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In Five Volumes

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The W O R L D.

By ADAM FITZ-ADAM.

NUMB. CLX. *Thursday, January 22, 1756.*

To Mr. FITZ-ADAM.

I THINK, sir, more than three years are past since you began to bestow your labours on the reformation of the follies of the age. You have more than once hinted at the great success that has attended your endeavours; but surely, Mr. Fitz-Adam, you deceive yourself. Which of your papers has effectuated any real amendment? Have fewer fools gone to or returned from France since you commenced author? Or have fewer French follies been purchased or propagated by those who never were in France? Do not women, dressed French, still issue from houses dressed Chinese, to theatres dressed Italian, in spite of your grave admonitions? Do the young men wear less claret, or the beauties less *rouge*, in obedience to your lectures? Do men of fashion, who used to fling for a thousand pounds a throw, now cast only for five hundred? Or if they should, do you impute it to Your credit with Them, or to Their want of credit? I do not mean, sir, to depreciate the merit of your lucubrations: in point of effect, I believe they have operated as great reformation as the discourses of the divine Socrates, or the sermons of the affecting Tillotson. I really believe you would have corrected that young Athenian marquis, Alcibiades, as soon as his philosophic preceptor. What I would urge is, that all the preachers in the world, whether jocose, satiric, severe, or damnatory, will never be able to bring about a reformation of manners, by the mere charms of their eloquence or exhortation. You cannot imagine, Mr. Fitz-Adam, how much edge it would

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give to your wit to be backed by a little temporal authority. We may in vain regret the simplicity of manners of our ancestors, while there are no sumptuary laws to restrain luxury, no ecclesiastic censures to castigate vice. I shall offer to your readers an instance or two, to elucidate the monstrous disproportion between our riches and extravagance, and the frugality of former times; and then produce some of the wholesome censures and penalties, which the elders of the church were empowered to impose on persons of the first rank, who contravened the established rules of sobriety and decorum.

How would our progenitors have been astonished at reading the very first article in the late will of a *grocer! "Imprimis, I give to my dear wife *one hundred thousand pounds.*" A sum exceeding a benevolence, or two subsidies, some ages ago. Nor was this enormous legacy half the personal estate of the above-mentioned tradesman, on whom I am far from designing to reflect: he raised his fortune honestly and industriously: but I hope some future antiquarian, struck with the prodigality of the times, will compute how much sugar and plums must have been wasted weekly in one considerable parish in London, or even in one or two streets of that parish, before a single shopkeeper could have raised four hundred thousand pounds by retailing those and such-like commodities. Now let us turn our eyes back to the year 1385, and we shall find no less a person than the incomparable and virtuous lady Joan, princess dowager of Wales, by her last will and testament bequeathing the following simple moveables; and we may well believe they were the most valuable of her possessions, as she divided them between her son the king, and her other children. To her son, king Richard, she gave her new bed of red velvet, embroidered with ostrich feathers of silver, and heads of leopards of gold, with boughs and leaves proceeding from their mouths. Also to her son Thomas, earl of Kent, her bed of red camak, paled with red, and rays of gold; and to John Holland, her other son, one bed of red camak. These particulars are faithfully copied from Dugdale †: an instance of simplicity and moderation in so great and illustrious a princess, which I fear I should in vain recommend to my cotemporaries, and which is only likely to be imitated, as all her other virtues are, by the true representative of her fortune and excellence ‡.

* One Craftsman. † Vol. ii. p. 94. ‡ The present princess dowager of Wales.

I come

I come now, sir, to those proper checks upon licentiousness, which, though calculated to serve the views of a popish clergy, were undoubtedly great restraints upon immorality and indecency; and we may lament that such sober institutions were abolished with the real abuses of popery. Our ecclesiastic superiors had power to lay such fines and mulcts upon wantonness, as might raise a revenue to the church and poor, and at the same time leave the lordly transgressors at liberty to enjoy their darling foibles, if they would but pay for them. Adultery, fornication, drunkenness, and the other amusements of people of fashion, it would have been in vain to subject to corporal punishments. To ridicule those vices, and laugh them out of date by Tatlers, Spectators and Worlds, was not the talent of monks and confessors, who at best only knew how to wrap up very coarse terms in very bald Latin, and jingling verses. The clergy steered a third course, and assumed a province, which I could wish, Mr. Fitz-Adam, was a little connected with your censorial authority. If you had power to oblige your fair readers and offenders to do penance in clean linen, for almost wearing no linen at all, I believe it would be an excellent supplement to your paper of May the 24th, 1753. The wisest exercise that I find recorded of this power of inflicting penance, is mentioned by the same grave author, from whom I copied the will above mentioned: it happened in the year 1360, in the case of a very exalted personage, and shows how little the highest birth could exempt from the severe inspection of those judges of manners. The lady Elizabeth, daughter of the marquis of Juliers, and widow of John Plantagenet earl of Kent, uncle of the princess Joan, before mentioned, having on the death of the earl her husband retired to the monastery of Waverly, did (I suppose immediately) make a vow of chastity, and was solemnly veiled a nun there by William de Edendon, bishop of Winchester. Somehow or other it happened, that about eight years afterwards, sister Elizabeth of Waverly became enamoured of a goodly knight, called sir Eustace Drawbridgcourt*, smitten (as tradition says she affirmed) by his extreme resemblance to her late lord;

* Froissart, speaking of this knight, whom he calls d'Auberticourt, and who had made considerable conquests in Champagne and held a dozen fortresses there, says, "Il aimâ donc par amours, & depuis épousa madame Ysabella de Julliers, fille jadis au comte de Julliers. Cette dame avoit aussi en amour monseigneur Eustache

pour les grandes appertiffes d'armes qu'elle en oyoit recorder, & luy envoya la dite, haquenes courriers & lettres amoureuses, parquoi le dit messire Eustace en estoit plus hardi, & faisoit tant de chevaleries & faits d'armes, que chacun gaignoit avec luy."

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though, as other creditable writers affirm, he was considerably younger: and notwithstanding her vows of continence, which could not bind her conscience, and in spite of her confinement, which was not strong enough to detain a lady of her great quality, she was clandestinely married to her paramour, in a certain chapel of the mansion-house of Robert de Brome, a canon of the collegiate church of Wyngham, without any licence from the archbishop of Canterbury, by one sir John Ireland, a priest, before the sunrising, upon Michaelmas-day, in the thirty-fourth of Edward the third.

Notwithstanding the great scandal such an indecorum must have given, it is evident from the subservience of two priests to her desires, that her rank of princess of the blood set her above all apprehension of punishment for the breach of her monastic vows; yet it is as evident from the sequel of the story, that her dignity could not exempt her from such proper censures and penalties, as might deter others from commission of the like offences; as might daily and frequently expose the lady herself to blushes for her miscarriage; and as might draw comfort to the poor, from taxing the inordinate gratification of the appetites of their superiors: a sort of comfort, which, to do them justice, the poor are apt to take as kindly, as the relief of their own wants.

My author says*, that the lady dowager and her young husband being personally convented before the archbishop of Canterbury for the said transgression, at his manor-house of Haghfeld, upon the seventh ides of April, the archbishop for their penance enjoined them to find a priest to celebrate divine service daily for them, the said sir Eustace and Elizabeth, and for him, the archbishop; besides a large quantity of penitential psalms, paternosters and aves, which were to be daily repeated by the priests and the transgressors. His grace moreover ordered the lady Elizabeth, whom for some reasons best known to himself I suppose he regarded as the seducer, to go once a year on foot in pilgrimage to the tomb of that glorious martyr, St. Thomas of Canterbury; and once every week during her life to fast on bread and drink, and a mess of pottage, wearing no smock, especially in the absence of her husband; a penance that must appear whimsical to us, and not a little partial to sir Eustace, whom the archbishop seems in more respects than one to have considered rather as disobedient to the canons, than guilty of much

* Vol. ii. page 95.

voluptuousness by his wedlock. But the most remarkable articles of the penance were the two following. The archbishop appointed the said sir Eustace and the lady Elizabeth, that the next day after any repetition of their transgression had passed between them, they should competently relieve six poor people, and both of them that day to abstain from some dish of flesh or fish, whereof they did most desire to eat.

Such was the simplicity of our ancestors. Such were the wholesome severities to which the greatest dames and most licentious young lords were subject in those well-meaning times. But though I approve the morality of such corrections, and perhaps think that a degree of such power might be safely lodged in the hands of our great and good prelates; yet I am not so bigoted to antiquity as to approve either the articles of the penance, or to think that they could be reconciled to the difference of modern times and customs. Paternosters and aves might be supplied by prayers and litanies of a more protestant complexion. Instead of a pilgrimage on foot to Canterbury, if an inordinate matron were compelled to walk to Ranelagh, I believe the penance might be severe enough for the delicacy of modern constitutions. For the article of leaving off a shift, considering that the upper half is already laid aside, perhaps to oblige a lady-offender to wear a whole shift, might be thought a sufficient punishment; for wise legislators will allow a latitude of interpretation to their laws, to be varied according to the fluctuating condition of times and seasons. What most offends me, as by no means proper for modern imitation, is the article that prescribes charity to the poor, and a restriction from eating of a favourite dish, after the performance of certain mysteries. If the right reverend father was determined to make the lady Elizabeth ashamed of her incontinence, in truth he lighted upon a very adequate expedient, though not a very wise one; for as devotion and charity are observed to increase with increase of years, the bishop's injunction tended to nothing but to lessen the benefactions of the offenders as they grew older, by the conditions to which he limited their largesse.

One can scarce reflect without a smile on the troops of beggars waiting every morning at sir Eustace's gate, till he and his lady arose, to know whether their wants were to be relieved. One must not word, but one cannot help imagining, the style of a modern footman, when ordered at breakfast by his master and lady to go and send away the beggars, for they were to

have nothing that morning. One might even suppose the good lady pouting a little as she gave him the message. But were such a penance really enjoined now, what a fund of humour and wit would it open to people of fashion, invited to dine with two illustrious penitents under this circumstance! As *their* wit is never indelicate; as the subject is inexhaustible; and as the ideas on such an occasion must be a little corporeal, what *bons mots*, wrapped up indeed, but still intelligible enough, would attend the arrival of every new French dish, which sir Eustace or my lady would be concluded to like, and would decline to taste!—But I am afraid I have transgressed the bounds of a letter. You, Mr. Fitz-Adam, who sway the censorial rod with the greatest lenity, and who would blush to put your fair penitents to the blush, might be safely trusted with the powers I recommend. Human weaknesses, and human follies, are very different: continue to attack the latter; continue to pity the former. An ancient lady might resist wearing pink; a matron who cannot resist the prowess of a sir Eustace Drawbridgecourt, is not a topic for satire, but compassion; as you, who are the best-natured writer of the age, will, I am sure, agree to think with, sir,

Your constant reader

and humble servant,

THOMAS HEARNE, JUN.

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