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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**

VII. Common Sense. Saturday, April 30, 1737. N° 14.

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country; and that they shall enjoy a connivance, in the nature of a drawback, to those excesses, which otherwise I shall not tolerate.

I must add, that if it be so genteel to copy the French, even in their weakneses, I should humbly hope it might be thought still more so, to imitate them where they really deserve imitation, which is, in preferring every thing of their own to every thing of other people's. A Frenchman, who happened to be in England, at the time of the last total eclipse of the sun, assured the people, whom he saw looking at it with attention, that it was not to be compared to a French eclipse: would some of our fine women emulate that spirit, and assert, as they might do with much more truth, that the foreign manufactures are not to be compared to the English, such a declaration would be worth two or three hundred thousand pounds a year to the kingdom, and operate more effectually than all the laws made for that purpose. The Roman ladies got the Oppian law, which restrained their dress, repealed, in spite of the unwearied opposition of the elder Cato. I exhort the British ladies to exert their power to better purposes, and to revive, by their credit, the trade and manufactures of their own country, in spite of the supine negligence of those, whose more immediate care it ought to be to cultivate and promote them.

## VII.

## COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, April 30, 1737. N<sup>o</sup> 14.

**T**HOSE, who attack the fundamental laws of virtue and morality, urge the uncertainty of them, and alledge their variations in different countries, and even in different ages in the same countries. Morality, say they, is local, and consequently an imaginary thing, since what is rejected in one climate as a vice, is practised in another as a virtue; and according to them, the voice of nature speaks as many different languages as there are nations in the world.

The

The dangers and ill consequences of this doctrine are obvious, but surely the falsity of it is not less so ; and the most charitable opinion one can entertain of those who propagate it, is, that they mistake fashion and custom, for nature and reason. The invariable laws of justice and morality are the first and universal emanations of human reason, while unprejudiced and uncorrupted ; and we may as well say, that sickness is the natural state of the body, as that injustice and immorality are the natural situation of the mind. We contract most of the distempers of the one, by the irregularity of our appetites, and of the other, by yielding to the impetuosity of our passions ; but in both cases, reason, when consulted, speaks a different language.

I admit, that the prevailing customs and fashions of most countries are not founded upon reason, and, on the contrary, are too frequently repugnant to it ; but then the reasonable people of those countries condemn and abhor, though, it may be, they too wittingly comply with, or, at least, have not courage enough openly to oppose, them.

The people of rank and distinction, in every country, are properly called the people of fashion ; because, in truth, they settle the fashion. Instead of subjecting themselves to the laws, they take measure of their own appetites and passions, and then make laws to fit them ; which laws, though neither founded in justice, nor enacted by a legal authority, too often prevail over, and insult, both justice and authority. This is fashion.

In this light, I have often considered the word *honor* in its fashionable acceptation in this country, and must confess, that, were that the universal meaning of it throughout this kingdom, it would very much confirm the doctrine I endeavour to confute ; and would be so contrary to that honor, which reason, justice, and common sense point out, that I should not wonder, if it inclined people to call in question the very existence of honor itself.

The character of a man of honor, as received in the *beau monde*, is something so very singular, that it deserves a particular examination ; and, though easier observed than described, I shall endeavour to give my readers a description of it, illustrated with some original pieces, which have luckily fallen into my hands.

A man

A man of honor is one, who peremptorily affirms himself to be so, and who will cut any body's throat that questions it, though upon the best grounds. He is infinitely above the restraints, which the laws of God or man lay upon vulgar minds, and knows no other ties but those of honor; of which word, he is to be the sole expounder. He must strictly adhere to a party denomination, though he may be utterly regardless of its principles. His expence should exceed his income considerably, not for the necessaries, but for the superfluities of life, that the debts he contracts may do him honor. There should be a haughtiness and insolence in his deportment, which is supposed to result from conscious honor. If he be choleric, and wrong-headed into the bargain, with a good deal of animal courage, he acquires the glorious character of a man of nice and jealous honor: and if all these qualifications are duly seasoned with the genteelest vices, the man of honor is compleat; any thing his wife, children, servants, or tradesmen, may think to the contrary, notwithstanding.

Belville is allowed to be a man of the most consummate honor, that this or any age ever produced. The men are proud of his acquaintance, and the women of his protection; his party glories in being countenanced by him, and his honor is frequently quoted as a sanction for their conduct. But some original letters, which I shall give my readers, will let them more intimately into the particulars of so shining a character, than mere description would do.

He had run out a considerable fortune by a life of pleasure, particularly by gaming, and, being delicately scrupulous in points of honor, he wrote the following letter to his attorney, after an ill run at play;

“ S I R,

“ **I** H A D a damned tumble last night at hazard, and  
 “ must raise a thousand within a week; get it me upon  
 “ any terms, for I would rather suffer the greatest incum-  
 “ brance upon my fortune, than the least blemish upon  
 “ my honor. As for those clamorous rascals the tradef-  
 “ men, insist upon my privilege, and keep them off as long  
 “ as

“ as possible ; we may chance to ruin some of them, before they can bring us to trial.

“ Yours, &c.

“ BELVILLE.

“ To Mr. Tho. Goofetree, attorney,  
“ in Furnival’s Inn.”

But, lest the endeavours of Mr. Goofetree should prove ineffectual, Belville, from the same principle of honor, resolved, at all events, to secure that sum collaterally, and therefore wrote the following letter to the first minister:

“ S I R,

“ I WAS applied to yesterday in your name by \*\*\*  
“ to vote for the point, which is to come into our house  
“ to-morrow ; but, as it was extremely contrary to my  
“ opinion and principles, I gave him no explicit answer,  
“ but took some time to consider of it. I have there-  
“ fore the honor now to acquaint you, that I am de-  
“ termined to give my concurrence to this affair ;  
“ but must desire, at the same time, that you will im-  
“ mediately send \*\*\* to me, with the fifteen hundred  
“ pounds he offered me yesterday, and for which I have  
“ a pressing occasion this morning. I am persuaded you  
“ know me too well to scruple this payment before-  
“ hand, and that you will not be the first person, that  
“ ever questioned the honor of,

“ S I R,

“ Your most faithful humble servant,”

“ BELVILLE.

I find another letter of the same date, to a lady, who appears to be wife of his most intimate friend :

“ My

“MY DEAR,

“**I** HAVE just now received yours, and am very  
 “ sorry for the uneasiness your husband’s behaviour has  
 “ given you of late; though I cannot be of your opinion,  
 “ that he suspects our connexion. We have been bred up  
 “ together from children, and have lived in the strictest  
 “ friendship ever since; so that I dare say he would as soon  
 “ suspect me of a design to murder, as wrong him this  
 “ way. And you know it is to that confidence and se-  
 “ curity of his, that I owe the happiness that I enjoy.  
 “ However, in all events, be convinced that you are in  
 “ the hands of a man of honor, who will not suffer you  
 “ to be ill used; and should my friend proceed to any  
 “ disagreeable extremities with you, depend upon it, I  
 “ will cut the cuckold’s throat for him.

“Yours most tenderly.”

The fourth and last letter is to a friend, who had, probably, as high notions of honor as himself, by the nature of the affair, in which he requires his assistance:

“DEAR CHARLES,

“**P**RYTHEE come to me immediately, to serve me  
 “ in an affair of honor. You must know, I told a damn-  
 “ ed lye last night in a mixed company, and a formal odd  
 “ dog, in a manner, insinuated that I did so; upon  
 “ which, I whispered him to be in Hyde Park this morn-  
 “ ing, and to bring a friend with him, if he had such a  
 “ thing in the world. The booby was hardly worth my  
 “ resentment; but you know my delicacy, where honor  
 “ is concerned.

“Yours,

“BELVILLE.”

It appears from these authentic pieces, that Mr. Belville, filled with the noblest sentiments of honor, paid all debts but his just ones; kept his word scrupulously in the

the flagitious sale of his conscience to a minister; was ready to protect, at the expence of his friend's life, his friend's wife, whom, by the opportunities that friendship had given him, he had corrupted; and punished truth with death, when it intimated, however justly, the want of it in himself.

This person of refined honor, conscious of his own merit and virtue, is a most unmerciful censor of the lesser vices and failings of others; and lavishly bestows the epithets of scoundrel and rascal upon all those, who, in a subordinate rank of life, seem to aspire to any genteel degree of immorality. An awkward country gentleman, who sells his silent vote cheap, is with him a sad dog. The industrious tradesmen are a pack of cheating rascals, who should be better regulated, and not suffered to impose upon people of condition; and servants are a parcel of idle scoundrels, that ought to be used ill, and not paid their wages, in order to check their insolence.

It is not to be imagined how pernicious the example of such a creature is to society; he is admired, and consequently imitated: he not only immediately corrupts his own circle of acquaintance, but the contagion spreads itself to infinity, as circles in water produce one another, though gradually less marked out, in proportion as they are remoter from the cause of the first.

To such practice and such examples in higher life, may justly be imputed the general corruption and immorality, which prevail through this kingdom. But, when such is the force of fashion, and when the examples of people of the first rank in a country are so prevalent as to dignify vice and immorality, in spite of all laws divine and human, how popular might they make virtue, if they would exert their power in its cause? and how must they, in their cooler moments, reproach themselves, when they come to reflect, that, by their fatal examples, they have beggared, corrupted, and, it may be, enslaved, a whole nation?