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The W O R L D.

By A D A M F I T Z - A D A M.

NUMB. CIII. *Thursday, December 19, 1754.*

I AM never better pleas'd than when I can vindicate the honour of my native country: at the same time, I would not endeavour to defend it preposterously, nor to contradict the eyes, the senses of mankind, out of stark good patriotism. The fluctuating condition of the things of this world necessarily produces a change in manners and morals, as well as in the face of countries and cities. Climates cannot operate so powerfully on constitutions, as to preserve the same character perpetually to the same nations. I do not doubt but in some age of the world the Bœotians will be a very lively whimsical people, and famous for their repartees; and that our neighbour islanders will be remarkable for the truth of their ideas, and for the precision with which they will deliver their conceptions. Some men are so bigoted to antiquated notions, that if they were, even in this age, to write a panegyric on old England, they would cram their composition with encomiums to our good-nature, our bravery, and our hospitality. This indeed might be a panegyric on OLD England, but would have very little resemblance to the modern characteristics of the nation. Our good-nature was necessarily soured by the spirit of party; our courage has been a little cramped by the act of parliament that restrained prize-fighting; and hospitality is totally impracticable, since a much more laudable custom has been introduced, and prevailed universally, of paying the servants of other people much more than their master's dinner cost. Yet we shall always have virtues sufficient to countenance very exalted panegyrics: and if some of our more heroic qualities are grown obsolete, others of a gentler cast, and better calculated for the happiness
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of society, have grown up and diffused themselves in their room. While we were rough and bold, we could not be polite: while we feasted half a dozen wapentakes with furloins of beef, and sheep roasted whole, we could not attend to the mechanism of a plate, no bigger than a crown piece, loaded with the legs of canary birds dressed *à la Pompadour*.

Let nobody start at my calling this a polite nation. It shall be the business of this paper to prove that we are the most polite nation in Europe; and that France must yield to us in the extreme delicacy of our refinements. I might urge, as a glaring instance in which that nation has forfeited her title to politeness, the impertinent spirit of their parliaments, which, though couched in very civilly-worded remonstrances, is certainly at bottom very ill-bred. They have contradicted their monarch, and crossed his clergy in a manner not to be defended by a people who pique themselves upon complaisance and attentions.—But I abominate politics, and, when I am writing in defence of politeness, shall certainly not blend so coarse a subject with so civil a theme.

It is not virtue that constitutes the politeness of a nation, but the art of reducing vice to a system that does not shock society. “POLITENESS (as I understand the word) is an universal desire of pleasing others (that are not too much below one) in trifles, for a little time; and of making one’s intercourse with them agreeable to both parties, by civility without ceremony, by ease without brutality, by complaisance without flattery, by acquiescence without sincerity.” A clergyman who puts his patron into a sweat by driving him round the room till he has found the coolest place for him, is not polite. When Bubbamira changes her handkerchief before you, and wipes her neck, rather than leave you alone while she should perform the refreshing office in next room; I should think she is not polite. When Boncœur shivers on your dreary hill, where for twenty years you have been vainly endeavouring to raise reluctant plantations, and yet professes that only some of the trees have been a little kept back by the late dry season; he is not polite: he is more—he is kind. When Sophia is really pleased with the stench of a kennel, because her husband likes that she should go and look at a favourite litter; she must not pretend to politeness—she is only a good wife. If this definition and these instances are allowed me, it will be difficult to maintain that the nations who have had the most extensive renown for politeness, had any pretensions to it. The Greeks called all the rest of the world barbarians:
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the Romans went still farther, and treated them as such. Alexander, the best-bred hero among the former, I must own, was polite, and showed great ATTENTIONS for Darius's family; but I question, if he had not extended his ATTENTIONS a little farther to the princess Statira, whether he could be pronounced quite well-bred. For the Romans; so far from having had any notion of treating foreigners with regard, there is not one classic author that mentions a single ball or masquerade given to any stranger of distinction. Nay, it was a common practice with them to tie kings, queens, and women of the first fashion of other countries, in couples, like hounds, and drag them along their *via Piccadillia* in triumph, for the entertainment of their shopkeepers and 'prentices:—a practice that we should look upon with horror! What would *The Examiner* have said, if the duke of Marlborough had hauled marshal Tallard to Saint Paul's or the Royal Exchange behind his chariot? How deservedly would the French have called us SAVAGES, if we had made marshal Belleisle pace along the kennel in Fleet-street, or up Holborn, while some of our ministers or generals called it an OVATION!

The French, who attempt to succeed the Romans in empire, and who affect to have succeeded them in politeness, have adopted the same way of thinking, though so contrary to true good-breeding. They have no idea that an Englishman or a German ever sees a suit of clothes till he arrives at Paris. They wonder, if you talk of a coach at Vienna, or of a souper at London: and are so confident of having monopolized all the arts of civilized life, that, with the greatest complaisance in the world, they affirm to you, That they suppose your dukes and duchesses live in caves, with only the property of wider forests than ordinary; and that *les milords Anglois*, with a great deal of money, live upon raw flesh, and ride races without breeches or saddles. At their houses, they receive you with wonder that shocks you, or with indifference that mortifies you; and if they put themselves to the torture of conversing with you, after you have taken infinite pains to acquire their language, it is merely to inform you, that you neither know how to dress like a sensible man, nor to eat, drink, game, or divert yourself like a christian. How different are our ATTENTIONS to foreigners! How open our houses to their nobility, our purses to their tradesmen! But without drawing antitheses between our politeness and their ill-breeding, I shall produce an instance in which we have pushed our refinements *on the duties of society*, beyond what the most civilized nations ever imagined. We are not only well-bred in

common intercourse, but our very crimes are transacted with such a softness of manners, that though they may *injure*, they are sure never to *affront* your neighbour. The instance I mean, is the extreme good-breeding which has been introduced into the science of robbery, which (considering how very frequent it is become) would really grow a nuisance to society, if the professors of it had not taken all imaginable precautions to make it as civil a commerce, as gaming, conveyancing, toad-eating, pimping, or any of the money-inveigling arts, which had already got an established footing in the world. A highwayman would be reckoned a BRUTE, a MONSTER, if he had not all manner of attention *not to frighten the ladies*; and none of the great Mr. * Nash's laws are more sacred, than that of restoring any favourite bawble to which a robbed lady has a particular partiality. Now turn your eyes to France. No people upon earth have less of the *savoir vivre* than their banditti. No Tartar has less *douceur* in his manner than a French highwayman. They take your money without making you a bow, and your life without making you an apology. This obliges their government to keep up a numerous guët, a severe police, racks, gibbets, and twenty troublesome things, which might all be avoided, if they would only reckon and breed up their thieves to be *good company*. I know that some of our latest imported young gentlemen affirm that the sieur Mandrin †, the terror of the eastern provinces, learned to dance of Marseille himself, and has frequently supped with the incomparable Jelliot ‡. But till I hear whether *he dies like a gentleman*, I shall forbear to rank him with the *petit-mâtres* of our own Tyburn. How extreme is the politesse of the latter! Mrs. § Chenevix has not more insinuation when she sells a snuff-box of *papier-maché*, or a bergamot toothpick-case, than a highwayman when he begs to know if you have no rings nor bank-bills.

An || acquaintance of mine was robbed a few years ago, and very near shot through the head by the going off of the pistol of the accomplished M^r LEAN; yet the whole affair was conducted with the greatest good-breeding on both sides. The robber, who had only taken a purse *this way*, because he had that morning been disappointed of marrying a great fortune, no

* A remarkable person, who for a great number of years presided as master of the ceremonies at Bath and Tunbridge.

† A famous French smuggler.

‡ A singer in the opera at Paris.

§ A fashionable toy woman.

|| The author himself.

sooner returned to his lodgings, than he sent the gentleman two letters of excuses, which, with less wit than the epistles of Voiture, had ten times more natural and easy politeness in the turn of their expression. In the post-script, he appointed a meeting at Tyburn at twelve at night, where the gentleman might *purchase again* any trifles he had lost; and my friend has been blamed for not accepting the rendezvous, as it seemed liable to be construed by ill-natured people into a doubt of the *honour* of a man, who had given him all the satisfaction in his power, for having *unluckily* been near shooting him through the head.

The Lacedæmonians were the only people, except the English, who seem to have put robbery on a right foot; and I have wondered how a nation that had delicacy enough to understand robbing on the highway, should at the same time have been so barbarous, as to esteem poverty, black-broth and virtue! We had no highwaymen, that were men of fashion, till we had exploded plum-porridge.

But of all the gentlemen of the road, who have *conformed* to the manners of the GREAT WORLD, none seem to me to have carried TRUE POLITENESS so far as a late adventurer, whom I beg leave to introduce to my readers under the name of the VISITING HIGHWAYMAN. This refined person made it a rule to rob none but *people he visited*; and whenever he designed an impromptu of that kind, dressed himself in a rich suit, went to the * lady's house, asked for her, and, not finding her at home, *left his name* with her porter, after enquiring which way she was gone. He then followed, or met her, on her way home; *proposed* his demands, which were generally for some favourite ring or snuff-box that he had seen her wear, and which he had a mind to wear for her sake; and then letting her know that he had been *to wait on her*, took his leave with a cool bow, and without scampering away, as *other* men of fashion do from a visit with really the appearance of having stolen something.

As I do not doubt but such of my fair readers, as propose *being at home* this winter, will be impatient to send this charming smuggler (Charles Fleming by name) a card for their assemblies, I am sorry to tell them that he was hanged last week.

* This happened to Mrs. Cavendish at Thistleworth.

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