

**LORD CHESTERFIELD'S ADVICE TO
HIS SON ON MEN AND MANNERS.
TO WHICH ARE ADDED, SELECTIONS
FROM COLTON'S "LACON," OR
MANY THINGS IN FEW WORDS**

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Lord Chesterfield's Advice to His Son on Men and Manners. To Which Are Added, Selections from Colton's "Lacon," or Many Things in Few Words by Philip Dormer Stanhope & Charles Caleb Colton

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1861.

LIFE OF LORD CHESTERFIELD.

PHILIP DORMER STANHOPE, Earl of Chesterfield, was born in London, in 1694, and was educated at Cambridge. Before he was of age, he sat in Parliament as member for Lostwithiel, and spoke with so much violence as to provoke from his antagonists a hint, that his minority might possibly be taken advantage of to move for his exclusion. In 1726, he succeeded to the Earldom of Chesterfield. The accession of George II. opened to Stanhope the road to political honours. He was sworn a Privy Counsellor; was appointed in 1728 Ambassador Extraordinary to Holland; received the Garter in 1730; and was nominated Steward of the Household. The latter office he resigned in 1733; and for many years he continued in strenuous opposition to the measures of Sir Robert Walpole. Among the anti-ministerial Peers he stood conspicuous for activity and eloquence. At the same time his pen was frequently employed with powerful effect, in the "Craftsman" and other papers. It was not till January, 1745, that the Government once more availed itself of his talents. In that month he was sent to Holland, as Ambassador Extraordinary; and on his

return, in May, he went over to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant. The viceregal power he held rather less than twelve months, but the equity and beneficence of his sway are still remembered with gratitude. In October, 1746, he was nominated Secretary of State; and this office he held till the beginning of 1748, when the state of his health induced him to resign it. In the Senate he continued to speak till increasing deafness incapacitated him for oratorical exertions. But his pen did not remain idle. He contributed largely to "The World;" among his contributions were the two papers which drew forth the celebrated letter addressed to him by Dr. Johnson. He died March 24th, 1773. Chesterfield was a man of highly polished manners, extensive acquirements, and versatile talents. He held no mean place among diplomatists, statesmen, wits, writers, and orators; in the latter capacity he has been called the British Cicero. His works consist of his "Letters to his Son," and "Miscellaneous Pieces."

LORD CHESTERFIELD'S
ADVICE TO HIS SON.

ABSENCE OF MIND.

AN absent man is generally either a very weak, or a very affected, man ; he is, however, a very disagreeable man in company. He is defective in all the common offices of civility. He does not enter into the general conversation, but breaks into it from time to time, with some start of his own, as if he waked from a dream. He seems wrapped up in thought, and possibly does not think at all ; he does not know his most intimate acquaintance by sight, or answers them as if he were at cross purposes. He leaves his hat in one room, his cane in another ; and would probably leave his shoes in a third, if his buckles, though awry, did not save them. This is a sure indication, either of a mind so weak that it cannot bear above one object at a time, or so affected that it would be supposed to be wholly engrossed by some very great and important object. Sir Isaac Newton, Mr. Locke, and, perhaps, five or six more since the creation, may have had a right

to absence, from the intense thought their investigations required; but such liberties cannot be claimed by, nor will be tolerated in, any other persons.

No man is, in any degree, fit for either business or conversation, who does not command his attention to the present object, be it what it will. When I see a man absent in mind, I choose to be absent in body; for it is almost impossible for me to stay in the room, as I cannot stand inattention and awkwardness.

I would rather be in company with a dead man than with an absent one; for if the dead man affords me no pleasure, at least he shows me no contempt; whereas the absent man very plainly, though silently, tells me that he does not think me worth his attention. Besides, an absent man can never make any observations upon the characters, customs, and manners of the company. He may be in the best companies all his lifetime, (if they will admit him,) and never become the wiser; we may as well converse with a deaf man as an absent one. It is indeed a practical blunder to address ourselves to a man, who, we plainly perceive, neither hears, minds, nor understands us.

ATTENTION.

A MAN is fit for neither business nor pleasure, who either cannot or does not command and direct his attention to the present object, and in some degree banish, for that time, all others from his thoughts. If at a ball, a supper, or a party of pleasure, a man were to be solving, in his own mind, a problem in Euclid, he would be a very bad companion, and make a poor figure in that company; or if, in studying a problem in his closet, he were to think of a minnet, I am apt to believe that he would make a very poor mathematician.

There is time enough for every thing in the course of the day, if you do but one thing at once: but there is not time enough in the year, if you will do two things at a time.

This steady and undissipated attention to one object is a sure mark of a superior genius; as hurry, bustle, and agitation are the never-failing symptoms of a weak and frivolous mind.

Indeed, without attention, nothing is to be done: want of attention, which is really want of thought, is either folly or madness. You should not only have attention to every thing, but a quickness of attention, so as to observe, at once, all the people in the room,—their motions, their looks, and their words; and yet without staring at them, and seeming to be an observer. This quick and unobserved

observation is of infinite advantage in life, and is to be acquired with care; and, on the contrary, what is called absence, which is a thoughtlessness and want of attention about what is doing, makes a man so like either a fool or a madman, that, for my part, I see no real difference. A fool never has thought; a madman has lost it; and an absent man is, for the time, without it.

In short, the most material knowledge of all—I mean the knowledge of the world—is never to be acquired without great attention; and I know many old people, who, though they have lived long in the world, are but children still as to the knowledge of it, from their levity and inattention. Certain forms, which all people comply with, and certain arts, which all people aim at, hide, in some degree, the truth, and give a general exterior resemblance to almost every body. Attention and sagacity must see through that veil, and discover the natural character.

Add to this, there are little attentions which are infinitely engaging, and which sensibly affect that degree of pride and self-love which is inseparable from human nature; as they are unquestionable proofs of the regard and consideration which we have for the persons to whom we pay them. As for example: suppose you invited any body to dine or sup with you, you ought to recollect if you had observed that they had any favourite dish, and take care to provide it for them: and, when it came,