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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**

X. Common Sense. Saturday, July 16, 1737. N° 25.

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honor and bishops, who shall act in joint commission in this important affair; since the first are the best judges of wit and modesty, the latter of morality and religion, in this kingdom.

Yours,

A. Z.

X.

COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, July 16, 1737. N<sup>o</sup> 25.

**I**T is the complaint of most men, who have lived any time in the world, that the present age is much degenerated in its morals within the memory of man. I am afraid this complaint is not altogether without foundation. That there has been a gradual decay of public spirit for some years, cannot be denied; and which owes its original, if I am not very much mistaken, to our party divisions.

There is a particular maxim among parties, which alone is sufficient to corrupt a whole nation; which is, to countenance and protect the most infamous fellows, who happen to herd amongst them. There is no man, let his private character be ever so scandalous, that can be of some use to serve a turn, but immediately grows to be a man of consequence with his party.

It is something shocking to common sense, to see the man of honor and the knave, the man of parts and the blockhead, put upon an equal foot; which is often the case amongst parties. In the struggles that happen about elections, when some candidate of a fair character has been set up on one side, how often have you seen the most abandoned knave of the other party put up to oppose him, and both supported with equal zeal! Parties will always find something or other, in the worst of men, to reconcile them to the obnoxious parts of their characters. He that has sense enough to distinguish right from wrong, can make a noise; nay, the less sense, the more obstinacy, especially in a bad cause, and the greater knave, the more obedient to his leaders, especially when they are playing the rogue. These are the best tools, and

such are the qualities necessary for putting in execution the bad measures, which the corrupt leaders of parties intend to carry on, if they are uppermost.

Party zeal changes the name of things; black is white, vice is virtue, a bribe in an office is called a perquisite, and the most studied and concerted fraud, that can enter into the head of the most thorough-paced knave, shall be voted a little negligence. In fine, party merit takes away all blots and stains out of the blackest characters; and he that deserves to be hanged, by all laws human and divine, for his conduct in private life, may, at the same time, be an angel with his party.

Mendax, while he held an office in the state, is detected in a little mean fraud, for Mendax was of a complexion so delicate, and had something in his conscience so scrupulously nice, that he fancied he wronged his family, if he did not play the rogue whenever any thing was to be got by it; but, however, Mendax, in a public capacity, has been always true to the troop. The chiefs of the party having met, to consider how to behave with respect to Mendax in this critical juncture, all the men of honor amongst them were for giving him up, and even joined in any punishment that might be laid upon him, in order to convince the world, that they would not protect the man that had wronged his country; but a veteran, who was grown old in all the iniquitous practices of party, and who had acquired authority by his experience, was quite of another opinion. "Mendax," says he, "has always been an active member of the cause: and what have we to do with his morals, or his honor?" adding, "The man that is true to the troop must always be screened, let him be guilty of what he will."

Thus, by the detestable politics of party, Mendax was countenanced and caressed under the infamy of a most scandalous fraud; and lived to do his country more mischief, by the corruption which he afterwards spread through it, than a famine, a plague, or a war could have done.

If we look back into the history of a few years past, we shall find that the immense estates that have been made, by the numerous fraudulent projects with which this virtuous age has abounded, have been by persons who pretended to be zealous party men, and have gone great lengths in party: nay, some have been so cunning as to shift

shift

shift sides, and go over to the strongest, just before they have resolved to strike some bold stroke, wisely securing a good retreat before they enter upon action; so that I have often thought, that a strong party is the same thing to a cheat, that a strong island in the West-Indies is to a pirate, a place of safety to lay up all he has stolen.

As I have intitled my paper, Common Sense, the public may depend upon it, that I shall not write the sense of a party, because common sense must be free from all prejudice, and party sense is observed to be rarely so. I will farther add, that I take common sense and common honesty to be so near akin, that, whenever I see a man turn knave, I shall not stick to pronounce him a fool. I have the experience of the times in which I have lived, to justify me in this opinion. I never knew a man, that set out with good principles, and afterwards became a prostitute to men in power, but some creature of a little, narrow, mean understanding. A piece of ribbon, or a word added to a name, shall reconcile a fool to the most destructive measures, that the most corrupt minister or ministers can enter upon; but common sense has some modesty; it has a sense of shame, and cannot act in direct opposition to truth and honor.

But I am farther of opinion, that, if a writer should at this time expect to make his way in the world, and to become popular, by running violently into all the prejudices of a party, he would meet with a reception from the public, very different from what he expected. Party prejudice is not the same thing it was. The malignity of the distemper is worn out; and it must be a singular pleasure to a man who loves his country, to find that those two odious distinctions of Whig and Tory, with which we formerly reproached one another, are used no more. All men unplaced, and unpenioned, talk and think alike; and we see gentlemen, who were bred up in opposite principles, and, though in other respects men of honor, had imbibed all the prejudices of their respective parties, now meet and shake hands, and, upon comparing notes, wonder that they had ever differed: and what makes it more extraordinary, is that all this should happen without being reproached, either by their country, or their particular friends, of changing their principles; which shews there is something in an honest and an upright

right conduct, that will carry it through the world, and support it against all the suggestions that calumny can invent.

I will not say, that it is prosperity that has wrought this great change. I am afraid this union of minds is not owing to a universal content of the nation: the causes of it are too well known to need any explanation; but, be it as it will, it is certain that the cure of any grievances that may fall upon us can come from nothing else but this union. This is not only my opinion; it is certainly the opinion of those whose safety, next to the corruption of the times, depends upon our divisions.

When a nation is divided against itself, how great must be the providence that must save it from sinking! When the people are broken into parties and factions, worrying and reviling one another, what a fine harvest it yields to the common enemy! If I should be asked, who is that common enemy? I shall only answer, that there are banditti in time of peace as well as in time of war; there are free-booters, who are not regularly lifted on either side, and who, while both sides are engaged against each other, will certainly plunder the nation.

I will only say, beware of those, who are labouring to keep alive the animosities of party: it is true, they have laboured in vain, and Providence has so confounded their devices, that they have united us by the very methods they took to keep us asunder; but they have not yet given up the game for lost. They are continually throwing out bones of contention; they are raking up the dying embers of party, in hopes of kindling a new flame.

There is a set of men, who are governed by no principles, and have no friends or followers, but such as are attached to them for mercenary ends. These assume to themselves the name of a party, though they do not carry so much as the appearance of it: it is they, who are for fomenting divisions, in hopes that, when the madness of party shall again seize the people, both sides will by turns fall in with them, in order to be revenged and undo each other, which will save a great deal in bribes; a method of doing business, which must have an end, when there is no money left in the nation. But it happens, that they have been so awkward in concealing their foul play, that all the world has seen through it; and it  
looks

looks as if Providence had infatuated their cunning, with a kind intention of putting us upon our guard, and of rousing that antient spirit of our people, which has preserved this nation, when any encroachments have been made upon its liberties.

But though there may be no dangerous designs at present, and the whole body of the people may entertain the same opinion of the good intentions and of the great abilities of our present set of ministers as they really merit, yet it is not amiss to have our eyes about us. Political jealousy is inseparable from the minds of good patriots; it is their duty to be watchful for the public, and suspicious of the designs of men in power. A certain degree of this jealousy is absolutely necessary to be kept up at all times, for the preservation of liberty. This jealousy, I say, is our great security; and it cannot decay till public spirit decays.

The individuals of that great body called *the people* are so taken up with their several avocations, that they are not always at leisure to examine well the designs of men in power, and to see through those disguises, which they endeavour to throw over bad measures; therefore it is the duty of every private man to give the alarm whenever he perceives any thing doing, which must have a tendency to alter and impair that plan of government, under which we and our ancestors have lived free.—And this we propose shall be partly the business of this paper.

The adversaries, that in all probability will oppose us in this design, are not much to be feared. That paper, which is looked upon as the work of the greatest wits, and most profound politicians of the faction, for they are not to be called a party, might be excelled by the lowest productions in Grub-street; yet here you see all the good sense that is amongst them, and it would be reason enough for making the people uneasy, if they should have a notion that the public affairs were to be managed by such hands as publish the most idle, the most inconsistent, and most slavish schemes of politics, that the world ever saw.

I cannot help thinking, that they have taken up a notion, that the only qualification of a political writer is a hardy and intrepid manner of asserting what is not, and of denying what is. As to their profligate manner of endeavouring to turn public spirit into ridicule, they have  
done

done it with so little wit, that they have not been able to gain the very laughers on their side. Thanks be to their dulness, it rises against their opposition: he that laughs with them, must laugh without a jest, and therefore, as often as I saw my predecessors employ their wit against those who never used that weapon against them, I own I did not look upon it as very generous in them; methinks, if I were master of that weapon called wit, I should be as much ashamed of drawing it against an Osborne, or a Walsingham, as I should of drawing a sword against a naked man.

Upon the whole, though I have promised never to be dull with design, yet I would not have the public expect much from me at such times as I shall be drawn into a dispute with that paper, which has a mob of Swiss writers to support it; it is a Briareus with an hundred hands, but not one head: and as there is neither conduct, nor order, nor discipline, nor honor amongst them, they will be as easily defeated as any other rabble.

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 XI.

## COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, August 20, 1737. N<sup>o</sup> 30.

**T**HOUGH the separation of the parliament generally suspends the vigor of political altercations, I doubt it creates domestic ones, not less sharp and acrimonious; and, possibly, the individuals of both houses may find as warm debates at home, as any they have met with during the course of the session.

Their motion for adjourning into the country, is I believe, seldom seconded by their wives and daughters; and if at last they carry it, it is more by the exertion of their authority, than by the cogency of their reasoning.

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