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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**

XIV. Common Sense. Saturday, October 8, 1737. N° 37.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-52092](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-52092)

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^o 37.

SOMEbody 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.

into the bargain. But one can no more help it, than one can help laughing at an awkward fellow, who, going to sit down, misses his chair, and falls ridiculously upon his breech; though, to be sure, there is no joke in it, and very probably the poor man has hurt himself too. Mr. Osborne has quite a different effect upon me; his solid uniform dulness is the surest soporific I have met with, and every Saturday night, as soon as I am in bed, my man constantly asks me, "Does your honor take your London Journal to-night?" I never refuse his offer, and, to do him justice, he reads with a slow monotony, so excellently adapted to the performance, that one would think he was the author of it himself.

Thus, after taking these two authors regularly, night and morning, they are carefully laid by in a little closet, where I ultimately take them, as they happen to lie next my hand.

I have lately heard, with concern, that I shall soon be deprived of these benefits, and that my two favourite authors will withdraw their weekly and daily labors from the public, in order to exhibit themselves in other shapes. Mr. Osborne, I am told, has engaged himself to supply the stage with tragedies, and sir A. B. C. with comedies; that it may not be said, that the late act of parliament has prevented the production of excellent dramatic performances, as some of the malecontents pretended it would. Though this will disturb the present regular course of my present laughter, which I must afterwards take by the lump, and in twelve-penny doses, yet I must acknowledge them to be the properest authors to answer the true meaning and intendment of the bill; for I will defy the most inveterate and ingenious malice, even that of the Craftsman, to apply any thing out of their writings. With what impatience do I long to see the tragic scenes of our laureat disgraced and eclipsed by Osborne's solid drama! Yes, Osborne shall snatch the poppies from Cibber's brow, and plant them on his own. I cannot help suggesting, as a friend, to this hopeful young tragic poet, that there is in the Rehearsal both a sleeping scene, and a yawning one, incomparably well written, which I would advise him to have before his eyes, while he can keep them open.

I condole

I condole with the ingenious author of "Love in a hollow tree*," who must, indisputably, resign the comic scenes to sir A. B. C.

As I am persuaded these two young writers will have the stage entirely to themselves, I most humbly represent it to the lord chamberlain, as a piece of justice, to have their labors equally divided between the managers of the two only theatres now subsisting. The comedy, I believe, must belong to Mr. Rich; for, I presume, sir A. B. C. after the distinguished zeal he has manifested for the protestant religion, in opposition to the attempts of Mr. Ward, would, by no means, aid and abet a person of Mr. Fleetwood's principles of religion.

Having said thus much to my two friends, to whom I give my word I will never say any thing more, I cannot conclude, without addressing myself a little to the patron and pay-master. He has certainly parts, a pretty turn to waggery, a little coarse indeed, but yet not without salt; and one must allow him to be what Tully allowed Nævius, "*scurra non parum facetus*," (a buffoon not destitute of some humor). I therefore cannot imagine why he will suffer, much less pay, such blockheads to write for him. I know he will say, they are the best he can get. I admit it, I dare say they are: but then why will he have any? He had much better have none. Sylla bought off a dunce who would be writing for him, and Augustus paid a bad poet, in bad verses, as the surest way to prevent any more. If these fellows are to be paid for their zeal, let the honorable person oblige them to throw him their silence into the bargain. Formerly, a right reverend or two used to draw their pens in his defence, but of late we have seen nothing from that quarter neither; whether those reverend persons have too much wit, or too much bishoprick, to go on, I cannot tell: but this piece
of

* This comedy was written by the late lord Grimston when a boy, and printed in 1705. When he grew up, he was justly ashamed of it, and endeavoured to suppress it: and this he would have effected, but that the duchess of Marlborough, to serve an election purpose, caused a new impression to be printed, with an elephant in the title page dancing on a rope. All this edition the author purchased; but her grace, being determined to accomplish her design, sent a copy to be re-printed in Holland, and distributed the whole impression among the electors of St. Albans. See the Works of Dr. William King of the Commons, vol. III. p. 66.

of advice I will give him, whenever he can get another author of that kind to write for him, not to *translate* him too soon.

This certainly never happened in any reign, or under any administration, before; for, excepting a late imitation of Horace, by Mr. Pope who but seldom meddles with public matters, I challenge the ministerial advocates to produce one line of sense, or English, written on the same side of the question for these last seven years. Has there been an essay in verse or prose, has there been even a distich, or an advertisement, fit to be read on the side of the administration? But on the other side, what numbers of dissertations, essays, treatises, compositions of all kinds in verse and prose, have been written, with all that strength of reasoning, quickness of wit, and elegance of expression, which no former period of time can equal? Has not every body got by heart satires, lampoons, ballads and sarcasms against the administration? and can any body recollect, or repeat, one line for it? What can be the cause of this? It cannot be, that those who are able to serve the honorable person despair of being rewarded by him, since the known instances of his liberality to the worst of writers are sure pledges of his profusion to the best. Is it then the rigid virtue, the inflexible honor of the brightest geniuses of this age, that hinders them from engaging in that cause, for which they would be so amply recompensed? If so, I congratulate the present times, for that was not usually the characteristic of wit, and they were formerly accused of flattery, at least, if not of prostitution, to ministerial favour and rewards.

In all former reigns, the wits were of the side of the ministers; the Osbornes and the A. B. C's against them. And how would the Godolphins, the Somers's, the Halifax's, and the Dorsets, have blushed, to have been the Mæcenas of such wretched scribblers? But they were not reduced to such an ignominious necessity. They found the best writers as proud to engage in their cause, as able to support it. Even the infamous and pernicious measures of King Charles the second's reign, as they are now called, were palliated, varnished, or justified by the ablest pens. By what uncommon fatality then is this administration destitute of all literary support?

One

One would be apt to suppose, if one did not know the contrary, that there was something in the measures so low, so corrupt, and so disgraceful, that common decency would not suffer wit, or good sense, to appear on that side, but made them, in this case, withstand those temptations, to which heretofore they have too often yielded. Nay, the misfortune extends still farther: for I am told, that among those very few, who engaged in the measures, and are able to countenance them in two certain places, the best withhold their eloquence, and only swell the numbers, by a silent and sullen concurrence. So that, as Pliny observed in his time, *Vota nunc numerantur, non ponderantur* (votes now are counted, not weighed).

As this case is really compassionate in itself, and particularly hard upon us anti-ministerial writers, as we are called, who cannot possibly answer what we do not understand, I will offer what expedients occur to me, for our mutual relief.

I should think Mr. Wreathcock and Mr. Justice, who are both happily returned from transportation, might be of singular use in this distress. The experienced knowledge of the former in the useful parts of the law, and the known skill of the latter in books of all sorts, must qualify them excellently well for political writers; and if they clubbed their talents, they would amply repair the loss of the deceased Francis Walsingham, esq; or, at least, they would infinitely exceed any now extant. But, if this cannot be brought about, and the avocations of these two gentlemen will not allow them the leisure to turn authors, the last shift I can think of, and which seems to me the most likely to be put in practice, is for the administration to employ the authors of acts of parliament, who answered certain humorous theatrical pieces very effectually last year, with a * "Be it enacted," and who, with a "Be it further enacted," will probably reply next year, with the same spirit and vigor, to all other performances of what kind soever.

XV. COM-

* In allusion to a thought of Mr. Gay, who addressed a poem to his ingenious and worthy friend Mr. Lowndes, "author of that celebrated treatise in folio, called *the Land Tax Bill*."