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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**

XLV. The World. Thursday, Oct. 7, 1757. N° 197.

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## XLV.

## THE WORLD.

THURSDAY, Oct. 7, 1757. N<sup>o</sup> 197.

**I**F we give credit to the vulgar opinion, or even to the assertions of some reputable authors, both antient and modern, poor human nature was not originally formed for keeping: every age has degenerated; and, from the fall of the first man, my unfortunate ancestor, our species has been tumbling on, century by century, from bad to worse, for about six thousand years.

Considering this progressive state of deterioration, it is a very great mercy that things are no worse with us at present; since, geometrically speaking, the human ought by this time to have sunk infinitely below the brute and the vegetable species, which are neither of them supposed to have dwindled or degenerated considerably, except in a very few instances: for it must be owned that our modern oaks are inferior to those of Dodona, our breed of horses to that of the Centaurs, and our breed of fowls to that of the Phœnixes.

But is this really the case? Certainly not. It is only one of those many errors which are artfully scattered by the designs of a few, and blindly adopted by the ignorance and folly of the many. The moving exclamations of—*these sad times! this degenerate age!* the affecting lamentations over *declining virtue* and *triumphant vice*, and the tender and final farewell bidden every day to unrewarded and discouraged public spirit, arts, and sciences, are the common-place topics of the pride, the envy, and the malignity, of the human heart, that can more easily forgive, and even commend, antiquated and remote, than bear cotemporary and contiguous, merit. Men of these mean sentiments have always been the satirists of their own, and the panegyrist of former times. They give this tone, which fools, like birds in the dark, catch by air, and whistle all day long.

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As it has constantly been my endeavour to root out, if I could, or, if I could not, to expose, the vices of the human heart, it shall be the object of this day's paper to examine this strange inverted entail of virtue and merit upwards, according to priority of birth, and seniority of age. I shall prove it to be forged, and consequently null and void to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

If I loved to jingle, I would say that human nature has always been invariably the same, though always varying; that is, the same in substance, but varying in forms and modes, from many concurrent causes, of which perhaps we know but few. Climate, education, accidents, severally contribute to change those modes; but in all climates, and in all ages, we discover through them the same passions, affections, and appetites, and the same degree of virtues and vices.

This being unquestionably the true state of the case, which it would be endless to bring instances to prove, from the histories of all times and of all nations, I shall, by way of warning to the incautious, and of reproof to the designing, proceed to explain the reasons, which I have but just hinted at above, why the human nature of the time being, has always been reckoned the worst and most degenerate.

Authors, especially poets, though great men, are, alas! but men; and, like other men, subject to the weaknesses of human nature, though perhaps in a less degree: but it is however certain that their breasts are not absolutely strangers to the passions of jealousy, pride, and envy. Hence it is that they are very apt to measure merit by the century, to love dead authors better than living ones, and to love them the better, the longer they have been dead. The Augustan age is therefore their favourite æra, being at least seventeen hundred years distant from the present. That emperor was not only a judge of wit, but, for an emperor, a tolerable performer too; and Mæcenas, his first minister, was both a patron and a poet; he not only encouraged and protected, but fed and fattened men of wit at his own table, as appears from Horace: no small encouragement for panegyric. Those were times indeed for genius to display itself in! It was honoured, tasted, and rewarded. But now — *O tempora! O mores!* One must however

however do justice to the authors, who thus declaim against their own times, by acknowledging that they are seldom the aggressors; their own times have commonly begun with them. It is their resentment, not their judgment, if they have any, that speaks this language. Anger and despair make them endeavour to lower that merit, which, till brought very low indeed, they are conscious they cannot equal.

There is another and more numerous set of much greater men, who still more loudly complain of the ignorance, the corruption, and the degeneracy, of the present age. These are the consummate volunteer, but unregarded and unrewarded politicians, who, at a modest computation, amount to at least three millions of souls in this political country, and who are all of them both able and willing to steer the great vessel of the state, and to take upon themselves the whole load of business, and burthen of *employments*, for the service of their dear country. The administration for the time being is always the worst, the most incapable, the most corrupt, that ever was, and negligent of every thing but their own interest. *Where are now your Cecils and your Walsinghams?* Those who ask that question could answer it, if they would speak out, *Themselves*: for they are all that, and more too.

I stept the other day, in order only to inquire how my poor country did, into a coffee-house, that is without dispute the seat of the soundest politics in this great metropolis, and sat myself down within ear-shot of the principal council-table. Fortunately for me, the president, a person of age, dignity, and becoming gravity, had just begun to speak. He stated, with infinite perspicuity and knowledge, the present state of affairs in other countries, and the lamentable situation of our own. He traced with his finger upon the table, by the help of some coffee which he had spilt in the warmth of his exordium, the whole course of the Ohio, and the boundaries of the Russian, Prussian, Austrian, and Saxon dominions; foresaw a long and bloody war upon the continent, calculated the supplies necessary for carrying it on, and pointed out the best methods of raising them, which, for that very reason, he intimated, would not be pursued. He wound up his discourse with a most pathetic peroration, which he con-

cluded with saying, *Things were not carried on in this manner in queen Elizabeth's days; the public was considered, and able men were consulted and employed. Those were days!*

"Aye, fir, and nights too, I presume," said a young fellow who stood near him, "some longer and some shorter, according to the variation of the seasons; pretty much like ours." Mr. President was a little surprized at the suddenness and pertness of this interruption; but, recomposing himself, answered with that cool contempt that becomes a great man, "I did not mean astronomical days, but political ones." The young fellow replied, "O then, fir, I am your servant," and went off in a laugh.

Thus informed and edified, I went off too, but could not help reflecting in my way upon the singular ill-luck of this my dear country, which, as long as ever I remember it, and as far back as I have read, has always been governed by the only two or three people, out of two or three millions, totally incapable of governing, and unfit to be trusted. But these reflections were soon interrupted by numbers of people, whom I observed crowding into a public house. Among them I discovered my worthy friend and taylor, that industrious mechanic, Mr. Regnier. I applied to him to know the meaning of that concourse; to which, with his usual humanity, he answered, "We are the master taylors, who are to meet to-night to consider what is to be done about our journeymen, who insult and impose upon us, to the great detriment of trade." I asked him whether, under his protection, I might slip in and hear their deliberations. He said, "Yes and welcome; for that they should do nothing to be ashamed of." I profited of this permission, and, following him into the room, found a considerable number of these ingenious artists assembled, and waiting only for the arrival of my friend, who it seems was too considerable for business to begin without him. He accordingly took the lead, opened the meeting with a very handsome speech, in which he gave many instances of the insolence, the unreasonableness, and the exorbitant demands, of the journeymen taylors, and concluded with observing, "that, if the government minded any thing now-a-days but themselves, such abuses would not have been suffered; and had they been but attempted in queen Elizabeth's days, she would have

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“ have *worked* them with a witness.” Another orator then rose up to speak ; but, as I was sure that he could say nothing better than what had just fallen from my worthy friend, I stole off unobserved, and was pursuing my way home, when in the very next street I discovered a much greater number of people, though by their dress of seemingly inferior note, rushing into another public house. As numbers always excite my curiosity, almost as much as they do each other’s passions, I crowded in with them, in order to discover the object of this meeting, not without some suspicion that this frequent senate might be composed of the journeymen taylor, and convened in opposition to that which I had just left. My suspicion was soon confirmed by the eloquence of a journeyman, a finisher I presume, who expatiated, with equal warmth and dignity, upon the injustice and oppression of the master taylor, to the utter ruin of thousands of poor journeymen and their families ; and concluded with asserting, “ it was a shame that the government and the parliament did not take care of such abuses ; and that, had the master taylor done these things in queen Elizabeth’s days, she would have *mastered* them with a vengeance, so she would.”

I confess I could not help smiling at this singular conformity of sentiments, and almost of expressions, of the master politicians, the master taylor, and the journeymen taylor. I am convinced that the two latter really and honestly believed what they said ; it not being in the least improbable that their understandings should be the dupes of their interests : but I will not so peremptorily answer for the interior conviction of the political orator, though at the same time I must do him the justice to say, he seemed full dull enough to be very much in earnest.

The several scenes of this day suggested to me when I got home various reflections, which perhaps I may communicate to my readers in some future paper.