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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**

XV. Common Sense. Saturday, January 15, 1738. N° 51.

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## XV.

## COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, January 15, 1738. N<sup>o</sup> 51.

**M**Y ingenious predecessor the Spectator, whom I wish to imitate, but without pretending to equal, bid his fair countrywomen, "beware the Ides of May," looking upon that season to be as fatal to their virtue, as the Ides of March had formerly proved to Cæsar's life. I am sure I heartily concur with him, in his regard and concern for that beautiful part of our species: but I cannot help differing with him greatly, as to the time and causes of their danger, and thinking that he has left the most critical part of the year unguarded and defenceless. Beware, therefore, ye fair, say I, the Ides of January; and muster up all the collected force of habit, education, and virtue to withstand the operations of the winter campaign, or you may happen to fall, with less decency than Cæsar.

The Spectator founds his apprehensions of the month of May upon three suppositions, all which, with submission, I think groundless. The first is, "that the spirits, after having been, as it were, frozen and congealed by the winter, are then turned loose and set a rambling."

Surely the spirits may more justly be said to be turned loose, and set a rambling, in January, after a tedious six months confinement in the country, than they can be in May, after a four months evaporation in London. For my own part, I consider January as the general gaol delivery of the fair sex. It is then that they come to town, flushed with the health, and irritated with the confinement, of the country. It is then that, with an appetite whetted for pleasure by long abstinence, they taste more exquisitely their regained liberty, and feel all the benefits of their *babeas corpus*. And if ever constitution or resentment can be supposed to have any share in a fine woman's

man's transactions, it is then that their effects are most to be dreaded.

The Spectator's next supposition is, "that the gay prospect of the fields and the meadows, with the courtship of the birds on every tree, naturally unbend the mind, and soften it to pleasure." What effect this rural scene may have upon a milkmaid, I cannot say, but I can never imagine that women of fashion and delicacy can be affected by such objects. The fields and the meadows are their aversion, and the periodical anniversary loves of the birds their contempt. It is the gay London scene, where successive pleasures raise the spirits and warm the imagination, which prepares the fairest breasts to receive the tenderest impressions.

The last conjecture is, "that a woman is prompted by a kind of instinct to throw herself upon a bed of flowers, and not to let those beautiful couches, which nature has provided, lie useles." This again evidently relates to the ruddy milkmaid; for, not to mention the danger of catching cold upon one of these beds, to any body above a milkmaid, surely the privacy, conveniency, and security, of a good damask bed, or couch, are much stronger temptations to a woman of fashion, to recline a little, than all the daizies and cowslips in a meadow.

Having thus briefly answered the arguments of my predecessor, or at least shewn, that his care and concern were only calculated for the inferior part of the sex, I shall, now, humbly lay before those of superior rank, the many "difficulties and dangers," to which the winter exposes them.

I believe I may take it for granted, that every fine woman, who comes to town in January, comes heartily tired both of the country and of her husband. The happy pair have yawned at one another at least ever since Michaelmas, and the two indivisible halves, of man and wife, have been exceedingly burthensome to each other. The lady, who has had full leisure most minutely to consider her other moiety, has either positively or comparatively found out, that he is by no means a pretty man, and meditates indemnification to herself, either by her return to the pretty man, or by enlisting one for the current service of the year. In these dispositions she opens the  
winter,

winter, but at the same time, with firm and stedfast purpose, of not transgressing the bounds, or even violating the appearances, of virtue. But alas! how frail are all our best resolves! The lover appears first in the innocent form, of value and esteem, his conversation is listened to with attention, and approved of: it grows frequent and particular; how can one help that? Where is the harm of being distinguished by the friendship of a man of sense and fashion? can it be wondered at, that one converses more with him, than with a thousand fools, that would be always plaguing one? Besides, he says nothing one has reason to take ill, or that would justify one in not being civil to him.

With these early and just distinctions in his favour, the pretty man proceeds, and gains the more ground, as his approaches are the less perceived or apprehended. He is admitted to the toilette, as an agreeable friend and companion, where he improves the morning moments, which I take to be the *mollia tempora*, so propitious to *tête à tête*: here the conversation insensibly grows more serious, particular applications are made of general topics, sentiments of love and constancy are discussed; the pretty man confesses and laments his unfortunate disposition to both, and wishes to heaven that he knew neither; the lady, not without some emotion, and an awkward smartness, tells him that she believes they will neither of them ever do him any great hurt. This unjust reproach extorts from him, what otherwise he could never have had the courage to have said, *viz.* that, "that depends entirely upon her." Here it is out, the ice is broke. What is to be done? The lady now plainly perceives his meaning, which she never before suspected. She flattered herself that he had a friendship and value for her, but she now finds the contrary. She is sorry she has put it out of her power, to have any longer that esteem for him, which she confesses she once had; but they must never meet any more, if that is to be the language. The lover, for now I may call him so, deprecates her wrath, bids her blame her own beauty, and his fate, but pity him, and pressing her hand, which, it may be, in her anger, she forgets to pull away, faithfully promises, never to hold that language more, if he can help it. Upon this solemn engagement, he is forgiven, re-admitted, and all danger

is looked upon to be over. Short and fallacious security! for, this point once gained, the besieger, if I may borrow some military metaphors, is most advantageously posted, is in a situation to parley with the garrison, and stands fair for the *born-work*. Here he can argue the case fully, shew the negligence, the injustice, or the oppression, of the present governor, offer terms of honor, safety, and better usage, and, by persuasions, either bring about a willing surrender, or at least so far abate the vigor of the resistance, as with a little force to make himself master of the place.

Having thus represented the danger, I will now point out the best preservatives, I can think of, against it; for in this case prevention alone can be used, remedy comes too late.

I therefore recommend to my countrywomen, to be particularly upon their guard, against the very man whose conquest they most wish for, and to be assured that the reasons which determine their choice are so many instances of their danger. Let them begin to reflect, as soon as ever they begin to find a particular pleasure in his conversation, and let them tremble when they first make him a graver curtesy than they do to other people. But if, when he approaches them, they pull up their gloves, adjust their tucker, and count the sticks of their fan, let them despair, for they are further gone than they imagine. And though they may, for a time, deceive themselves with the notion that it is his understanding only that engages their attention, they will find at last that man, like the serpent, when he has once got his head in, the rest will soon follow. Friendship and esteem are the bearded arrows of love, that enter with ease, but, when torn out, leave the wound greater.

A constant dissipation, and hurry of various trifles, is of great use in this case, and does not give leisure to the mind to receive lasting impressions; but beware of select *coteries*, where, without an engagement, a lady passes but for "an odd body."

A course of visiting-days is also an excellent preservative against an attachment. The rigorous sentences of those tremendous tribunals, fulminated by the old and ugly, upon the young and fair, and where, as in the inquisition, the slightest suspicions amount to proofs, must

must necessarily strike great terror, and inspire wholesome resolutions.

I absolutely prohibit balls; the agitation of country-dances putting the blood into an unusual ferment, too favourable to the partner. Besides, they often encourage, and cause, the first squeeze by the hand; which, according as it is taken, is either laid to the violence of the passion, or excused by the impetuosity of the dance. Moreover, there is a certain figure called *setting*, that often occasions a familiar collision, which I have often known ominous, and in its consequences productive of *other figures*.

Masquerades should be used with great care and moderation; for, though I do not look upon them as either convenient or necessary for the ratification of mutual love and alliance, I hold them to be exceedingly commodious for the previous negotiations; and there are certain secret articles in those treaties, which are better asked, heard, and adjusted, between the contracting parties, under a masque than barefaced.

I have no objection to operas; the innocence of the composition admitting of no application, and conveying no idea whatsoever: what little inconveniencies might be apprehended from the softness and tenderness of the music, are amply counterbalanced, *Sopranos* being the objects of the attention, and raptures of the ladies. And I have even known this harmless musical attachment stand many a fine woman in great stead.

But I require them to be very cautious in the choice and use of the other theatrical entertainments, and avoid the representation of those dramatic pieces, both tragic and comic, which seem only calculated to soften the heart, and inflame the imagination. What warm and pleasing descriptions of love are our best tragedies filled with! It is commonly what the whole turns upon, and is represented as the only comfort, pleasure, or joy, of life. It is described, as

“ The cordial drop, heaven in our cup has thrown,  
“ To make the nauseous draught of life go down.”

And can one wonder then, that a lady, who does not find this incomparable drop at home, should seek for it elsewhere?

We are told in another place, that,

“ Life without love is load, and time stands still :  
 “ What we refuse to love to death we give,  
 “ And, then, then only when we love we live.”

This at once explains the whole thing to them, and accounts for their being tired of their country *tête-à-têtes*, with their husbands, and for their saying so often, “ Well! this is not living !” It seems it was all for want of love ; an omission which they resolve, not to be much longer guilty of.

Mr. Dryden expresses himself with still more energy upon this subject in *Aurengzebe*, and paints it in the warmest and most glowing colours ; with him, it is the pleasure,

“ Where nature fums up all her joys in one ;”

and which,

“ So fills the senses, that the soul seems fled,  
 “ And thought itself does for the time lie dead.”

Must not such lively descriptions as these, independently of certain hints of nature, tempt curiosity to make a trial of the truth ? And is it possible not to pity, rather than blame, the experiments, which a lady is thus strongly prompted to make ?

But this is not all : for, lest these tender sentiments and luscious descriptions should only soften the heart, our best comedies come in to their aid, with their practical part, and pin the basket. Here the ways and means are chalked out, the pleasing progress of love delineated, and even the conclusion of it almost exhibited. It is unlucky for the audience, that *Berynthia*, in the *Relapse*, had an inner room, where she and her lover retire. But, however, that the audience may not be much longer in the dark than she had been, she takes care to inform them, that she never was better pleased in all her life.

*Belinda*, in taking her leave of Mr. *Dorimant*, after having passed part of the night with him, seems most penitentially to say, “ Well, were this to do again ;” but, upon Mr. *Dorimant*'s answering, “ We should do it,  
 “ should

“ should not we ?” She tenderly replies, “ I believe we should.” Can one refuse to give credit to the so recent testimonies and experience of two ladies of such agreeable characters ? And the belief of a pleasure, naturally invites to the pursuit of it.

It would be endless to specify the particular plays which I must totally prohibit ; but I believe the best, and shortest general rule, that I can give my countrywomen, is absolutely to abstain from all those, which they like best.

There are certain books too, of a most stimulating and inflammatory nature, a few doses of which may throw the reader into such a fever, that all the cooling and soporific volumes of our modern divines may not be able to abate, and which can only be cured by strong sudorifics. The catalogue of these books would be endless : but my fair readers will pretty well guess at them, when I tell them, that I mean those, which are generally kept under lock and key, and which, when any body comes in, are immediately clapt under the cushion.

I have but one caution more to add ; but that is, it may be, the most material one of all ; to beware of morning visits. Breakfast-time is a critical period ; the spirits are fresh and active, and, if the watchful lover comes in soon after the drowsy husband is gone out, it presents to the lady a contrast too favourable to the former. The interpoling tea-table is but a weak barrier against impatient love. Opportunity invites, resentment provokes, nature at least approves ; and, in such a violent situation,

“ She, who alone her lover can withstand,  
“ Is more than woman, or he less than man.”