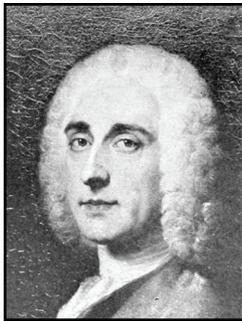


ALL-ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN LORD CHESTERFIELD (1694-1773)



While John Byrom, with his enthusiasm for Malebranche and his engagement with Christian mysticism, meanders on a by-road of eighteenth century culture, Lord Chesterfield marches staunchly up the highway and strives mightily to draw his son after him. By a stroke of good fortune for posterity, his widowed daughter-in-law's straitened circumstances eventually lead her to publish the letters Chesterfield has written to her husband from the time of the latter's early childhood to his death about three decades later. Unwittingly, in seeking to guide and educate his son, the father has created the work of literature for which he is mainly remembered. But while this collection is the jewel which keeps Lord Chesterfield's memory shining, every gem is the better for a fine setting, and the perfect setting for this gem would be a selection of Chesterfield's letters to other correspondents. Not only is Saintsbury right in saying that to know the man we need to read his missives to such friends as Mme de Monconseil and Solomon Dayrolles, we need to read them to enlarge our perspective on the relationship between father and son.

In 1731, the Earl of Chesterfield, Britain's twenty-seven-year-old Ambassador to Holland, seduces in the Hague a governess named Elizabeth du Bouchet. A year later, he finds himself captivated by their seven-week-old son, a "gaillard" or energetic young fellow, who already shows signs of future merit. The baby has been given his father's name of Philip, and he and his mother soon settle in London, where the Earl can occasionally see his son and attempt, largely through letters, to mould him into a phenomenon.

Chesterfield decides that his son will not only become a gentleman of known probity and a scholar furnished with all the knowledge appropriate for a European statesman, but a person whose bearing, manners, dress and speech immediately charm all who meet him. To the challenge that such a

paragon is an impossibility, he replies that he has known one example – Lord Bolingbroke, though he admits that Bolingbroke, who was notoriously a rake and a secret negotiator with James II's son, the Old Pretender, lacked impeccable morals. Chesterfield is certain that the good opinion of all but the rarest of people is to be won by outward appearances, and only when their eyes and ears have been pleased will they attend to the reasonings of a good mind. All that he desires for Philip, he keeps insisting, he or nearly any man can acquire by making sufficient effort, for everything can be learnt except how to be a good poet.

When Philip is no older than five, and is still living with his mother, Chesterfield begins the long process of his education. At the start, he urges the importance of moral character and sound learning: being just, compassionate and true to one's word, as well as free from cruelty, arrogance and avarice, is a necessity if one is to enjoy a clear conscience and the respect of others. Writing to his little boy in French, he makes sure that he studies Latin, Greek, ancient and modern history, and the geography of Europe. He assures him that distinction lies ahead, partly because "Everybody knows Latin, but few people know Greek well." When Philip is nine years old, Chesterfield lays out the history which has led to the much talked about Maria Theresa's becoming ruler of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and explains why France has sent an army into Bulgaria. Later he will add German and Italian to the list of his son's necessary accomplishments. He is at times a stern taskmaster accompanying the promise of glory that achievement will bring with threats to withdraw his love if the boy falls short in his studies. Philip, it will turn out, is an honest boy and a natural scholar who loves books and reading. But very early, soon after he reaches the age of seven, his father introduces his third requirement, the acquisition of the easy, polite manners common in the French upper classes but uncommon in England. This demand leads to years of struggle for the tormented father and harassed son.

At the age of fourteen, Philip is sent to travel in Europe with his scholarly tutor, Walter Harte. The latter is instructed to perfect his charge's linguistic skills and augment his geographical knowledge in preparation for his entry into the Foreign Service. Most young English travellers, Chesterfield has observed, wallow in pleasure and learn little, and the result is that the British Foreign Service is full of ignorant, incompetent officials. But once abroad, his son is to study under renowned legal scholars and to mix with fashionable society, partly to perfect his French, German and Italian, but also to acquire, especially from ladies of fashion, the social graces his father finds in woefully short supply west of the English Channel. "There is hardly a French cook," he laments, "that is not better bred than most Englishmen of quality."

It is at this point that a notorious element enters the letters. Chesterfield warns Philip—as he also warns his protégé the young Lord Huntingdon, who is four years older—against relations with low class women, who can impoverish a man and infect him with disease. However, a relationship with a woman of the upper class, a class which is rife with (in Byron’s words) “What men call gallantry and gods adultery” —can add the missing gloss to his manners and bearing. When Philip is two months short of his eighteenth birthday, his father instructs him that “The gallantry of high life, though not strictly justifiable, carries, at least, no external marks of infamy about it. Neither the heart nor the constitution is corrupted by it; neither nose nor character lost by it; manners, possibly, improved.” With less restraint, he tells Huntingdon, “As for mistresses, I do not presume to stint you, the more the better, provided they are such as neither endanger your health nor your character.” When Huntingdon falls for a Parisian dancing girl, Chesterfield comments to Philip, “I should have thought Lord Huntingdon, at his age, and with his parts and address, need not have been reduced to keep an opera whore, in such a place as Paris, where so many women of fashion generously serve as volunteers.” In 1751, he is even to make the odious suggestion that his son seduce Mme de Blot, who has been married for less than a year and “has as yet been scrupulously constant to her husband.” More commendably, he gives him fatherly warnings against the perils of “gaming,” (gambling for high stakes) and admonishes him to enjoy wine sparingly and remain “infinitely short of drunkenness.”

At the beginning of 1750, when Philip is seventeen, Chesterfield ceases to open his letters with “Dear Boy” and starts to address him as “Dear Friend.” At the end of the year, Harte returns to England alone and Chesterfield hands his son over to his Parisian friend Mme de Monconseil, rather as parents used to send their daughters to a finishing school: the lady is commissioned to give him the social veneer he lacks. His Lordship’s wish is that people, unprompted, should exclaim about his son, “*Ah qu’il est aimable! Quelles manières, quelles graces, quel art de plaire!*” Philip, alas, stoops, is absent-minded in company, speaks indistinctly, and for all his linguistic prowess, expresses himself inelegantly in English. To encourage him to mend these faults, his father tells him of great deeds accomplished simply through the power to please. The Duke of Marlborough, whom he knew well, had, he says, no genius, nothing more than “an excellent good plain understanding with sound judgment,” but “his manner was irresistible, by either man or woman,” and it was this that enabled him “to connect the various and jarring powers of the Grand Alliance, and to carry them on to the main object of the war.” Julius Caesar had graces that “made him beloved, even by his enemies” and enabled him to subvert “the liberties of Rome.” Chesterfield himself, when he was determined to make Britain

adopt the corrected calendar already in use in most of Europe, got lawyers and astronomers to draw up the appropriate Bill. This, he writes,

was necessarily composed of law jargon and astronomical calculations, to both of which I am an utter stranger. However, it was absolutely necessary to make the House of Lords think that I knew something of the matter; and also to make them believe that they knew something of it themselves ... I gave them, therefore, only an historical account of calendars ... but I was particularly attentive to the choice of my words, to the harmony and roundness of my periods, to my elocution, to my action. This succeeded, and ever will succeed; they thought I informed because I pleased them; and many of them said that I had made the whole very clear to them.

To Mme du Boccage, Chesterfield confides his fear that Philip's manner may have been infected by "German stiffness and Italian buffoonery," and six weeks later, on receiving Mme de Monconseil's frank report of his son, he expresses his dismay at the boy's defects, which she alone has a chance of curing. He makes the mistake, his father tells Solomon Dayrolles, a minor diplomat, of thinking that "knowledge is all." When an unnamed acquaintance protests that "It is not in his character; that gentleness, that *douceur*, those attentions which you wish him to have, are not in his nature," Chesterfield argues that "those exterior accomplishments" can be acquired if one has sufficient determination.

In June 1752, when Philip is about to make his entrance into public life at George II's German court in Hanover, his father writes, "I confess that I am more anxious about it, than ever bride was on her wedding night ... the character which you will acquire there will, more or less, be that which will abide by you for the rest of your life." Three months later, he announces that the time has come for him to relinquish the role of authority in the young man's life and replace it with that of adviser. His counsel continues to be much needed, for, though Philip learns to dance well, he never acquires the art of pleasing or becomes an effective public speaker. Chesterfield, at considerable expense, has him elected to Parliament in 1754, but the young man's first and only speech is marred by stumbling and confusion. Uncharacteristically, his usually critical father writes him a comforting letter and recommends participation in committee work as a preparation for better success.

About ten months afterwards, Chesterfield tells his old friend the Bishop of Waterford, "I have placed my boy in a situation to push himself forwards when I am gone." Events, however, are to turn out very differently from the way he imagines.

During this period, Chesterfield is writing to friends of long-standing of the increasing infirmity and hereditary deafness that have driven him into retirement, and, while giving the subject less emphasis, he does not hide the facts from Philip: "I look upon myself now," he admits, "to be *emeritus* in business.... My only remaining ambition is to be the counsellor and minister of your rising ambition. Let me see my own youth revived in you."

In 1746, Philip is appointed Resident at Hamburg, and from September 1757 to May 1758 his father's letters express an understandable and affectionate wish to hear details of his son's life in his off-duty hours, but his pleas meet with continual excuses. While Chesterfield has long warned Philip against low class sirens and urged the advantages of relationships with ladies of fashion, it seems not to have occurred to him that the young man may be attracted to a woman who is neither a social star nor a strumpet. It seems probable that the time has already arrived when he has fallen in love with and secretly married Eugenia Peters, the plain but musical illegitimate daughter of a rich Irishman and has not dared to tell his father of his deed. His domestic life, however, has not impaired his professional efficiency, for he is writing official letters which please the Duke of Newcastle and even the King: his father is happy enough to exclaim, "Go on so, with diligence, and you will be, what I began to despair of your ever being, SOMEBODY." About a year later, he remarks on Lord Titchfield's good report of the civilities Philip showed him at Hamburg and teases him, "At this rate, if you do not take care, you will get the unmanly reputation of a well-bred man."

From 1756 to 1763, Britain is engaged in the Seven Years War, during which she fights against France in India, West Africa, the West Indies and North America. In this period, Chesterfield's letters to Philip, like those to his other correspondents, record his fear of a disastrous outcome for England, as well as for her ally and his idol, Frederick the Great of Prussia. He writes, too, of his personal life—of growing fruit at his estate at Blackheath and of taking the waters, with very limited benefit, at Bath. Once he confesses that the excesses of his youth are responsible for his pains: "I cannot accuse Nature, for I abused her; and it is reasonable I should suffer for it." In 1764 he seems to sum up his final opinion of his son when he laments to Mme de Monconseil, "He has excellent merchandise in his shop, but he does not have the ability to display it." Nevertheless, he continues to advise him on his career, and when he is content not to seek re-election to the House of Commons, he admonishes him, "I am of a very different opinion from you, about being in parliament, as no man can be of consequence in this country, who is not in it; and, though one may not

“speak like a Lord Mansfield or a Lord Chatham, one may make a very good figure in a second rank.”

Chesterfield’s resignation to the prospect of a second rank status for his son may be made easier by the appearance in his life of a new child in whom to invest his emotional energy. Because Philip is illegitimate, the heir to the earldom is a distantly related small boy, also called Philip Stanhope. Since this child’s parents cannot afford to educate him appropriately, they allow Lord Chesterfield to take over his upbringing. The literary result is a second series of letters designed to guide a boy towards the acquisition of moral probity, scholarly learning and captivating manners. This enterprise – ultimately unsuccessful – begins in 1761 and ends in 1770, when the recipient is only fourteen. It repeats the lessons of the earlier part of the first series, again offering conditional love, but this time Chesterfield is able to spur his charge to extra effort by threatening that the boy’s sister, who is all that the boy should be and who loves him now, will come to despise him if he fails to improve.

By 1764, Chesterfield is becoming seriously anxious about the health of his own son. He consults a physician and also offers advice based on his personal experience, but his efforts are ineffectual. His worry increases, and he eventually receives the dreadful news of Philip’s death in November 1768. How he must be startled to learn also that his son has left behind a widow and two small boys! His hundreds of letters to Philip are gracefully complemented by nine written to his daughter-in-law and one to his grandsons, whose care and education he at once undertakes. He addresses the widow, as “Madam” (“Madame” is his term of address even for his dear friend Mme de Monconseil) but seems to establish an amiable enough relationship with her. In one letter he assures her that he likes her and in another refers to some pains she is prepared to take over some “pine” plants (?pineapples) he might like to grow. She shows an interest in his life and health, and he pays her the compliment of saying she is a most uncharacteristic widow in her willingness to assume “perpetual shackles” for her children’s sake. At an early meeting, he becomes so absorbed in playing with his grandsons that he forgets to discuss how soon their mother wants them sent to school. He is more discriminating in planning for them than he was in planning for their father. “Charles,” he writes, “will be a scholar, if you please; but our little Philip, without being one, will be something or other as good, though I do not yet guess what.” In October 1771, at the end of the series of letters, he thanks the boys for “two of the best written letters that ever I saw in my life,” and expresses astonishment that Phil, being an “idle rogue,” has written as well as his painstaking brother.

Meanwhile, Chesterfield continues the epistolary nurture of his godson. He is happy with the child’s progress, but in mid-1770 he writes of his

fear: "The more I love you now the more I dread the snares and dangers that await you the next six or seven years of your life from ill company and bad examples." Two years later, Huntingdon must be abroad, for he seeks through Solomon Dayrolles a confidential report "of his faults as well as of his perfections (if he has any)." By this time, the Earl is so weak that he has to dictate his letter.

Although the education and guidance of his son is the major subject of Chesterfield's famous letters to Philip, the contents are much richer and more various than this suggests. While the son's life is in the foreground, the father's is present in the background. We glimpse him holding a levy as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland; resigning as Secretary of State (to enjoy the quiet befitting his age, he tells Philip; even more, he tells Dayrolles, because he is not free to do what he thinks right); taking pride in his fine new neoclassical mansion; grieving over the death of his brother John; seeking melon seeds and fig cuttings to plant on the estate at Blackheath that he inherits from that brother; and succumbing to deafness, weakened eyesight, headaches, stomach disorders, and the loss of flesh and function in his legs. The beliefs he expresses and the tastes he discloses are thoroughly characteristic of his time.

Lord Chesterfield's self-portrait is vivid and detailed. The portrait of Philip that emerges from his father's letters, though less detailed, is clear. Young Philip is a lover of literature with a healthy curiosity about different countries and their societies. He is attracted neither to the vices his father deplors nor the high society his father wishes him to frequent. Obediently, he takes lessons in dancing, riding and fencing. His spare money goes not on frivolous ornaments—"Have one handsome snuff-box," Chesterfield concedes, "(if you take snuff), and one handsome sword; but then no more pretty and useless things"); he prefers to accumulate a large collection of books. When his mother moves, Chesterfield houses the huge library of rare volumes she can no longer accommodate. The young man's emotions impel him not to illicit amours but to a marriage and a home where he is not constrained to a kind of behaviour alien to his temperament. His nature also disposes him to a certain love of ease: about the time he is elected to the House of Commons, his father confesses, "I own I fear but one thing for you, and that is what one has generally the least reason to fear from one of your age; I mean your laziness; which, if you indulge, will make you stagnate in a contemptible obscurity all your life."

The vices that Chesterfield warns Philip against are mostly those that blighted his own youth—heavy drinking, gambling for high stakes, and, for a short time, swearing; he confined his sexual activity, however, to willing and respectable women. The many passages in the letters that refer to his earlier life paint a picture of a young man who leaves Cambridge

University every bit as uncertain of himself as his son is to be later. Lacking a father either able or willing to guide him, he adopts what he considers to be modish vices but is lucky enough to find a lady of fashion who teaches him how to behave in society – that is, what he calls the art of pleasing. For all his self-indulgence, he does not forsake his studies, and when he embarks on his career he learns that pleasure and business, when mixed, sweeten each other. In order to succeed in the political world, he pays great attention to the language in which he expresses his thoughts and trains himself in the art of public speaking. Once he obtains a post, he is very methodical in fulfilling his duties: strict adherence to method, he says, eluded the Duke of Newcastle but made possible the success of Sir Robert Walpole, “who had ten times the business to do” yet “was never seen in a hurry.”

A principle that sustains Chesterfield in public life, he tells Lord Huntingdon, is the belief that human beings “have natural and inherent rights which no power upon earth can legally deprive them of” and that guarding “The natural rights and liberty of mankind” is the *raison d’être* of the Whig party, to which they both belong. Very reasonably, Chesterfield sees an absolute monarchy as the antithesis of a free people’s government, and he exclaims:

I know of no brute so fierce, nor no criminal so guilty, as the creature called a Sovereign ... who thinks himself, either by divine or human right, vested with an absolute power of destroying his fellow-creatures; or who, without inquiring into his right, lawlessly exerts that power.

Despite his scorn for their destructive hostility to “arts, sciences, and learning,” Chesterfield respects the Goths’ freedom from one-man rule. “The Gothic form of government,” he instructs Philip, “was a wise one ... their kings were little more than generals in time of war ... and could do nothing without the consent of the principal people, who had regular assemblies for that purpose: from whence our parliaments are derived.” As a British citizen, he contrasts the “fixed laws and constitutional barriers for the security of our liberties and properties” with the lack of any counterpart in the royal dictatorship of France. Underlying this Lockean view is the conviction that wealth and social status are determined by chance, not merit. “We are all of the same species,” he tells young Philip,

and no distinction whatever is between us, except that which arises from fortune. For example, your footman and Lisette would be your equals were they as rich as you. Being poor, they are obliged to serve you. Therefore, you must not add to their misfortune by insulting or by ill treating them.

Thirty-three years later, he admonishes his godson in similar fashion, telling him, "The lowest and the poorest in the world ... are by nature your equals." While this egalitarian strain does not prevent him from referring aristocratically, when he is old and ailing, to the "great crowd of trifling and unknown people" that frequent the public rooms in Bath, he maintains that the Corsicans, though they are "a parcel of cruel and perfidious rascals," become "asserters of their natural rights" in rising against their Genoan overlords. At home, he is indignant that an Act allowing Jews to be naturalized should be withdrawn in response to "the absurd and groundless clamors of the mob." Writing to the Irish publisher George Faulkner, he refers to the Habeas Corpus Act and asserts "were nobody wiser than I, you should have one to-day; for I think every human creature has a right to liberty, which cannot with justice be taken from him, unless he forfeits it by some crime." Reacting to the slaying of Whiteboys – Irish peasants violently resisting rapacious landlords – he suggests "that if the military force had killed half as many landlords, it would have contributed more effectively to restore quiet. The poor people in Ireland are used worse than negroes by their Lords and Masters, and their Deputies of Deputies of Deputies."

Disappointingly, for all his enthusiasm about the rights of "every human creature," Chesterfield can express a low opinion of women. While he points out to his son that "men have done much more mischief in the world than women," he also teaches him that the latter are "only children of a larger growth." Recommending Lord Huntingdon to cultivate the acquaintance of his Parisian friends Mme de Monconseil and Mme du Boccage, he says that they compensate for their plain looks by their good sense – but adds, "I mean good female sense." When, in the Seven Years War, his hero Frederick II of Prussia is threatened by the Empress Elizabeth's Russia and Maria Theresa's Austria as well as by Louis XV's France, he remarks that under female government "whim and humour commonly prevail, reason very seldom, and then only by a lucky mistake."

In a manner typical of his age, Chesterfield allows his fidelity to reason to dominate his view of religion. While, unlike Dr. Johnson, he recognizes the wickedness of the Crusades, he lets his perception of the evil caused by the clashing of sects and creeds blind him to the better sides of the great religious figures: in Luther and Fénelon he can only see self-seeking ambition, in St. Ignatius Loyola a madman, and in the prophet Mohammed an impostor. At the opposite extreme, he despises atheists and is satisfied, in the spirit of the Deists, who disbelieve in revelation, that the existence of the universe bears witness to the existence of a Creator. Though he can pay lip service to Christianity – and even writes to his small godson of the Bible, "which you will and ought to believe every word of, as it was dictated by the Spirit of Truth" – to Lord Huntingdon he confesses that Moses

is not the man for him, and he enquires of his eight-year-old son, “do you still put the bad English of the Psalms into bad Latin?” Using the kind of language that the devout Johnson mocks in *Rasselas*, he insists on the imperative of “conforming all our actions to the rule of right reason, which is the great law of nature,” and upholds “the native beauty and simplicity of true natural religion.” Essentially, Chesterfield is indeed a Deist. He scorns priests and tells Mme du Boccage, “The most tyrannical kings only desire power over the bodies and goods of men; but all clergy, from the Great Lama of Tibet to His Holiness at Rome, and the Archbishop of Canterbury at London, claim power over their souls.” In keeping with this position, he despises Roman Catholicism as superstition, but is a strong and consistent proponent of religious toleration. Reacting to Philip’s surprise at the credulity of the Catholics at Einsiedlen in Switzerland, he admonishes him:

remember ... that errors and mistakes, however gross, in matters of opinion, if they are sincere, are to be pitied, but not punished nor laughed at. The blindness of the understanding is as much to be pitied as the blindness of the eye; and there is neither jest nor guilt in a man’s losing his way in either case. Charity bids us set him right if we can, by arguments and persuasions; but charity, at the same time, forbids, either to punish or ridicule his misfortune.

Failure to be ruled by reason is by no means, Chesterfield believes, confined to women and the superstitious. He warns Philip:

The herd of mankind can hardly be said to think; their notions are almost all adoptive; and, in general, I believe it is better that it should be so, as such common prejudices contribute more to order and quiet than their own separate reasonings would do, uncultivated and unimproved as they are.

Accordingly, although he adores Voltaire above all other contemporary writers, he tells Mme de Monconseil that he regrets his work is larded with impiety, “which he would do better wisely to suppress, since in the last analysis one should not disturb the established order.”

France is, at this time, half a century ahead of Britain in creating a neo-classical literature, a literature that is closely modelled on those of ancient Greece and Rome. As a man of the Enlightenment who despises Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, the crown of mediaeval literature, as impossibly obscure, Chesterfield cultivates a firmly neoclassical taste. He adores the literature of France’s *Grand Siècle* and takes sides in the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns that erupted in the late seventeenth century. Champions of

the Ancients hold that the great works of the Greek and Roman classical ages have never been equalled; their opponents argue that the Moderns have, in fact, equalled or surpassed the Ancients. Instructing Philip on the importance of thinking for oneself, Chesterfield records how books and his teachers instilled in him a youthful prejudice that "Homer and Virgil could have no faults, because they were ancient; Milton and Tasso could have no merit, because they were modern," but he has come to see that French authors such as "Corneille, Racine, Molière, Boileau, and La Fontaine" equal those of Rome's Augustan Age. Later, his praise becomes even more lavish as he asserts that "There is not, nor ever was, any theatre comparable to the French" (and he writes to Baron Kreuningen that the French drama far surpasses the Greek and Roman). The choruses in the ancient Greek drama he finds absurd. In typical neoclassical fashion, he writes of Shakespeare that if his "genius had been cultivated, those beauties, which we so justly admire in him, would have been undisciplined by those extravagancies, and that nonsense, with which they are frequently accompanied." He rejoices that "The reign of King Charles II. (meritorious in no other respect) banished false taste out of England, and proscribed puns, quibbles, acrostics, etc.," and that since then, following in the same tradition, "Addison, Pope, and Swift, have vigorously defended the rights of good sense." (The neoclassical argument is that false wit operates on the chance resemblances between words, true wit on the resemblances between what the words signify.)

Besides the portraits of father and son, the letters to Philip yield glimpses, sometimes intriguing, of other characters. The boy's mother remains a shadowy figure, though she is obviously devoted to her son, as Chesterfield often reminds him, nudging him, for example, "to bring your mother some little presents" and urging him to write to her frequently, "if it be but three words, to prove your existence; for, when she does not hear from you, she knows to a demonstration that you are dead, if not buried."

A woman more clearly seen is Lady Hervey, who "has been bred all her life at courts; of which she has acquired all the easy good-breeding and politeness, without the frivolousness ... she understands Latin perfectly well, though she wisely conceals it." She is perceptive enough to warn his father that Philip is very well as he is and cannot be expected to become perfect. After she returns from France to London, Chesterfield reports to Mme de Monconseil, "We have here the body of Lady Hervey, but without the heart or spirit. She languishes, she wearies, she breathes indeed, but she only lives, she says, in Paris."

Sadder is the case of Sir Charles Williams, a friend of Chesterfield and a man who takes a liking to Philip. Chesterfield has to cross-question him rigorously to elicit the information that the young man, though of good

character and full of learning, is absent-minded in company, clumsy at table, and negligent in his dress. Tragically, in 1758, Williams becomes infatuated with an adventuress in Germany, falls temporarily into insanity, and has to be confined.

The most memorable of all the characters in the letters after the two principals is Walter Harte, the amiable scholar who serves as Philip's tutor and becomes exceedingly fond of his charge. We follow Harte as he returns alone to England in 1751, holidays in Cornwall, and takes up the clerical post Chesterfield has obtained for him as a prebend at Windsor. As the years pass, he regrets that Philip seldom writes and he has to rely on Lord Chesterfield for news of him. In 1759 he publishes his biography of Gustavus Adolphus, which Chesterfield finds is "full of good matter" but marred by "a bad style, of a new and singular kind; it is full of Latinisms, Gallicisms, Germanisms, and all *isms* but Anglicisms." Unsurprisingly, the book does not take, and Chesterfield blames its failure for the breakdown of Harte's health, but notes that after some time he becomes "extremely devout, which ... is always a comfort to the afflicted." He does not regain his health, but at the end of 1763 he is an historian luxuriating in the access he has been given to the papers of Lord Craven, who intervened in the Thirty Years War in defence of Charles I's sister Elizabeth, who was briefly Queen of Bohemia. However, his final production is neither a history nor his collection of verse moral tales but a book on agriculture, of which the surprised Chesterfield writes, "This work is not only in English, but good and elegant English; he has even scattered graces upon his subject; and in prose, has come very near Virgil's 'Georgics' in verse." Harte's illness grows worse, and Chesterfield, in his last letter to Philip, tells how "he has entirely lost the use of his left side, and can hardly speak intelligibly," but retains his fondness for his former pupil and is greatly distressed to learn that he, too, is sick.

The self-portrait and the impressions of other characters are embedded in a book that owes its unplanned form to the great good luck of its contents extending from Philip's sixth to his thirty-sixth year. Beginning by guiding a very small boy in the fields of morals, French, Latin and ancient history and mythology, the correspondence opens out like a funnel, taking in more and more of Chesterfield's world. It comes to include the lessons, negative and positive, Chesterfield has learnt from his youthful dissipation; the countries and courts that Philip visits; observations on people's ruling passions and principal weaknesses; the adroit uses of flattery; the value of civility to rivals and enemies (but not simulated friendship—that crosses an ethical boundary); the rights of man, which absolute rule violates; the greatness of French literature of the time of Louis XIV; the power struggles between Britain and France culminating in the Seven Years

War with its mortal danger to the philosopher-king Frederick the Great of Prussia; the puzzling manoeuvres in Parliament that follow that War; and Chesterfield's last years.

To some of his correspondents, however, Lord Chesterfield sends more news of his later life than he is willing to burden Philip with. As his body decays, he starts to think more about death and judgment, and writes to the Bishop of Waterford of his sufferings being just recompense for his youthful pleasures, of his admiration for the very rationalistic Archbishop of Canterbury John Tillotson, and of his reliance on God's mercy tempered a little with some fear of His wrath.

Chesterfield contributes to the Bishop's charity that resettles in Ireland refugees driven out of France by "the rage and fury of the Clergy," while he several times recommends kinder treatment of Ireland's own Roman Catholic population. He retains a strong affection for the country where he served as Lord Lieutenant and writes to Swift's publisher George Faulkner of the damage done there by "party feuds and animosities." To the Irish soldier Major Irvine, he observes that excessive drinking bars the population from "a degree of quiet and plenty that it has never yet known." He keeps his Dutch friend Solomon Dayrolles informed about his last interventions in public life: in 1755, despite his increasing deafness, he blocks an "indecent, ungenerous, and malignant" motion in the House of Lords urging George II not to visit his German possessions, and a few months later he speaks in the same chamber for nearly an hour to press for a precautionary treaty with Russia as the possibility of what becomes the Seven Years War looms. That war causes a long gap in his correspondence with Mme de Monconseil, a correspondence rooted in affectionate esteem based on shared tastes. In 1748 he invites her to visit his new house, which he is decking out in the French manner, and where, "with the exception of the good cheer, the good company, and all the pleasures of the society, you would think yourself still at Paris." While he writes solemnly to her of his son's need to acquire the graces and his inability to obtain the pardon she wishes for a Jacobite exile, he can banter about a supposed rival in her affections, and when she gives birth to a girl, he teases her that she is confining her beneficence to the Amazons. He can even show himself capable of playful fantasy, imagining how they might fly with the wings of time, of the wind, of love, of friendship, but then lamenting how the poets lie with their metaphors and speaking of a journey to the moon to regain his lost hearing.

Although Lord Chesterfield, in comparison with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, has a limited experience of contrasting countries, his correspondence, though very different, is nearly as rich as hers. While he lacks her descriptive powers, both discuss literature, both are interested in ideas,

and both are plentifully gifted with wit. Humour and expressions of delight give a sparkle to many of Lady Mary's letters, while others seem to sigh and sob with passion. Chesterfield, however afflicted with troubles, never loses his dignity, but continues to craft sentences with all the elegance of Georgian architecture. This does not prevent him from enlivening his instruction of Philip with many entertaining accounts of how not to behave. Among his best satirical passages, some are devoted to the misconduct of rich young Englishmen abroad, some describe the mishaps of ungainly, awkward men, and some take the form of highly convincing and very instructive dialogues. The most famous is an account of a man "whose moral character, deep learning, and superior parts elicit Chesterfield's deep respect, but whose bodily movements and behaviour in society excite his repulsion and ridicule. It now seems that the man in question is Lord Lyttleton, but for long it was believed to be Dr. Johnson.