Lord Chesterfield To His Son

A. About Letter-Writing

My Dear Child—by my writing so often, and by the manner in which I write, you will easily see that I do not treat you as a little child, but as a boy who loves to learn, and is ambitious of receiving instructions. I am even persuaded, that, in reading my letters, you are attentive, not only to the subject of which they treat, but likewise to the orthography and to the style. It is of the greatest importance to write letters well; as this is a talent which unavoidably occurs every day of our life, as well in business as in pleasure; and inaccuracies in orthography or in style are never pardoned but in ladies. When you are older, you will read the "Epistles" (that is to say Letters) of Cicero, which are the most perfect models of good writing. A propos of Cicero, I must give you some account of him. He was an old Roman, who lived eighteen hundred years ago, a man of great genius, and the most celebrated orator that ever was. Will it not be necessary for you to explain to you what an orator is? I believe I trust. An orator is a man who, engaging in public assemblies, speaks with eloquence, skill in his way, reasons well, and chooses his words properly. Now, newer man succeeded better than Cicero in all those different points: he had skill, wit, and a kind of a spirit, which uncommonly delighted the whole people of Rome assembled; and, by the force of his eloquence, persuaded them to whatever he pleased. At other times, he used to undertake causes, and plead for his clients in courts of judicature, and in those causes he generally had all the suffrage, that is, to say, all the opinions, all the decisions, in his favor. While the Roman republic enjoyed its freedom, he gave very signal services to his country, but when it was abdicated by Julius Caesar, the first Emperor of the Roman Empire, Cicero became suspected by the tyrants, and was at last put to death by order of Mark Antony, who hated him for the severity of his orations against him, at the time that he endeavored to obtain the sovereignty of Rome.

In case there should be any words in my letters which you do not perfectly understand, remember always to inquire the explanation from your mamma, or else to seek for them in the dictionary. Advice.

To your obedient son,

Bath, October 4, 1738.