

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
Kant London Descartes Cervantes Voltaire Hesse
Poe Aristotle Wells Bunner Shakespeare Cooke
Hale James Hastings Richter Chambers Irving
Doré Chekhov da Shaw Benedict Alcott
Swift Dante Pushkin Newton
Wodehouse



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**Letters to His Son on the Art of
Becoming a Man of the World and
a Gentleman, 1751**

Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield

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LETTERS TO HIS SON

1751

By the EARL OF CHESTERFIELD

on the Fine Art of becoming a

MAN OF THE WORLD

And

A GENTLEMAN

LETTER CXXVI

LONDON, January 8, O.S. 1751

MY DEAR FRIEND: By your letter of the 5th, N. S., I find that your 'debut' at Paris has been a good one; you are entered into good company, and I dare say you will, not sink into bad. Frequent the houses where you have been once invited, and have none of that shyness which makes most of your countrymen strangers, where they might be intimate and domestic if they pleased. Wherever you have a general invitation to sup when you please, profit of it, with decency, and go every now and then. Lord Albemarle will, I am sure, be extremely kind to you, but his house is only a dinner house; and, as I am informed, frequented by no French people. Should he happen to employ you in his bureau, which I much doubt, you must write a better hand than your common one, or you will get no credit by your manuscripts; for your hand is at present an illiberal one; it is neither a hand of business nor of a gentleman, but the hand of a school-boy writing his exercise, which he hopes will never be read.

Madame de Monconseil gives me a favorable account of you; and so do Marquis de Matignon and Madame du Boccage; they all say that you desire to please, and consequently promise me that you will; and they judge right; for whoever really desires to please, and has (as you now have) the means of learning how, certainly will please and that is the great point of life; it makes all other things easy. Whenever you are with Madame de Monconseil, Madame du Boccage, or other women of fashion, with whom you are tolerably free, say frankly and naturally: "I know little of the world; I am quite a novice in it; and although very desirous of pleasing, I am at a loss for the means. Be so good, Madame, as to let me into your secret of pleasing everybody. I shall owe my success to it, and you will always have more than falls to your share." When, in consequence of this request, they shall tell you of any little error, awkwardness, or impropriety, you should not only feel, but express the warmest acknowledgment. Though nature should suffer, and she will at first hearing them, tell them, that you will look upon the

most severe criticisms as the greatest proof of their friendship. Madame du Boccage tells me, particularly, to inform you: "I shall always, receive the honor of his visits with pleasure; it is true, that at his age the pleasures of conversation are cold; but I will endeavor to make him acquainted with young people," etc.

Make use of this invitation, and as you live, in a manner, next door to her, step in and out there frequently. Monsieur du Boccage will go with you, he tells me, with great pleasure, to the plays, and point out to you whatever deserves your knowing there. This is worth your acceptance too; he has a very good taste. I have not yet heard from Lady Hervey upon your subject; but as you inform me that you have already supped with her once, I look upon you as adopted by her; consult her in all your little matters; tell her any difficulties that may occur to you; ask her what you should do or say in such or such cases; she has 'l'usage du monde en perfection', and will help you to acquire it. Madame de Berkenrode 'est paitrie de graces', and your quotation is very applicable to her. You may be there, I dare say, as often as you please, and I would advise you to sup there once a week.

You say, very justly, that as Mr. Harte is leaving you, you shall want advice more than ever; you shall never want mine; and as you have already had so much of it, I must rather repeat than add to what I have already given you; but that I will do, and add to it occasionally, as circumstances may require. At present I shall only remind you of your two great objects, which you should always attend to; they are parliament and foreign affairs. With regard to the former, you can do nothing while abroad but attend carefully to the purity, correctness, and elegance of your diction; the clearness and gracefulness of your utterance, in whatever language you speak. As for the parliamentary knowledge, I will take care of that when you come home. With regard to foreign affairs, everything you do abroad may and ought to tend that way. Your reading should be chiefly historical; I do not mean of remote, dark, and fabulous history, still less of jimcrack natural history of fossils, minerals, plants, etc., but I mean the useful, political, and constitutional history of Europe, for these last three centuries and a half. The other thing necessary for your foreign object, and not less necessary than either ancient or modern knowledge, is a great knowledge of the world,

manners, politeness, address, and 'le ton de la bonne compagnie'. In that view, keeping a great deal of good company, is the principal point to which you are now to attend. It seems ridiculous to tell you, but it is most certainly true, that your dancing-master is at this time the man in all Europe of the greatest importance to you. You must dance well, in order to sit, stand, and walk well; and you must do all these well in order to please. What with your exercises, some reading, and a great deal of company, your day is, I confess, extremely taken up; but the day, if well employed, is long enough for everything; and I am sure you will not slattern away one moment of it in inaction. At your age, people have strong and active spirits, alacrity and vivacity in all they do; are 'impigri', indefatigable, and quick. The difference is, that a young fellow of parts exerts all those happy dispositions in the pursuit of proper objects; endeavors to excel in the solid, and in the showish parts of life; whereas a silly puppy, or a dull rogue, throws away all his youth and spirit upon trifles, where he is serious or upon disgraceful vices, while he aims at pleasures. This I am sure will not be your case; your good sense and your good conduct hitherto are your guarantees with me for the future. Continue only at Paris as you have begun, and your stay there will make you, what I have always wished you to be, as near perfection as our nature permits.

Adieu, my dear; remember to write to me once a-week, not as to a father, but, without reserve, as to a friend.

LETTER CXXVII

LONDON, January 14, O. S. 1751

MY DEAR FRIEND: Among the many good things Mr. Harte has told me of you, two in particular gave me great pleasure. The first, that you are exceedingly careful and jealous of the dignity of your character; that is the sure and solid foundation upon which you must both stand and rise. A man's moral character is a more delicate thing than a woman's reputation of chastity. A slip or two may possibly be forgiven her, and her character may be clarified by subsequent and continued good conduct: but a man's moral character once tainted is irreparably destroyed. The second was, that you had acquired a most correct and extensive knowledge of foreign affairs, such as the history, the treaties, and the forms of government of the several countries of Europe. This sort of knowledge, little attended to here, will make you not only useful, but necessary, in your future destination, and carry you very far. He added that you wanted from hence some books relative to our laws and constitution, our colonies, and our commerce; of which you know less than of those of any other part of Europe. I will send you what short books I can find of that sort, to give you a general notion of those things: but you cannot have time to go into their depths at present — you cannot now engage with new folios; you and I will refer the constitutional part of this country to our meeting here, when we will enter seriously into it, and read the necessary books together. In the meantime, go on in the course you are in, of foreign matters; converse with ministers and others of every country, watch the transactions of every court, and endeavor to trace them up to their source. This, with your physics, your geometry, and your exercises, will be all that you can possibly have time for at Paris; for you must allow a great deal for company and pleasures: it is they that must give you those manners, that address, that 'tournure' of the 'beau monde', which will qualify you for your future destination. You must first please, in order to get the confidence, and consequently the secrets,

of the courts and ministers for whom and with whom you negotiate.

I will send you by the first opportunity a short book written by Lord Bolingbroke, under the name of Sir John Oldcastle, containing remarks upon the history of England; which will give you a clear general notion of our constitution, and which will serve you, at the same time, like all Lord Bolingbroke's works, for a model of eloquence and style. I will also send you Sir Josiah Childe's little book upon trade, which may properly be called the "Commercial Grammar." He lays down the true principles of commerce, and his conclusions from them are generally very just.

Since you turn your thoughts a little toward trade and commerce, which I am very glad you do, I will recommend a French book to you, which you will easily get at Paris, and which I take to be the best book in the world of that kind: I mean the 'Dictionnaire de Commerce de Savory', in three volumes in folio; where you will find every one thing that relates to trade, commerce, specie, exchange, etc., most clearly stated; and not only relative to France, but to the whole world. You will easily suppose, that I do not advise you to read such a book 'tout de suite'; but I only mean that you should have it at hand, to have recourse to occasionally.

With this great stock of both useful and ornamental knowledge, which you have already acquired, and which, by your application and industry, you are daily increasing, you will lay such a solid foundation of future figure and fortune, that if you complete it by all the accomplishments of manners, graces, etc., I know nothing which you may not aim at, and in time hope for. Your great point at present at Paris, to which all other considerations must give way, is to become entirely a man of fashion: to be well-bred without ceremony, easy without negligence, steady and intrepid with modesty, genteel without affectation, insinuating without meanness, cheerful without being noisy, frank without indiscretion, and secret without mysteriousness; to know the proper time and place for whatever you say or do, and to do it with an air of condition all this is not so soon nor so easily learned as people imagine, but requires observation and time. The world is an immense folio, which demands a great deal of time and attention to be read and understood as it

ought to be; you have not yet read above four or five pages of it; and you will have but barely time to dip now and then in other less important books.

Lord Albemarle has, I know, wrote {It is a pleasure for an ordinary mortal to find Lord Chesterfield in grammatical error—and he did it again in the last sentence of this paragraph—but this was 1751? D.W.} to a friend of his here, that you do not frequent him so much as he expected and desired; that he fears somebody or other has given you wrong impressions of him; and that I may possibly think, from your being seldom at his house, that he has been wanting in his attentions to you. I told the person who told me this, that, on the contrary, you seemed, by your letters to me, to be extremely pleased with Lord Albemarle's behavior to you: but that you were obliged to give up dining abroad during your course of experimental philosophy. I guessed the true reason, which I believe was, that, as no French people frequent his house, you rather chose to dine at other places, where you were likely to meet with better company than your countrymen and you were in the right of it. However, I would have you show no shyness to Lord Albemarle, but go to him, and dine with him oftener than it may be you would wish, for the sake of having him speak well of you here when he returns. He is a good deal in fashion here, and his PUFFING you (to use an awkward expression) before you return here, will be of great use to you afterward. People in general take characters, as they do most things, upon trust, rather than be at the trouble of examining them themselves; and the decisions of four or five fashionable people, in every place, are final, more particularly with regard to characters, which all can hear, and but few judge of. Do not mention the least of this to any mortal; and take care that Lord Albemarle do not suspect that you know anything of the matter.

Lord Huntingdon and Lord Stormount are, I hear, arrived at Paris; you have, doubtless, seen them. Lord Stormount is well spoken of here; however, in your connections, if you form any with them, show rather a preference to Lord Huntingdon, for reasons which you will easily guess.

Mr. Harte goes this week to Cornwall, to take possession of his living; he has been installed at Windsor; he will return here in about

a month, when your literary correspondence with him will be regularly carried on. Your mutual concern at parting was a good sign for both.

I have this moment received good accounts of you from Paris. Go on 'vous etes en bon train'. Adieu.

LETTER CXXVIII

LONDON, January 21, O. S.. 1751

MY DEAR FRIEND: In all my letters from Paris, I have the pleasure of finding, among many other good things, your docility mentioned with emphasis; this is the sure way of improving in those things, which you only want. It is true they are little, but it is as true too that they are necessary things. As they are mere matters of usage and mode, it is no disgrace for anybody of your age to be ignorant of them; and the most compendious way of learning them is, fairly to avow your ignorance, and to consult those who, from long usage and experience, know them best. Good sense and good-nature suggest civility in general; but, in good-breeding there are a thousand little delicacies, which are established only by custom; and it is these little elegances of manners which distinguish a courtier and a man of fashion from the vulgar. I am assured by different people, that your air is already much improved; and one of my correspondents makes you the true French compliment of saying, 'F'ose vous promettre qu'il sera bientôt comme un de nos autres'. However unbecoming this speech may be in the mouth of a Frenchman, I am very glad that they think it applicable to you; for I would have you not only adopt, but rival, the best manners and usages of the place you are at, be they what they will; that is the versatility of manners which is so useful in the course of the world. Choose your models well at Paris, and then rival them in their own way. There are fashionable words, phrases, and even gestures, at Paris, which are called 'du bon ton'; not to mention 'certaines Petites politesses et attentions, qui ne sont rien en elle-memes', which fashion has rendered necessary. Make yourself master of all these things; and to such a degree, as to make the French say, 'qu'on droit que c'est un Francois'; and when hereafter you shall be at other courts, do the same thing there; and conform to the fashionable manners and usage of the place; that is what the French themselves are not apt to do; wherever they go, they retain their own manners, as thinking them the best; but, granting them to be so, they are still

in the wrong not to conform to those of the place. One would desire to please, wherever one is; and nothing is more innocently flattering than an approbation, and an imitation of the people one converses with.

I hope your colleges with Marcel go on prosperously. In these ridiculous, though, at the same time, really important lectures, pray attend, and desire your professor also to attend, more particularly to the chapter of the arms. It is they that decide of a man's being genteel or otherwise, more than any other part of the body. A twist or stiffness in the wrist, will make any man in Europe look awkward. The next thing to be attended to is, your coming into a room, and presenting yourself to a company. This gives the first impression; and the first impression is often a lasting one. Therefore, pray desire Professor Marcel to make you come in and go out of his room frequently, and in the supposition of different companies being there; such as ministers, women, mixed companies, etc. Those who present themselves well, have a certain dignity in their air, which, without the least seeming mixture of pride, at once engages, and is respected.

I should not so often repeat, nor so long dwell upon such trifles, with anybody that had less solid and valuable knowledge than you have. Frivolous people attend to those things, 'par preference'; they know nothing else; my fear with you is, that, from knowing better things, you should despise these too much, and think them of much less consequence than they really are; for they are of a great deal, and more especially to you.

Pleasing and governing women may, in time, be of great service to you. They often please and govern others. 'A propos', are you in love with Madame de Berkenrode still, or has some other taken her place in your affections? I take it for granted, that 'qua to cumque domat Venus, non erubescendis adurit ignibus. Un arrangement honnete sied bien a un galant homme'. In that case I recommend to you the utmost discretion, and the profoundest silence. Bragging of, hinting at, intimating, or even affectedly disclaiming and denying such an arrangement will equally discredit you among men and women. An unaffected silence upon that subject is the only true medium.

In your commerce with women, and indeed with men too, 'une certaine douceur' is particularly engaging; it is that which constitutes that character which the French talk of so much, and so justly value, I mean 'l'aimable'. This 'douceur' is not so easily described as felt. It is the compound result of different things; a complaisance, a flexibility, but not a servility of manners; an air of softness in the countenance, gesture, and expression, equally whether you concur or differ with the person you converse with. Observe those carefully who have that 'douceur' that charms you and others; and your own good sense will soon enable you to discover the different ingredients of which it is composed. You must be more particularly attentive to this 'douceur', whenever you are obliged to refuse what is asked of you, or to say what in itself cannot be very agreeable to those to whom you say it. It is then the necessary gilding of a disagreeable pill. 'L'aimable' consists in a thousand of these little things aggregatedly. It is the 'suaviter in modo', which I have so often recommended to you. The respectable, Mr. Harte assures me, you do not want, and I believe him. Study, then, carefully; and acquire perfectly, the 'Aimable', and you will have everything.

Abbe Guasco, who is another of your panegyrists, writes me word that he has taken you to dinner at Marquis de St. Germain's; where you will be welcome as often as you please, and the oftener the better. Profit of that, upon the principle of traveling in different countries, without changing places. He says, too, that he will take you to the parliament, when any remarkable cause is to be tried. That is very well; go through the several chambers of the parliament, and see and hear what they are doing; join practice and observation to your theoretical knowledge of their rights and privileges. No Englishman has the least notion of them.

I need not recommend you to go to the bottom of the constitutional and political knowledge of countries; for Mr. Harte tells me that you have a peculiar turn that way, and have informed yourself most correctly of them.

I must now put some queries to you, as to a 'juris publici peritus', which I am sure you can answer me, and which I own I cannot answer myself; they are upon a subject now much talked of.

1st. Are there any particular forms requisite for the election of a King of the Romans, different from those which are necessary for the election of an Emperor?

2d. Is not a King of the Romans as legally elected by the votes of a majority of the electors, as by two-thirds, or by the unanimity of the electors?

3d. Is there any particular law or constitution of the empire, that distinguishes, either in matter or in, form, the election of a King of the Romans from that of an Emperor? And is not the golden bull of Charles the Fourth equally the rule for both?

4th. Were there not, at a meeting of a certain number of the electors (I have forgotten when), some rules and limitations agreed upon concerning the election of a King of the Romans? And were those restrictions legal, and did they obtain the force of law?

How happy am I, my dear child, that I can apply to you for knowledge, and with a certainty of being rightly informed! It is knowledge, more than quick, flashy parts, that makes a man of business. A man who is master of his matter, twill, with inferior parts, be too hard in parliament, and indeed anywhere else, for a man of-better parts, who knows his subject but superficially: and if to his knowledge he joins eloquence and elocution, he must necessarily soon be at the head of that assembly; but without those two, no knowledge is sufficient.

Lord Huntingdon writes me word that he has seen you, and that you have renewed your old school-acquaintance.

Tell me fairly your opinion of him, and of his friend Lord Stormount: and also of the other English people of fashion you meet with. I promise you inviolable secrecy on my part. You and I must now write to each other —as friends, and without the least reserve; there will for the future be a thousand-things in my letters, which I would not have any mortal living but yourself see or know. Those you will easily distinguish, and neither show nor repeat; and I will do the same by you.

To come to another subject (for I have a pleasure in talking over every subject with you): How deep are you in Italian? Do you understand Ariosto, Tasso, Boccaccio and Machiavelli? If you do, you

know enough of it and may know all the rest, by reading, when you have time. Little or no business is written in Italian, except in Italy; and if you know enough of it to understand the few Italian letters that may in time come in your way, and to speak Italian tolerably to those very few Italians who speak no French, give yourself no further trouble about that language till you happen to have full leisure to perfect yourself in it. It is not the same with regard to German; your speaking and writing it well, will particularly distinguish you from every other man in England; and is, moreover, of great use to anyone who is, as probably you will be, employed in the Empire. Therefore, pray cultivate them sedulously, by writing four or five lines of German every day, and by speaking it to every German you meet with.

You have now got a footing in a great many good houses at Paris, in which I advise you to make yourself domestic. This is to be done by a certain easiness of carriage, and a decent familiarity. Not by way of putting yourself upon the frivolous footing of being 'sans consequence', but by doing in some degree, the honors of the house and table, calling yourself 'en badinant le galopin d'ici', saying to the masters or mistress, 'ceci est de mon departement; je m'en charge; avouez, que je m'en acquitte a merveille.' This sort of 'badinage' has something engaging and 'liant' in it, and begets that decent familiarity, which it is both agreeable and useful to establish in good houses and with people of fashion. Mere formal visits, dinners, and suppers, upon formal invitations, are not the thing; they add to no connection nor information; but it is the easy, careless ingress and egress at all hours, that forms the pleasing and profitable commerce of life.

The post is so negligent, that I lose some letters from Paris entirely, and receive others much later than I should. To this I ascribe my having received no letter from you for above a fortnight, which to my impatience seems a long time. I expect to hear from you once a week. Mr. Harte is gone to Cornwall, and will be back in about three weeks. I have a packet of books to send you by the first opportunity, which I believe will be Mr. Yorke's return to Paris. The Greek books come from Mr. Harte, and the English ones from your humble servant. Read Lord Bolingbroke's with great attention, as well to the style as to the matter. I wish you could form yourself such a

style in every language. Style is the dress of thoughts; and a well-dressed thought, like a well-dressed man, appears to great advantage. Yours. Adieu.