



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

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**

XLIII. The World. Thursday, Aug. 12, 1756. N° 189.

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

For my own part, I made my escape as soon as I possibly could, with my head full of the most extraordinary conversation, which I had just heard, and which from having taken no part in it, I had attended to the more, and retained the better. I went straight home, and immediately reduced it into writing, as I here offer it for the present edification of my readers. But, as it has furnished me with great and new lights, I propose, as soon as possible, to give the public a new and complete system of ethics, founded upon these principles of *people of fashion*; as, in my opinion, they are better calculated than many others, for the use and instruction of all private families.

 XLIII.

THE WORLD.

 THURSDAY, Aug. 12, 1756. N^o 189.

WE are accused by the French, and perhaps but too justly, of having no word in our language, which answers to their word *police*, which therefore we have been obliged to adopt, not having, as they say, the thing.

It does not occur to me that we have any one word in our language, I hope not from the same reason, to express the ideas which they comprehend under their word *les mœurs*. *Manners* are too little, *morals* too much. I should define it thus; *a general exterior decency, fitness, and propriety of conduct, in the common intercourse of life.*

Cicero in his *Offices*, makes use of the word *decorum* in this sense, to express what the Greeks signified by their word (I will not shock the eyes of my polite readers with Greek types) *to prepon*.

The thing however is unquestionably of importance, by whatever word it may be dignified or degraded, distinguished or mistaken; it shall therefore be the subject
of

of this paper to explain and recommend it ; and upon this occasion I shall adopt the word *decorum*.

But, as I have some private reasons for desiring not to lessen the sale of these my lucubrations, I must premise, that, notwithstanding this serious introduction, I am not going to preach either religious or moral duties. On the contrary, it is a scheme of interest which I mean to communicate, and which, if the supposed characteristic of the present age be true, must, I should apprehend, be highly acceptable to the generality of my readers.

I take it for granted that the most sensible and informed part of mankind, I mean people of fashion, pursue singly their own interests and pleasures ; that they desire as far as possible to enjoy them exclusively, and to avail themselves of the simplicity, the ignorance, and the prejudices, of the vulgar, who have neither the same strength of mind, nor the same advantages of education. Now it is certain that nothing would more contribute to that desirable end, than a strict observance of this *decorum*, which, as I have already hinted, does not extend to religious or moral duties, does not prohibit the enjoyments of vice, but only throws a veil of decency between it and the vulgar, conceals part of its native deformity, and prevents scandal and bad example. It is a sort of pepper-corn quit-rent paid to virtue, as an acknowledgment of its superiority ; but according to our present constitution, is the easy price of freedom, not the tribute of vassalage.

Those who would be respected by others, must first respect themselves. A certain exterior purity, and dignity of character, commands respect, procures credit, and invites confidence ; but the public exercise and ostentation of vice has all the contrary effects.

The middle class of people in this country, though generally straining to imitate their betters, have not yet shaken off the prejudices of their education ; very many of them still believe in a supreme being, in a future state of rewards and punishments, and retain some coarse, home-spun notions of moral good and evil. The rational system of materialism has not yet reached them, and, in my opinion, it may be full as well it never should ; for, as I am not of
level-

levelling principles, I am for preserving a due subordination from inferiors to superiors, which an equality of profligacy must totally destroy.

A fair character is a more lucrative thing than people are generally aware of; and I am informed that an eminent money-scrivener has lately calculated with great accuracy the advantage of it, and that it has turned out a clear profit of thirteen and a half *per cent* in the general transactions of life; which advantage, frequently repeated, as it must be in the course of the year, amounts to a very considerable object.

To proceed to a few instances. If the courtier would but wear the appearance of truth, promise less, and perform more, he would acquire such a degree of trust and confidence, as would enable him to strike on a sudden, and with success, some splendid stroke of perfidy, to the infinite advantage of himself and his party.

A patriot, of all people, should be a strict observer of this *decorum*, if he would, as it is to be presumed he would, bear a good price at the court market. The love of his dear country, well acted and little felt, will certainly get him into good keeping, and perhaps procure him a handsome settlement for life; but, if his prostitution be flagrant, he is only made use of in cases of the utmost necessity, and even then only by cullies. I must observe by the bye, that of late the market has been a little glutted with patriots, and consequently they do not sell quite so well.

Few masters of families are, I should presume, desirous to be robbed indiscriminately by all their servants; and as servants in general are more afraid of the devil, and less of the gallows, than their masters, it seems to be as imprudent as indecent to remove that wholesome fear, either by their examples, or their philosophical dissertations, exploding in their presence, though ever so justly, all the idle notions of future punishments, or of moral good and evil. At present, honest faithful servants rob their masters conscientiously only in their respective stations; but take away those checks and restraints which the prejudices of their education have laid them under, they will soon rob indiscriminately, and out of their several departments; which would probably create some little confusion in families, especially in numerous ones.

I cannot omit observing, that this *decorum* extends to the little trifling offices of common life; such as seeming to take a tender and affectionate part, in the health or fortune of your acquaintance, and a readiness and alacrity to serve them, in things of little consequence to them, and of none at all to you. These attentions bring in good interest; the weak and the ignorant mistake them for the real sentiments of your heart, and give you their esteem and friendship in return. The wise, indeed, pay you in your own coin, or by a truck of commodities of equal value, upon which, however, there is no loss; so that, upon the whole, this commerce, skilfully carried on, is a very lucrative one.

In all my schemes for the general good of mankind, I have always a particular attention to the utility that may arise from them to my fair fellow-subjects, for whom I have the tenderest and most unfeigned concern; and I lay hold of this opportunity, most earnestly to recommend to them the strictest observance of this *decorum*. I will admit that a fine woman of a certain rank cannot have too many real vices; but, at the same time, I do insist upon it, that it is essentially her interest, not to have the appearance of any one. This *decorum*, I confess, will conceal her conquests, and prevent her triumphs; but, on the other hand, if she will be pleased to reflect that those conquests are known, sooner or later, always to end in her total defeat, she will not upon an average find herself a loser. There are indeed some husbands of such humane and hospitable dispositions, that they seem determined to share all their happiness with their friends and acquaintance; so that, with regard to such husbands, singly, this *decorum* were useless: but the far greater number are of a churlish and uncommunicative disposition, troublesome upon bare suspicions, and brutal upon proofs. These are capable of inflicting upon the fair delinquent the pains and penalties of exile and imprisonment at the dreadful mansion-seat, notwithstanding the most solemn protestations and oaths, backed with the most moving tears, that nothing really criminal has passed. But it must be owned that, of all negatives, that is much the hardest to be proved.

Though deep play be a very innocent and even commendable amusement in itself, it is however, as things are yet constituted, a great breach, nay perhaps the highest violation

violation possible, of the *decorum* in the fair sex. If generally fortunate, it induces some suspicion of dexterity; if unfortunate, of debt; and in this latter case, the ways and means for raising the supplies necessary for the current year, are sometimes supposed to be unwarrantable. But what is still much more important, is, that the agonies of an ill run will disfigure the finest face in the world, and cause most ungraceful emotions. I have known a bad game, suddenly produced upon a good game, for a deep stake at bragg or commerce, almost make the vermilion turn pale, and elicit from lips, where the sweets of Hybla dwelt, and where the loves and graces played, some murmured oaths, which, though minced and mitigated a little in their terminations, seemed to me, upon the whole, to be rather unbecoming.

Another singular advantage, which will arise to my fair countrywomen of distinction from the observance of this *decorum*, is, that they will never want some creditable led-captain to attend them at a minute's warning to operas, plays, Ranelagh, and Vauxhall; whereas I have known some women of extreme condition, who, by neglecting the *decorum*, had flattered away their characters to such a degree, as to be obliged upon those emergencies to take up with mere toad-eaters of very equivocal rank and character, who by no means graced their entry into public places.

To the young unmarried ladies, I beg leave to represent, that this *decorum* will make a difference of at least five-and-twenty if not fifty *per cent.* in their fortunes. The pretty men, who have commonly the honor of attending them, are not in general the marrying kind of men; they love them too much, or too little, know them too well, or not well enough, to think of marrying them. The husband-like men are a set of awkward fellows with good estates, and who, not having got the better of vulgar prejudices, lay some stress upon the characters of their wives, and the legitimacy of the heirs to their estates and titles. These are to be caught only by *les mœurs*; the hook must be baited with the *decorum*; the naked one will not do.

I must own that it seems too severe to deny young ladies the innocent amusements of the present times, but I beg of them to recollect that I mean only with regard to outward appearances; and I should presume that *tete-a-tetes*

tetes with the pretty men might be contrived and brought about in places less public than Kenfington-gardens, the two parks, the high roads, or the streets of London.

Having thus combined, as I flatter myself that I have, the solid enjoyment of vice, with the useful appearances of virtue, I think myself entitled to the thanks of my country in general, and to that just praise which Horace gives to the author, *qui miscuit utile dulci*; or in English, who joins the useful with the agreeable.

 XLIV.

THE WORLD.

 THURSDAY, Sept. 30, 1756. N^o 196.

IT is a vulgar notion, and worthy of the vulgar, for it is both false and absurd, that passionate people are the best-natured people in the world. *They are a little hasty, it is true; a trifle will put them in a fury, and while they are in that fury, they neither know nor care what they say or do: but then as soon as it is over, they are extremely sorry and penitent for any injury or mischief they did.* This panegyric of these choleric good-natured people, when examined and simplified, amounts in plain common sense and English to this: that they are good-natured when they are not ill-natured; and that when, in their fits of rage, they have said or done things that have brought them to the gaol or the gallows, they are extremely sorry for it. It is indeed highly probable that they are; but where is the reparation to those whose reputations, limbs, or lives, they have either wounded or destroyed? This concern comes too late, and is only for themselves. Self-love was the cause of the injury, and is the only motive of the repentance.

Had these furious people real good nature, their first offence would be their last, and they would resolve at all events
never