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Miscellaneous works Of The Late Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl Of Chesterfield

Consisting Of Letters to his Friends, never before printed, And Various
Other Articles

**Chesterfield, Philip Dormer Stanhope of
Dublin, 1777**

III. Fog's Journal. Saturday, April 10, 1736. N° 388.

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Having thus demonstrated, by many instances, that the ear is the most material part in the whole mechanism of our structure, and that it is both the seat and source of honor, power, pleasure, and pain, I cannot conclude without an earnest exhortation to all my country-folks, of whatsoever rank or sex, to take the utmost care of their ears. Guard your ears, O ye princes, for your power is lodged in your ears. Guard your ears, ye nobles, for your honor lies in your ears. Guard your ears, ye fair, if you would guard your virtue. And guard your ears, all my fellow subjects, if you would guard your liberties and properties.

 III.

F O G ' S J O U R N A L .

SATURDAY, April 10, 1736. N^o 388.

HAVING in a former paper set forth the valuable privileges and prerogatives of the E A R, I should be very much wanting to another material part of our composition, if I did not do justice to the E Y E S, and shew the influence they either have, or ought to have, in Great Britain.

While the eyes of my countrymen are in a great measure the part that directed, the whole people saw for themselves; seeing was called believing, and was a sense so much trusted to, that the eyes of the body and those of the mind were, in speaking, indifferently made use of for one another. But I am sorry to say that the case is now greatly altered; and I observe with concern an epidemical blindness, or, at least, a general weakness and distrust of the eyes scattered over this whole kingdom, from which we may justly apprehend the worst consequences.

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This observation must have, no doubt, occurred to all who frequent public places, whom, instead of seeing so many eyes employed, as usual, either in looking at one another, or in viewing attentively the object that brings them there, we find modestly delegating their faculty to glasses of all sorts and sizes to see for them. I remarked this more particularly at an opera I was at, the beginning of this winter, where Polypheme was almost the only person in the house that had two eyes; the rest had but one apiece, and that a glass one.

As I cannot account for this general decay of our optics from any natural cause, not having observed any alteration in our climate or manner of living, considerable enough to have brought so suddenly upon us this universal short-sightedness, I cannot but entertain some suspicions, that their pretended helps to the sight are rather deceptions of it; and the inventions of wicked and designing persons, to represent objects in that light, shape, size, and number, in which it is their inclination or interest to have them beheld. I shall communicate to the public the grounds of my suspicion.

The honest plain spectacles and reading-glasses were formerly the refuge only of aged and decayed eyes; they accompanied grey hairs, and in some measure shared their respect: they magnified the object a little, but still they represented it in its true light and figure. Whereas now the variety of refinements upon this first useful invention have persuaded the youngest, the strongest, and the finest eyes in the world out of their faculty, and convinced them, that, for the true discerning of objects, they must have recourse to some of these *media*; nay, into such disrepute is the natural sight now fallen, that we may observe, while one eye is employed in the glass, the other is carefully covered with the hand, or painfully shut, not without shocking distortions of the countenance.

It is very well known, that there are not above three or four eminent operators for these portable or pocket-eyes, and that they engross that whole business. Now, as these persons are neither of them people of quality, *who are always above such infamous and dirty motives*, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they may be liable to a pecuniary influence: nor consequently is it improbable that an administration should think it worth its while, even
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at a large expence, to secure those few that are to see for the bulk of the whole nation. This surely deserves our attention.

It is most certain, that great numbers of people already see objects in a different light from what they were ever seen in before, by the naked and undeluded eye, which can only be ascribed to the misrepresentations of some of these artificial *media*, of which I shall enumerate the different kinds that have come to my knowledge.

The looking-glass, which for many ages was the minister and counsellor of the fair sex, has now greatly extended its jurisdiction; every body knows that that glass is backed with quicksilver, to hinder it from being diaphanous; so that it stops the beholder, and presents him again to himself. Here his views centre all in himself, and dear self alone is the object of his contemplations. This kind of glass, I am assured, is now the most common of any, especially among people of distinction, insomuch that nine in ten of the glasses that we daily see levelled at the public are in reality not diaphanous, but agreeably return the looker to himself, while his attention seems to be employed upon others.

The reflecting telescope has of late gained ground considerably, not only among the ladies, who chiefly view one another through that medium, but has even found its way into the cabinets of princes; in both which cases it suggests reflections to those, who before were not apt to make many.

The microscope, or magnifying glass, is an engine of dangerous consequence, though much in vogue: it swells the minutest object to a most monstrous size, heightens the deformity, and even deforms the beauties of nature. When the finest hair appears like a tree, and the finest pore like an abyss, what disagreeable representations may it exhibit, and what fatal mistakes may it mutually occasion between the two sexes! Nature has formed all objects for that point of view in which they appear to the naked eye; their perfection lessens in proportion as they leave out that point, and many a Venus would cease to appear one, even to her lover, were she, by the help of a microscope, to be viewed in the ambient cloud of her insensible perspiration.

perspiration. I bar Mrs. Osborne's returning my microscope upon me, since I leave her in quiet possession of the spectacles, and even of the reading-glasses, if she can make use of them.

There is another kind of glass now in great use, which is the oblique glass, whose tube, levelled in a straight line at one object, receives another in at the side, so that the beholder seems to be looking at one person, while another intirely engrosses his attention. This is a notorious engine of treachery and deceit; and yet, they say, it is for the most part made use of by ministers to their friends, and ladies to their husbands.

The smoked glass, that darkens even the lustre of the sun, must of course throw the blackest dye upon all other objects. This, though the most infernal invention of all, is far from being unpractised; and I knew a gentleman, who, in order to keep her husband at home, and in her own power, had his whole house glazed with it, so that the poor gentleman shut up his door, and neither went abroad, nor let any body in, for fear of conversing, as he thought, with so many devils.

The dangers that may one day threaten our constitution in general, as well as particular persons, from the variety of these mischievous inventions, are so obvious, that they hardly need be pointed out: however, as my countrymen cannot be too much warned against it, I shall hint at those that terrify me the most.

Suppose we should ever have a short-sighted prince upon the throne, though otherwise just, brave and wise; who can answer for his glass-grinder, and consequently, who can tell through what medium, and in what light, he may view the most important objects? or who can answer for the persons that are to take care of his glasses, and present them to him upon occasion? may not they change them, and slip a wrong one upon him, as their interest may require, and thus magnify, lessen, multiply, deform, or blacken, as they think proper; nay, and by means of the oblique glass above-mentioned, shew him even one object for another? Where would the eye of the master be then? where would be that eye divinely deputed to watch over? but shrunk and contracted within the narrow circle of a deceitful tube.

On the other hand, should future parliaments, by arts of a designing minister, with the help of a corrupted glass-grinder, have delusive and perverse glasses slipped upon them, what might they see? or what might they not see? nobody can tell. I am sure every body ought to fear they might possibly behold a numerous standing army in time of peace, as an inoffensive and pleasing object, nay, as a security to our liberties and properties. They might see our riches increase by new debts, and our trade by high duties; and they might look upon the corrupt surrender of their own power to the crown, as the best protection of the rights of the people. Should this ever happen to be the case, we may be sure it must be by the interposition of some strange medium, since these objects were never viewed in this light by the naked and unassisted eyes of our ancestors.

In this general consideration, there is a particular one that affects me more than all the rest, as the consequence of it would be the worst. There is a body of men, who, by the wisdom and for the happiness of our constitution, make a considerable part of our parliament: all, or at least most of, these venerable persons, are, by great age, long study, or a low mortified way of living, reduced to have recourse to glasses. Now should their *media* be abused, and political translatives ones be slipped upon them, what scandal would their innocent, but misguided, conduct bring upon religion, and what joy would it give, at this time particularly, to the dissenters? Such as, I am sure, no true member of our church can think of without horror! I am the more apprehensive of this, from the late revival of an act that flourished with idolatry, and that had expired with it, I mean the staining of glass. That medium, which throws strange and various colours upon all objects, was formerly sacred to our churches, and consequently may, for aught I know, in the intended revival of our true church discipline, be thought a candidate worthy of our favour and reception, and so a stained medium be established as the true, orthodox, and canonical one.

I have found it much easier to point out the mischiefs I apprehend, than the means of obviating or remedying them, though I have turned it every way in my thoughts.

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To have a certain number of persons appointed to examine and license all the glasses, that should be used in this kingdom, would be lodging so great a trust in those persons, that the temptations to betray it would be exceedingly great too; and it is to be feared that people of quality would not take the trouble of it, so that, *Quis custodiat ipsos custodes?* (By whom will these keepers be kept?)

I once thought of proposing, that a committee of both houses of parliament should be vested with that power: but I immediately laid that aside, for reasons which I am not obliged to communicate to the public.

At last, despairing to find out any legal method that should prove effectual, I resolved to content myself with an earnest exhortation to all my country-folks, of whatsoever rank or sex, to see with their own eyes, or not see at all, blindness being preferable to error.

See then with your own eyes, ye princes, though weak or dim: they will still give you a fairer and truer representation of objects, than you will ever have by the interposition of any medium whatsoever. Your subjects are placed in their proper point of view for your natural sight: viewing them in that point, you will see that your happiness consists in theirs, your greatness in their riches, and your power in their affections.

See likewise with your own eyes, ye people, and reject all proffered *media*: view even your princes with your natural sight; the true rays of majesty are friendly to the weakest eye, or, if they dazzle and scorch, it is owing to the interposition of burning-glasses. Destroy those pernicious *media*, and you will be pleased with the sight of one another.

In short, let the natural eyes retrieve their credit, and resume their power: we shall then see things as they really are, which must end in the confusion of those, whose hopes and interests are founded upon misrepresentations and deceit.