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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**

XLI. The World. Thursday, Oct. 30, 1755. N° 148.

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XLI.

THE WORLD.

THURSDAY*, Oct. 30, 1755. N^o 148.

CIVILITY and GOOD-BREEDING are generally thought, and often used, as synonymous terms, but are by no means so.

GOOD-BREEDING necessarily implies CIVILITY; but CIVILITY does not reciprocally imply GOOD-BREEDING. The former has its intrinsic weight and value, which the latter always adorns, and often doubles by its workmanship.

To sacrifice one's own self-love to other people's, is a short, but, I believe, a true definition of CIVILITY: to do it with ease, propriety, and grace, is GOOD-BREEDING. The one is the result of good-nature; the other of good-sense, joined to experience, observation, and attention.

A ploughman will be civil, if he is good-natured, but cannot be well-bred. A courtier will be well-bred, though perhaps without good-nature, if he has but good-sense.

Flattery is the disgrace of GOOD-BREEDING, as brutality often is of truth and sincerity. GOOD-BREEDING is the middle point between those two odious extremes.

CEREMONY is the superstition of GOOD-BREEDING, as well as of religion; but yet, being an out-work to both, should not be absolutely demolished. It is always, to a certain degree, to be complied with, though despised by those who think, because admired and respected by those who do not.

The most perfect degree of GOOD-BREEDING, as I have already hinted, is only to be acquired by great knowledge of the world, and keeping the best company.

* Lord Chesterfield, being at Bath; shewed one of his last Worlds to his friend general Irwine, who dined with him almost every day. The general, in the course of the conversation, mentioned good-breeding as distinguished from mere civility, as a subject that deserved to be treated by him. His lordship at first declined it, but on his friend's insisting, and urging the singular propriety of its being undertaken by a man who was so perfect a master of the thing, he suddenly called for pen and ink, and wrote this excellent piece off hand, as he did all the others, without any rasure or interlineation. The paper ever after, went by the name of general Irwine's paper.

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It is not the object of mere speculation, and cannot be exactly defined, as it consists in a fitness, a propriety of words, actions, and even looks, adapted to the infinite variety and combinations of persons, places, and things. It is a mode, not a substance: for what is GOOD-BREEDING at St. James's, would pass for foppery or banter in a remote village, and the home-spun civility of that village, would be considered as brutality at court.

A cloystered pedant may form true notions of CIVILITY; but if, amidst the cobwebs of his cell, he pretends to spin a speculative system of GOOD-BREEDING he will not be less absurd than his predecessor, who judiciously undertook to instruct Hannibal in the art of war. The most ridiculous and most awkward of men are, therefore, the speculatively well-bred monks of all religions and all professions.

GOOD-BREEDING, like charity, not only covers a multitude of faults, but, to a certain degree, supplies the want of some virtues. In the common intercourse of life, it acts good nature, and often does what good-nature will not always do; it keeps both wits and fools within those bounds of decency, which the former are too apt to transgress, and which the latter never know.

Courts are unquestionably the seats of GOOD-BREEDING, and must necessarily be so; otherwise they would be the seats of violence and desolation. There all the passions are in their highest state of fermentation. All pursue what but few can obtain, and many seek what but one can enjoy. GOOD-BREEDING alone restrains their excesses. There, if enemies did not embrace, they would stab. There, smiles are often put on, to conceal tears. There, mutual services are professed, while mutual injuries are intended; and there, the guile of the serpent simulates the gentleness of the dove: all this, it is true, at the expence of sincerity, but upon the whole, to the advantage of social intercourse in general.

I would not be misapprehended, and supposed to recommend GOOD-BREEDING, thus prophaned and prostituted to the purposes of guilt and perfidy; but I think I may justly infer from it, to what a degree the accomplishment of GOOD-BREEDING must adorn and enforce virtue and truth, when it can thus soften the outrages and deformity of vice and falshood.

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I am sorry to be obliged to confess that my native country is not perhaps the seat of the most perfect GOOD-BREEDING, though I really believe that it yields to none in hearty and sincere CIVILITY, as far as CIVILITY is, and to a certain degree it is, an inferior moral duty of doing as one would be done by. If France exceeds us in that particular, the incomparable author of *L'Esprit des Loix* accounts for it very impartially, and I believe very truly. "If my countrymen," says he, "are the best-bred people in the world, it is only because they are the vainest." It is certain that their GOOD-BREEDING and attentions, by flattering the vanity and self-love of others, repay their own with interest. It is a general commerce, usually carried on by a barter of attentions, and often without one grain of solid merit, by way of medium to make up the balance.

It were to be wished that GOOD-BREEDING were in general thought a more essential part of the education of our youth, especially of distinction, than at present it seems to be. It might even be substituted in the room of some academical studies, that take up a great deal of time to very little purpose; or at least, it might usefully share some of those many hours, that are so frequently employed upon a coach-box, or in stables. Surely those who, by their rank and fortune, are called to adorn courts, ought at least not to disgrace them by their manners.

But I observe with concern, that it is the fashion for our youth of both sexes to brand GOOD-BREEDING with the name of ceremony and formality. As such they ridicule and explode it, and adopt in its stead an offensive carelessness and inattention, to the diminution, I will venture to say, even of their own pleasures, if they know what true pleasures are.

Love and friendship necessarily produce, and justly authorize, familiarity; but then GOOD-BREEDING must mark out its bounds, and say, thus far shalt thou go, and no farther; for I have known many a passion and many a friendship degraded, weakened, and at last, if I may use the expression, wholly flattered away, by an unguarded and illiberal familiarity. Nor is GOOD-BREEDING less the ornament and cement of common social life: it connects, it endears, and, at the same time that it indulges the just liberty, restrains that indecent licentiousness of
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conversation, which alienates and provokes. Great talents make a man famous, great merit makes him respected, and great learning makes him esteemed; but GOOD-BREEDING alone can make him be loved.

I recommend it in a more particular manner to my country women, as the greatest ornament to such of them as have beauty, and the safest refuge for those who have not. It facilitates the victories, decorates the triumphs, and secures the conquests of beauty, or in some degree atones for the want of it. It almost deifies a fine woman, and procures respect at least to those, who have not charms enough to be admired.

Upon the whole, though GOOD-BREEDING cannot, strictly speaking, be called a virtue, yet it is productive of so many good effects, that, in my opinion, it may justly be reckoned more than a mere accomplishment.

 XLII.

THE WORLD.

 THURSDAY, Nov. 20, 1755. N^o 151.

I WAS lately subpoenaed, by a card, to a general assembly at Lady Townly's, where I went so awkwardly early, that I found nobody but the five or six people who had dined there, and who for want of hands enough for play, were reduced to the cruel necessity of conversing till something better should offer. Lady Townly observed with concern and impatience, "that people of fashion now came intolerably late, and in a glut at once, which laid the lady of the house under great difficulties, to make the parties properly." "That, no doubt," said Manly, "is to be lamented; and the more so, as it seems to give your ladyship some concern: but in the mean time, for want of something better to do, I should be glad to know the true meaning of a term that you have just made use of, *people of fashion*. I confess, I have never yet had a precise and clear idea of it; and