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N<sup>o</sup> 11. Thursday, May 9, 1709.

S T E E L E.

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*Quicquid agunt homines —*

*nostri est farrago libelli.*

Juv. Sat. i. 85, 86.

“Whate’er men do, or say, or think, or dream,  
“Our medley Paper seizes for its theme.” P.

By ISAAC BICKERSTAFF, Esquire.

WILL’s Coffee-house, May 3.

A Kinsman has sent me a letter, wherein he informs me, he had lately resolved to write an heroic poem, but by business has been interrupted, and has only made one similitude, which he should be afflicted to have wholly lost; and begs of me to apply it to something, being very desirous to see it well placed in the world. I am so willing to help the distressed, that I have taken it in: but, though his greater genius might very well distinguish his verses from mine, I have marked where his begin. His lines are a description of the sun in eclipse, which I know nothing more like than a brave man in sorrow, who bears it as he should, without



without imploring the pity of his friends, or being dejected with the contempt of his enemies : as in the case of Cato.

When all the globe to Cæsar's fortune bow'd,  
Cato alone his empire disallow'd ;  
With inborn strength alone oppos'd mankind,  
With heav'n in view, to all below it blind :  
Regardless of his friends applause, or moan,  
Alone triumphant, since he falls alone\*.

“ Thus when the Ruler of the genial day  
“ Behind some dark'ning planet forms his way,  
“ Desponding mortals, with officious care,  
“ The concave drum and magic brass prepare ;  
“ Implore him to sustain th' important fight,  
“ And save depending worlds from endless night :  
“ Fondly they hope their labour may avail  
“ To ease his conflict, and assist his toil,  
“ Whilst he, in beams of native splendor bright, }  
“ (Tho' dark his orb appear to human sight) }  
“ Shines to the gods with more diffusive light ; }  
“ To distant stars with equal glory burns,  
“ Inflames their lamps, and feeds their golden urns,  
“ Sure to retain his known superior tract,  
“ And proves the more illustrious by defect.”

This is a very lively image ; but I must take the liberty to say, my kinsman drives the sun a

\* The verses are by Mr. JABEZ HUGHES, who seems therefore, to have some claim to be considered as the author of this number, or at least of the first part of the Paper.



little like *Phaëton*\*: he has all the warmth of *Phæbus*, but will not stay for his direction of it. *Avail* and *toil*, *defect* and *tract*, will never do for rhymes. But, however, he has the true spirit in him; for which reason I was willing to entertain any thing he pleased to send me. The subject which he writes upon naturally raises great reflections in the soul, and puts us in mind of the mixed condition which we mortals are to support; which, as it varies to good or bad, adorns or defaces our actions to the beholders: all which glory and shame must end in, what we so much repine at, death. But doctrines on this occasion, any other than that of living well, are the most insignificant and most empty of all the labours of men. None but a tragedian can die by rule, and wait till he discovers a plot; or says a fine thing upon his *exit*. In real life, this is a *chimæra*; and by noble spirits it will be done decently, without the ostentation of it. We see men of all conditions and characters go through it with equal resolution: and if we consider the speeches of the mighty philosophers, heroes, lawgivers, and great captains, they can produce no more in a discerning spirit, than rules to make a man a fop on his death-bed. Commend me to that natural greatness of soul, expressed by an innocent, and consequently resolute country-fellow, who said in the pains of the cholic, "If I

\* OVID. *Metam.* II. 1.



“once get this breath out of my body, you  
“shall hang me before you put it in again.”  
Honest NED! and so he died\*.

But it is to be supposed, that from this place you may expect an account of such a thing as a new play is not to be omitted. That acted this night is the newest that ever was writ. The Author is my ingenious friend Mr. THOMAS DURFEY. This drama is called, “THE MODERN PROPHETS†,” and is a most unanswerable satire against the late spirit of enthusiasm. The writer had by long experience observed that, in company, very grave discourses had been followed by bawdry; and therefore has turned the humour that way with great success, and taken from his audience all manner of superstition, by the agitations of pretty Mrs. BIGNELL, whom he has, with great subtilty, made a lay-sister, as well as a prophetess; by which means she carries on the

\* This NED was a farmer of ANTHONY HENLEY, Esq. who mentions this saying of his in a letter to SWIFT. SWIFT’s Work, vol. XVIII. p. 15. As SWIFT was in London at this time, perhaps he might be the author of this paper, or at least give hints for it. It is more probable that ANTHONY HENLEY, Esq. communicated to his friend STEELE, this anecdote of *honest* NED, and the Paper itself. This annotator was informed on good authority that ANTHONY HENLEY, Esq. was the author of some Papers in these volumes, which the respectable person who gave him the intelligence could not particularly point out. See TAT. N<sup>o</sup> 25, *ad finem*.

† See *Misc. Works of Lord CHESTERFIELD*, by Dr. Maty, 4to. vol. II. p. 523 and 555; EXAMINER, N<sup>o</sup> 48; *Supplement* to SWIFT, vol. II. p. 329, and vol. III. p. 9.



affairs of both worlds with great success. My friend designs to go on with another work against winter, which he intends to call, "The Modern Poets," a people no less mistaken in their opinions of being inspired, than the other. In order to this, he has by him seven songs, besides many ambiguities, which cannot be mistaken for any thing but what he means them. Mr. DURFEY generally writes state-plays, and is wonderfully useful to the world in such representations. This method is the same that was used by the old Athenians, to laugh out of countenance, or promote, opinions among the people. My friend has therefore, against this play is acted for his own benefit, made two dances, which may be also of an universal benefit. In the first, he has represented absolute power in the person of a tall man with a hat and feather, who gives his first minister, that stands just before him, an huge kick; the minister gives the kick to the next before; and so to the end of the stage. In this moral and practical jest, you are made to understand, that there is, in an absolute government, no gratification, but giving the kick you receive from one above you, to one below you. This is performed to a grave and melancholy air; but on a sudden the tune moves quicker, and the whole company fall into a circle, and take hands; and then, at a certain sharp note, they move round, and kick as kick can. This latter performance he makes to be the representation



sentation of a free state; where, if you all mind your steps, you may go round and round very jollily, with a motion pleasant to yourselves and those you dance with: nay, if you put yourselves out, at the worst you only kick and are kicked, like friends and equals.

From my own Apartment, May 4.

Of all the vanities under the sun, I confess that of being proud of one's birth is the greatest. At the same time, since in this unreasonable age, by the force of prevailing custom, things in which men have no hand are imputed to them; and that I am used by some people, as if ISAAC BICKERSTAFF, though I write myself *Esquire*, was nobody: to set the world right in that particular, I shall give you my genealogy, as a kinsman of ours has sent it me from the Herald's office. It is certain, and observed by the wisest writers, that there are women who are not nicely chaste, and men not severely honest, in all families; therefore let those who may be apt to raise aspersions upon ours, please to give us as impartial an account of their own, and we shall be satisfied. The business of heralds is a matter of so great nicety, that, to avoid mistakes, I shall give you my cousin's letter *verbatim*, without altering a syllable\*.

\* Mr. TWISDEN was the author of this letter, as appears from STEELE's *Preface* to TATLER, vol. IV. See TAT. N<sup>o</sup> 14, *ad finem*.



“DEAR COUSIN,

“SINCE you have been pleased to make  
 “yourself so famous of late, by your in-  
 “genious writings, and some time ago by  
 “your learned predictions: since PARTRIDGE  
 “of immortal memory is dead and gone†, who,  
 “poetical as he was, could not understand his  
 “own poetry; and philomatical as he was,  
 “could not read his own destiny: since the  
 “pope, the king of France, and great part of  
 “his court, are either literally or metaphori-  
 “cally defunct: since, I say, these things (not  
 “foretold by any one but yourself) have come  
 “to pass after so surprising a manner; it is  
 “with no small concern I see the original of  
 “the STAFFIAN race so little known in the  
 “world as it is at this time; for which reason,  
 “as you have employed your studies in astro-  
 “nomy, and the occult sciences, so I, my  
 “mother being a Welch woman, dedicated  
 “mine to genealogy, particularly that of our  
 “own family, which, for its antiquity and  
 “number, may challenge any in GREAT BRI-  
 “TAIN. The STAFFS are originally of *Staf-*  
 “*fordsshire*, which took its name from them;  
 “the first that I find of the STAFFS was one

† PARTRIDGE was the rise of the “first BICKERSTAFF.”  
 EXAMINER, vol. V. N<sup>o</sup> 30. This is an ill-natured allusion  
 to a passage in STEELE’s *Dedication of TATLER*, vol. I. and  
 an unfair inference from it. See SWIFT’s Works, vol. III.  
 p. 194. vol. VI. p. 83. cr. 8vo. 1766; and introd. Note to  
 the TATLER, N<sup>o</sup> I.

“JACOB=



“ JACOBSTAFF, a famous and renowned astro-  
“ nomer, who by DOROTHY his wife had issue  
“ seven sons, viz. BICKERSTAFF, LONGSTAFF,  
“ WAGSTAFF, QUARTERSTAFF, WHITE-  
“ STAFF, FALSTAFF, and TIPSTAFF. He  
“ also had a younger brother, who was twice  
“ married, and had five sons, viz. DISTAFF,  
“ PIKESTAFF, MOPSTAFF, BROOMSTAFF,  
“ and RAGGEDSTAFF. As for the branch  
“ from whence you spring, I shall say very  
“ little of it, only that it is the chief of the  
“ STAFFS, and called BICKERSTAFF, *quasi*  
“ BIGGERSTAFF; as much as to say, the  
“ GREAT STAFF, or STAFF OF STAFFS; and  
“ that it has applied itself to Astronomy with  
“ great success, after the example of our afore-  
“ said forefather. The descendants from LONG-  
“ STAFF, the second son, were a rakish disor-  
“ derly sort of people, and rambled from one  
“ place to another, until, in the time of Harry  
“ the second, they settled in Kent, and were  
“ called LONG-TAILS, from the LONG TAILS  
“ which were sent them as a punishment for  
“ the murder of Thomas a-Becket, as the le-  
“ gends say. They have always been fought  
“ after by the ladies; but whether it be to shew  
“ their aversion to popery, or their love to mi-  
“ racles, I cannot say. The WAGSTAFFS are  
“ a merry thoughtless sort of people, who have  
“ always been opinionated of their own wit;  
“ they have turned themselves mostly to poetry.  
“ This is the most numerous branch of our  
“ family,



“ family, and the poorest. The QUARTER-  
 “ STAFFS are most of them prize-fighters or  
 “ deer-stealers: there have been so many of  
 “ them hanged lately, that there are very few  
 “ of that branch of our family left. The  
 “ WHITESTAFFS\* are all courtiers, and have  
 “ had very considerable places. There have been  
 “ some of them of that strength and dexterity,  
 “ that five hundred † of the ablest men in the  
 “ kingdom have often tugged in vain to pull  
 “ a staff out of their hands. The FALSTAFFS  
 “ are strangely given to whoring and drinking:  
 “ there are abundance of them in and about  
 “ London. One thing is very remarkable  
 “ of this branch, and that is, there are just as  
 “ many women as men in it. There was a  
 “ wicked stick of wood of this name in Harry  
 “ the fourth’s time, one Sir JOHN FALSTAFF.  
 “ As for TIPSTAFF, the youngest son, he was  
 “ an honest fellow; but his sons, and his sons’  
 “ sons, have all of them been the veriest  
 “ rogues living: it is this unlucky branch that  
 “ has stocked the nation with that swarm of  
 “ lawyers, attorneys, serjeants, and bailiffs,  
 “ with which the nation is over-run. TIP-  
 “ STAFF, being a seventh son, used to cure the  
 “ king’s-evil; but his rascally descendants are

\* An allusion to the staff that is carried, as an ensign of  
 his office, by the first Lord of the Treasury, who is after-  
 wards humourously compared by STEELE to “ an emmet  
 “ distinguished from his fellows by a white straw.”

† The House of Commons.

“ so



“ so far from having that healing quality, that,  
“ by a touch upon the shoulder, they give a  
“ man such an ill habit of body, that he can  
“ never come abroad afterwards. This is all I  
“ know of the line of JACOBSTAFF: his younger  
“ brother ISAACSTAFF, as I told you before,  
“ had five sons, and was married twice; his  
“ first wife was a STAFF (for they did not  
“ stand upon false heraldry in those days) by  
“ whom he had one son, who, in process of  
“ time, being a schoolmaster and well read  
“ in the Greek, called himself DISTAFF, or  
“ TWICESTAFF. He was not very rich, so he  
“ put his children out to trades; and the DIS-  
“ TAFFS have ever since been employed in the  
“ woollen and linen manufactures, except my-  
“ self, who am a genealogist. PIKESTAFF,  
“ the eldest son by the second *venter*, was a  
“ man of business, a downright plodding fel-  
“ low, and withal so plain, that he became a  
“ proverb. Most of this family are at present  
“ in the army. RAGGEDSTAFF was an un-  
“ lucky boy, and used to tear his cloaths in  
“ getting birds nests, and was always playing  
“ with a tame bear his father kept. MOPSTAFF  
“ fell in love with one of his father’s maids,  
“ and used to help her to clean the house.  
“ BROOMSTAFF was a chimney-sweeper. The  
“ MOPSTAFFS and BROOMSTAFFS are naturally  
“ as civil people as ever went out of doors;  
“ but alas! if they once get into ill hands,  
“ they knock down all before them. PIL-  
“ GRIMSTAFF



“ GRIMSTAFF ran away from his friends, and  
 “ went strolling about the country: and PIPE-  
 “ STAFF was a wine-cooper. These two were  
 “ the unlawful issue of LONGSTAFF.

“ N. B. The CANES, the CLUBS, the  
 “ CUDGELS, the WANDS, the DEVIL UPON  
 “ TWO STICKS\*, and one BREAD, that goes  
 “ by the name of STAFF OF LIFE, are none  
 “ of our relations. I am,

“ DEAR COUSIN,

From the Heralds  
 office, May 1, 1709.

“ Your humble servant,

“ D. DISTAFF.”

St. JAMES'S Coffee-house, May 4.

As political news is not the principal subject on which we treat, we are so happy as to have no occasion for that art of cookery which our brother newsmongers so much excel in; as appears by their excellent and inimitable manner of dressing up a second time for your taste the same dish which they gave you the day before, in case there come over no new pickles from Holland. Therefore, when we have nothing to say to you from courts and

\* An allusion to the *Diablo Boiteux*, or “The Devil on Crutches,” of LE SAGE, a book of rapid sale, and bought with so much avidity, that it is said, two gentlemen contended sword in hand, for the last copy of the second edition. It is a masterly imitation, very superior to the original, of a Spanish publication by *L. Velez Guevara*, entitled, *El Diablo cojuelo*.

camps,



camps, we hope still to give you somewhat new and curious from ourselves: the women of our house, upon occasion, being capable of carrying on the business, according to the laudable custom of the wives in Holland; but, without farther preface, take what we have not mentioned in our former relations.

Letters from Hanover of the thirtieth of the last month say, that the Prince Royal of Prussia arrived there on the 15th, and left that court on the second of this month, in pursuit of his journey to Flanders, where he makes the ensuing campaign. Those advices add, that the young Prince Nassau, hereditary governour of Friesland, celebrated on the twenty-sixth of the last month his marriage with the beauteous Princess of Hesse-Cassel, with a pomp and magnificence suitable to their age and quality.

Yesterday, at four in the morning, his grace the Duke of Marlborough set out for Margate, and embarked for Holland at eight this morning. Yesterday also Sir George Thorold was declared Alderman of Cordwainers Ward, in the room of his brother Sir Charles Thorold, deceased.

\* \* Any Ladies who have any particular stories of their acquaintance, which they are willing privately to make public, may send them by the penny-post to ISAAC BICKERSTAFF, Esq. inclosed to Mr. John Morphew, near Stationers Hall.