

My Dear and Eldest Son

Probably before this letter is finished, but most certainly before it comes to hand, you will be entered into your 19<sup>th</sup> year; at which time of life, I remember that I felt all the man; therefore I hope you will not be affronted, that I should henceforth esteem and treat you as such; which I am glad to find that I have good warrant to do, from the various accounts given of you by your sister and others. Go on my dear Jack! and as you have had greater assistance than your Father, may you excel him in all respects!

for the like reason, it has been my greatest ambition to follow the footsteps of, and outrun your Grand Fathers and Great Uncle M. Bennet; three men of whom it may be said that few more worthy ever lived. The history of their lives is well worth your attention, and should I live to enfold you once more in my parental arms, I shall think it an agreeable task to inform you of such particulars concerning them, as will at the same time excite your ambition, and rouse in you an emulation of their virtues in the different spheres of life. You will learn from your sister Poll's letters, and one that I wrote to you jointly with Ann, that I did myself the pleasure of visiting your sister Poll in

London. It was a very short visit, of little more than 24 hours, yet one of the most agreeable I ever made in my life; especially as I had the pleasure of meeting your Uncle the Captain in good health and spirits. I hope this pleasure is still capable of improvement, for from a Hint sent me by your Aunt Inman our common Parent! I flatter myself with having it in my power, to make you the same compliment in company with your sister Ann. Should your Mother make one of the party, would not your Joy be almost complete? I am very happy to find the piece of cloth I sent you for a suit of clothes, was agreeable to you. Having adorned your body I am anxious

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to improve your mind and amuse you at the same time; therefore beg your acceptance of a set of Shakespeare's plays which I hope you will receive safe with this, and if any other book, which I think equally useful, should fall in my way, I will send it. I had some intention of making you a present of a late publication, but thought it right to peruse it first; the beginning was pleasing and instructive, the middle wicked and detestable, and the conclusion, had it not been for the purity of the language, and an easy agreeable style, would have been stale and tedious. Shall I name it? No less than Lord Chesterfield's letters to his only Son, who by the bye, was a natural one. I will attempt a review of it. He begins

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his education at five years old, and pushes it on so fast, that at eight, he is a proficient in French, Latin and Greek; he then puts him to Westminster School for three or four years, teaching him History Geography and Philosophy, with dancing under private tutors at the same time. During this period his Lordship's letters are very agreeable, as they abound with fine strokes of criticism on the different studies his son was engaged in; but I could not help thinking that the father overloaded his son with learning. A little turned of twelve, he is sent abroad under a traveling tutor one Mr. Harte, afterwards a canon of Windsor, a good scholar, but by the History of Gustavus Adolphus, which he published and I have

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read, he seems to have been an affected Pedant. Under his tutor he travels through Holland, France and Germany, in which last he resides some years at the University of Leipsic, to learn the German tongue, and study History, particularly that of the Empire, under one Professor Mascon. Having got his skinful of learning he is transported to Italy about 16. Now his Lordship who all along had labored to make his son lively clever, and debonair, lays on him thicker and faster to sacrifice to the Graces, as she calls it, insists upon his devoting as much of his time as possible to the Ladies, not only to improve his Italian, from such agreeable teachers, but to become an amoroso and pay court to the Cyprian Queen, who seemed to have transferred

her Empire to Rome. The time allotted for our Pupil's residence in Italy being expired, we find him at Paris at 18, your age Jack! Here his father thinking him old enough to guide himself under this Lordship's own occasional directions, dismisses his tutor and turns him loose upon a town, with free command of money, where every Vice may be said to be fashionable.

Before I go further, it seems proper to make you acquainted with such particulars of this Mr. Stanhope, as I have been able to pick up. His Mother was a Dutch Lady whom his Lordship seduced in Holland, brought over to England, and deserted her to marry a niece of the Duchess of Kendall, King G. 1<sup>st</sup> Mistress;

it appears also that the father had a diopsical complaint, about the time this boy was born and at best was no gracious figure, but greatly improved by art. From all this it naturally followed that the produce of this amour was grave, serious, unhealthy, and had a very ungracious aspect. Now how is he treated at his first setting out? He is not only advised but as it were ordered to be gay and gallant to indulge a passion for the sex whether he had or not. Ld. C. professes himself an Irishman but with whom? Girls of the town or demireps? No, they are of too easy purchase, low and unsafe; with young ladies of character? Even they are not recommended, I suppose for fear of the same consequences which befel his mother.

With whom then? Why no other and no less than married women and one of those in particular, of the most distinguished virtue, and enjoying the highest conjugal happenings. How do you feel Jack? What would you think of, what would you do to that Villain who should dare to make an attempt upon your Mother's Honour. Infamous wretch! Not only to secure eternal remorse to his only son, but to destroy the peace of a worthy, innocent and happy family. Could I suppose you capable of such impiety, Oh my Son! I should execrate the day of your birth, and carry down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Yet it appears that Ld. C. at the time he gave this ignoble advice was older I am now.

Infamous Pander! Whether his son Mr. Stanhope attempted or succeeded in this affair, does not appear, but it is certain that he had connections of the same kind with others. It appears however that after all the foolish wicked father's pains, his son was never bright, nor yet to his honour, debauched in principle, for he married, I suppose, a modest woman, by whom he had two or more children. But mark the catastrophe of this ignoble plan. Poor Mr. Stanhope was seized when very young with an asthma, and from 16 to near 36 was seldom long well together, about that time he fell into a confirmed diopsy which carried him off leaving his father to repent of the folly of his plan.

Lord C. outlived not only his son but himself, and his son's widow had in some degree avenged the loss of her husband by publishing the letters in question, which at the same time that they demonstrate the abilities, learning and politeness of the writer, will fix an indelible proof of his want of moral principles and true religion. But how will this Father meet the spirit of his injured son? His fine wit, his satirical turn, his gibes and jokes will naught avail, and unless sincere repentance added to mediatorial influence has obliterated his crime, eternal punishment must prove it unexpiated. This is a long letter Jack! especially if you think it so; but I thought it my duty to make you alieno periculo cautus,

and finding the precepts of the noble delinquent so opposite to reason, virtue and religion, I could not refrain from delineating it, in order to contrast it with those I am about to give, and that example I have exhibited and with the Divine assistance hope I ever shall exhibit to my family. It would be an affront to your understanding to be minute, nor have I leisure to be prolix on this occasion, yet as it is the first family letter I ever wrote and may be last, I shall endeavour to give such hints as may be useful in every line of life, and enable you to improve upon the parental task before or after I fall asleep.

First consider well what is your Duty to

your Maker, your neighbour and yourself, and do it without regarding the consequences of praise or dispraise, of profit and loss. By following this simple plan you must expect to meet with several rubs, but your mind will always be at ease, and your reward in the end glorious both here and hereafter. I do not mean however that you should set the good opinion of the world at defiance, or treat it with contempt; on the contrary it is perhaps next to the mens conscia recti the most agreeable reward of good conduct; but whoever regulates his actions by the Vox populi contrary to his own sentiments will never please himself nor yet other people long.

Every thing I have seen or heard of you

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hitherto has given me the greatest pleasure, and I have little fear of your perseverance in the course you have so happily begun; but as you are probably very soon to launch into the world at large, you will forgive a Parent's anxiety, and excuse his putting you in mind of what perhaps you are already well appraised of.

As you must mix with the busy, and often the wicked world, you will unavoidably meet with many things that must give you pain, particularly the ridicule that is thrown upon every thing serious and sacred, especially revealed religion, by would be wits and shallow philosophers; the best method to get rid of this Vermin is to treat them with as much contempt as civility will allow, to turn the discourse

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to another subject, or shift the argument to some in the company older and more likely to be better qualified than yourself, but if all this will not do, be prepared to give an account of the Hope that is within you, avoiding carefully formal or warm argument, of which a fatal instance now occurs to my memory. Keep therefore an absolute command over your own temper however provoked, and avoid irritating your adversary, but should he grow warm, drop the argument immediately, observing coolly that as you argue for truth, and not victory, you are always ready to give up a dispute. There is another method of managing that is to take the defensive and put the proof upon your adversary by asking

questions, which is called the Socratic method of arguing; this artfully managed in a good cause will always insure conquest, and is at the same time the least apt to give offence. As your business is commerce, not divinity, you will in prudence shun disputes concerning religion particularly about the merits of its different sects; none of them are void of error, yet for the most part you will find those most tenacious of their opinions who are the furthest distant from reason. The general and saving principles of the Christian religion are or ought to be the same through all its sects, and in adhering to those principles you can give no offence.

For the sake of improvement and occasionally to keep up conversation, I would recommend

it to you to become acquainted with the tenets of every religion that exists or has existed, there is something good in them all; but do you frame your own religious opinions on the plain and obvious meaning of the words of the sacred writings, which I often have recommended, and do now most seriously recommend to your frequent perusal; in them are the treasures of eternal life, yet from the perverted and strained meaning of several words to be found in them have arisen various contradictory & absurd opinions, which as they were conceived in error, have been supported with obstinacy, and given birth to persecution, war and bloodshed to the great disgrace of true Religion Humanity and Reason. Would you know

a truly religious man? He is one whose principles are founded upon, and whose conduct is directed by universal love and charity.

The next topic of conversation is generally politics, which few men know, yet most pretend to, therefore supply their want of knowledge by bold assertions and positiveness, sometimes by railing and abuse.

A thorough knowledge of Geography and History particularly of one's native country, is absolutely necessary to enable any man to become a politician, the laws, customs, manners and genius of nations are requisite for this kind of knowledge, all which require more time, reading and observation than you will probably have to spare for them of a long

time. Common Sense and moderate observation will for the most part discover on which side the strength of the argument lies; but as in religion, so in politics, it often happens that many a good man from Prejudices interest or disappointment takes sides and become enthusiast, hunc tu Romano caveto. While unemployed by Government it is not incumbent on you to fight it battles, yet I hope you will always retain a due respect for the country and government in and under which you was born, and Loyalty to the lawful Sovereign is the Character of your family. Should a Clergyman or King's officer be illiberally attacked in their several characters in your company, I hope you

will always think it your duty to defend them for the same reason that you would prevent a woman, especially a modest one, from being insulted, of which a remarkable instance occurred in London last summer. A Clergyman who had been an officer in the Army was in company with a Mrs. Hartly, a very pretty woman and celebrated comedian, her husband, and some others at Vauxhall, where she was rudely insulted by three or four macaronis, of which the present Lord Littleton was one, this Clergyman finding that none of the Company cared to defend her, opposed himself to their resentment by a very spirited conduct, which not only rescued the Lady but exposed them to the contempt and ridicule

of the whole Kingdom – as the affair was made public, much to the Honor of the Heroic Minister.

? Another topic of conversation I need not mention – You will soon find it out – never be the first to introduce it, rather repress it, if you please, especially if Ladies or Clergymen are in company; but if the current runs strong, that way, it would look like affectation or prudery to be serious. In mixing in such discourse avoid ribaldry – all manner of ideas may be conveyed in modest words.

Thus far for conversation – next for your general plan of life. In whatever manner you spend time; let your pillow thoughts review the words and actions of the bypast day

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be the faithful historian of yourself, nothing extenuate, naught set down amiss. Where there is cause for blame, resolve to correct; what is right, determine to continue – one self approving hour is better far than ages of popular applause. Free from remorse, your sleep will refresh and invigorate. Awaking in the morning with a sense of gratitude towards the giver of good gifts, think of your duty seriously in all its extent, plan out the rising day as circumstances require; morning is the time for business. It was wittily but severely said by Ld. Ch \_\_\_d of the Duke of Newcastle, that he lost an hour in the morning and kept running after it all day. Avoid this reflection by all means, avoid also strong drink especially

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in a morning. If you have my flow of spirits and I am told you possess them strongly, you have no need of a spur; a very little will disorder you and throw you off your guard, besides injuring your health. Shun long meals if you can and be careful not to overload your stomach either by quantity or variety; nature is a sure guide, if you regard her admonitions you will soon find what is right and what is wrong in natural life – in moral life it is often otherwise as you already know.

When business has intervals or is finished, indulge innocent mirth as I hear you do, court virtuous friendship, neglect no opportunity of improvement by conversation, reading and writing. I wish you were a little fonder

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of the last. Your sisters are. Your answer will be, I have nothing to say. Remember the newspaper motto, Quicquid agunt homines, amor, ira, odium, discursus, nostri farrago libelli – and you will never want subject for a letter. I have no complaints to make of your style, it is very good but you are too laconic; it should seem that you never begin to write till it is time to leave off, which makes you always in a hurry. I am told that you are fond of company, that company is fond of you, that you talk a good deal and in a very easy, correct, and agreeable manner; do Jack! Favour us now and then with one of your conversation pieces. But when you write letters of business, be as laconic as you please,



providing you are plain, intelligible and to the purpose. With regard to your intercourse with the world, remember the latin distich: cum fueris Roma, Romano Vivito, more, cum fueris alibi, vivito more loci. I mean so far as reason and virtue will permit, for I insist it is better to be virtuously singular than viciously fashionable. Had I when at your age or for some years after indulged the fashionable gallantry that my compeers gave way to, like most of them I had died before I was fully ripe, or been at this a childless, worn out man. I might have grown rich and bribed some girl to be my wife and nurse, teased her and fretted myself, either have had no children or a few

foolish, funny, sickly half existing animals, requiring more nursing than they were worth. Are my children such? Answer for yourself my Son.

Having breakfasted done all your business dined, and if the climate is warm, taken a short siesto, how do you spend the afternoon Jack? If you are not otherwise engaged, will you give me leave to introduce you to tea in a respectable genteel private family, where there are some agreeable young ladies under the eye of a prudent Mother and Grandmother, who receives her welcome guests with a graceful ease, and frowns not when her children enter into familiar conversation with their friends, where do you please to sit – among

the girls I warrant you. Have you even now nothing to say? They will find subject, and you can do no less than keep the ball up; do it cheerfully, cleverly and wittily if you can. Youth is the season of mirth. If the weather and time of year permit treat the Ladies with a walk in the Garden; if it is cold and wet, a little fun within doors – a great chance if they do not move for a game of romps. Baulk them not – But have a care – of what? Your heart and passions - There is a bound beyond which you must not go. Beware of love John, was the last advice I received from my Uncle Bennet, who knew the world well. I give it to you. Where do you spend the evening? You are engaged with company

of your own age and rank. If it is agreeable, I shall be glad to be of the party. I love to be young now and then. Let us have ladies among us, they are the very life and soul of good company. A man may be a scholar, a man of business, a Philosopher, an Artist, but ladies only can form the polite complete gentleman; and let Lord Chesterfield say what he will, he may be a modest man, yet I must confess the sex is rather fond of an inclination to libertinism; but until time has braced every nerve at 22 or 23, let it be in appearance only, and afterwards too, as long as you can. At all events, avoid mischievous intrigues, low amours and adulterous connexions. Solomon was a wise man, and

had more experience in the sex than perhaps all that lived before or since his time, observe his precepts, they are just and curious. But perhaps you are going to the tavern – with all my heart - we are set – the conversation is awkward and trifling. The glass goes about the second sound makes us all acquainted. The set consist of soakers, jokers, praters, pedants and buffoons, with a few sensible young fellows, and well bred gentlemen. We first smokes his pipes and understands, at least speaks no other language but what is timed to the glass, he smiles, looks grave, and fills his pipe by turns, his greatest joy and pride is to stay longer, drink more, and triumph over the sobriety of all the company. Be not

mighty to drink strong drink. The second is only happy in getting the company into a roar, fun is his object, and fun he must have at all events often at the expense of some modest well meaning man, - it is right to be merry, but ridicule is often cruel, especially when pointed at serious subjects or natural defects. In such cases join not in it. Be merry and wise. A perpetual prater is a pest in company, he engrosses the conversation, he tells a story of his Grandmother's Cat, and introduces it head and shoulders. Lord Chesterfield is very severe upon storytellers, yet he is perpetually exemplifying by anecdotes, thus you see theory and practice are different. A well told story aptly and happily introduced

is always agreeable, but too many of them and too often repeated is very disagreeable. I remember an old M who had an excellent budget, but he was so profuse that he emptied it in a fortnight, then his repetitions became nauseous. Shun this example. Learning, however agreeable in the closet is seldom so in company, unless it consists entirely or chiefly of learned men, which will seldom be the case at your age. If the conversation turns upon learning, one looks silly not to be able to enter into it. Watch however the looks of the company when they begin to yawn, make faces, and say come drink about, endeavor to turn the conversation or drop the present subject. Buffoons are a

mere set of make weights in society, and sicken everybody with their folly and insignificance; they follow jokers as a shadow, and it is hard to say which of the two is most contemptible. The last class consists of those and only those (with) whom one would wish to associate with, who temper good sense with cheerfulness, who bound mirth with reason, and occasionally display all that is agreeable and engaging in conversation in an easy unaffected manner. The acquaintance and society of such, cultivate, make one of them at stated times; (?) for a too frequent use of the best viands will nauseate or render them insipid.

“Finally whatsoever things are true whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just,

whosoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which you have both learned and received, and heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with “you”. Ponder on these things Oh my Son! and carry them into practice; then I fear not of your being an ornament to your family your country and human nature, happy here and hereafter, all which, that you may be, is the fervent Prayer of

Your most affectionate Father  
John Murray