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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**

XIII. Common Sense. Saturday, Sept. 10, 1737. N° 33.

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## XIII.

## COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, Sept. 10, 1737. N<sup>o</sup> 33.

**H**AVING, in my former paper, censured, with freedom, the affectations and follies of my own sex, I flatter myself, that I shall meet with the indulgence of the ladies, while I consider, with the same impartiality, those weaknesses and vanities, to which their sex is as liable as ours, and, if I dare say so, rather more, as their sphere of action is more bounded and circumscribed. Man's province is universal, and comprehends every thing, from the culture of the earth, to the government of it; men only become coxcombs, by assuming particular characters, for which they are particularly unfit, though others may shine in those very characters. But the case of the fair sex is quite different; for there are many characters, which are not of the feminine gender, and consequently, there may be two kinds of women coxcombs; those who affect what does not fall within their department, and those who go out of their own natural characters, though they keep within the female province.

I should be very sorry to offend, where I only mean to advise and reform; I therefore hope the fair sex will pardon me, when I give ours this preference. Let them reflect, that each sex has its distinguishing characteristic: and if they can with justice, as certainly they may, brand a man with the name of a cott-quean, if he invades a certain female detail, which is unquestionably their prerogative, may not we, with equal justice, retort upon them, when, laying aside their natural characters, they assume those which are appropriated to us? The delicacy of their texture, and the strength of ours, the beauty of their form, and the coarseness of ours, sufficiently indicate the respective vocations. Was Hercules ridiculous and contemptible with his distaff? Omphale would not have been less so at a review or a council-board. Women are not formed for great cares themselves, but to sooth

and soften ours: their tenderness is the proper reward for the toils we undergo for their preservation, and the ease and chearfulness of their conversation, our desirable retreat from the labors of study and business. They are confined within the narrow limits of domestic offices; and when they stray beyond them, they move excentrically, and consequently without grace.

Agrippina, born with an understanding and dispositions, which could, at best, have qualified her for the sordid help-mate of a pawn-broker or usurer, pretends to all the accomplishments that ever adorned man or woman, without the possession, or even the true knowledge, of any one of them. She would appear learned, and has just enough of all things, without comprehending any one, to make her talk absurdly upon every thing. She looks upon the art of pleasing as her master-piece, but mistakes the means so much, that her flattery is too gross for self-love to swallow, and her lies too palpable to deceive for a moment; so that she shocks those she would gain. Mean tricks, shallow cunning, and breach of faith, constitute her mistaken system of politics. She endeavours to appear generous at the expence of trifles, while an indiscreet and unguarded rapaciousness discovers her natural and insatiable avidity. Thus mistaking the perfections she would seem to possess, and the means of acquiring even them, she becomes the most ridiculous, instead of the most complete, of her sex.

Eudofia, the most frivolous woman in the world, condemns her own sex for being too trifling. She despises the agreeable levity and chearfulness of a mixed company; she will be serious, that she will, and emphatically intimates, that she thinks reason and good sense very valuable things. She never mixes in the general conversation, but singles out some one man, whom she thinks worthy of her good sense, and in a half voice, or *sotto voce*, discusses her solid trifles in his ear, dwells particularly upon the most trifling circumstances of the main trifle, which she enforces with the proper inclinations of head and body, and with the most expressive gesticulations of the fan, modestly confessing every now and then, by way of parenthesis, that possibly it may be thought presumption in a

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woman to talk at all upon those matters. In the mean time, her unhappy hearer stifles a thousand gapes, assents universally to whatever she says, in hopes of shortening the conversation, and carefully watches the first favourable opportunity, which any motion in the company gives him, of making his escape from this excellent solid understanding. Thus deserted, but not discouraged, she takes the whole company in their turns, and has, for every one, a whisper of equal importance. If Eudofia would content herself with her natural talents, play at cards, make tea and visits, talk to her dog often, and to her company but sometimes, she would not be ridiculous, but bear a very tolerable part in the polite world.

Sydaria had beauty enough to have excused, while young, her want of common sense. But she scorned the fortuitous and precarious triumphs of beauty. She would only conquer by the charms of her mind. A union of hearts, a delicacy of sentiments, a mental adoration, or a sort of tender quietism, were what she long sought for, and never found. Thus nature struggled with sentiment till she was five and forty, but then got the better of it to such a degree, that she made very advantageous proposals to an Irish ensign of one and twenty: equally ridiculous in her age and in her youth.

Canidia, withered by age, and shattered by infirmities, totters under the load of her misplaced ornaments, and her dress varies according to the freshest advices from Paris, instead of conforming itself, as it ought, to the directions of her undertaker. Her mind, as weak as her body, is absurdly adorned: she talks politics and metaphysics, mangles the terms of each, and, if there be sense in either, most infallibly puzzles it; adding intricacy to politics, and darkness to mysteries, equally ridiculous in this world and the next.

I shall not now enter into an examination of the lesser affectations; (most of them are pardonable, and many of them are pretty, if their owners are so); but confine my present animadversions to the affectations of ill-suited characters, for I would by no means deprive my fair countrywomen of their genteel little terrors, antipathies, and affections. The alternate panicks of thieves, spiders, ghosts, and thunder, are allowable to youth and beauty, provided they do not survive them. But, what I mean

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is, to prevail with them to act their own natural parts, and not other peoples; and to convince them, that even their own imperfections will become them better than the borrowed perfections of others.

Should some lady of spirit, unjustly offended at these restrictions, ask what province I leave to their sex? I answer, that I leave them whatever has not been peculiarly assigned by nature to ours. I leave them a mighty empire, Love. There they reign absolute, and by unquestioned right, while beauty supports their throne. They have all the talents requisite for that soft empire, and the ablest of our sex cannot contend with them in the profound knowledge and conduct of those *arcana*. But then, those who are deposed by years or accidents, or those, who by nature were never qualified to reign, should content themselves with the private care and œconomy of their families, and the diligent discharge of domestic duties.

I take the fabulous birth of Minerva, the goddess of arms, wisdom, arts, and sciences, to have been an allegory of the antients, calculated to shew, that women of natural and usual births must not aim at those accomplishments. She sprang armed out of Jupiter's head, without the co-operation of his consort Juno; and, as such only, had those great provinces assigned her.

I confess, one has read of ladies, such as Semiramis, Thalestris, and others, who have made very considerable figures in the most heroic and manly parts of life; but, considering the great antiquity of those histories, and how much they are mixed up with fables, one is at liberty to question either the facts, or the sex. Besides that, the most ingenious and erudite Conrad Wolfgang Laboriosus Nugatorius, of Hall in Saxony, has proved to a demonstration, in the 14th volume, page 2981, of his learned treatise *De Hermaphroditis*, that all the reputed female heroes of antiquity were of this Epicene species, though, out of regard to the fair and modest part of my readers, I dare not quote the several facts and reasonings with which he supports this assertion; and as for the heroines of modern date, we have more than suspicions of their being at least of the epicene gender. The greatest monarch that ever filled the British throne, till very lately, was queen Elizabeth, of whose sex we have abundant rea-  
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son to doubt, history furnishing us with many instances of the manhood of that princess, without leaving us one single symptom or indication of the woman; and thus much is certain, that she thought it improper for her to marry a man. The great Christina, queen of Sweden, was allowed by every body to be above her sex, and the masculine was so predominant in her composition, that she even conformed, at last, to its dress, and ended her days in Italy. I therefore require that those women, who insist upon going beyond the bounds allotted to their sex, should previously declare themselves in form hermaphrodites, and be registered as such in their several parishes; till when, I shall not suffer them to confound politics, perplex metaphysics, and darken mysteries.

How amiable may a woman be, what a comfort and delight to her acquaintance, her friends, her relations, her lover, or her husband, in keeping strictly within her character! She adorns all female virtues with native female softness. Women, while untainted by affectation, have a natural cheerfulness of mind, tenderness and benignity of heart, which justly endears them to us, either to animate our joys, or sooth our sorrows; but how are they changed, and how shocking do they become, when the rage of ambition, or the pride of learning, agitates and swells those breasts, where only love, friendship and tender care, should dwell!

Let Flavia be their model, who, though she could support any character, assumes none, never misled by fancy or vanity, but guided singly by reason: whatever she says or does, is the manifest result of a happy nature, and a good understanding, though she knows whatever women ought, and, it may be, more than they are required to know. She conceals the superiority she has, with as much care, as others take to display the superiority they have not; she conforms herself to the turn of the company she is in, but in a way of rather avoiding to be distanced, than desiring to take the lead. Are they merry, she is cheerful; are they grave, she is serious; are they absurd, she is silent. Though she thinks and speaks as a man would do, she effeminates, if I may use the expression, whatever she says, and gives all the graces of her own sex to the strength of ours; she is well-bred without the troublesome ceremonies and frivolous forms of those who only affect

affect to be so. As her good breeding proceeds jointly from good nature and good sense, the former inclines her to oblige, and the latter shews her the easiest and best way of doing it. Woman's beauty, like men's wit, is generally fatal to the owners, unless directed by a judgment, which seldom accompanies a great degree of either: her beauty seems but the proper and decent lodging for such a mind; she knows the true value of it, and far from thinking that it authorizes impertinence and coquetry, it redoubles her care to avoid those errors, that are its usual attendants. Thus she not only unites in herself all the advantages of body and mind, but even reconciles contradictions in others; for she is loved and esteemed, though envied, by all.

## XIV.

## COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, October 8, 1737. N<sup>o</sup> 37.

**S**OMEbody told the late regent of France\*, that a very silly parish priest had abused him most grossly in the pulpit, to which the regent, who was much above resenting the insults of fools, answered very coolly, "Why does the blockhead meddle with me? I am not of his parish."

In this manner I reply to all the anger and indignation, which the grave Mr. Osborne, and the facetious Sir A. B. C. have been pleased to express against me. Cannot they let me alone? I am sure they have nothing to do with common sense. Nay, I even return them good for evil, and do for them, what I believe nobody in the kingdom does but myself, for I take in their papers at my own expence. It is true I find my account in it, for the Gazetteer makes me laugh, and the London Journal makes me sleep. I take the former in the morning, and the latter at night. Sir A. B. C. and his associates have such an absurd pertness, and so inimitable an alacrity in sinking, that it is impossible not to laugh at first, though, I confess they are below it, and that it is a little ill-natured into

\* The duke of Orleans, who was regent during the minority of Lewis XV.