

**OUT OF THE PAST: SOME  
BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS.  
IN TWO VOLS.-VOL. I**

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**MOUNTSTUART E. GRANT DUFF**

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IN TWO VOLS.-VOL. I**



# OUT OF THE PAST

## SOME BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS

BY THE RIGHT HON.

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## ADVERTISEMENT

v. 1

IN these two volumes, which may be considered as supplementary to my *Notes from a Diary*, I have collected some biographical papers, most of which have appeared in the periodicals enumerated in the Table of Contents, to whose Editors I beg to return my thanks for permission to reproduce them. I have added several Addresses of a similar character, which I have delivered from time to time. The last paper in the Second Volume was a Friday Evening Lecture, upon Epitaphs, given at the Royal Institution in Albemarle Street. I have placed it here, because it deals with a subject to which the other contents of the volume naturally turned my thoughts.

Dr. Moore's  
1828

"For some we loved, the loveliest and the best  
That from his Vintage rolling Time has prest,  
Have drunk their Cup a Round or two before  
And one by one crept silently to rest."

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## OUT OF THE PAST

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### CHESTERFIELD AS AN EDUCATOR

"THE eagle," said one of the wisest of men, "does not nestle securely in the very bosom of Jove, the day on which he has quarrelled with a beetle." How much more serious, however, is the predicament of the royal bird, if he has offended, not a humble insect, but an animal of a far higher order. This was the misfortune which befel Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield. Justly or unjustly, for we know but one side of the story, he roused against him the anger of the "literary whale"<sup>1</sup> of his generation, and his memory suffers from it unto this day, in spite of the partial reparation which was made by his assailant. It is not my intention in the following paper to attempt to do anything towards rehabilitating Chesterfield, who had unquestionably his fair share of faults. Persons who set to work to rehabilitate damaged reputations are peculiarly apt to be attacked by a dangerous form of the *rabies*

<sup>1</sup> Peter Pindar prophesied very truly of Boswell—

"Triumphant thou thro' Time's vast gulf shalt sail,  
The pilot of our literary whale."

*biographica*, and to confound truth and falsehood, right and wrong, in their headlong advocacy. The object of the following pages is far more humble, and purely practical. Mr. Leslie Stephen, not the least eminent of an eminent family, has adopted, or almost adopted, what appears to me a monstrously unjust criticism of Dr. Johnson's upon a work of Chesterfield's, which ought in my judgment to be far more generally read than it is; and I am anxious, by recalling to the attention of some readers what really was the essential part of the teaching of Chesterfield, to do something towards making the study of his *Letters to his Son* what I think they ought to be, a regular portion of the education of every Englishman who is likely to enter public life tolerably early. Before going further, however, it is absolutely necessary to admit, without any qualifications, that the book has some very grave defects. These fall for the most part under three heads.

1st. There are a number of coarse expressions and allusions thinly scattered through the four volumes which are, although they occur in all the light literature of last century, not the less repugnant to modern eyes and ears.

2nd. The whole book is pitched, so to speak, an octave too low, if not for the day in which it was written, at least for that in which we have the good fortune to live. A man of the world, as shrewd as Chesterfield, would in the year 1879 have grasped the truth that to make an assured and

honourable success in politics now, a character ought to be broader and deeper than that on the building up of which he laboured so assiduously. There must be just as much shrewdness and knowledge of the world as ever, in the composition of the politician who is to play at the gold table and to win; but there must be, in an age when great masses are to be moved, a good deal more enthusiasm, a good deal more sympathy, and a good deal more poetry.

3rd. There are a great variety of passages which inculcate what we have happily learned to think a most detestable morality. Chesterfield drew a broad distinction between ordinary dissipation and the gallantry which the practice of his times authorised in all continental countries, and to this topic he recurs with provoking frequency.

If I were engaged in estimating his character, it would be necessary to linger on this disagreeable subject, and to inquire what weight ought to be given to it in balancing his faults against his virtues. I cannot, however, make it too clear that I am not engaged in estimating his character. That was done very well, more than a generation ago, by the late Lord Stanhope in his History, and by Mr Hayward in an Essay, which has been reprinted.

My object is, as I have said, a purely practical one—to examine, namely, how far his *Letters to his Son* can be made useful at the present day, and it fortunately happens that all his bad morality may, for that particular purpose,