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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**

XI. Common Sense. Saturday, August 20, 1737. N° 30.

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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.

 XI.

COMMON SENSE.

 SATURDAY, August 20, 1737. N^o 30.

THOUGH 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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This act of power so strenuously withstood at first, and so unwillingly submitted to at last, lays but an indifferent foundation of domestic harmony during their retirement ; and I am surprized that the throne, which never fails, at the end of the session, to recommend to both houses certain wholesome and general rules for their behaviour and conduct, when scattered in their respective counties, should hitherto have taken no notice of their ladies, nor have made them the least excuse for the disagreeable consequences, which result to them from the recess. Nay even in the female reigns of queen Elizabeth and queen Anne, I cannot discover that any advice, or application of this nature, has ever been directed to the fair sex ; as if their uneasiness and dissatisfaction were matters of no concern to the peace and good order of the kingdom in general.

For my own part, I see this affair in a very different light, and I think I shall do both my country and the ministry good service, if by any advice and consolation I can offer to my fair countrywomen, in this their dreadful time of trouble and trial, I can alleviate their misfortunes, and mitigate the horrors of their retirement ; since it is obvious, that the people in the country, who see things but at a distance, will never believe that matters go right, when they observe a general discontent in every one but the master of the family, whose particular tranquillity they may, possibly, ascribe to particular reasons, and not to the happy state of the public. Besides that, my real concern and regard for the fair sex, excites my compassion for them ; and I sympathize with them in that scene of grief and despair, which the prospect of their six months exile presents to them.

I own I have been so sensibly touched, as I have gone along the streets, to see, at the one pair of stairs windows, so many fine eyes bathed in tears, and dismally fixed upon the fatal waggons loading at their doors, that I resolved, my endeavours should not be wanting to administer to them whatever amusement or comfort I could think of, under their present calamity.

The antient philosophers have left us most excellent rules for our conduct, under the various afflictions to which we are liable. They bid us not be grieved at misfortunes, nor pleased with prosperity ; and undeniably
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prove, that those imaginary ills of old age, sickness, the loss of friends, fortune, &c. would really not be ills, if we were but wise enough not to be affected by them. But I have nowhere found, in their writings, any consolation offered to the fair sex, to support and strengthen them under the rigors of a country life. Whether this barbarous custom of confining the ladies half the year in the country was not practised among the ancients, whether the case was not looked upon as above comfort or below attention, or whether the Goths and Vandals may not have deprived the learned world of those valuable treatises, I cannot tell: but this is certain, that I know no case of greater compassion, and few of greater consequence, than that of a fine woman, hurried, not only by her husband, but *with* her husband, from all the joys of London to all the horrors of the mansion-seat in the country; where, not to mention many other circumstances of this tyranny, in one particular, I fear it too often resembles the Mezentian cruelty of tying a living body to a dead one.

I first address myself to those ladies, whose distinguished beauty, delicacy, and accomplishments, justly place them at the head of the pleasures and fashion of the town. Their will is the law, and their example the model, of the polite world: possessed, one half of the year, of more than imperial sway, the other half, they groan under the usurped power of their husbands. Nay, even the superior beauty of many ladies, like the superior merit of many illustrious Athenians, has often both caused and prolonged their exile. Can kings deposed and imprisoned experience a more cruel reverse of fortune than this? Their case is certainly above comfort; and I own I am at a loss what to recommend to them. *Succedanea* there are none; I shall only endeavour to suggest lenitives.

I am not absurd enough, even to hint the usual rural recreations, of fetching a walk, a horse-race, an assize ball, or a sillabub under the red cow, which must all of them be exceedingly shocking to their delicacy. Besides, I know, that, at their first arrival in the country, they entirely give up all hopes, not only of pleasure, but of comfort, and, from a just contempt of whatever they are to see or hear, plunge themselves at once into an august melancholy,

melancholy, and a fullen despair, like captive princesses in a tragedy.

I wish I could procure them a six months sleep or annihilation; but, as that is not in my power, the best advice I can give them, is to carry down a provision of the tenderest books, which will at once improve their style, nourish all the delicacy of their sentiments, and keep imagination awake.

The most voluminous romances are the most serviceable, and wear the best in the country, since four or five of them will very near hold out the season. Besides that, the pleasing descriptions of the flowery vales, where the tender heroines so often bewailed the absence of their much-loved heroes, may, by the help of a little imagination and an elegant sympathy, render the solitary prospect of the neighbouring fields a little more supportable.

This serious study may sometimes be diversified by short and practical novels, of which the French language furnishes great abundance. Here the catastrophe comes sooner, and nature has its share, as well as sentiments; so that a lady may exactly fit the humour she happens to be in.

If a gentle languor only inspires tender sentiments, she may find, in the clearest light, whatever can be said upon *le cœur & l'esprit*, (the heart and the mind), to indulge those thoughts; or, if intruding nature breaks in with warmer images, she will likewise find in those excellent manuals, suitable and corresponding passages. The pleasing tumult of the senses, the soft annihilation, and the expiring sighs of the dissolving happy pair, may, agreeably recal the memory of certain transactions in the foregoing winter, or anticipate the expected joys of the ensuing one.

Some time too may be employed in epistolatory correspondence with distressed, sympathizing, friends in the same situation, pathetically describing all the disagreeable circumstances of the country; with this just exception only, "that one could bear with it well enough for two or three months in the summer, with the company one liked, and without the company one disliked."

As for the more secret and tender letters, which are to go under two or three directions, and as many covers, the uppermost to be directed by trusty Betty, and by her
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given into the postman's own hand, they of course furnish out the most pleasing moments of the confinement; and I dare say, I need neither recommend them, nor the attentive and frequent perusal of the answers returned to them.

But, as these occupations will necessarily meet with some interruption, and as there will be intervals in the day, when thoughts will claim their share, as at dinner with my lord or his neighbours, or on Sundays at church, I advise that they should be turned as much as possible from the many disagreeable, to the few agreeable prospects, which the country affords.

Let them reflect, that these absences, however painful for the time, revive and animate passions, which, without some little cessation, might decay and grow languid. Let them consider, how propitious the chapter of accidents is to them in the country, and what charming events they may reasonably flatter themselves with, from the effusion of strong beer and port, and the friendly interposition of hedges, ditches, and five-barred gates: not to mention another possible contingency, of their husbands meeting with Actæon's fate from their own hounds, which, whether probable or not, they know best.

With these prospects, and these dissipations, I should hope they may pass, or rather kill, the tedious time of their banishment, without very great anxiety; but, if that cannot be, there is but one expedient more which occurs to me, and which I have often known practised with success, that is, the colic, and pains of the stomach, to such a degree, as absolutely to require the assistance of the Bath. The colic, in the stomach I mean, is a clean genteel distemper, and by no means below women of the first condition, and they should always keep it by them, to be used as occasion requires; for as its diagnostics are neither visible nor certain, it is pleadable against husband, neighbours, and relations without any possibility of being traversed.

As for those ladies, who move but in a second sphere in town, their case is far from being so compassionate, their fall from London to the country being by no means so considerable; nay, in some particulars, I am not sure if they are not gainers by it. For they are indisputably
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in the country, what they never are in town, the first. They give currency to fashions and expressions; they are stared at, admired, and consulted; and the female district forms itself upon their model. They are likewise of a more accommodating temper, and can let themselves down to country recreations; they do not disdain the neighbouring assembly, nor the captain of dragoons who commands at it. They can swallow a glass of red wine and a macaroon, in the evening, when hospitably tendered them by the squire's lady, or the parson's wife; and, upon a pinch, can make up a country dance at night, with the help of the butler, the house-keeper, and a couple of chairs.

It is true, these are but condescensions too, which they would be horribly ashamed of, should they be detected in the fact by any of their London acquaintance; but still, with these helps, the summer goes off tolerably well, till bad roads, bad weather, and long evenings, change the scene. Then comes the dire domestic struggle: the lady exposes with satire and contempt the rustic pleasures, that detain them in the country; the husband retorts the pleasures of a different nature, which, he conceives, invite her ladyship up to town: warmth ensues, the lady grows eloquent, the husband coarse, and from that time, till the day is fixed for going to London, peace is banished the family.

The Bath would be of sovereign efficacy in this case too, and like the waters of Lethé, would wash away the remembrance of these disagreeable incidents; but, if that cannot be compassed, the last resort I can recommend to these ladies is, by the alternate and proper use of clamor and sullenness, invectives and tears, to reduce their husbands to seek for quiet in town.

How useful these my endeavours for the service of my fair countrywomen may prove, I cannot pretend to say; but I hope, at least, they will be acceptable to them, and that, in return for my good intentions, they will admit my paper, with their tea tables, to dissipate some of the tedious moments of their retirement.