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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**

XIX. Common Sense. Saturday, Nov. 11, 1738. N° 93.

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## XIX.

## COMMON SENSE.

SATURDAY, NOV. II, 1738. N° 93.

EVERY age has its fashionable follies, as well as its fashionable vices: but, as follies are more numerous than vices, they change oftner, and every four or five years produce a new one. I will indulge my fellow-subjects in the full enjoyment of such follies, as are inoffensive in themselves, and in their consequences. Men, as well as children, must have their play-things: but when *hæ nugæ seria ducunt in mala*, (these trifles lead on to real evils) I shall take the liberty to interpose, represent, and censure.

Fashion, which is always at first the offspring of little minds, and the child of levity, gains strength and support by the great number of its relations, till at length it is received and adopted by better understandings, who either conform to it to avoid singularity, or who are surprized into it, from want of attention to an object, which they look upon as indifferent in itself, and so dignify and establish the folly.

This is the case of a present prevailing extravagancy, I mean the absurd and ridiculous imitation of the French, which is now become the epidemical distemper of this kingdom: not confined to those only, from whom one expects no better, but it has even infected those whom one should have thought much above such weaknesses; and I behold with indignation the sturdy conquerors of France shrunk and dwindled into the imperfect mimics, or ridiculous *caricaturas*, of all its levity. The *travesty* is universal; poor England produces nothing fit to eat, or drink, or wear. Our cloaths, our furniture, nay our food too, all is to come from France, and I am credibly informed that a poulterer at Calais now actually supplies our polite tables with half their provisions.

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I do not mean to undervalue the French; I know their merit, they are a chearful, industrious, ingenious, polite people, and have many things in which I wish we did imitate them. But, like true mimics, we only ape their imperfections, and aukwardly copy those parts, which all reasonable Frenchmen themselves contemn in the originals.

If this folly went no farther than disguising both our meats and ourselves in the French modes, I should bear it with more patience, and content myself with representing only to my country folks, that the one would make them sick, and the other ridiculous: but when even the materials for the folly are to be brought over from France too, it becomes a much more serious consideration. Our trade and manufactures are at stake, and what seems at first only very silly, is in truth a great national evil, and a piece of civil immorality.

There is surely some obedience due to the laws of the land, which strictly prohibit the importation of these fooleries, and, independently of those laws, there is a strong obligation upon every member of a society from which he himself receives so many advantages: these are moral duties, if I know what moral duties are, but I presume they are aukward ones, and not fit to restrain the unbounded fancy of fine gentlemen and fine ladies, in their dress and manner of living; and it is, certainly, much more reasonable, that our trade should decay, and our manufactures starve, than that people of taste and condition should content themselves with the wretched produce of their own country.

Methinks there is something very mean in being such avowed plagiaries, and I wonder the British spirit will submit to it. Why will our countrymen thus distrust themselves? Let them exert their own genius and invention, and I make no doubt but they will be able to produce as many original extravagancies, as all the marshals of France can do. How much more glorious would it be for those ladies who establish the fashion here, to consider at the same time their own dignity, and the public good! Let them not servilely copy or translate French edicts, but let them enact original laws of their own. I look upon the birth-day cloaths of a fine woman to be the statute of dress for that year: and, by the way, the only statute which

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which is complied with. I therefore humbly intreat, that it may be enacted in English. Seriously, if three or four ladies, at the head of the fashion, would but value themselves upon being cloathed entirely with the manufactures of their own country, and from the plenitude of their own power, pronounce all foreign manufactures ungenteeled, awkward, and frippery, the legions, who dress under their banner, would soon be as much ashamed of dressing against their country, as they are now of being thought even natives of it. This would be moreover the real imitation of the French, who like nothing but their own.

What I have said with relation to my fair countrywomen holds equally true, as to my fine countrymen, to whom I cannot help hinting, over and above, that they make very ridiculous Frenchmen, and might be very valuable Englishmen. Every nation has its distinguishing mark and characteristic. If we have a solidity, which the French have not, they most certainly have an elasticity, which we have not; and the imitation is equally awkward. Horace justly calls imitators *servum pecus* (slavish cattle); and, to do him justice, he is himself an original. If my countrymen would be thought conversant with Horace, as the most of them would be, I am sure they will find in him no instance of foppery, luxury, or profusion.

We have heard with satisfaction that some considerable persons in this kingdom, from a just and becoming concern for our distressed tradesmen and manufacturers, discountenance, as far as possible, this pernicious folly. And though I make no doubt but, at the end of this long mourning, by which trade has suffered so immensely, some measures will be taken to this effect elsewhere, this would be the most likely way of eradicating the evil, and as it is by no means unprecedented to annex certain conditions to the honor and privilege of subjects appearing in the presence of their sovereign, surely none can be juster nor more reasonable than, that they should contribute to the good of their country.

But the mischief does not stop here neither; for now we are not content with receiving our fashions and the materials for them from France, but we even export ourselves in order to import them. The matter, it seems, is of too great consequence to trust to hear-say evidence  
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for; but we must go ourselves to view those great originals, be able to say of our own knowledge, how such a glutton eats, and how such a fool dresses, and return loaded with the prohibited tinsel and frippery of the *palais*\*. Half the private families in England take a trip, as they call it, every summer to Paris; and I am assured, that near four hundred thousand pounds have been remitted thither in one year, to supply this extravagancy. Should this rage continue, the act of parliament, proposed in one of Mr. Congreve's comedies, to prohibit the exportation of fools, will in reality become necessary. Travelling is, unquestionably, a very proper part of the education of our youth; and, like our bullion, I would allow them to be exported. But people of a certain age beyond refining, and once stamped here, like our coin, should be confined within the kingdom. The impressions they have received make them current here, but obstruct their currency any where else, and they only return disguised, defaced, and probably much lessened in the weight.

The sober and well-regulated family of a country gentleman is a very valuable part of the community; they keep up good neighbourhood by decent hospitality, they promote good manners by their example, and encourage labor and industry by their consumption. But when once they run French, if I may use the expression, and are to be polished by this trip to Paris, I will venture to assure them, that they may, from that day, date their being ridiculous for ever afterwards. They are laughed at in France, for not being like the French, they are laughed at here, for endeavouring to be like them; and what is worse, their mimicking their luxury brings them into their necessity, which ends in a most compleat imitation indeed, of their mean and servile dependance upon the court.

I could point out to these itinerant spirits a much shorter, less expensive, and more effectual method of travelling and frenchifying themselves, which is, if they would but travel  
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\* The place where the courts of justice and parliament are held at Paris, answering to Westminster-hall. Milliners and toymen are allowed to have shops and stalls; and know how to dispose of their trinkets, to young lawyers, foreigners, and other persons, whom curiosity or idleness draws to this place.

to *old Soho*, and stay two or three months in *le quartier des Grecs*\*; lodgings and *legumes* are very cheap there, and the people very civil to strangers. There too they might possibly get acquainted with some French people, which they never do at Paris, and, it may be, learn a little French, which they never do in France neither: and I appeal to any one, who has seen those venerable personages of both sexes, of the refugees, if they are not infinitely more genteel, easier, and better dressed in the French manner, than any of their modern English mimics.

As for our fair countrywomen in particular they are so valuable, so beautiful a part of our own produce, and in which we so eminently excel all other nations, that I can by no means allow of their exportation: they are surely, if I may say so, much more valuable commodities than wool or fuller's earth, the exportation of which is so strictly prohibited by our laws, lest foreigners should have the manufacturing of them; which reasoning holds stronger, upon many accounts, in this case, than in the two others.

Let it not be urged, that the loss arising from these follies is but a trifling object with relation to our trade in general. This, for aught I know, might have been true some years ago: but such is the present unhappy state of our trade, that I doubt no object is now a trifling one, or below the attention of every individual. After six and twenty years peace, we labor under every one of the taxes which subsisted at the conclusion of the last expensive war, without reckoning some new ones laid on since; while other nations gradually eased of that burthen, under-work and under-sell us in every foreign market. The last valuable part of our trade, how has it been attacked for these many years! and how has it been protected! It would be unreasonable to expect that the administration, ingrossed by much greater cares, should attend to so trifling a consideration as trade; nor can one wonder that it has intirely escaped the attention of parliaments, when one considers, that so many affairs of a much higher nature

\* The place, where most of the descendants of the French refugees then lived. Their chapel, in which divine service was, and still continues to be, performed, according to the rites of the church of England, had formerly belonged to a congregation of Greeks, and has given its name to all the *environs* of Soho square.

ture have, of late, so advantageously employed them. But it therefore becomes more peculiarly the care of every individual; and if, from the reformation only of those follies here mentioned, five or six hundred thousand pounds a year may be saved to the nation, which I am convinced is the case, how incumbent is it upon every one to sacrifice a little private folly to so much public good! It may at least be a reprieve to our trade and manufactures from that ruin which, at best, seems to be too near them; and possibly too the examples of some private people may, at least, shame others, whose more immediate care it ought to be, into some degree of attention to what they have so long seemed to neglect and despise.

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 XX.

## C O M M O N S E N S E.

 SATURDAY, Jan. 27, 1739. N<sup>o</sup> 103.

S I R,

**I** HAVE lately read, with the greatest satisfaction, the account, printed in our public papers, of the signal victory obtained by his majesty's Hanoverian troops over the Danes\*, notwithstanding the great inequality of the numbers, the Danes being at least thirty, and the Hanoverians at most five hundred men; the Danes having moreover the important fortress of Steinhorst to protect, and the counsels of counsellor Wedderkop to direct them.

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\* A more serious account of this transaction, which occasioned a long paper war, and was terminated in 1740 by a treaty with the king of Denmark, is given in the *Farther Vindication of the case of the Hanover Troops*, written by lord Chesterfield and Mr. Waller.