

**PRIVATE CORRESPONDENCE OF DAVID  
HUME WITH SEVERAL DISTINGUISHED  
PERSONS, BETWEEN THE YEARS 1761  
AND 1776. NOW FIRST PUBLISHED  
FROM THE ORIGINALS**

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Private Correspondence of David Hume with Several Distinguished Persons, Between the Years 1761 and 1776. Now First Published from the Originals by David Hume

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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE History of England, by David Hume, has been aptly styled the "History of English Passions, by Human Reason." It displays alike the learning, the judgment and the impartiality of its celebrated author: but it conveys little idea of his private character, of his equanimity, of the cheerfulness, and even playfulness of his disposition, and of the habits of his life. These are to be learnt only from his Private Correspondence, which, not being intended for the public eye, reveals the man, and betrays his individuality.

The following Correspondence, which the Editor feels himself particularly fortunate in having obtained, comprehends a period of sixteen years, that is, from 1761 to 1776. It consists principally of letters written by David Hume to the Countess de Boufflers, and the Marchioness of Barbantane, at Paris; of various others, by the celebrated J. J. Rousseau, the Countess de Boufflers, the Earl Marshal of Scotland, &c.

The Letters, written by Hume to the Countess de Boufflers, are forty in number ; and, independent of coming from the pen of the celebrated Historian, and referring to one of the most interesting periods of the last century, viz. the end of the reign of Louis XV. in France, and the beginning of the long and eventful reign of George III. in England, they derive an increased interest from the person to whom they are addressed.

The Countess de Boufflers-Rouvrel was not less celebrated for the beauty of her person, than for the uncommon powers of her mind, the sprightliness of her wit, and the extent of her information. On her entrance into public life, after her marriage, she became the companion of the Duchess of Orleans, the Grandmother of the present Duke. But having had some differences with Her Royal Highness, she left the Princess, and formed a very intimate connexion with the Prince de Conti. Though her accomplishments and the gracefulness of her manners rendered her a principal object of attraction at his Court, she yet found time to write a French tragedy in prose, which, indeed, was neither acted nor printed, but which was highly spoken of by the most distinguished literary characters of the age. To patronize literature and the arts was her delight. She was an enthusiastic admirer of J. J. Rousseau ; and zealously attached to Hume, with whom she entered into an epistolary correspondence. The death of the Count de Boufflers, her husband, which happened in the month of October 1764, led her to aspire to the exalted rank of

a Princess. On this occasion Hume gave her the most delicate advice; and afterwards, by his cheering philosophy, supported her under her disappointment. She twice visited England. Her son was educated in Holland, at the Protestant University of Leyden. He gave very great hopes, but must not be confounded with his relation the witty Chevalier de Boufflers, who was the youngest son of the Marquis de Boufflers-Rémien-court, and whose mother enjoyed the tender regard of Stanislaus, King of Poland, and Duke of Lorraine.

The letters to the Marchioness de Barbantane, as well as those to the Countess de Boufflers, confirm the circumstance which caused so much surprise to the Baron de Grimm, that all the pretty women of France were fond of Hume, and that the stout Scotch philosopher appeared highly delighted with their society. The flattering reception which Hume met with in France from all ranks and persons, and the bitter feuds which prevailed at that period in England between the Whigs and Tories, rendered him so partial to French manners, that he thought them synonymous with politeness itself. It is not, indeed, surprising that a temper, serene and tranquil like his, should have preferred the witty conversation of accomplished Parisian ladies, in their elegant saloons, to the boisterous political discussions of English gentlemen, over their bottles at taverns and coffee-houses, which, in his time, were their places of fashionable resort.



vous commettre aux soins de mon ami ; il est digne de devenir le vôtre, et il le désire beaucoup. Son nom est *Elliot* ; il demeure à Londres, dans . . . . . Si vous lui faites savoir le moment de votre arrivée, il vous joindra immédiatement, et vous conduira dans la retraite que nous avons choisie. J'espère que vous y trouverez la tranquillité et le bonheur. Le peu de part que vous me permettez d'y prendre, me rendra très heureux, et je compterai cet événement comme un des plus fortunés de ma vie. Les libraires de Londres offrent aux auteurs plus d'argent de leurs ouvrages, que ceux de Paris ; ainsi vous pourrez sans peine vivre frugalement du fruit de votre propre travail. Je parle sur ce sujet, parceque je sais, Monsieur, que vous voulez toujours que le genre humain vous soit redevable, et ne rien recevoir de lui."

*Translation.*

"The epistolary correspondence which the Earl Marshal of Scotland, our mutual friend, has procured me with you, was too gratifying for me not to have been anxious to continue it, had I not been afraid of being ranked among those troublesome persons, who, under the pretence of admiring, have not ceased to persecute you with their letters. A conversation which I lately had with the Marchioness de Verdelin, revives my hopes of being enabled to soften your present situation ; and I flatter

myself, that you will kindly accept of my services. Your singular and continued misfortunes must, independent of your virtues and genius, strongly interest every human creature in your behalf; and I think I may safely engage, that you will find in England complete security against persecution; not only on account of the tolerance of our laws, but also on account of the respect which every one in England entertains for your character. But before I mentioned my project to you, I wished to be sure of its execution. I wrote to a friend of mine, and his answer is such as I wished. Madame de Verdelin will acquaint you with the particulars. Her advice, and mine, is, that you should begin your journey as soon as possible, to avoid the bad season, and also to deprive your enemies of the opportunity of renewing their insults. It would have given me great pleasure, if I could have gone to meet you in Switzerland, in order to accompany you on your journey: but having been for some time entrusted with the public affairs here, I am obliged to return immediately to the Court of London, to give an account of what I have done. From London I shall proceed to Ireland, to join the Earl of Hertford, who formerly was our Ambassador in France, and is at present Vice-Roy of that kingdom. The necessity which I am under of performing this journey, will deprive me of the pleasure of seeing you in England before next summer. In the mean time, I hope you will allow me to confide you to the care of my friend; he is worthy to become yours, and he wishes it

very much. His name is Elliot; he lives in London at . . . . . If you will let him know the moment you expect to arrive, he will be instantly with you, and conduct you to the retreat which we have chosen. I hope you will there find tranquillity and happiness. The small share which you permit me to take in your welfare will render me very happy, and I shall consider this event as one of the most fortunate of my life. The booksellers of London pay authors better for their works than those of Paris; you will therefore easily be enabled to live frugally on the fruits of your own labour. I mention this because I know that you always wish mankind to be indebted to you, without accepting any thing from them."

The letters of the Countess de Boufflers justify all that we before stated, respecting the accomplishments of that Lady. The ease, elegance, and vivacity of their style, and the force of their reasoning, place them almost on the same line with the celebrated letters of Madame de Sévigné.

In her letter to David Hume, the Countess is justly offended at Hume having made the Baron D'Holbach at Paris his first confidant, respecting his quarrel with J. J. Rousseau; and at his not having recommended a strict silence on the subject. His letter to the Baron had been publicly read at a brilliant supper, given by M. Necker; it began with these remarkable words: "*Mon cher Baron, Jean Jacques est un Scélérat.*" The expression was, no doubt, intemperate, and too strong for the