

Tatler 25, June 4, 1709 (Steele)

No. 25.

From Saturday, June 4, to Tuesday, June 7, 1709.

* * * * *

White's Chocolate-house, June 6.

A letter from a young lady, written in the most passionate terms

(wherein she laments the misfortune of a gentleman, her lover, who was lately wounded in a duel), has turned my thoughts to that subject, and inclined me to examine into the causes which precipitate men into so fatal a folly. And as it has been proposed to treat of subjects of

gallantry in the article from hence, and no one point of nature is more

proper to be considered by the company who frequent this place, than

that of duels, it is worth our consideration to examine into this

chimerical groundless humour, and to lay every other thought aside, till we have stripped it of all its false pretences to credit and reputation

amongst men. But I must confess, when I consider what I am going about, and run over in my imagination all the endless crowd of men of honour who will be offended at such a discourse, I am undertaking, methinks, a work worthy an invulnerable hero in romance, rather than a private gentleman with a single rapier; but as I am pretty well acquainted by great opportunities with the nature of man, and know of a truth, that all men fight against their will, the danger vanishes, and resolution rises upon this subject. For this

reason I shall talk very freely on a custom which all men wish exploded, though no man has courage enough to resist it. But there is one unintelligible word which I fear will extremely perplex my dissertation, and I confess to you I find very hard to explain, which is, the term "satisfaction." An honest country gentleman had the misfortune to fall into company with two or three modern men of honour, where he happened to be very ill-treated; and one of the company being conscious of his offence, sends a note to him in the morning, and tells him, he was ready to give him satisfaction. "This is fine doing," says the plain fellow: "last night he sent me away cursedly out of humour, and this morning he fancies it would be a satisfaction to be run through the body." As the matter at present stands, it is not to do handsome actions denominates a man of honour; it is enough if he dares to defend ill ones. Thus you often see a common sharper in competition with a gentleman of the first rank; though all mankind is convinced, that a fighting gamester is only a pickpocket with the courage of a highwayman. One cannot with any patience reflect on the unaccountable jumble of persons and things in this town and nation, which occasions very frequently, that a brave man falls by a hand below that of the common hangman, and yet his executioner escapes the clutches of the hangman for doing it. I shall therefore hereafter consider, how the bravest men in other ages and nations have behaved themselves upon such incidents as we decide by combat; and show, from their practice, that this resentment neither has its foundation from true reason, nor solid fame; but is an imposture, made up of cowardice, falsehood, and want of understanding. For this work, a good history of quarrels would be very edifying to the public, and I apply myself to the town

for particulars and circumstances within their knowledge, which may serve to embellish the dissertation with proper cuts. Most of the quarrels I have ever known, have proceeded from some valiant coxcomb's persisting in the wrong, to defend some prevailing folly, and preserve himself from the ingenuity of owning a mistake.

By this means it is called, "giving a man satisfaction," to urge your offence against him with your sword; which puts me in mind of Peter's order to the keeper, in the "Tale of a Tub": "If you neglect to do all this, damn you and your generation for ever; and so we bid you heartily farewell." If the contradiction in the very terms of one of our challenges were as well explained, and turned into plain English, would it not run after this manner?

"SIR,

"Your extraordinary behaviour last night, and the liberty you were pleased to take with me, makes me this morning give you this, to tell you, because you are an ill-bred puppy, I will meet you in Hyde Park an hour hence; and because you want both breeding and humanity, I desire you would come with a pistol in your hand, on horseback, and endeavour to shoot me through the head; to teach you more manners. If you fail of doing me this pleasure, I shall say, you are a rascal on every post in town: and so, sir, if you will not injure me more, I shall never forgive what you have done already. Pray sir, do not fail of getting everything ready, and you will infinitely oblige,

"Sir,

"Your most obedient,

"humble Servant, &c."

From my own Apartment, June 6.

Among the many employments I am necessarily put upon by my friends, that of giving advice is the most unwelcome to me; and indeed, I am forced to use a little art in the matter; for some people will ask counsel of you, when they have already acted what they tell you is still under deliberation. I had almost lost a very good friend the other day, who came to know how I liked his design to marry such a lady. I answered, "By no means; and I must be positive against it, for very solid reasons, which are not proper to communicate." "Not proper to communicate!" said he with a grave air, "I will know the bottom of this." I saw him moved, and knew from thence he was already determined; therefore evaded it by saying, "To tell you the truth, dear Frank, of all women living, I would have her myself." "Isaac," said he, "thou art too late, for we have been both one these two months." I learned this caution by a gentleman's consulting me formerly about his son. He railed at his damned extravagance, and told me, in a very little time, he would beggar him by the exorbitant bills which came from Oxford every quarter. "Make the rogue bite upon the bridle," said I, "pay none of his bills, it will but encourage him to further trespasses." He looked plaguy sour at me. His son soon after sent up a paper of verses, forsooth, in print, on the last public occasion; upon which, he is convinced the boy has parts, and a lad of spirit is not to be too much cramped in his maintenance, lest he take ill courses. Neither father nor son can ever since endure the sight of me. These sort of people ask opinions, only out of the fulness of their heart on the subject of their perplexity, and not from a desire of information. There is nothing so easy as to find out which opinion the person in doubt has a mind to; therefore the sure

way is to tell him, that is certainly to be chosen. Then you are to be very clear and positive; leave no handle for scruple. "Bless me! sir, there is no room for a question." This rivets you into his heart; for you at once applaud his wisdom, and gratify his inclination. However, I had too much bowels to be insincere to a man who came yesterday to know of me, with which of two eminent men in the City he should place his son? Their names are Paulo and Avaro. This gave me much debate with myself, because not only the fortune of the youth, but his virtue also depended upon this choice. The men are equally wealthy; but they differ in the use and application of their riches, which you immediately see upon entering their doors.

The habitation of Paulo has at once the air of a nobleman and a merchant. You see the servants act with affection to their master, and satisfaction in themselves: the master meets you with an open countenance, full of benevolence and integrity: your business is despatched with that confidence and welcome which always accompanies honest minds: his table is the image of plenty and generosity, supported by justice and frugality. After we had dined here, our affair was to visit Avaro: out comes an awkward fellow with a careful countenance; "Sir, would you speak with my master? May I crave your name?" After the first preambles, he leads us into a noble solitude, a great house that seemed uninhabited; but from the end of the spacious hall moves towards us Avaro, with a suspicious aspect, as if he believed us thieves; and as for my part, I approached him as if I knew him a cut-purse. We fell into discourse of his noble dwelling, and the great estate all the world knew he had to enjoy in it: and I, to plague him, fell a commending Paulo's way of living. "Paulo," answered Avaro, "is a very good man; but we who have smaller estates, must cut our coat according to our cloth." "Nay," says I, "every man knows his own

circumstance best; you are in the right, if you haven't wherewithal." He looked very sour (for it is, you must know, the utmost vanity of a mean-spirited rich man to be contradicted, when he calls himself poor). But I was resolved to vex him, by consenting to all he said; the main design of which was, that he would have us find out, he was one of the wealthiest men in London, and lived like a beggar. We left him, and took a turn on the 'Change. My friend was ravished with Avaro. "This," said he, "is certainly a sure man." I contradicted him with much warmth, and summed up their different characters as well as I could. "This Paulo," said I, "grows wealthy by being a common good; Avaro, by being a general evil: Paulo has the art, Avaro the craft of trade. When Paulo gains, all men he deals with are the better: whenever Avaro profits, another certainly loses. In a word, Paulo is a citizen, and Avaro a cit." I convinced my friend, and carried the young gentleman the next day to Paulo, where he will learn the way both to gain, and enjoy a good fortune. And though I cannot say, I have, by keeping him from Avaro, saved him from the gallows, I have prevented his deserving it every day he lives: for with Paulo he will be an honest man, without being so for fear of the law; as with Avaro, he would have been a villain within the protection of it.

St. James's Coffee-house, June 6.

We hear from Vienna of the 1st instant, that Baron Imoff, who attended her Catholic Majesty with the character of Envoy from the Duke of Wolfembuttel, was returned thither. That Minister brought an account, that Major-general Stanhope, with the troops which embarked at Naples, was returned to Barcelona. We hear from Berlin, by advices of the 8th instant, that his Prussian Majesty had received intelligence

from his
Minister at Dresden, that the King of Denmark desired to meet
his
Majesty at Magdeburg. The King of Prussia has sent answer,
that his
present indisposition will not admit of so great a journey;
but has sent
the king a very pressing invitation to come to Berlin or
Potsdam. These
advices say, that the Minister of the King of Sweden has
produced a
letter from his master to the King of Poland, dated from
Batitzau the
30th of March, O.S., wherein he acquaints him, that he has
been
successful against the Muscovites in all the occasions which
have
happened since his march into their country. Great numbers
have revolted
to the Swedes since General Mazeppa went over to that side;
and as many
as have done so, have taken solemn oaths to adhere to the
interests of
his Swedish Majesty.

Advices from the Hague of the 14th instant, N.S., say, that
all things
tended to a vigorous and active campaign; the Allies having
strong
resentments against the late behaviour of the Court of France;
and the
French using all possible endeavours to animate their men to
defend
their country against a victorious and exasperated enemy.
Monsieur
Rouillé had passed through Brussels without visiting either
the Duke of

Marlborough or Prince Eugene, who were both there at that time. The States have met, and publicly declared their satisfaction in the conduct of their deputies during the whole treaty. Letters from France say, that the Court is resolved to put all to the issue of the ensuing campaign. In the meantime, they have ordered the preliminary treaty to be published, with observation upon each article, in order to quiet the minds of the people, and persuade them, that it has not been in the power of the king to procure a peace, but to the diminution of his Majesty's glory, and the hazard of his dominions. His Grace the Duke of Marlborough and Prince Eugene arrived at Ghent on Wednesday last, where, at an assembly of all the general officers, it was thought proper, by reason of the great rains which have lately fallen, to defer forming a camp, or bringing the troops together; but as soon as the weather would permit, to march upon the enemy with all expedition.