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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**

XXXI. The World. Thursday, Nov. 14, 1754. N° 98.

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your time, and will banish from your breasts that tiresome listlessness, or those tormenting thoughts, from which you endeavour, though in vain, to fly. Is your retrospect uncomfortable? Exert yourselves in time to make your prospect better; and let the former serve as a back-ground to the latter. Cultivate and improve your minds, according to your several educations and capacities. There are several useful books suited to them all. True religion and virtue give a chearful and happy turn to the mind, admit of all true pleasures, and even procure the truest.

Cantabrigius drinks nothing but water, and rides more miles in a year than the keenest sportsman, and with almost equal velocity. The former keeps his head clear, the latter his body in health. It is not from himself that he runs, but to his acquaintance, a synonymous term for his friends. Internally safe, he seeks no sanctuary from himself, no intoxication for his mind. His penetration makes him discover and divert himself with the follies of mankind, which his wit enables him to expose with the truest ridicule, though always without personal offence. Chearful abroad, because happy at home; and thus happy, because virtuous!

 XXXI.

THE WORLD.

 THURSDAY, NOV. 14, 1754. N^o 98.

IT gives me great pleasure that I am able, in this day's paper, to congratulate the polite part of my fellow subjects of both sexes, upon the splendid revival of that most rational entertainment, an Italian opera. Of late years it had seemed to sicken, so that I greatly feared that the unsuccessful efforts, which it made from time to time, were its convulsive and expiring pangs. But it now appears, and indeed much to the honour of this country, that we

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have

have still too many protectors and protectoresses of the liberal arts, to suffer that of music, the most liberal of them all, to sink for want of due encouragement.

I am sensible that Italian operas have frequently been the objects of the ridicule of many of our greatest wits; and, viewed in one light only, perhaps not without some reason. But, as I consider all public diversions singly with regard to the effects, which they may have upon the morals and manners of the public, I confess, I respect the Italian operas as the most innocent of any.

The severe monsieur Boileau justly condemns the French operas, the morals of which he calls,

“ ———— Morale lubrique

“ Que Lully rechauffa des sons de sa musique.*”

But then it must be considered that French operas are always in French, and consequently may be understood by many French people, and that they are fine dramatic tragedies, adorned with all the graces of poetry and harmony of sounds, and may probably inspire too tender, if not voluptuous, sentiments. Can the Italian opera be accused of any thing of this kind? Certainly not. Were, what is called, the poetry of it intelligible in itself, it would not be understood by one in fifty of a British audience: but I believe that even an Italian of common candor will confess, that he does not understand one word of it. It is not the intention of the thing; for, should the ingenious author of the words, by mistake, put any meaning into them, he would, to a certain degree, check and cramp the genius of the composer of the music, who perhaps might think himself obliged to adapt his sounds to the sense: whereas now he is at liberty to scatter indiscriminately, among the kings, queens, heroes, and heroines, his ADAGIOS, his ALLEGROS, his PATHETICS, his CHROMATICS, and his JIGGS. It would also have been a restraint upon the actors and actresses, who might possibly have attempted to form their action upon the meaning of their parts; but as it is, if they do but seem, by turns, to be angry and sorry in the two first acts, and very merry in the last scene of the last, they are sure to meet with the deserved applause.

* Boileau, Sat. x. l. 141, 142.

3. Lessons of licentiousness, which Lully (the founder of the French operas) animated with the sounds of his music.

Signior

Signior Metaftatio attempted fome time ago a very dangerous innovation. He tried gently to throw fome fenfe into his operas; but it did not take: the confequences were obvious, and nobody knew where they would ftop.

The whole ſkill and judgment of the poet now confiſts in ſelecting about a hundred words, for the opera vocabulary does not exceed that number, that terminate in liquids and vowels, and rhyme to each other. Theſe words excite ideas in the hearer, though they were not the reſult of any in the poet. Thus the word *tortorella*, ſtretched out to a quaver of a quarter of an hour, excites in us the ideas of tender and faithful love; but if it is ſucceeded by *navicella*, that ſoothing idea gives way to the boiſterous and horrid one of a ſkiff, that is, a heart, tossed by the winds and waves upon the main ocean of love. The handcuffs and fetters in which the hero commonly appears, at the end of the ſecond, or beginning of the third act, indicate captivity; and when properly jingled to a pathetic piece of recitativo upon *queſti ceppi*, are really very moving, and inſpire a love of liberty. Can any thing be more innocent, or more moral, than this muſical pantomime, in which there is not one indecent word or action, but where, on the contrary, the moſt generous ſentiments are, however imperfectly, pointed out and inculcated?

I was once indeed afraid, that the licentiousneſs of the times had infected even the opera: for in that of Alexander, the hero going into the heroine's apartment, found her taking a nap in an eaſy chair. Tempted by ſo much beauty, and invited by ſo favourable an opportunity, he gently approached, and *ſtole a pair of gloves*. I confeſs, I dreaded the confequences of this bold ſtep; and the more ſo, as it was taken by the celebrated ſignior Senefino. But all went off very well; for the hero contented himſelf with giving the good company a ſong, in which he declared the lips he had juſt kiſſed were a couple of rubies.

Another good effect of the Italian operas is, that they contribute extremely to the keeping of good hours; the whole audience, though paſſionately fond of muſic, being ſo tired before they are half, and ſo ſleepy, before they are quite, done, that they make the beſt of their way home, too drowſy to enter upon freſh ſpirits that night.

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Having

Having thus rescued these excellent musical dramas from the unjust ridicule, which some people of vulgar and illiberal tastes have endeavoured to throw upon them, I must proceed, and do justice to the virtuofos and virtuosas who perform them. But, I believe, it will be necessary for me to premise, for the sake of many of my English readers, that VIRTU among the modern Italians, signifies nothing less than what VIRTUS did among the antient ones, or what VIRTUE signifies among us; on the contrary, I might say that it signifies almost every thing else. Consequently those respectable titles of virtuoso and virtuosas have not the least relation to the moral characters of the parties. They mean only that those persons, endowed some by nature, and some by art, with good voices, have from their infancy devoted their time and labor to the various combinations of seven notes: a study that must unquestionably have formed their minds, enlarged their notions, and have rendered them most agreeable and instructive companions; and as such I observe that they are justly solicited, received, and cherished, by people of the first distinction.

As these illustrious personages come over here with no fordid view of profit, but merely *per far piacer a la nobilita Inglese*, that is, to oblige the English nobility, they are exceedingly good and condescending to such of the said English nobility, and even gentry, as are desirous to contract an intimacy with them. They will, for a word's speaking, dine, sup, or pass the whole day, with people of a certain condition, and perhaps sing or play, if civilly requested. Nay, I have known many of them so good as to pass two or three months of the summer at the country seats of some of their noble friends, and thereby mitigate the horrors of the country and mansion-house, to my lady and her daughters. I have been assured by many of their chief patrons and patronesses, that they are all *the best creatures in the world*; and from the time of signior Cavaliero Nicolini down to this day, I have constantly heard the several great performers, such as Farinelli, Carestini, Monticelli, Gaffarielli, as well as the signore Cuzzoni, Faustina, &c. much more praised for their affability, the gentleness of their manners, and all the good qualities of the head and heart, than for either their musical skill
or

or execution. I have even known these their social virtues lay their protectors and protectresses under great difficulties, how to reward such distinguished merit. But benefit-nights luckily came in to their assistance, and gave them an opportunity of insinuating, with all due regard, into the hands of the performer, in lieu of a ticket, a considerable bank-bill, a gold snuff-box, a diamond-ring, or some such trifle. It is to be hoped, that the illustrious signior Farinelli has not yet forgot the many instances he experienced of British munificence: for it is certain that many private families *still remember them*.

All this is very well; and I greatly approve of it, as I am of tolerating and naturalizing principles. But however, as the best things may admit of improvement by certain modifications, I shall now suggest two; the one of a public, the other of a private, nature. I would by all means welcome these respectable guests, but I would by no means part with them, as is too soon and too often the case.

Some of them, when they have got ten or fifteen thousand pounds here, unkindly withdraw themselves, and purchase estates in land in their own countries; and others are seduced from us, by the pressing invitations of some great potentate to come over to superintend his pleasures, and to take a share in his counsels. This is not only a great loss to their particular friends, the nobility and gentry, but to the nation in general, by turning the balance of our musical commerce considerably against us. I would therefore humbly propose, that immediately upon the arrival of these valuable strangers, a writ of *ne exeat regnum* should be issued to keep them here. The other modification, which I beg leave to hint at only, it being of a private nature, is that no virtuoso, whose voice is below a *contralto*, shall be taken to the country seat of any family whatsoever; much less any strapping fiddler, bassoon, or base viol, who does not even pretend to sing, or, if he does, sings a rough tenor, or a tremendous bass. The consequences may be serious, but at least the appearances are not edifying.