and Politicks, perpetually enquiring into publick Affairs, giving their Judgments in Matters of State, and passionately disputing every Inch of a Party Opinion. I have indeed observed the same Disposition among most of the Mathematicians I have known in *Europe*, although I could never discover the least Analogy between the two Sciences; unless those People suppose, that because the smallest Circle hath as many Degrees as the largest, therefore the Regulation and Management of the World require no more Abilities than the handling and turning

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ing of a Globe. But, I rather take this Quality to spring from a very common Infirmity of human Nature, inclining us to be more curious and conceited in Matters where we have least Concern, and for which we are least adapted either by Study or Nature.

THESE People are under continual Disquietudes, never enjoying a Minute's Peace of Mind; and their Disturbances proceed from Causes which very little affect the rest of Mortals. Their Apprehensions arise from several Changes they dread in the celestial Bodies. For instance; That the Earth, by the continual Approaches of the Sun towards it, must in Course of Time be absorbed or swallowed up: That the Face of the Sun will, by degrees, be encrusted with its own Effluvia, and give no more Light to the World: That the Earth very narrowly escaped a Brush from the Tail of the last Comet, which would have infallibly reduced it to Ashes; and that
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the next, which they have calculated for one and thirty Years hence, will probably destroy us. For, if in its Perihelion it should approach within a certain Degree of the Sun, (as by their Calculations they have reason to dread) it will conceive a Degree of Heat ten thousand times more intense than that of red-hot glowing Iron; and in its absence from the Sun, carry a blazing Tail ten hundred thousand and fourteen Miles long; through which, if the Earth should pass at the distance of one hundred thousand Miles from the *Nucleus* or main Body of the Comet, it must in its Passage be set on fire, and reduced to Ashes. That the Sun daily spending its Rays without any Nutriment to supply them, will at last be wholly consumed and annihilated; which must be attended with the Destruction of this Earth, and of all the Planets that receive their Light from it

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THEY are so perpetually alarmed with the Apprehensions of these and the like impending Dangers, that they can neither sleep quietly in their Beds, nor have any Relish for the common Pleasures or Amusements of Life. When they meet an Acquaintance in the Morning, the first Question is about the Sun's health, how he looked at his Setting and Rising, and what hopes they have to avoid the Stroke of the approaching Comet. This Conversation they are apt to run into with the same Temper that Boys discover, in delighting to hear terrible Stories of Spirits and Hobgoblins, which they greedily listen to, and dare not go to bed for fear.

THE Women of the Island have abundance of Vivacity; they contemn their Husbands, and are exceedingly fond of Strangers, whereof there is always a considerable number from the Continent below, attending at Court, either upon Affairs of the several Towns
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and Corporations, or their own particular Occasion, but are much despised, because they want the same Endowments. Among these the Ladies chuse their Gallants: But the vexation is, that they act with too much Ease and Security; for the Husband is always so wrapt in Speculation, that the Mistress and Lover may proceed to the greatest Familiarities before his Face, if he be but provided with Paper and Implements, and without his Flapper at his side.

THE Wives and Daughters lament their Confinement to the Island, although I think it the most delicious Spot of Ground in the World; and although they live here in the greatest Plenty and Magnificence, and are allowed to do whatever they please, they long to see the World, and take the Diversions of the Metropolis, which they are not allowed to do without a particular Licence from the King; and this is not easy to be obtained, because the People of Quality

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lity have found, by frequent Experience, how hard it is to persuade their Women to return from below. I was told that a great Court-Lady, who had several Children, is married to the Prime Minister, the richest Subject in the Kingdom, a very graceful Person, extremely fond of her, and lives in the finest Palace of the Island, went down to *Lagado*, on the pretence of Health, there hid her self for several Months, till the King sent a Warrant to search for her, and she was found in an obscure Eating-house all in Rags, having pawned her Clothes to maintain an old deformed Footman, who beat her every day, and in whose Company she was taken much against her Will. And although her Husband received her with all possible Kindness, and without the least Reproach, she soon after contrived to steal down again, with all her Jewels, to the same Gallant, and hath not been heard of since.

THIS may, perhaps, pass with the Reader rather for an *European* or *English* Story, than for one of a Country so remote: But he may please to consider, that the Caprices of Womenkind are not limited by any Climate or Nation, and that they are much more uniform than can be easily imagined.

IN about a Month's time I had made a tolerable Proficiency in their Language, and was able to answer most of the King's Questions, when I had the Honour to attend him. His Majesty discovered not the least Curiosity to enquire into the Laws, Government, History, Religion, or Manners of the Countries where I had been, but confined his Questions to the State of Mathematicks, and received the Account I gave him, with great Contempt and Indifference, though often roused by his *Flapper* on each side.