

Excerpt from Letters to His Son, Vol. 2 of 2: Edited With Occasional Elucidatory Notes, Translations of All the Latin, French, and Italian Quotations, and a Biographical Notice of the Author I hope in God, and I verily believe, that you want no moral virtue. But the possession of all the moral virtues, in actu primo, as the logicians call it, is not sufficient; you must have them in actu secundo too: nay, that is not sufficient neither; you must have the reputation of them also. Your character in the world must be built upon that solid foundation, or it will soon fall, and upon your own head. You cannot therefore be too careful, too nice, too scrupulous, in establishing this character at first, upon which your whole depends. Let no conversation, no example, no fashion, no born mot, no silly desire of seeming to be above, what most knaves, and many fools, call prejudice, ever tempt you to avow, excuse, extenuate, or laugh at the least breach of morality; but show upon all occasions, and take all occasions to show, a detestation and abhorrence of it. There, though young, you ought to be strict; and there only, while young, it becomes you to be strict and severe. But there, too, spare the persons, while you lash the crimes. All this relates, as you easily judge, to the vices of the heart, such as lying, fraud, envy, malice, detraction, &c.; and I do not extend it to the little frailties of youth, flowing from high spirits and warm blood. It would ill become you, at your age, to declaim against them, and sententiously censure a gallantry, an accidental excess of the table, a frolic, an inadvertency; no, keep as free from them yourself as you can; but say nothing against them in others. They certainly mend by time, often by reason; and a mans worldly character is not affected by them, provided it be pure in all other respects. To come now to a point of much less but yet of very great consequence, at your first setting out. Be extremely upon your guard agaâ€¦

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