

**CHESTERFIELD'S  
LETTERS TO HIS  
SON: SELECTIONS**

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Chesterfield's letters to his son: selections by Philip Dormer Stanhope Chesterfield

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**PHILIP DORMER STANHOPE CHESTERFIELD**

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*Selections*

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## Prefatory Remarks

**P**HILIP DORMER STANHOPE,  
Earl of Chesterfield, 1694-1773,  
has had the fate of being generally mis-  
understood. Doctor Johnson, then Mr.,  
a poor scholar but in the prime of life,  
seems to have mistaken a delay in an  
interview, and to have abused his lord-  
ship very soundly ever afterward,  
although on Chesterfield's side there  
was not wanting a most gracious move-  
ment toward reconciliation where no  
offence had been given. To this mis-  
conception we owe one of the finest  
and manliest letters ever written; but  
we cannot overlook the blunder.



## \* Prefatory Remarks

After this, too, came the condemnation of the celebrated letters, — a savage epigram, only partially true, and redeemed by a more favourable criticism. If Mr. Dickens painted — as it has been said he did — Sir John Chester from Lord Chesterfield, he equally mistook the man; and we are sorry to add to this list of those who have followed Johnson's lead, Mrs. Oliphant, in her recent admirable "Historical Sketches."

The simple truth is, that men are to be judged by the places, temper of the times, nay, even the very atmosphere which surrounds them, — and Chesterfield lived in a lax, immoral time, when a mistress was as well recognised in polite society as a concubine was in the days of King David. The *Cupidon*

## Prefatory Remarks ❀

*décbainé* at The Hague, a beautiful young lady, a governess or *dame de compagnie*, set her wits against his, and suffered the usual penalty; she fell, and this son to whom these letters are written was the result. But if Chesterfield was not a Christian gentleman, he was in some sense a gentleman; Mademoiselle, or, as she was called, Madame de Bouchet, was always treated with distinguished politeness, and when he died he left her a legacy as some slight recompense for the injury he had done her. He married a lady of blood royal, though crossed by a bar sinister [daughter of George I. and the Duchess of Kendal], and this lady grew very fond of his son Philip and respectfully greeted the mother; and for this son more than a thousand letters attest the

## ✧ Prefatory Remarks

father's affection; he is placed under the care of an excellent clergyman, he is urged to pay the greatest attention to his mother, to his tutor, to his morals, to his upright, straightforward behaviour, to his honesty. "I don't speak of religion," writes his father, "I am not in a position to do so; the excellent Mr. Harte will do that." We don't defend Chesterfield's faults, but we must speak for his virtues. Not one father in ten thousand, in those days, was so good, so tender, and so wise; his son grew up to marry a lady of whom his father knew nothing till a widow and two children came as suppliants, in that splendid room in Chesterfield House where the old earl sate in lonely greatness. He forgave the dead son's offence, and behaved