

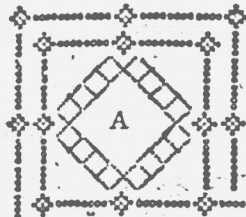
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MARYLAND GAZETTE.

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 1772.

From the OXFORD MAGAZINE.

The CENSOR, NUMBER XIII.



VIRTUOUS Man, and a good Citizen, will always be sensibly concerned for the Honour of his Country; and as it will give him the highest Satisfaction to hear that her Fame is exalted above that of the other Nations of the Earth; so will he be deeply afflicted to find she is characterized by any particular Vice, to which his Fellow-Subjects are addicted, in such a Degree as to render it a notorious and general Charge. Valour, Integrity, and Amity, are the Virtues for which Englishmen are renowned. Intemperance and Suicide are the Vices with which they are branded as a People.

The Intemperance of my Countrymen is chiefly confined to the Three following Articles, Women, Wine, and Money. In the Gratification of their inordinate Lust, under either of these Heads, I am sorry to say, I apprehend we have no Rivals. The Annals of modern Gallantry contain the most melancholy Proofs, that no Laws, sacred or prophane, no Ties of Friendship or Gratitude, can stop our Career, when a fine Woman is the Object of our Desires. I defy any Country around us to produce Instances of such Perfidy, brutal Indecency, and low Debauchery, as are to be met with in the Depositions on the one Part and the other, published (contrary to all good Order and sound Manners) in the Grosvenor Cause. The black Ingratitude of Capt. Sutherland and Lady Mary Scott; the mean Lewdness of Mrs. B—y, and the contemptible, mercenary Disposition of that vile Tool her Husband, are corroborating Evidences of the voluptuous Intemperance, and Sordidness, which are daily gaining Ground in the Capital of this Kingdom.

No less conspicuous is the disgraceful Vice of Drunkenness, exhibited every Night in our Streets, at the breaking up of Tavern and Alehouse Clubs. And as to the last Branch of Intemperance, Money, we know that there are Numbers amongst us, who are dead to the Calls of Humanity, and to every social Feeling; and who will act the most unnatural and unjustifiable Parts, when Interest is in View. But it will be said, avaritious Men are to be found in all Countries, and that the Thirst of Gain is not peculiar to the English; this will readily be granted; yet most certain it is, that no People on Earth have done such mad Actions merely for the Sake of Money.

I wish we could stop here, and that the Pages of recent History did not confirm the Opinion, which all Foreigners entertain, that Suicide is the English Crime. I have taken some Pains to examine from whence this Notion of our Countrymen is derived, and I find, that for One European of any other Nation, that has destroyed himself within the last Half Century, there have been no less than Thirty of our Countrymen; and this is the more surprising, because the natural Valour for which we are famed, it might be imagined, would inspire us with Fortitude to encounter those Adversities in Life, that are the common Causes of Suicide. Those, indeed, who contend that the Act of Self-Murder is a Proof of Valour, will reconcile this Vice to our national Character of Bravery; and on this Principle they may account for its being more frequent in England than elsewhere.

It has been a Question amongst the Learned, whether the Commission of this Crime does not always suppose a State of Lunacy, and from this Supposition it has become the usual Practice for the Coroner's Inquest, upon these melancholy Occasions, to bring in a Verdict of Lunacy. But if we consult the Records of Antiquity, or take a critical Review of some of the fatal Catastrophes that have happened in our own Country, we shall find, that the cool, deliberate Manner in which many Persons have prepared themselves for a voluntary Death, and the Resolution with which they afterwards encountered this terrible Fate, were the surest Indications of a sound Mind, and of the full Use of their rational Faculties. It is not my Intention, however, to justify this Crime, but since we are branded with it as a national one, I would willingly lessen the Odium, and refute the ridiculous Opinion, that it is always an Act of Lunacy.

It has been maintained, that the celebrated Cato put himself to Death through an Imbecillity of Mind. But whoever considers what Fortitude he must have possessed, not only to overcome the most powerful Instinct of Nature, but to determine on preferring Death to a Life which he thought ignominious; when we reflect that his generous Soul could not bear the Idea of Slavery, and that his Affection for his Country would not permit him to behold her subjected to the Usurpation of Caesar, we cannot but acknowledge he had the perfect Use of his Reason. We must grant likewise that Brutus, Cassius, the sublime Arria, the Emperor Otho, Mark Anthony, and many more celebrated Heroes of ancient Rome, had not the least Symptom of Lunacy, when they calmly resolved to quit Life, rather than live to be taken Prisoners, and to be led in shameful

Triumph through the Cities in which they had been honoured with the first Dignities of the Commonwealth, and been held in the highest Veneration. By their Deaths they knew they should consecrate their Names to latest Posterity; by surviving, to be made Captives, they were assured their Memories would be eternally disgraced, and their Persons despised.

But the Romans put an End to their Existence upon Occasions, which, in the Eyes of Christians, must appear very unjustifiable. When they were afflicted with any painful or lingering Disorder, for which they knew no Remedy, they deliberately settled all their worldly Affairs, acquainted their Families that they were resolved to die, prepared their nearest and dearest Relations to bear the Shock of the tragic Scene that was to ensue, and even brought them to consent to the Measure, and to give it the Sanction of their Approbation. And as a Proof that Suicide was neither considered as an Act of Lunacy nor yet of Cowardice, some of the greatest Philosophers of Antiquity have written in Defence of an Action now universally condemned. In Fact, as neither the religious nor civil Codes of the Heathens forbade the Practice, it became a Part of the Customs of the Nation, and was at length considered as a Mark of heroic Virtue.

The Testament of a Suicide was decreed to be valid by a Law of Mark Anthony; which was never revoked; but the Wills of Persons who were deemed insane were always null and void by the Roman Laws. From this cursory Review of Suicide, in the most renowned Republick of Rome, once the Mistress of the World, it will be hard to account for the penal Laws and infamous Punishments, which have been introduced into the civil Institutes of most modern Countries, with respect to an Action now considered as an horrid Crime, and formerly accounted a Virtue. If our modern Legislators have proceeded on the Principles of Christianity, it is incumbent on them, as Voltaire justly observes, to point out any positive Ordinance concerning Suicide either in the Old or the New Testament; the Silence of Scripture on this Head has induced some modern Writers of no small Repute, though educated in the Principles of Christianity, to apologize for this fatal Error, for such it certainly is, as I shall make it appear before I quit the Subject; my Intention being only to invalidate the false Notion, that all Suicides are Madmen or Lunatics; and to excite our Attention to the Causes of the Frequency of these tragic Scenes in England, in order that we may use our best Endeavours to prevent them.

I am concerned to find all the Blame lie at the Door of the unhappy Victims, while those Wretches who may be said to have murdered them, though they did not actually give the mortal Blow, escape unscathed. We derive many strange Customs from our Canon Law; amongst others, that of confiscating the personal Effects of Suicides, of denying them the Rights of Sepulture, and of rendering their Names infamous. But by a strange Insatiation, hardly to be accounted for in an enlightened Age, we do not stigmatize the obdurate unrelenting Parent—the cruel, perfidious Seducer of female Innocence—the avaritious Oppressor of the distressed in Circumstances—the Violator of the Rights of Humanity—the implacable Villain who never forgives, but pursues his Resentment, till the Destruction of its Object is accomplished—these all live to enjoy their successful Triumphs over the unhappy Suicides, to whom they have administered the Poison of Despair. In the Case of Duels, as well as Suicide, it seems equitable, that the Parties who have fomented the Quarrels which occasion a fatal Catastrophe, should be called to Account by the civil Power; but since we have no Laws to punish such Offenders, the Censor thinks it his Duty to remind those pretended Christians, who are the Causes, by their Conduct, either of Duels or Self-Murders, that they are more guilty than the Victims themselves, and ought to be expelled from Society, instead of being received into all Companies as Persons of Honour and Reputation.

In every Age and Country it has been remarked, that particular Vices have been rendered habitual by Custom. In Rome it was the Fashion for Men to destroy themselves whenever their Situation in Life appeared intolerable. In France, at a certain Period, Duelling was so much in Vogue, that the Government was obliged to proceed to the utmost Severity against the Survivor: Yet this could not totally prevent the Practice; for the Duke de Montmorency; the Marshal de Marillac, de Thoue, Cinq Mars, and some other Noblemen of Quality, preferred the Risk of being executed like common Felons, to the Imputation of having dishonoured themselves by refusing a Challenge, and being so unfortunate to survive their Antagonists, were carried through the Streets of Paris in Sledges, and suffered at the common Place of Execution for the lowest Criminals. Had it been the Fashion to destroy themselves, these Men would have had the Resolution to prevent a more ignominious Death. At Japan it is the Fashion, when Two Persons of Rank have quarrelled, for the offended Party to rip up his own Belly, in Presence of his Enemy, and to challenge him to do the same. Ridiculous as this Custom may appear, yet no Japanese, who values his Reputation, dare refuse instantly to plunge the fatal Knife into his Body, and

expire with his Antagonist; to survive, would be to entail Dishonour and Infamy on himself and his Posterity.

Such being the Force of Custom in all Countries, though differing in its Modes of Operation, surely they ought to be deemed the most detestable of Men, who by their Villainy establish vicious and destructive Habits, or favour a Propensity to Acts of bloody Violence. He who teaches his Fellow-Citizen false Principles of Honour, which urge him to sheathe his Sword in the Bowels of his best Friend; or to fall a Victim to his own idle Resentment, should be put to Death by the same Weapon; he should be considered as the Abettor and Accomplice of Murder. The hardened Wretch, who, by his Cruelty and Oppression, drives another to the dreadful Act of Suicide, ought in Justice to share the same Fate; but if he is suffered to live, he should be shunned by all Mankind; none should converse with him; no Man of Credit should have any Connections with him. The Horror and Aversion to a living Monster of this Species, which the Author of the Censor has conceived in his Breast, gave him the Idea of writing on this melancholy Subject.

A most amiable Man, endeared to Society by every social Virtue, has lately fallen a Victim to the Implacability of the mean, sordid Wretch he has in View. The Story is recent, and the Characters so well known, that Names need not be mentioned.

The unfortunate Gentleman was in the India Service, and his principal Owner taking a Pique to him, determined to take from him the Command of his Ship: To cover his Inhumanity with some colourable Pretence, he presented Complaints against the worthy Captain to the East-India Company, by whom he was honourably acquitted, and recommended to the Command; but the obstinate, choleric, mercenary D— would not relent; but procured, by his Interest, the Consent of some other Owners to exclude the Captain. Soon after, the unhappy Man, while the Family where he lived were at Dinner, ran his Sword through his Body, came down from his Chamber, drew it out, and then deliberately repeated this agonizing Operation Twice more, till he expired on the Spot. Behold the cursed Effects of Fashion! Two or Three remarkable Acts of Suicide had happened in the Course of last Summer, and this oppressed, this injured Man, followed the bad Example.

Had it been the Custom, as it was in the Time of the virtuous Romans, first to destroy the cruel Oppressor; so generous was the Disposition of this good Man, that he would hardly have countenanced it. But all may not be of his Mind; and it is really amazing, that Men are not more afraid of distressing their Fellow-Creatures to such an extreme Degree, as to leave them no Remedy but Death. The Apprehension of falling into the Hands of Justice, and suffering a shameful Death, is the Safeguard of private Tyrants, or they would often fall Victims to their unrelenting Cruelty. The general Causes of Suicide, with us, are outrageous ill Usage from Relations, and Persons with whom the unfortunate stand connected in Business. Therefore, though we acknowledge Self-Murder to be a Crime, on the Christian System, for every Christian ought to submit to his Destiny, be it good or bad in the World; yet it is evident, that such Monsters as we have just described are more criminal. The Censor thinks it may be a Means of softening the Inhuman, of conciliating Differences, and of exciting the Compassion of those who have any Remains of Virtue, if men would shew a general Detestation and Abhorrence of all inexorable Parents—of all Villains who have seduced and ruined Virgins—of all sordid Misers, who let their own Offspring perish for Want—and of all cruel Oppressors, who contribute to render the Crime of Suicide a national Stigma. If Gentlemen would recollect the Circumstances, and call to Mind the private Histories of Families, they would find many of these black Characters in the World, with whom they inadvertently associate. If a noble Contempt was shewn, and these Monsters were hunted down, wherever they dared to mix with the virtuous Part of Mankind, we should soon hear of relenting Fathers receiving Home unhappy Daughters, of humane Creditors releasing starved Debtors, and of opulent Men lending their Assistance to indigent Relations—Suicide would not be the prevailing Custom; for Men in general would bear their Misfortunes with more Fortitude, from the Hopes, that when those who are the primary Cause of them were branded in Society, it might have the happy Effect to induce them to alleviate their Distresses.

I cannot conclude this Paper, without recommending to all Persons in unhappy Circumstances in Life, to remember that they are not Masters of One Moment of Futurity, consequently they cannot tell but the next Moment may produce a Change in their Favour; if no Principles of Religion can refrain them from destroying themselves, this Consideration alone ought to be a Motive to break the fatal Resolution. We have many Instances in History, where it has happened, that if the unhappy Suicides had lived but a few Days, sometimes a few Hours longer, all their Affairs would have been settled to their entire Satisfaction. In a Word, Englishmen should take Care, above all Things, not to dishonour their Country, by adding to the ge-