

## ON LUXURY.

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A DISCOURSE on Operas, and the gayer pleasures of the town, may seem to be too trifling for the important scene of affairs, in which we are at present engaged; but I must own my fears, that they will bear too great a part in the success of a war, to make the consideration of them foreign to it. A very little reflection on history will suggest this observation, that every nation has made either a great or inconsiderable figure in the world, as it has fallen into luxury or resisted its temptations. What people are more distinguished than the Persians under Cyrus, nursed up in virtue, and inured to labor and toil? Yet (in the short space of 220 years\*) they became so contemptible under Darius, as scarce to give honor to the conqueror's sword. The Spartans, and the long-rulers of the world, the Romans, speak the same language; and I wish future history may not furnish more modern examples.

When the mind is enervated by luxury, the body soon falls an easy victim to it; for how is it possible to imagine, that a man can be capable of the great and generous sentiments, which virtue inspires, whose mind is filled with the soft ideas, and wanton delicacies that pleasure must infuse? And were it possible to be warmed with such notions, could it ever put them in execution? For toils and fatigues would be difficulties unsurmountable to a soul dissolved in ease. Nor are these imaginary, speculative ideas of a closet; but such as have been the guide and policies of the wisest states. Of this we have the most remarkable instance in Herodotus. "The Persians, after their great and extended conquests, desired Cyrus to give them leave to remove out of their own barren and mountainous country into one more blest by the indulgence of Providence. But that great and wise prince, revolving the effect in his mind, bid them do as they would; telling them at the same time, that for the future they must not expect to command, but obey; for Providence had so

\* Liv. lib. 9, cap. 19.

ordered it, that an effeminate race of people were the certain produce of a delicious country." What regard the great historian had to this opinion, may be easily collected from his reserving it for the conclusion of this excellent piece. And the case is directly the same, whether pleasures are the natural product of a country, or adventitious exotics. They will have the same effect, and cause the same extended ruin. How often have they revenged the captive's cause and made the conqueror's sword the instrument of his own undoing? Capua destroyed the bravest army which Italy ever saw, flushed with conquest, and commanded by Hannibal. The moment Capua was taken, that moment the walls of Carthage trembled. What was it that destroyed the republic of Athens, but the conduct of Pericles;\* who by his pernicious politics first debauched the people's minds with shows and festivals, and all the studied arts of ease and luxury; that he might, in the mean time, securely guide the reins of empire, and riot in dominion? He first laid the foundation of Philip's power; nor had a man of Macedon ever thought of enslaving Greece, if Pericles had not first made them slaves to pleasure. That great statesman Tiberius† clearly saw what was the surest instrument of arbitrary power; and therefore refused to have luxury redressed, when application was made to him in the senate for that purpose. Artful princes have frequently introduced it with that very view. Davilla tells us, that in an interview and semblance of treaty with the king of Navar, Catharine of Medicis broke the prince's power more with the insidious gaieties of her court, than many battles before had done. But there is a single passage in Herodotus,‡ which will supply the place of more quotations. "When Cyrus had received an account that the Lydians had revolted from him, he told Cræsus, with a good deal of emotion, that he had almost determined to make them all slaves. Cræsus begged him to pardon them; but, says he, that they may no more rebel, or be troublesome to you, command them to lay aside their arms, to wear long vests and buskins. Order them to sing and play on the harp; to drink and debauch; and you will soon see their spirits broken, and themselves changed from men into women; so that they will no more rebel, or be uneasy to you for the future." And the event answered the advice. They are puny politicians, who attack a people's liberty directly. The means are dangerous, and the success precarious. Notions of liberty are interwoven with our very being; and the least suspicion of its being in danger fires the soul with a generous indignation. But he is the statesman formed for ruin and

\* Plut. in Peric., and Demost. Orat.

† Tac. An. lib. 2, cap. 33.

‡ Herod. lib. 1, cap. 155.

destruction, whose wily head knows how to disguise the fatal hook with baits of pleasure, which his artful ambition dispenses with a lavish hand, and makes himself popular in undoing. Thus are the easy, thoughtless crowd made the instruments of their own slavery; nor do they know the fatal mine is laid till they feel the goodly pile come tumbling on their heads. This is the finished politician: the darling son of Tacitus and Machiavel.

But, thanks to Providence, the sacred monuments of history extend the short contracted span of human life, and give us years in books. These point out the glorious landmarks for our safety; and bid us be wise in time, before luxury has made too great a progress among us. Operas and masquerades, with all the politer elegances of a wanton age, are much less to be regarded for their expense (great as it is) than for the tendency which they have to deprave our manners. Music has something so peculiar in it, that it exerts a willing tyranny over the mind; and forms the ductile soul into whatever shape the melody directs. Wise nations have observed its influence, and have therefore kept it under proper regulations. The Spartans,\* vigilantly provident for the people's safety, took from the famed Timotheus's harp the additional strings, as giving his music a degree of softness inconsistent with their discipline. The divine Plato is expressly of opinion, that the music of a country cannot be changed, and the public laws remain unaffected. Heroes will be heroes, even in their music. Soft and wanton are the warbled songs of Paris;† but Achilles‡ sings the godlike deeds of heroes. A noble, manly music will place virtue in its most beautiful light, and be the most engaging incentive to it. A well wrought story, attended with its prevailing charms, will transport the soul out of itself; fire it with glorious emulation; and lift the man into a hero; but the soft Italian music relaxes and unnerves the soul, and sinks it into weakness; so that while we receive their music, we at the same time are adopting their manners. The effects of it will appear in the strongest light from the fate of the people of Sybaris; a town in Italy, strong and wealthy; blessed with all the goods of fortune, and skilled in all the arts of luxury and ease; which they carried to so great an excess, that their very horses were taught to move and form themselves as the music directed. Their constant enemies, the people of Crotona, observing this, brought a great number of harps and

\* Cicero, lib. 2, de leg. cap. 39.

† Hor. lib. 1. Od. 15.

—————Grataque fœminis  
Imbelli cithara, carmina divides.

‡ Hom. Iliad. 9, 189.

pipes into the field, and when the battle began, the music played; upon which these well-bred horses immediately began to dance; which so disconcerted the whole army, that 300,000 were killed, and the whole people destroyed. Though this story seems a little fabulous, yet it contains at least a very good moral.— What effect Italian music might have on our polite warriors at Gibraltar, I cannot take upon me to say; but I wish our luxury at home may not influence our courage abroad.