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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**

XXXVI. The World. Saturday, Feb. 20, 1755. N° 112.

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

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<sup>o</sup> 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

those who, without any examination, take it upon trust and entertain it by habit.

There are even some prejudices, founded upon error, which ought to be connived at, or perhaps encouraged; their effects being more beneficial to society, than their detection can possibly be.

Human reason, even when improved by knowledge, and undisturbed by the passions, is not an infallible, though it is our best, guide: but, unimproved by knowledge, and adulterated by passion, it becomes the most dangerous one; constituting obstinate wrongheadedness, and dignifying, nay almost sanctifying, error.

The bulk of mankind have neither leisure nor knowledge sufficient to reason right: why then should they be taught to reason at all? Will not honest instinct prompt, and wholesome prejudices guide them, much better than half reasoning?

The power of the magistrate to punish bad, and the authority of those of superior rank to set good examples, properly exerted, would probably be of more diffusive advantage to society, than the most learned, theological, philosophical, moral and casuistical dissertations. As for instance.

An honest cobbler in his stall thinks and calls himself a good honest protestant; and if he lives at the city end of the town, probably goes to his parish church on Sundays. Would it be honest, would it be wise, to say to this cobbler, "Friend, you only think yourself a member of the church of England; but in reality you are not one, since you are only so from habit and prejudice, not from examination and reflection. But study the ablest controversial writers of the popish and reformed churches; read Bellarmine, Chillingworth, and Stillingfleet, and then you may justly call yourself, what in truth you are not now, a protestant."

Should our mender of shoes follow this advice, which I hope he would not, a useful cobbler would most certainly be lost, in a useless polemic, and a scurvy logician.

It would be just the same thing in morals. Our cobbler received from his parents that best and shortest of all christian and moral precepts, "Do as you would be done by:" he adopted it without much examination, and scrupulously practised it in general, though with some few exceptions

ceptions perhaps in his own trade. But should some philosopher, for the advancement of truth and knowledge, assure this cobbler, "That his honesty was mere prejudice and habit, because he had never sufficiently considered the relation and fitness of things, nor contemplated the beauty of virtue; but that, if he would carefully study the Characteristics, the Moral Philosopher, and thirty or forty volumes more upon that subject, he might then, and not till then, justly call himself an honest man;" what would become of the honesty of the cobbler after this useful discovery, I do not know: but this I very well know, that he should no longer be *MY* cobbler.

I shall borrow him in two instances more, and then leave him to his honest, useful, homespun prejudices, which half-knowledge and less reasoning will, I hope, never tempt him to lay aside.

My cobbler is also a politician. He reads the first newspapers he can get, desirous to be informed of the state of affairs in Europe, and of the street robberies in London. He has not, I presume, analysed the interests of the respective countries of Europe, nor deeply considered those of his own: still less is he systematically informed of the political duties of a citizen and a subject. But his heart and his habit supply those defects. He glows with zeal for the honor and prosperity of old England; he will fight for it, if there be occasion, and drink to it perhaps a little too often, and too much. However, is it not to be wished that there were in this country six millions of such honest and zealous, though uninformed, citizens?

All these unreflected and unexamined opinions of our cobbler, though prejudices in him, are in themselves undoubted and demonstrable truths, and ought therefore to be cherished even in their coarsest dress. But I shall now give an instance of a common prejudice in this country, which is the result of error, and which yet I believe no man in his senses would desire should be exposed or removed.

Our honest cobbler is thoroughly convinced, as his forefathers were for many centuries, that one Englishman can beat three Frenchmen; and, in that persuasion, he would by no means decline the trial. Now, though in my own private opinion, deduced from physical principles, I am apt to believe that one Englishman could beat no more than

than two Frenchmen of equal strength and size with himself, I should however be very unwilling to undeceive him of that useful and sanguine error, which certainly made his countrymen triumph in the fields of Poictiers and Crecy.

But there are prejudices of a very different nature from these; prejudices not only founded on original error, but that gave birth and sanction to the most absurd, extravagant, impious, and immoral customs.

Honor, that sacred name, which ought to mean the spirit, the supererogation of virtue, is, by custom, profaned, reduced, and shrunk to mean only a readiness to fight a duel upon either a real or an imaginary affront, and not to cheat at play. No vices nor immoralities whatsoever blast this fashionable character, but rather, on the contrary, dignify and adorn it: and what should banish a man from all society, recommends him in general to the best. He may, with great honor, starve the tradesmen, who by their industry, supply not only his wants, but his luxury; he may debauch his friend's wife, daughter, or sister; he may, in short, unboundedly gratify every appetite, passion, and interest, and scatter desolation round him, if he be but ready for single combat, and a scrupulous observer of all the moral obligations of a gamester.

These are the prejudices for wit to ridicule, for satire to lash, for the rigor of the Law to punish, and, (which would be the most effectual of all) for fashion to discountenance and proscribe. And these shall in their turns be the subjects of some future papers.

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XXXVII.

T H E W O R L D.

SATURDAY, Feb. 27. 1755. No. 113.

**T**HE custom of DUELLING is most evidently "the result of the passions of the many, and of the designs of a few;" but here the definition stops; since far from being "the ape of reason," it prevails in open defiance

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