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Miscellaneous works Of The Late Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl Of Chesterfield

Consisting Of Letters to his Friends, never before printed, And Various
Other Articles

**Chesterfield, Philip Dormer Stanhope of
Dublin, 1777**

Introduction.

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M E M O I R S

O F

L O R D C H E S T E R F I E L D.

I N T R O D U C T I O N.

IT hath long been a matter of doubt with me, whether the following undertaking will tend to promote the benefit of mankind, which ought to be the object of every writer: for, though it cannot be denied that history hath been chiefly founded on the authority of contemporary relations, and authentic memoirs, yet it is no less certain, and hath often been lamented [1], that nothing hath contributed more to render historical truth suspected, than disguised accounts of facts by interested statesmen, and false representations of characters and motives by prejudiced or mercenary writers.

The improper use, however, which hath been made of such materials cannot be urged as a sufficient reason for depriving posterity of the advantages, which may be derived from them, even though they may be imperfect, and in some instances suspicious. It is from the number and variety of private memoirs, and the collision of opposite testimonies,

testimonies, that the judicious reader is enabled to strike out light, and find his way through that darkness and confusion, in which he is at first involved. Who cannot but regret that neither the Cato nor the Anti-Cato have been transmitted to us? Who doth not wish that Cæsar had lived to finish his commentaries, and that Pompey's sons, instead of fighting their father's cause, had employed themselves in writing his life? What a valuable legacy would Cicero have left us, if, instead of some of his philosophical works, he had written the memoirs of his own times! or how much would Tyro, to whom posterity is so much indebted for the preservation of his master's letters, have increased that obligation, if, from his own knowledge, he had connected and explained them! The life of Agricola, by his son-in-law Tacitus, is undoubtedly one of the most precious monuments of antiquity. Even remote biographers, such as Cornelius Nepos [2], Suetonius, and Plutarch, convey more exact representations of persons and facts, than compilers, or writers of abridgments, such as Paterculus, Florus, and Justin; and to come nearer to our times, the Comines, Sullys, Clarendons, and Ludlows, will continue to survive the Daniels, D'Orleans, Oldmixons, and Guthries.

But besides this general utility, which public history derives from private authorities, other advantages, perhaps no less important, may be obtained from them. It is from observing different individuals, that we may be enabled to draw the outlines of that extraordinary complicated being, man. The characteristics of any country or age must be deduced from the separate characters of persons, who however distinguishable in many respects, still preserve a family likeness. From the life of almost
any

any one individual, but chiefly from the lives of such eminent men as seemed destined to enlighten or to adorn society, instructions may be drawn, suitable to every capacity, rank, age, or station. Young men aspiring to honors cannot be too assiduous in tracing the means by which they were obtained: by observing with what difficulty they were preserved, they will be apprised of their real value, estimate the risks of the purchase, and discover frequent disappointment in the possession.

It is not my province to determine, whether the memoirs of lord Chesterfield will answer these several purposes. I profess, however, they were written with that view. The transactions of the two last reigns are so recent, that general history cannot yet relate them with faithfulness and accuracy. But materials should now be collected, characters should be drawn, while they are still fresh in the memory of the living, and anecdotes should be snatched from the destructive hands of time and oblivion. I do not presume to have penetrated into the sanctuary, nor can I venture to promise that I shall always be able to come at the truth; some secrets may, and perhaps must, remain for ever undisclosed. Those, who are possessed of better informations, may be incited by this attempt to communicate their knowledge to the public,

How happy should I have been, had this undertaking been honored with the earl's own assistance [3]! Could my pen, as I wished, have been directed by his masterly hand, posterity would have received a work more worthy of its attention. As the difficulty of the task excited my industry, I have supposed myself under the inspection of lord Chesterfield's piercing eye, commanded by him to
speak

Speak the truth without malignancy and without extenuation; and as no man knew better than himself, that perfection or pure virtue never was the lot of humanity, I have not scrupled to add some shades to my colors.

To throw these memoirs into some kind of order, I have divided them into six parts, or sections. The first contains the early periods of lord Chesterfield's life, and extends to his twentieth year, or to the death of queen Anne. The second comprehends the detail of his conduct at court, in parliament, and in society, during the reign of George the first, ending in 1727. The third gives an account of his first embassy to Holland, and his return to England, to the time of his dismissal in 1733. The period of his opposition, during the twelve following years, is the subject of the fourth section. The fifth includes his lordship's second embassy to Holland; his administration in Ireland, and his share in public affairs as secretary of state, till the beginning of 1748 when he resigned; and the sixth and last represents his lordship in his retreat, enjoying the fruits of his experience and labors, bearing up against the infirmities of old age, and continuing to the last the favourite of the muses, the friend to his country, and the well-wisher to mankind.

SECTION