

A

REVIEW  
OF THE  
STATE  
OF THE  
BRITISH NATION.

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Thursday, June 7. 1711.

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**T**HE loss this Nation, *as well as its Neighbours*, feels every Day by the raging of an unhappy Distemper among us, I mean the *Varoles*, or *Small Pox*, which for almost two Year has been a kind of Plague, has frequently inclin'd me to say something, which perhaps if noticed and observed, might be useful to such Families as are afflicted with it.

I make no question but there are Constitutions more particularly inclin'd than others, to this Distemper, and to whom it is more fatal, when it happens, than to others——I will not either deny, but even this Particular in Persons may be sometimes Hereditary to Families, or as

our common People express it not improperly, *It runs in the Blood*: To some Families we see the *Small Pox* always favourable, to some always fatal——Of a whole Race you shall see all have it, and of another, none ever have it. Of some Families, when they have it, none ever dye; of others, none ever live with it——The Reasons, or natural Causes, of this variety are not very difficult to account for, the Temperature and Complexion of Bodies, as they are Hot or Cold, Flegmatic or Sanguine, affording Particulars more than Sufficient, to explain it by. Therefore this is no part of my present Enquiry.



The Case I am upon, is an Enquiry, whether there is not a Defect in the common Applications to the Cure of this Distemper? And whether the Management of the Patient is not the most hazardous part of the Distemper?

I am no Unbeliever in the Doctrine of Medicine; I am fully satisfy'd, that Heaven having plac'd Medicinal healing Vertue, in the Plants, Drugs, and other Produce of the Earth, is a full and authentick Testimony of his Will, in case of Distemper (*viz.*) that we should apply to the proper use of those Medicines:—Nor am I a Doctor-hater, tho' I have it to be thankful for, that I have had occasion to use them but little—I doubt not, but the Skill of rightly applying proper Medicines to every Evil, and of rightly judging of the Disease, is obtain'd by Study, Application and Experience. I will not accuse the Learned of learning their Knowledge and Art, at the Expence of the Lives of their Patients, whom they send to Heaven very often for their (the Doctor's) Information; yet I must own, that when a Patient dyes after such and such Application, he is but a mean Student in Physick that gathers no Experience from it, or takes no instructive Observations to himself by it; and tho' some may *dye of the Doctor*, let him be never so careful, and sometimes meerly by his being over careful; yet the Error may not be wilful or ignorant, but the mysterious working of Nature under Disease, is not so just and so equal, that the best Physician can always find out, and trace a Confederacy between Distemper, Constitution and Humour: All which often attack Nature together.

But as the Small Pox is a Distemper, which when once it has seiz'd the Blood, is obstinate, and will have its Course, and that when it is come to a certain Length, the only safety of the Patient is to have them come freely out. I wish our People would determine, whether the great Art of preserving the Patient, does not consist in giving Nature only due assistance, to expel the invading Enemy, by its ordinary

and natural Course, rather than by driving her on faster, to waste her Strength, or by bleeding to exhaust the Spirits: Either of which, throw the Patients generally into Convulsions, and they are the Handmaids to the Grave; *in short*, whether the Nurse is not the more proper Person than the Doctor?

I start this Question, not from Experience only, but from the Opinion and Practice of many Eminent Physicians, who when they find the Distemper coming on, always rather encourage it to come on than resist it, or stop it in its Course, and commit the Patient to the Nurse, with Instructions to keep them warm, but not too hot; to give them such and such Food, Cordials, &c. and leave it to Nature so assisted—and I have observed, that but few Patients miscarry under such a Management. But when Violences are used upon Nature, and strong Applications, how fatal do we find it? And such People may indeed be said to *dye of the Doctor*—A Fate that is too much the Disaster of our People of Quality; and therefore I believe it is, that generally and in proportion to their Number, the Small Pox kills more of the Rich than it does of the Poor.

I remember a Story to the Purpose, very much, which happen'd to the famous *Tonfor of Epsom*, a known Man amongst the Frequenters of that Summer Retreat, where he made himself very valuable to the Citizens by his constant Study, to divert them, and was the general Favourite of the Place—It happen'd that poor *Tonfor* fell very Sick, and as every Body was concern'd for fear of the loss of *Tonfor*; all the Physicians in Town were spoken to by one Friend or another, to go and assist him: But it was all to no purpose, *Tonfor* would hear all they said, but would take nothing they prescrib'd, nor could any Intreaties prevail on him—At length the famous Dr. *Ratcliff* coming to Town, his Friends renew'd their Importunities to *Tonfor*; they told him the King's Physician, Dr. *Ratcliff*, was come to *Epsom*, and they did not doubt but they could pre-



prevail upon him to come and see what he could do for him, and begg'd he would but let the Doctor see him, assuring him the Doctor would take no Fees from him, and it should cost him nothing. *Tou-  
for* heard them patiently, but for a good while gave no Answer; but being importun'd, he shrunk up his Shoulders, *NO*, says he, *I had rather dye a natural Death.*

I have been told the poor Man did at last submit to take the Assistance, whether of Dr. *Ratcliff*, or some other Physician, and that he did not dye so much of a *natural Death* as he desir'd. But that is not to the Purpose.

I cannot be perswaded to think, that the greatest part of our Nobility and Gentry, who dye now of the Small Pox, dye a *natural Death*; I rather think they dye violent Deaths. They dye for want of giving, as we may say, Nature, and the Disease, *fair Play*, would they leave them more to the Ladies, and let them only have common Instructions to be careful and watchful of them; the very Distemper it self tends naturally to spend and wast it self, and keep Nature supported, and cherish'd in a moderate Degree, it works off of course.

I have the concurring Opinion of so many Physicians in this; I have seen the Practice so constantly attended with Success, as well in my own Family, as in other Families of my Acquaintance; and I have seen the contrary so fatal, that I cannot but recommend it to the Families of our Gentry, who are yet in Danger, and entreat them to let their Friends have leave to dye a *natural Death*, or at least not kill them *a la Medicin*. I am perswaded, with submission to the Doctrine of Fate, and Irresistible Decree, which I shall not meddle with here; had this Course been taken, we had not seen so many of

the Coaches of our Gentry cover'd with Black, and the Illustrious Families of our Nobility in Tears for the nearest of their Relations.

There is a great Unhappinefs attends Men of Quality and Honour, they are so link'd to the World, that they kill themselves for fear of Death — if a Distemper seizes them, they worry their Physician for the utmost they can think of; they press them with Fees and Importunities: Good Sir! omit nothing you can do: Lord! Sir, Can you think of nothing else? Pray spare for nothing; and the honest Man is bound to prescribe them, when he has nothing to write to satisfy the impatient Relations.

A Physician of my Acquaintance, complain'd to me the other Day, says he, They give me Fees twice a Day, and if I am not always prescribing something or other, they think I do know nothing; I am forc'd to write to the Apothecary for something every Day, and then I am oblig'd to go to the Apothecary, and bid him send nothing but some little Cordial, or something that signifies nothing; for if I should give him things, as they would have me, I shall murder him; if they will let the Man alone, he will live and do well enough.

Wretched is the Condition of Men bury'd thus in the Wealth and Affection of their Friends, who think, that throwing away two Guineas a day to a Doctor, will make him do more for the Patient than he can do without it, and that judge of the Doctor's Care, by the number of *Phials* and Pots upon the Side-board, till the Apothecary's Shop seems to be transplanted to the Chamber of the Patient, and the smell of the Drugs and Medicine is enough to give Nature as much disturbance as the Disease.



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