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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**

XXXV. The World. Thursday, Feb. 13, 1755. N° 111.

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XXXV.

THE WORLD.

THURSDAY, Feb. 13, 1755.

N^o III.

IT is very well known that religion and politics are perfectly understood by every body, as they require neither study nor experience. All people therefore decide peremptorily, though often variously, upon both.

All sects, severally sure of being in the right, intimate, at least, if not denounce, damnation to those who differ from them, in points so clear, so plain, and so obvious. On the other hand, the infidel, not less an enthusiast than any of them, though upon his own principles he cannot damn, because he knows to demonstration that there is no future state, would very gladly hang, as hypocrites or fools, the whole body of believers.

In politics, the sects are as various and as warm: and what seems very extraordinary, is, that those who have studied them the most, and experienced them the longest, always know them the least. Every administration is in the wrong, though they have the clue and secret of business in their hands; and not less than six millions of their fellow subjects, for I only except very young children, are willing and able to discover, censure, reform, and correct their errors, and put them in the right way.

These considerations, among many others, determined me originally not to meddle with religion or politics, in which I could not instruct, and upon which I thought it not decent to trifle.

Entertainment alone must be the object of an humble weekly author of a sheet and a half. A certain degree of bulk is absolutely necessary for a certain degree of dignity, either in man or book. A system of ethics, to be respected as it ought, requires at least a quarto; and even moral essays cannot decently, and with utility, appear in less than a thick octavo. But should I, in my ignoble state of a fugitive

sheet and a half, presume with a grave face to censure folly, or with an angry one to lash vice, the porter of every well-bred family in town would have orders to deny me; and I should forfeit my place at the breakfast-table, where now, to my great honor and emolument, I am pretty generally served up. But if, by the introduction of that wit and humor, which I believe my enemies must allow me, I can without offence to the politer part of my readers slide in any useful moral, I will not neglect the opportunity: for I will be witty whenever I can, and instructive whenever I dare; and when my scattered leaves shall, like the Sibyls, come to be collected, I believe, I may without vanity assert, that they will be, at least, as good oracles.

But in this design too I am aware of difficulties, little inferior to those, which discouraged me from meddling with religion and politics: for every body has wit and humor, and many have more of both than they, or at least their friends, know what to do with. As they are gifts of nature, not to be acquired by art, who is there that thinks himself so disinherited by nature as not to have some share of them? Nay, those, if such there are, who are modest enough to think themselves cut off with a shilling, husband that twelve-pence with care, and frugally spend their penny upon occasion, as sly wags, and dry jokers.

In this universal profusion, this prodigious plenty of wit and humor, I cannot help distrusting a little the success, though by no means the merit, of my own: for I have interior conviction, that no man in England has so much. But tastes are various, and the market is glutted. However, I should hope that my candid readers will have the same regard for my opinion, which they have for most of the opinions they entertain; that is, that they will take it upon trust, especially as they have it *from the gentleman's own mouth*.

The better to take my measures for the future, I have endeavoured to trace the progress and reception of my paper, through the several classes of its readers.

In families of condition, it is first received by the porter, who, yawning, just casts his half-open eyes upon it, for it comes out so early as between ten and eleven; but, finding either the politics nor the casualties of the week in it,
throws

throws it aside, and takes up in its stead a daily newspaper, in which all those matters are related with truth and perspicuity.

From thence it is sent up to Mrs. Betty, to lay upon the breakfast-table. She receives it in pretty much the same manner, finds it deficient in point of news, and lays it down in exchange for the Daily-Advertiser, where she turns with impatience to the advertisements, to see what invitations are thrown out by single gentlemen of undoubted characters, to agreeable young women of unblemished reputations, to become either their wives or their companions. And by a prudent forecast, she particularly attends to the premiums so frequently offered, for a fine wholesome breast of milk.

When it is introduced into my lady's dressing-room, it undergoes a severe examination: for, if my lord and lady ever meet, it is then and there. The youngest, probably, of the young ladies is appointed to read it aloud, to use her to read at sight. If my lord, who is a judge of wit, as well as of propriety, in the last resort, gives a favourable nod, and says, *it is well enough to-day*, my lady, who does not care to contradict him in trifles, pronounces it to be *charming*. But if unfortunately my lord, with an air of distaste, calls it *poor stuff*, my lady discovers it to be *horridly stupid*. The young family are unanimously of opinion, that the name of Adam Fitz-Adam is a very comical one, and enquire into the meaning of the globe in the frontispiece; by which, if any body could tell them, they might get a pretty notion of geography.

In families of an inferior class, I meet with a fuller, though perhaps not a more favorable, trial. My merits and demerits are freely discussed. Some think me too grave, others trifling. The mistress of the house, though she detests scandal, wishes, for example sake only, that I would draw the characters, and expose the intrigues, of the fine folks. The master wonders that I do not give the ministers a rap; and concludes that I receive hush-money. But all agree in saying facetiously and pleasantly enough, that the WORLD does not inform them how the WORLD goes. This is followed by many other *bons mots*, equally ingenious, alluding to the title of my paper, and worth at least the two-pence a week that it costs.

In the city, for my paper has made its way to that end of the town, upon the supposition of its being a fashionable one in this, I am received and considered in a different light. All my general reflexions upon the vices or the follies of the age are, by the ladies, supposed to be levelled at particular persons, or at least discovered to be very applicable to such and such of the *QUALITY*. They are also thought to be very pat to several of their own neighbours and acquaintance; and shrewd hints of the kind greatly embellish the conversation of the evening. The graver and more frugal part of that opulent metropolis, who do not themselves buy, but borrow my paper of those who do, complain that, though there is generally room sufficient at the end of the last page, I never insert the price of stocks nor of goods at Bear key. And they are every one of them astonished how certain transactions of the court of aldermen on one hand, and of the common-council on the other, can possibly escape my animadversion, since it is impossible that they can have escaped my knowledge.

Such are the censures and difficulties, to which a poor weekly author is exposed. However, I have the pleasure, and something more than the pleasure, of finding that two thousand of my papers are circulated weekly. This number exceeds the largest that was ever printed even of the *Spectators*, which in no other respect do I pretend to equal. Such extraordinary success would be sufficient to flatter the vanity of a good author, and to turn the head of a bad one. But I prudently check and stifle those growing sentiments in my own breast, by reflecting upon the other circumstances that tend to my humiliation. I must confess that the present fashion of curling the hair has proved exceedingly favourable to me: and perhaps the quality of my paper, as it happens to be peculiarly adapted to that purpose, may contribute, more than its merit, to the sale of it. A head that has taken a right French turn, requires, as I am assured, fourscore curls in distinct papers, and those curls must be renewed as often as the head is combed, which is perhaps once a month. Four of my papers are sufficient for that purpose, and amount only to eight pence, which is very little more than what the same quantity of plain paper would cost. Taking it therefore all together,

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it seems not inconsistent with good œconomy to purchase it at so small a price. This reflection might mortify me as an author; but on the other hand, self-love, which is ingenious in availing itself of the slightest favorable circumstances, comforts me with the thought, that, of the prodigious number of daily and weekly papers that are now published, mine is perhaps the only one that is ultimately applied to the head.

XXXVI.

THE WORLD.

SATURDAY, Feb. 20, 1755. N^o 112.

A LATE noble author has most justly and elegantly defined custom to be, "The result of the passions and prejudices of many, and of the designs of a few; the ape of reason, who usurps her seat, exercises her power, and is obeyed by mankind in her stead."

This definition enables us to account for the various absurd and wicked customs which have severally and successively prevailed in all ages and countries, and also for those which unfortunately prevail in this: for they may all be traced up to the passions and prejudices of the many, and the designs of a few.

It is certain, however, that there has not been a time, when the prerogative of human reason was more freely asserted, nor errors and prejudices more ably attacked and exposed by the best writers, than now. But may not the principle of inquiry and detection be carried too far, or at least made too general? And should not a prudent discrimination of cases be attended to?

A prejudice is by no means necessarily, though generally, thought so, an error. On the contrary, it may be a most unquestioned truth, though it be still a prejudice in those