

# Quotes and Images From Chesterfield's Letters to His Son - On the Fine Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman

The Earl of Chesterfield

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Letters to His Son, by The Earl of Chesterfield

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Title: Quotes and Images From Chesterfield's Letters to His Son  
On the Fine Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman

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Release Date: August 29, 2004 [EBook #7539]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

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QUOTES AND IMAGES FROM CHESTERFIELD'S

LETTERS TO HIS SON, 1766-1771

by The Earl of Chesterfield

QUOTATIONS

A little learning is a dangerous thing  
A joker is near akin to a buffoon  
A favor may make an enemy, and an injury may make a friend  
Ablest man will sometimes do weak things  
Above all things, avoid speaking of yourself

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Above the frivolous as below the important and the secret  
Above trifles, he is never vehement and eager about them  
Absolute command of your temper  
Abstain from learned ostentation  
Absurd term of genteel and fashionable vices  
Absurd romances of the two last centuries  
According as their interest prompts them to wish  
Acquainted with books, and an absolute stranger to men  
Advice is seldom welcome  
Advise those who do not speak elegantly, not to speak  
Advocate, the friend, but not the bully of virtue  
Affectation of singularity or superiority  
Affectation in dress  
Affectation of business  
All have senses to be gratified  
Always made the best of the best, and never made bad worse  
Always does more than he says  
Always some favorite word for the time being  
Always look people in the face when you speak to them  
Am still unwell; I cannot help it!  
American Colonies  
Ancients and Moderns  
Anxiety for my health and life  
Applauded often, without approving  
Apt to make them think themselves more necessary than they are  
Argumentative, polemical conversations  
Arrogant pedant  
Art of pleasing is the most necessary  
As willing and as apt to be pleased as anybody  
Ascribing the greatest actions to the most trifling causes  
Assenting, but without being servile and abject  
Assertion instead of argument  
Assign the deepest motives for the most trifling actions  
Assurance and intrepidity  
At the first impulse of passion, be silent till you can be soft  
Attacked by ridicule, and, punished with contempt  
Attend to the objects of your expenses, but not to the sums  
Attention to the inside of books  
Attention and civility please all  
Attention  
Author is obscure and difficult in his own language  
Authority  
Avoid cacophony, and, what is very near as bad, monotony  
Avoid singularity  
Awkward address, ungraceful attitudes and actions  
Be neither transported nor depressed by the accidents of life  
Be silent till you can be soft  
Being in the power of every man to hurt him  
Being intelligible is now no longer the fashion  
Better not to seem to understand, than to reply  
Better refuse a favor gracefully, than to grant it clumsily  
Blindness of the understanding is as much to be pitied  
Bold, but with great seeming modesty  
Borough-jobber  
Business must be well, not affectedly dressed  
Business now is to shine, not to weigh  
Business by no means forbids pleasures  
BUT OF THIS EVERY MAN WILL BELIEVE AS HE THINKS PROPER  
Can hardly be said to see what they see

Cannot understand them, or will not desire to understand them  
Cardinal Mazarin  
Cardinal Richelieu  
Cardinal de Retz  
Cardinal Virtues, by first degrading them into weaknesses  
Cautious how we draw inferences  
Cease to love when you cease to be agreeable  
Chameleon, be able to take every different hue  
Characters, that never existed, are insidiously displayed  
Cheerful in the countenance, but without laughing  
Chit-chat, useful to keep off improper and too serious subjects  
Choose your pleasures for yourself  
Civility, which is a disposition to accommodate and oblige others  
Clamorers triumph  
Close, without being costly  
Command of our temper, and of our countenance  
Commanding with dignity, you must serve up to it with diligence  
Committing acts of hostility upon the Graces  
Common sense (which, in truth, very uncommon)  
Commonplace observations  
Company is, in truth, a constant state of negotiation  
Complaisance  
Complaisance to every or anybody's opinion  
Complaisance due to the custom of the place  
Complaisant indulgence for people's weaknesses  
Conceal all your learning carefully  
Concealed what learning I had  
Conjectures pass upon us for truths  
Conjectures supply the defect of unattainable knowledge  
Connections  
Connive at knaves, and tolerate fools  
Consciousness of merit makes a man of sense more modest  
Consciousness and an honest pride of doing well  
Consider things in the worst light, to show your skill  
Content yourself with mediocrity in nothing  
Conversation-stock being a joint and common property  
Conversation will help you almost as much as books  
Converse with his inferiors without insolence  
Dance to those who pipe  
Darkness visible  
Decides peremptorily upon every subject  
Deep learning is generally tainted with pedantry  
Deepest learning, without good-breeding, is unwelcome  
Defended by arms, adorned by manners, and improved by laws  
Deserve a little, and you shall have but a little  
Desire to please, and that is the main point  
Desirous of praise from the praiseworthy  
Desirous to make you their friend  
Desirous of pleasing  
Despairs of ever being able to pay  
Dexterity enough to conceal a truth without telling a lie  
Dictate to them while you seem to be directed by them  
Difference in everything between system and practice  
Difficulties seem to them, impossibilities  
Dignity to be kept up in pleasures, as well as in business  
Disagreeable to seem reserved, and very dangerous not to be so  
Disagreeable things may be done so agreeably as almost to oblige  
Disputes with heat  
Dissimulation is only to hide our own cards

Distinction between simulation and dissimulation  
Distinguish between the useful and the curious  
Do as you would be done by  
Do not become a virtuoso of small wares  
Do what you are about  
Do what you will but do something all day long  
Do as you would be done by  
Do not mistake the tinsel of Tasso for the gold of Virgil  
Does not give it you, but he inflicts it upon you  
Doing, 'de bonne grace', what you could not help doing  
Doing what may deserve to be written  
Doing nothing, and might just as well be asleep  
Doing anything that will deserve to be written  
Done under concern and embarrassment, must be ill done  
Dress like the reasonable people of your own age  
Dress well, and not too well  
Dressed as the generality of people of fashion are  
Ears to hear, but not sense enough to judge  
Easy without negligence  
Easy without too much familiarity  
Economist of your time  
Either do not think, or do not love to think  
Elegance in one language will reproduce itself in all  
Employ your whole time, which few people do  
Endeavor to hear, and know all opinions  
Endeavors to please and oblige our fellow-creatures  
Enemies as if they may one day become one's friends  
Enjoy all those advantages  
Equally forbid insolent contempt, or low envy and jealousy  
ERE TITTING YOUTH SHALL SHOVE YOU FROM THE STAGE  
Establishing a character of integrity and good manners  
Even where you are sure, seem rather doubtful  
Every numerous assembly is MOB  
Every virtue, has its kindred vice or weakness  
Every man knows that he understands religion and politics  
Every numerous assembly is a mob  
Every man pretends to common sense  
EVERY DAY IS STILL BUT AS THE FIRST  
Everybody is good for something  
Everything has a better and a worse side  
Exalt the gentle in woman and man--above the merely genteel  
Expresses himself with more fire than elegance  
Extremely weary of this silly world  
Eyes and the ears are the only roads to the heart  
Eyes and ears open and mouth mostly shut  
Feed him, and feed upon him at the same time  
Few things which people in general know less, than how to love  
Few people know how to love, or how to hate  
Few dare dissent from an established opinion  
Fiddle-faddle stories, that carry no information along with them  
Fit to live--or not live at all  
Flattering people behind their backs  
Flattery of women  
Flattery  
Flexibility of manners is necessary in the course of the world  
Fools, who can never be undeceived  
Fools never perceive where they are ill-timed  
Forge accusations against themselves  
Forgive, but not approve, the bad.

Fortune stoops to the forward and the bold  
Frank without indiscretion  
Frank, but without indiscretion  
Frank, open, and ingenuous exterior, with a prudent interior  
Frequently make friends of enemies, and enemies of friends  
Friendship upon very slight acquaintance  
Frivolous, idle people, whose time hangs upon their own hands  
Frivolous curiosity about trifles  
Frivolous and superficial pertness  
Full-bottomed wigs were contrived for his humpback  
Gain the heart, or you gain nothing  
Gain the affections as well as the esteem  
Gainer by your misfortune  
General conclusions from certain particular principles  
Generosity often runs into profusion  
Genteel without affectation  
Gentlemen, who take such a fancy to you at first sight  
Gentleness of manners, with firmness of mind  
Geography and history are very imperfect separately  
German, who has taken into his head that he understands French  
Go to the bottom of things  
Good manners  
Good reasons alleged are seldom the true ones  
Good manners are the settled medium of social life  
Good company  
Good-breeding  
Graces: Without us, all labor is vain  
Gratitude not being universal, nor even common  
Grave without the affectation of wisdom  
Great learning; which, if not accompanied with sound judgment  
Great numbers of people met together, animate each other  
Greatest fools are the greatest liars  
Grow wiser when it is too late  
Guard against those who make the most court to you  
Habit and prejudice  
Habitual eloquence  
Half done or half known  
Hardened to the wants and distresses of mankind  
Hardly any body good for every thing  
Haste and hurry are very different things  
Have no pleasures but your own  
Have a will and an opinion of your own, and adhere to it  
Have I employed my time, or have I squandered it?  
Have but one set of jokes to live upon  
Have you learned to carve?  
He that is gentil doeth gentil deeds  
He will find it out of himself without your endeavors  
Heart has such an influence over the understanding  
Helps only, not as guides  
Herd of mankind can hardly be said to think  
Historians  
Holiday eloquence  
Home, be it ever so homely  
Honest error is to be pitied, not ridiculed  
Honestest man loves himself best  
Horace  
How troublesome an old correspondent must be to a young one  
How much you have to do; and how little time to do it in  
Human nature is always the same

Hurt those they love by a mistaken indulgence  
I hope, I wish, I doubt, and fear alternately  
I shall never know, though all the coffeehouses here do.  
I shall always love you as you shall deserve.  
I know myself (no common piece of knowledge, let me tell you)  
I CANNOT DO SUCH A THING  
I, who am not apt to know anything that I do not know  
Idleness is only the refuge of weak minds  
If free from the guilt, be free from the suspicion, too  
If you would convince others, seem open to conviction yourself  
If I don't mind his orders he won't mind my draughts  
If you will persuade, you must first please  
If once we quarrel, I will never forgive  
Ignorant of their natural rights, cherished their chains  
Impertinent insult upon custom and fashion  
Improve yourself with the old, divert yourself with the young  
Inaction at your age is unpardonable  
Inattention  
Inattentive, absent; and distrait  
Inclined to be fat, but I hope you will decline it  
Incontinency of friendship among young fellows  
Indiscriminate familiarity  
Indiscriminately loading their memories with every part alike  
Indolence  
Indolently say that they cannot do  
Infallibly to be gained by every sort of flattery  
Information is, in a certain degree, mortifying  
Information implies our previous ignorance; it must be sweetened  
Injury is much sooner forgotten than an insult  
Inquisition  
Insinuates himself only into the esteem of fools  
Insipid in his pleasures, as inefficient in everything else  
Insist upon your neither piping nor fiddling yourself  
Insolent civility  
INTOLERATION in religious, and inhospitality in civil matters  
Intrinsic, and not their imaginary value  
It is a real inconvenience to anybody to be fat  
It is not sufficient to deserve well; one must please well too  
Jealous of being slighted  
Jog on like man and wife; that is, seldom agreeing  
Judge of every man's truth by his degree of understanding  
Judge them all by their merits, but not by their ages  
Judges from the appearances of things, and not from the reality  
Keep your own temper and artfully warm other people's  
Keep good company, and company above yourself  
Kick him upstairs  
King's popularity is a better guard than their army  
Know their real value, and how much they are generally overrated  
Know the true value of time  
Know, yourself and others  
Knowing how much you have, and how little you want  
Knowing any language imperfectly  
Knowledge is like power in this respect  
Knowledge: either despise it, or think that they have enough  
Knowledge of a scholar with the manners of a courtier  
Known people pretend to vices they had not  
Knows what things are little, and what not  
Labor is the unavoidable fatigue of a necessary journey  
Labor more to put them in conceit with themselves

Last beautiful varnish, which raises the colors  
Laughing, I must particularly warn you against it  
Lay down a method for everything, and stick to it inviolably  
Lazy mind, and the trifling, frivolous mind  
Learn to keep your own secrets  
Learn, if you can, the WHY and the WHEREFORE  
Leave the company, at least as soon as he is wished out of it  
Led, much oftener by little things than by great ones  
Less one has to do, the less time one finds to do it in  
Let me see more of you in your letters  
Let them quietly enjoy their errors in taste  
Let nobody discover that you do know your own value  
Let nothing pass till you understand it  
Let blockheads read what blockheads wrote  
Life of ignorance is not only a very contemptible, but tiresome  
Listlessness and indolence are always blameable  
Little minds mistake little objects for great ones  
Little failings and weaknesses  
Loud laughter is the mirth of the mob  
Love with him, who they think is the most in love with them  
Loved without being despised, and feared without being hated  
Low company, most falsely and impudently, call pleasure  
Low buffoonery, or silly accidents, that always excite laughter  
Luther's disappointed avarice  
Machiavel  
Made him believe that the world was made for him  
Make a great difference between companions and friends  
Make himself whatever he pleases, except a good poet  
Make yourself necessary  
Make every man I met with like me, and every woman love me  
Man is dishonored by not resenting an affront  
Man or woman cannot resist an engaging exterior  
Man of sense may be in haste, but can never be in a hurry  
Man who is only good on holydays is good for very little  
Mangles what he means to carve  
Manner is full as important as the matter  
Manner of doing things is often more important  
Manners must adorn knowledge  
Many things which seem extremely probable are not true  
Many are very willing, and very few able  
Mastery of one's temper  
May you live as long as you are fit to live, but no longer!  
May you rather die before you cease to be fit to live  
May not forget with ease what you have with difficulty learned  
Mazarin and Lewis the Fourteenth riveted the shackles  
Meditation and reflection  
Mere reason and good sense is never to be talked to a mob  
Merit and good-breeding will make their way everywhere  
Method  
Mistimes or misplaces everything  
Mitigating, engaging words do by no means weaken your argument  
MOB: Understanding they have collectively none  
Moderation with your enemies  
Modesty is the only sure bait when you angle for praise  
Money, the cause of much mischief  
More people have ears to be tickled, than understandings to judge  
More one sees, the less one either wonders or admires  
More you know, the modester you should be  
More one works, the more willing one is to work



Mortifying inferiority in knowledge, rank, fortune  
Most people enjoy the inferiority of their best friends  
Most long talkers single out some one unfortunate man in company  
Most ignorant are, as usual, the boldest conjecturers  
Most people have ears, but few have judgment; tickle those ears  
Much sooner forgive an injustice than an insult  
My own health varies, as usual, but never deviates into good  
Mystical nonsense  
Name that we leave behind at one place often gets before us  
National honor and interest have been sacrificed to private  
Necessity of scrupulously preserving the appearances  
Neglect them in little things, they will leave you in great  
Negligence of it implies an indifference about pleasing  
Neither know nor care, (when I die) for I am very weary  
Neither abilities or words enough to call a coach  
Neither retail nor receive scandal willingly  
Never would know anything that he had not a mind to know  
Never read history without having maps  
Never affect the character in which you have a mind to shine  
Never implicitly adopt a character upon common fame  
Never seek for wit; if it presents itself, well and good  
Never to speak of yourself at all  
Never slattern away one minute in idleness  
Never quit a subject till you are thoroughly master of it  
Never maintain an argument with heat and clamor  
Never seem wiser, nor more learned, than the people you are with  
Never saw a froward child mended by whipping  
Never to trust implicitly to the informations of others  
Nipped in the bud  
No great regard for human testimony  
No man is distraught with the man he fears, or the woman he loves  
No one feels pleasure, who does not at the same time give it  
Not tumble, but slide gently to the bottom of the hill of life  
Not to communicate, prematurely, one's hopes or one's fears  
Not only pure, but, like Caesar's wife, unsuspected  
Not make their want still worse by grieving and regretting them  
Not making use of any one capital letter  
Not to admire anything too much  
Not one minute of the day in which you do nothing at all  
Notes by which dances are now pricked down as well as tunes  
Nothing in courts is exactly as it appears to be  
Nothing much worth either desiring or fearing  
Nothing so precious as time, and so irrecoverable when lost  
Observe, without being thought an observer  
Often more necessary to conceal contempt than resentment  
Often necessary, not to manifest all one feels  
Often necessary to seem ignorant of what one knows  
Often led by their hearts than by their understandings  
Old fellow ought to seem wise whether he really be so or not  
One must often yield, in order to prevail  
Only doing one thing at a time  
Only because she will not, and not because she cannot  
Only solid and lasting peace, between a man and his wife  
Our understandings are generally the DUPES of our hearts  
Our frivolous dissertations upon the weather, or upon whist  
Out of livery; which makes them both impertinent and useless  
Outward air of modesty to all he does  
Overvalue what we do not know  
Oysters, are only in season in the R months

Passes for a wit, though he hath certainly no uncommon share  
Patience is the only way not to make bad worse  
Patient toleration of certain airs of superiority  
Pay your own reckoning, but do not treat the whole company  
Pay them with compliments, but not with confidence  
People never desire all till they have gotten a great deal  
People lose a great deal of time by reading  
People will repay, and with interest too, inattention  
People angling for praise  
People hate those who make them feel their own inferiority  
Perfection of everything that is worth doing at all  
Perseverance has surprising effects  
Person to you whom I am very indifferent about, I mean myself  
Pettish, pouting conduct is a great deal too young  
Petty jury  
Plain notions of right and wrong  
Planted while young, that degree of knowledge now my refuge  
Please all who are worth pleasing; offend none  
Pleased to some degree by showing a desire to please  
Pleased with him, by making them first pleased with themselves  
Pleasing in company is the only way of being pleased in yourself  
Pleasure and business with equal inattention  
Pleasure is necessarily reciprocal  
Pleasure is the rock which most young people split upon  
Pleasures do not commonly last so long as life  
Pocket all your knowledge with your watch  
Polite, but without the troublesome forms and stiffness  
POLITICIANS NEITHER LOVE NOR HATE  
Prefer useful to frivolous conversations  
Prejudices are our mistresses  
Pride remembers it forever  
Pride of being the first of the company  
Prudent reserve  
Public speaking  
Put out your time, but to good interest  
Quarrel with them when they are grown up, for being spoiled  
Quietly cherished error, instead of seeking for truth  
Read my eyes out every day, that I may not hang myself  
Read with caution and distrust  
Real merit of any kind will be discovered  
Real friendship is a slow grower  
Reason ought to direct the whole, but seldom does  
Reason, which always ought to direct mankind, seldom does  
Receive them with great civility, but with great incredulity  
Reciprocally profess wishes which they seldom form  
Recommend (pleasure) to you, like an Epicurean  
Recommends self-conversation to all authors  
Refuge of people who have neither wit nor invention of their own  
Refuse more gracefully than other people could grant  
Repeating  
Represent, but do not pronounce  
Reserve with your friends  
Respect without timidity  
Respectful without meanness, easy without too much familiarity  
Return you the ball 'a la volee'  
Rich man never borrows  
Richelieu came and shackled the nation  
Rochefoucault, who, I am afraid, paints man very exactly  
Rochefoucault

Rough corners which mere nature has given to the smoothest  
Ruined their own son by what they called loving him  
Same coolness and unconcern in any and every company  
Scandal: receiver is always thought, as bad as the thief  
Scarce any flattery is too gross for them to swallow  
Scarcely any body who is absolutely good for nothing  
Scrupled no means to obtain his ends  
Secret, without being dark and mysterious  
Secrets  
See what you see, and to hear what you hear  
Seem to like and approve of everything at first  
Seeming frankness with a real reserve  
Seeming inattention to the person who is speaking to you  
Seeming openness is prudent  
Seems to have no opinion of his own  
Seldom a misfortune to be childless  
Self-love draws a thick veil between us and our faults  
Sentiment-mongers  
Sentiments that were never felt, pompously described  
Serious without being dull  
Settled here for good, as it is called  
Shakespeare  
She has all the reading that a woman should have  
She who conquers only catches a Tartar  
She has uncommon, sense and knowledge for a woman  
Shepherds and ministers are both men  
Silence in love betrays more woe  
Singularity is only pardonable in old age  
Six, or at most seven hours sleep  
Smile, where you cannot strike  
Some complaisance and attention to fools is prudent  
Some men pass their whole time in doing nothing  
Something or other is to be got out of everybody  
Something must be said, but that something must be nothing  
Sooner forgive an injury than an insult  
Sow jealousies among one's enemies  
Spare the persons while you lash the crimes  
Speaking to himself in the glass  
Stamp-act has proved a most pernicious measure  
Stamp-duty, which our Colonists absolutely refuse to pay  
State your difficulties, whenever you have any  
Steady assurance, with seeming modesty  
Studied and elaborate dress of the ugliest women in the world  
Style is the dress of thoughts  
Success turns much more upon manner than matter  
Sure guide is, he who has often gone the road which you want to  
Suspicion of age, no woman, let her be ever so old, ever forgive  
Swearing  
Tacitus  
Take the hue of the company you are with  
Take characters, as they do most things, upon trust  
Take, rather than give, the tone of the company you are in  
Take nothing for granted, upon the bare authority of the author  
Taking up adventitious, proves their want of intrinsic merit  
Talent of hating with good-breeding and loving with prudence  
Talk often, but never long  
Talk sillily upon a subject of other people's  
Talk of natural affection is talking nonsense  
Talking of either your own or other people's domestic affairs

Tell me whom you live with, and I will tell you who you are  
Tell stories very seldom  
The longest life is too short for knowledge  
The present moments are the only ones we are sure of  
The best have something bad, and something little  
The worst have something good, and sometimes something great  
There are many avenues to every man  
They thought I informed, because I pleased them  
Thin veil of Modesty drawn before Vanity  
Think to atone by zeal for their want of merit and importance  
Think yourself less well than you are, in order to be quite so  
Thinks himself much worse than he is  
Thoroughly, not superficially  
Those who remarkably affect any one virtue  
Those whom you can make like themselves better  
Three passions that often put honesty to most severe trials  
Timidity and diffidence  
To be heard with success, you must be heard with pleasure  
To be pleased one must please  
To govern mankind, one must not overrate them  
To seem to have forgotten what one remembers  
To know people's real sentiments, I trust much more to my eyes  
To great caution, you can join seeming frankness and openness  
Too like, and too exact a picture of human nature  
Trifle only with triflers; and be serious only with the serious  
Trifles that concern you are not trifles to me  
Trifling parts, with their little jargon  
Trite jokes and loud laughter reduce him to a buffoon  
Truth, but not the whole truth, must be the invariable principle  
Truth leaves no room for compliments  
Unaffected silence upon that subject is the only true medium  
Unguarded frankness  
Unintelligible to his readers, and sometimes to himself  
Unopened, because one title in twenty has been omitted  
Unwilling and forced; it will never please  
Use palliatives when you contradict  
Useful sometimes to see the things which one ought to avoid  
Value of moments, when cast up, is immense  
Vanity, interest, and absurdity, always display  
Vanity, that source of many of our follies  
Warm and young thanks, not old and cold ones  
Water-drinkers can write nothing good  
We love to be pleased better than to be informed  
We have many of those useful prejudices in this country  
We shall be feared, if we do not show that we fear  
Well dressed, not finely dressed  
What pleases you in others, will in general please them in you  
What displeases or pleases you in others  
What you feel pleases you in them  
What have I done to-day?  
What is impossible, and what is only difficult  
Whatever pleases you most in others  
Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well  
Whatever one must do, one should do 'de bonne grace'  
Whatever real merit you have, other people will discover  
When well dressed for the day think no more of it afterward  
Where one would gain people, remember that nothing is little  
Who takes warning by the fate of others?  
Wife, very often heard indeed, but seldom minded

Will not so much as hint at our follies  
Will pay very dear for the quarrels and ambition of a few  
Wish you, my dear friend, as many happy new years as you deserve  
Wit may created any admirers but makes few friends  
Witty without satire or commonplace  
Woman like her, who has always pleased, and often been pleased  
Women are the only refiners of the merit of men  
Women choose their favorites more by the ear  
Women are all so far Machiavelians  
Words are the dress of thoughts  
World is taken by the outside of things  
Would not tell what she did not know  
Wrapped up and absorbed in their abstruse speculations  
Writing anything that may deserve to be read  
Writing what may deserve to be read  
Wrongs are often forgiven; but contempt never is  
Yielded commonly without conviction  
You must be respectable, if you will be respected  
You had much better hold your tongue than them  
Young people are very apt to overrate both men and things  
Young fellow ought to be wiser than he should seem to be  
Young men are as apt to think themselves wise enough  
Your merit and your manners can alone raise you  
Your character there, whatever it is, will get before you here

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