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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**

V. Common Sense. Saturday, February 19, 1737. N° 3.

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as it implies common decency too, I shall confine myself to things, and not attack persons; it being my desire to improve or amuse every body, without shocking any body.

I do not think it necessary, at least yet, to give the public any information as to my person; let my paper stand upon its own legs. My present resolution is to keep my name concealed, unless my success should some day or other tempt my vanity to discover it. All I will say at present is, that I never appeared in print before; and if I should not meet with some encouragement now, I shall withdraw myself to my former retirements, and there indulge those oddnesses that compose my character; the description of which, if I go on, may some time or other entertain my readers.

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V.

COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, February 19, 1737. N<sup>o</sup> 3.

**B**ERNIER informs us of a very extraordinary custom, which prevails to this day in the empire of the Mogul. His imperial majesty is annually weighed upon his birth-day, and if it appears that, since his former weighing, he has made any considerable acquisition of flesh, it is matter of public rejoicings throughout his whole dominions. Upon that great day too, his subjects are obliged to make him presents, which seldom amount to less than thirty millions.

This seems to be a custom which, like many customs in other countries, is merely observed for antiquity or form-sake; but the original purpose for which it was at first wisely established, is either neglected or quite forgotten: or it is impossible to imagine, that his Mogul majesty's good and loyal subjects should find such matter of joy in the literal increase of their sovereign's materiality, which must of course render him less qualified for the functions and duties of his government;

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so that it is more reasonably to be presumed, that, as all the oriental nations chuse to convey their precepts of religion, morality, and government through hieroglyphics, types, and emblems, this custom was originally allegorical, and signified the political increase of his majesty's weight, as to credit, power, and dominion; which might justly administer great joy to his faithful subjects.

Or, to carry my conjecture a little farther, is it impossible that his now absolute empire might formerly have been a limited one; the equal balance of which it might be necessary often to examine, in order to preserve it in its just equilibrium? In which case, it is highly probable, that his majesty was weighed against some counterpoise; or, to speak plainer, the prerogative of the prince might be examined with relation to the rights and privileges of the subject. What confirms me the more in this opinion, is the choice of the day for the operation. It was his sacred majesty's birth-day, a day in which he was supposed to be in good humour; and the presents were of a nature to put him in good humour, in case they had not found him so: which circumstances seem to be meant as preparatory sweetners to a ceremony, that would not otherwise have been very agreeable to him.

It will be no objection to my conjecture, to alledge the present absolute form of that government; since a very little knowledge of history will shew us, that the most absolute governments now in the world have been originally free ones, and only bought, bullied, or beaten out of their liberties.

This may very probably have been the case in Indostan, where the nobles and representatives of the people might think it both civil and prudent not to weigh quite fair against his majesty; but to lighten their own scale, that he might preponderate a little. This little by degrees increased the bulk of their successors, by continually adding more and more to it.

The superiority of weight probably pleased his majesty, and gave him a relish for more; which these great annual presents, swelling up his civil list, enabled him the better to gratify, by having wherewithal to corrupt the weighers on the part of the nobles and the people, till  
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by degrees the whole weight was thrown into the royal scale, without any counterpoise. By such gradations this custom, originally established for the security of the constitution, may have dwindled into a mere pompous ceremony, and an expensive rareeshow annually exhibited to a cozened people, in exchange for their liberties.

Would I follow the example of the most eminent critics, I could support these my criticisms and conjectures by innumerable authorities both antient and modern; and prove, beyond contradiction, from the natural history of fat, that it is impossible a sovereign can desire the great increase of his corporal bulk, or a good subject rejoice in it. But I shall content myself with a few.

Fat and stupidity are looked upon as such inseparable companions, that they are used as synonymous terms; and all the properties of corporal materiality, when applied to the mind, intimate slowness, heaviness, dullness, and such like qualities.

The *pinguis Minerva* of the antients shews us their opinion, that, if even the goddesses of arts and wisdom herself were to grow fat, she would grow stupid too; which, if sauce for a god or goddess, may surely, with all due regard, be sauce for a king or queen.

Horace's *pingue ingenium*, or fat head, means by the same figure a puzzled, dull, impenetrable one.

The very air the Bœotians breathed was, from their stupidity, called a fat one; and at this day, a neighbouring nation, not less eminent than the Bœotians for the sedateness and tranquillity of their genius, are likewise distinguished by the weight and circumference of their bodies.

After these instances, it would not only be uncandid, but indecent, to suppose that any sovereign would desire to clog and encumber, by a load of flesh, those faculties upon whose clearness and quickness the welfare of his subjects, and his own glory, so much depend; besides that even bodily agility is highly necessary for a prince. A light, clever, active monarch can with more frequency and celerity visit his remotest dominions, where his presence may often be required. His military operations too may receive great lustre and advantage from the agility of his person; not to mention what a fatal hindrance a prominent

prominent abdomen would prove to his royal exertions in the seraglio.

Having thus proved that this custom must originally have been only emblematical, and never meant literally as an annual register, or rather bill of fare, of the real pounds of flesh his Indian majesty may get or lose in the course of a year, let us examine a little whether this custom may not deserve, in future times, adoption here, and be advantageously introduced into our constitution.

Methinks even our constitution itself points out to us this very method of preserving it; the three constituent parts of the supreme legislative power form a kind of a political *trilanz*, to each scale of which a due sort and proportion of weight is wisely allotted, that they may all hang even, and yet, with all submission to a right reverend prelate, independent of each other. What then more natural than an annual examination and inspection of this *trilanz*?

That this method of weighing states and empires is very antient, appears from Homer, who tells us, that Jupiter himself weighed the fates of Greece and Troy: by what kind of scale he weighed them, I do not find, either in Eustathius, or any other commentator; but it is only evident by the side that prevailed, that it could not be Troy weight.

Such, I acknowledge, is the happiness of our present times, such the wisdom and integrity of all those who now compose the legislative power, and such the nice equality of the scales, that any caution of this nature would be altogether unnecessary; but common sense looks farther, and wisely provides against future, remote, and possible dangers.

As therefore I apprehend no danger this century, I only propose this measure to commence in the year of our Lord 1800, when, as it is naturally to be presumed that all the persons, of which the legislative power shall be composed, will be such as are now unborn, nobody can tell what may happen, nor how necessary it may be to weigh them frequently, and with the greatest exactness. This too is the more practicable here, because we have the balance of Europe now ready in our hands for the purpose: we have held it with vast credit and success, and infinite advantage of late, and no doubt shall continue

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tinue long in possession of it ; so that the legislature may certainly borrow it of the ministry a couple of days in the year for this domestic purpose.

In the performing of this operation, it seems absolutely necessary that all interchangeable presents, betwixt the parties to be weighed, be strictly prohibited, as they might give an undue share of weight to the scale in which they may be thrown, and have the same fatal consequences here, that, in my opinion, they have already had in Indostan ; and should it ever happen that, through politeness, or any other motive, grains and drachms should be annually thrown into the regal scale, it must in the end so far preponderate, that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to retrieve it : nay, another case might happen, that would be very ridiculous, which is, if the regal scale and the popular scale, at the two extremities of the beam, should both be loaded with the spoils of the middle one, that middle one would still keep dangling, though quite empty.

What has been said hitherto relates only to metaphorical weight, and is meant to recommend to the serious care and attention of posterity the preservation of our happy constitution, and to advise them to be watchful of any the least innovation in any part of it. But I am not sure, whether the real literal weighing of many individuals may not greatly contribute to this good end ; and I am the more confirmed in this opinion by an experiment of that kind, which, I am informed, has been for some years last past tried with great success. I am assured that in a great hall, at the country seat of a very considerable person in Christendom, there is a very magnificent pair of man scales, where the master of the house and his numerous guests are annually weighed, and are as annually found to increase immensely. This hint, I think, may admit of great improvements ; something of this kind, whether scales or steel-yards, can be most advantageously made use of the first and last day of every session of parliament ; though, in my humble opinion, the scale must be found the more decent of the two, because it must appear ludicrous, and consequently turn the whole ceremony into a kind of farce, to see the people of the first rank, both in church and state, dangling and sprawling at the end of a steel-yard.

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But it is certain, that to come some way or other at the intrinsic weight of the individuals who compose our legislature, and to distinguish exactly betwixt that intrinsic weight, and the extraneous weight they may be apt to acquire, would greatly tend to preserve a due equilibrium, between the collective bodies that form our constitution.

I must own, many difficulties occur to me in this undertaking; but, as I am unwearied in my endeavours for the good of my country, I will turn this matter in my thought, till I have reduced it to some method that may appear to me to be practicable, when I shall not fail communicating it to the world, for the good of posterity. In the mean time, I shall think myself obliged to any ingenious person who shall send me his thoughts upon this subject, and help me to ascertain the due weight of every individual, as well as a true method of coming at it.

## VI.

## COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, February 26, 1737. N<sup>o</sup> 4.

THE Romans used to say, *ex pede Herculem*, or, you may know Hercules by his foot, intimating, that one may commonly judge of the whole by a part. I confess, I am myself very apt to judge in this manner, and may, without pretending to an uncommon share of sagacity, say, that I have very seldom found myself mistaken in it. It is impossible not to form to one's self some opinion of people the first time one sees them, from their air and dress; and a suit of cloaths has often informed me, with the utmost certainty, that the wearer had not common sense. The Greeks (to display my learning) said *ἰματίον ἀνρς*, or, the dress shews the man; and it is certain, that of all trifling things, there is none by which people so much discover their natural turn of mind, as by their dress. In greater matters they proceed more cautiously, nature is disguised, and weaknesses are concealed by art or imitation; but in dress they give a loose to their fancy, and by declaring it an immaterial thing, though at the same time they do not think it so, promise themselves at least