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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**

Characters Of Eminent Personages Of His Own Time. Written By The Late
Earl Of Chesterfield; And Never Before Published.

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CHARACTERS

OF

EMINENT PERSONAGES

OF HIS OWN TIME.

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CHARACTERS, &c.

GEORGE THE FIRST.

GEORGE the First was an honest, dull German gentleman, as unfit as unwilling to act the part of a King, which is, to shine and oppress. Lazy and inactive even in his pleasures; which were therefore lowly sensual. He was coolly intrepid, and indolently benevolent. He was diffident of his own parts, which made him speak little in public, and prefer in his social, which were his favourite, hours, the company of wags and buffoons. Even his mistress, the duchess of Kendal, with whom he passed most of his time, and who had all influence over him, was very little above an idiot. Importance could alone make him act, and then only to get rid of it. His views and affections were singly confined to the narrow compass of his electorate—England was too big for him.—If he had nothing great as a King, he had nothing bad as a man—and if he does not adorn, at least he will not stain the annals of this country. In private life he would have been loved and esteemed as a good citizen, a good friend, and a good neighbour.—Happy were it for Europe, happy for the world, if there were not greater kings in it!

QUEEN

QUEEN CAROLINE.

QUEEN CAROLINE had lively, pretty parts, a quick conception, and some degree of female knowledge; and would have been an agreeable woman in social, if she had not aimed at being a great one in public, life. She had the graces that adorn the former, but neither the strength of parts, nor the judgment necessary for the latter. She professed art, instead of concealing it, and valued herself upon her skill in simulation and dissimulation, by which she made herself many enemies, and not one friend, even amongst the women the nearest to her person. She loved money, but could occasionally part with it, especially to men of learning, whose patronage she affected. She often conversed with them, and bewildered herself in their metaphysical disputes, which neither she nor they themselves understood. Cunning and perfidy were the means she made use of in business—as all women do—for want of better. She shewed her art the most in her management of the king, whom she governed absolutely, by a seeming complaisance and obedience to all his humours—she even favoured and promoted his gallantries. She had a dangerous ambition, for it was attended with courage, and, if she had lived much longer, might have proved fatal, either to herself or to the constitution. After puzzling herself in all the whimsies and fantastical speculations of different sects, she fixed ultimately in Deism, believing a future state.—She died with great resolution and intrepidity, of a very painful distemper, and under some cruel operations.

Upon the whole, the Agreeable Woman was liked by most people, but the Queen was neither esteemed, beloved, nor trusted by any body but the king.

SIR ROBERT WALPOLE.

IMUCH question, whether an impartial character of Sir Robert Walpole will or can be transmitted to posterity :

ty : for he governed this kingdom so long, that the various passions of mankind mingled and in a manner incorporated themselves with every thing that was said or written concerning him. Never was man more flattered or more abused—and his long power was probably the cause of both. I was much acquainted with him both in his public and private life. I mean to do impartial justice to his character, and therefore my picture of him will perhaps be more like him, than it will be like any of the other pictures drawn of him.

In private life he was good-natured, chearful, social, inelegant in his manners, loose in his morals, he had a coarse strong wit, which he was too free of for a man in his station, as it is always inconsistent with dignity. He was very able as a Minister, but without a certain elevation of mind, necessary for great good, or great mischief. Profuse and appetent, his ambition was subservient to his design of making a great fortune—He had more of the Mazarin than of the Richelieu—He would do mean things for profit, and never thought of doing great ones for glory. He was both the best parliament-man, and the ablest manager of parliament, that I believe ever lived. An artful rather than eloquent speaker, he saw, as by intuition, the disposition of the house, and pressed or receded accordingly. So clear in stating the most intricate matters, especially in the finances, that, whilst he was speaking, the most ignorant thought that they understood what they really did not. Money, not prerogative, was the chief engine of his administration ; and he employed it with a success, which in a manner disgraced humanity. He was not, it is true, the inventor of that shameful method of governing, which had been gaining ground insensibly ever since Charles the Second, but with uncommon skill and unbounded profusion he brought it to that perfection which at this time dishonours and distresses this country, and which (if not checked, and God knows how it can be now checked) must ruin it.

Besides this powerful engine of government, he had a most extraordinary talent of persuading and working men

up

up to his purpose---A hearty kind of frankness, which sometimes seemed imprudence, made people think that he let them into his secrets, whilst the impoliteness of his manners seemed to attest his sincerity. When he found any body proof against pecuniary temptations, which alas! was but seldom, he had recourse to a still worse art: for he laughed at and ridiculed all notions of public virtue and the love of one's country, calling them "*The chimerical school-boy flights of classical learning*", declaring himself at the same time "*No Saint, no Spartan, no Reformer.*" He would frequently ask young fellows at their first appearance in the world, while their honest hearts were yet untainted---"*Well, are you to be an old Roman? a patriot? You'll soon come off of that and grow wiser.*" And thus he was more dangerous to the morals, than to the liberties of his country, to which I am persuaded that he meant no ill in his heart.

He was the easy and profuse dupe of women, and in some instances indecently so---He was excessively open to flattery, even of the grossest kind, and from the coarsest bunglers of that vile profession; which engaged him to pass most of his leisure and jovial hours with people whose blasted characters reflected upon his own---He was loved by many, but respected by none, his familiar and illiberal mirth and raillery leaving him no dignity---He was not vindictive, but on the contrary very placable to those who had injured him the most---His good humour, good nature, and beneficence in the several relations of father, husband, master, and friend, gained him the warmest affections of all within that circle.

His name will not be recorded in history amongst the Best Men, or the Best Ministers, but much less ought it to be ranked amongst the Worst.

MR. PULTENEY.

MR. PULTENEY was formed by nature for social and convivial pleasures---Resentment made him engage in business. He had thought himself slighted by
Sir

Sir Robert Walpole, to whom he publicly avowed not only revenge, but utter destruction. He had lively and shining parts, a surprizing quickness of wit, and a happy turn to the most amusing and entertaining kinds of poetry, as epigrams, ballads, odes, &c. in all which he had an uncommon facility. His compositions in that way were sometimes satyrical, often licentious, but always full of wit.

He had a quick and clear conception of business, could equally detect and practice sophistry—he could state and explain the most intricate matters, even in figures, with the utmost perspicuity. His parts were rather above business, and the warmth of his imagination, joined to the impetuosity and restlessness of his temper, made him incapable of conducting it long together with prudence and steadiness.

He was a most complete orator and debator in the House of Commons, eloquent, entertaining, persuasive, strong, and pathetic, as occasion required; for he had arguments, wit, and *tears* at his command. His breast was the seat of all those passions which degrade our nature and disturb our reason. There they raged in a perpetual conflict, but Avarice, the meanest of them all, generally triumphed, ruled absolutely, and in many instances, which I forbear to mention *, *most scandalously*.

His sudden passion was outrageous, but supported by great personal courage.

* One instance, if he had known it, the characterizer might not have thought beneath his notice. Vanity had often loudly insisted that the Earl of Bath should have a burial-place amongst the illustrious dead in Westminster Abbey, and had as often been called to order by Avarice for the extravagant idea. But at length she carried her point by a lucky opportunity of not only bringing her adversary over, but of animating her in a cause, which she now looked upon as her own, from the flattering prospect of extending her triumph, which she was already assured would be felt “strong in death,” even beyond death itself. It was discovered that in this receptacle of fallen grandeur there was a vault belonging to the family of Hatton, of which there was but one life remaining. Lord Bath purchased the reversion of this vault, which soon after became his property, and then sold a division of it for the full sum he had given for the whole, with the unspeakable happiness to foresee that his Right Honourable remnants would rot with Royalty at *free-cost*.

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Nothing

Nothing exceeded his ambition but his avarice: they often accompany and are frequently and reciprocally the causes and the effects of each other, but the latter is always a clog upon the former.

He affected good nature and compassion, and perhaps his heart might feel the misfortunes and distresses of his fellow-creatures, but his hand was seldom or never stretched out to relieve them.

Though he was an able actor of truth and sincerity, he could occasionally lay them aside to serve the purposes of his ambition or avarice.

He was once in the greatest point of view that I ever saw any subject in. When the opposition of which he was the leader in the House of Commons, prevailed at last against Sir Robert Walpole, he became the arbiter between the Crown and the People: the former imploring his protection, the latter his support. In that critical moment his various jarring passions were in the highest ferment, and for a while suspended his ruling one. Sense of shame made him hesitate at turning courtier on a sudden, after having acted the patriot so long, and with so much applause, and his pride made him declare that he would accept of no place, vainly imagining, that he could by such a simulated and temporary self-denial preserve his popularity with the people and his power at court. He was mistaken in both. The King hated him almost as much for what he might have done, as for what he had done: and a motley ministry was formed who by no means desired his company.

The nation looked upon him as a deserter, and he shrunk into insignificancy and an earldom.

He made several attempts afterwards to retrieve the popularity he had lost, but in vain--his situation would not allow it--he was fixed in the House of Lords, that hospital of incurables, and his retreat to popularity was cut off--For the confidence of the people, when once great, and once lost, is never to be regained--He lived afterwards in retirement with the wretched comfort of Horace's miser.

Populus me sibilat &c.

I may

I may perhaps be suspected to have given too strong colouring to some features of this portrait; but I solemnly protest, that I have drawn it conscientiously and to the best of my knowledge, from very long acquaintance with and observation of the original. Nay, I have rather softened than heightened the colouring.

L O R D H A R D W I C K E.

L O R D H A R D W I C K E was perhaps the greatest Magistrate that this country ever had. He presided in the Court of Chancery above twenty years, and in all that time none of his decrees were reversed, nor the justness of them ever questioned. Though avarice was his ruling passion, he was never in the least suspected of any kind of corruption—a rare and meritorious instance of virtue and self-denial, under the influence of such a craving, insatiable, and increasing passion!

He had great and clear parts; understood, loved, and cultivated the Belles Lettres.

He was an agreeable, eloquent speaker in Parliament, but not without some little tincture of the pleader.

Men are apt to mistake, or at least to seem to mistake their own talents, in hopes perhaps of misleading others to allow them that which they are conscious they do not possess. Thus Lord Hardwicke valued himself more upon being a great Minister of state, which he certainly was not, than upon being a great Magistrate, which he certainly was.

All his notions were clear, but none of them great. Good order and domestic details were his proper department. The great and shining parts of government, though not above his parts to conceive, were above his timidity to undertake.

By great and lucrative employments, during the course of thirty years, and by still greater parsimony, he acquired an immense fortune, and established his numerous family in profitable posts and advantageous alliances.

Though he had been Solicitor and Attorney General, he was by no means what is called a prerogative lawyer
---he

---he loved the constitution, and maintained the just prerogative of the crown, but without stretching it to the oppression of the people.

He was naturally humane, moderate, and decent, and when by his former employments he was obliged to prosecute state-criminals, he discharged that duty in a very different manner from most of his predecessors, who were too justly called the Blood-hounds of the Crown.

He was a chearful and instructive companion, humane in his nature, decent in his manners, unstained with any vice (Avarice excepted) a very Great Magistrate, but by no means a Great Minister.

MR. FOX.

MR. HENRY FOX was a younger brother of the lowest extraction. His father, Sir Stephen Fox, made a considerable fortune, *some how or other*, and left him a fair younger brother's portion, which he soon spent in the common vices of youth, gaming included. This obliged him to travel for some time. While abroad, he met with a very salacious Englishwoman, whose liberality retrieved his fortune, with several circumstances, more to the honor of his vigour than his morals.

When he returned, though by education a Jacobite, he attached himself to Sir Robert Walpole, and was one of his ablest *elevés*. He had no fixed principles either of religion or morality, and was too unwearied in ridiculing and exploding them.

He had very great abilities and indefatigable industry in business, great skill in managing, that is, in corrupting, the House of Commons, and a wonderful dexterity in attaching individuals to himself. He promoted, encouraged, and practised their vices; he gratified their avarice, or supplied their profusion. He wisely and punctually performed whatever he promised, and most liberally rewarded their attachment and dependance. By these and all other means that can be imagined, he made himself many personal friends and political dependants.

He

He was a most disagreeable speaker in parliament, inelegant in his language, hesitating and ungraceful in his elocution, but skilful in discerning the temper of the house, and in knowing when and how to press or to yield.

A constant good-humour and seeming frankness made him a welcome companion in social life, and in all domestic relations he was good-natured.

As he advanced in life, his ambition became subservient to his avarice. His early profusion and dissipation had made him feel the many inconveniencies of want, and, as it often happens, carried him to the contrary and worse extreme of corruption and rapine. *Rem, quocunque modo rem* became his maxim, which he observed (I will not say religiously and scrupulously) but invariably and shamefully.

He had not the least notion of, or regard for, the public good or the constitution, but despised those cares, as the objects of narrow minds, or the pretences of interested ones. And he lived, as Brutus died, calling *Virtue only a name*.

MR. P I T T.

MR. PITT owed his rise to the most considerable posts and power in this kingdom, singly to his own abilities. In him they supplied the want of birth and fortune, which latter, in others, too often supply the want of the former. He was a younger brother of a very new family, and his fortune was only an annuity of one hundred pounds a year.

The army was his original destination, and a cornetcy of horse his first and only commission in it. Thus unassisted by favour or fortune, he had no powerful protector to introduce him into business, and (if I may use that expression) to do the honors of his parts---but their own strength was fully sufficient.

His constitution refused him the usual pleasures, and his genius forbid him the idle dissipations, of youth, for so early as at the age of sixteen he was the martyr of an
hereditary

hereditary gout. He therefore employed the leisure which that tedious and painful distemper either procured or allowed him in acquiring a great fund of premature and useful knowledge. Thus by the unaccountable relation of causes and effects, what seemed the greatest misfortune of his life was perhaps the principal cause of its splendor.

His private life was stained by no vice, nor sullied by any meanness. All his sentiments were liberal and elevated. His ruling passion was an unbounded ambition, which when supported by great abilities, and crowned with great success, make what the world calls a Great Man.

He was haughty, imperious, impatient of contradiction, and overbearing—qualities which too often accompany, but always clog, great ones.

He had manners and address, but one might discern through them too great a consciousness of his own superior talents.

He was a most agreeable and lively companion in social life, and had such a versatility of wit, that he could adapt it to all sorts of conversation. He had also a most happy turn to poetry; but he seldom indulged, and seldom avowed it.

He came young into Parliament, and upon that great theatre he soon equalled the oldest and the ablest actors. His eloquence was of every kind, and he excelled in the argumentative, as well in the declamatory way. But his invectives were terrible, and uttered with such energy of diction, and such dignity of action and countenance, that he intimidated those who were the most willing and the best able to encounter him.* Their arms fell out of their hands, and they shrunk under the ascendant which his genius gained over their's.

In that Assembly, where public good is so much talked of, and private interest singly pursued, he set out with acting the patriot, and performed that part so ably, that he was adopted by the public as their chief, or rather their only unsuspected, champion.

* Hume Campbell and Lord Mansfield.

The

The weight of his popularity and his universally acknowledged abilities obtruded him upon King George the second, to whom he was personally obnoxious. He was made Secretary of State. In this difficult and delicate situation, which one would have thought must have reduced either the patriot, or the minister, to a decisive option, he managed with such ability, that while he served the King more effectually in his most unwarrantable electoral views than any former minister, however willing, had dared to do, he still preserved all his credit and popularity with the public, whom he assured and convinced that the protection and defence of Hanover with an army of seventy-five thousand men in British pay, was the only possible method of securing our possessions or acquisitions in North America---So much easier is it to deceive than to undeceive mankind.

His own disinterestedness, and even contempt of money, smoothed his way to power, and prevented or silenced a great share of that envy which commonly attends it. Most men think that they have an equal natural right to riches, and equal abilities to make a proper use of them, but not very many of them have the impudence to think themselves qualified for power.

Upon the whole he will make a great and shining figure in the annals of this country; notwithstanding the blot which his acceptance of three thousand pounds per annum pension for three lives, upon his voluntary resignation of the Seals, in the first year of the present King, must make in his character, especially as to the disinterested part of it.---However it must be acknowledged, that he had those qualities which none but a Great Man can have, with a mixture of some of those failings, which are the common lot of wretched and imperfect human nature.

EXTRACTS

EXTRACTS FROM ORIGINAL LETTERS,

WRITTEN BY LORD CHESTERFIELD.

————— IL [Voltaire] ne peut pas s'empêcher de larder tout ce qu'il écrit, & qu'il feroit mieux de supprimer; puisqu' au bout du compte on ne doit pas troubler l'ordre établi. Que chacun pense comme il veut, ou plutôt comme il peut, mais qu'il ne communique pas ses idées, dès qu'elles sont d'une nature à pouvoir troubler le repos de la société.

————— Sont les choses qui me retiennent nécessairement cette année d'un pais que j'aime beaucoup dans un pais que franchement je n'aime guères.

Londres ———

————— L E Chevalier Robert est parti aujourd'hui pour sa terre, chargé des dépouilles & de la haine du public. Arraché au roi par la majorité du Parlement, & au même tems *impudemment* comblé de nouvelles marques de sa faveur, comme, titre de Comte, pension considérable, des charges à vie pour ses amis et dépendans, et le pas de Vicomtesse pour une fille batarde, et qu'il a eue du vivant de sa première femme. Tous ces excès ont animé le public contre lui plus que jamais—si bien que sa retraite n'a pas la mine d'être forte tranquille.

————— J E vous dirai naturellement, mais c'est absolument entre nous, que Monsieur son fils [le fils de Miladi Hervey] dont vous me demandez le caractère, n'en a point du tout. C'est un petit freluquet, une petite fille frivole, sans esprit, mais avec beaucoup d'humeur.

————— J' A I *vegeté* toute cette année ici, sans plaisirs, & sans peines. Mon âge & ma surdité me défendent les premiers: ma philosophie, ou peut-être mon temperament (car on s'y trompe souvent) me garantit des derniers. Je tire toujours le meilleur parti que je puis des amusemens tranquilles du Jardinage, de la Promenade, & de la Lecture; moyennant quoi, j'attends la mort, sans la souhaiter, ou sans la craindre.

F I N I S.