

Westphalian Nobleman Christian Franz Dietrich von Fürstenberg Provides Instructions on the Education of his Daughters (1743)

Abstract

This text attests to one father's apprehensions, which were doubtless shared by other aristocratic parents of his time. The author of this text, a Westphalian nobleman, wanted to ensure that his daughters acquired habits of industriousness and accepted the obligations of everyday life, without scorning such things as the sole preserve of commoners. In short, he wanted them to accustom themselves not only to the pleasures and privileges of upper-class life. The text offers a good picture of the skills that many aristocratic daughters were expected to acquire.

Source

On the Subject of the Mademoiselle and the Discipline of the Females

Facta revisione Thematum of the little Daughters

Discussion of how to set about with my daughters

So I begin, as I now wish to call to mind one of the useful exhortations recently given to my daughters, as I wish to make inquiries about everything and see how things will be arranged in the future, and how, after the children grow up, they will successively be granted more of their own will.

How children do not grow up and are not left to their own devices all of a sudden but gradually

According to what I had drafted on April 5, 1741, the older children are successively granted more of their own will, and as they grow older, and when they have reached and passed 20 years, they will be given more tea, coffee, chocolate, wine, and fruit. At the same time, though, one has to consider carefully that excesses of wine, coffee, and such beverages are harmful, even fatal, of which we have had examples in our family.

We were not born into this world for amusements and delights

Just as we were not born into this world for drinking coffee etc., since we humans must not consider that our happiness, our pleasure in this world lies in drinking coffee, in wine, in games, in company, in dancing, in luxuriating, in all sorts of festivities, in abandoning ourselves senselessly in affectation to such delights and probably also amusements, allowing ourselves to become bored without this very idleness, we also must not consider amusements, flights of fancy etc., as something more aristocratic, while despising a calm, quiet, secluded, industrious, never idle, and cheerful life in its essence as something bourgeois;

What purpose the delights serve, and what everyone's proper business in the world be

Festivities, delights are to a person's life as spices are to dishes; someone wishing to dine and feed on nothing but spices would have to go to rack and ruin.

We are born into this world not to hop and dance but, according to our catechism, to honor God and to

achieve the salvation of our souls. Apart from this, everyone also has to learn all sorts of things, each according to his or her station, so as not to be superfluous, something with which he or she must keep occupied over the course of life, never to be idle, never to feel as if considered idle.

For the female sex, not being idle means: one moment I am praying, observing, and reading, one moment I am knitting, embroidering, sewing, and spinning, exercising such alternation as to win heaven easily:

One must keep occupied all the time

With this considered carefully, therefore, a young woman must get accustomed from an early age to keeping occupied all the time, never being idle, loving to keep occupied all the time, and hating, however, idleness. In that case, she will always live with happiness in her heart, being cheerful in any place, even if she lived in a wild wasteland.

How one must bring up children successively

The really young children learn their catechism. They are taught prayers and Christian nature; they are taught reading, writing, different languages, working, arithmetic, and economizing. They are also taught dancing, playing, a decent lifestyle; they are instructed how to live secluded, honorably, carefully, how to adapt themselves to anything and to become a nuisance to no one.

How the children have to behave in terms of delights and suchlike diversions

Should occasions arise to dance, to play something, if there are opportunities to amuse oneself by taking walks or other meetings and social gatherings, one takes part in them just as other people do.

Once this ends, one is not grieved by it, nay, one is quite glad that it is over, and one does not allow boredom to emerge, instead devoting oneself immediately again, with all of one's good and cheerful heart, to one's usual business, praying, reading, working, economizing, delighting exceedingly in these very ordinary dealings, which must be the soul's proper food.

Happy are the children who are thus brought up to ora et labora [pray and work] and who obey that principle

Those young children, taught in this way, who have accepted these facts, who delight in their continuous occupation in order not to be idle at any time, who are looking for their joy in that occupation, regarding a little fun as something passing, having a good time while it lasts but not setting their heart on it, these will always be happy.

Unhappy are the children, who despise it and strive after idleness and luxuriance

Those, however, who harness the horses behind the carriage, who assume idleness, laziness, luxuriance, hopping and jumping as if these were the aim of their lives, who arrogantly mean to grieve without these things, who claim to have no idea how to use their time, who mean to regard keeping occupied as something bourgeois, something indecent, those very persons cannot live for long. They must vanish, for it is impossible to maintain attending social gatherings all the time, during the course of which many are sinning as well; for if one's health were to endure this, i.e. constant merrymaking, even if one were empresses, queens, etc., if one wished to make fun occasions the aim of one's life, it would nevertheless not be possible for those to follow upon each other; instead many days of rest, many weeks, idle and long-drawn-out for such persons, would necessarily have to intervene. Whether in a city, in the countryside, at court, in one's home, life can be good anywhere, if only one knows how to keep occupied thus, so that one is never idle. Indeed one rather tires more of such restless activities in cities, at the

courts than amidst the solid rest one enjoys in one's home, when one knows how to keep occupied. Restlessness, constantly being merry consumes human beings as well, causing them to die earlier; rest, however, nurtures humans, causing them to live longer; just how many persons much younger than I have died, those that have senselessly chased after the splendor and restlessness of this world; I, however, in my peace and quiet, I am still alive.

Why one would state this, namely because of the seducers.

One would not state this in such an elaborate way for no reason, for even though everyone's enjoyable life consists in occupying oneself at all times with knowledge, with never being idle, and the children hopefully comprehend this as well, over a certain number of years, enough individuals will approach, advising against this or that application, wishing to persuade the children of such matters in a different way, speaking of nothing but idleness, merrymaking, and flying about, mocking to no end etc. the parents or others who might advise otherwise, who would not tolerate such, and who must necessarily step in.

Aims of the house

The whole of the suitors

For the most part, manservants and maids, as well as manorial officials, are also inclined to that, namely to flights [of fancy]. Moreover, young men desiring to get married are inclined to chase after women – even though apart from that they would not be able to make those young women's fortune but only look out for themselves; they strive to bring such young women to idleness, to merrymaking, to flights [of fancy], to guide them towards that, for then they are more easily seduced, persuaded, as idleness is the devil's pillow. Therefore, those wishing to supervise young people in a Christian way according to their duty must prevent that very thing;

The parents' duty

is to guide the children to prayers, to diligent perusal of good books; to guide the children to work hard and to like working in order never to be idle but always occupied. In order for them to recognize why they have come into this world, i.e. to pray and work, the delights, however, must only be placed between work and pleasures between the sorrows.

One must not allow oneself to be dominated. One must be on one's guard against flattery

One must not allow oneself to be dominated by manservants or maids, also one's manorial officials – if one has advanced as far in the world that one has such; this should not, however, cause the individual to swing to the other extreme, i.e. that after opportunities arise, one would not consult reasonably with each one and contemplate a matter.

Therefore, the children must watch out very carefully in this respect not to become prejudiced in favor of bad things by the servants' dazzling and saying what one wants to hear. The children must, however, trust completely those that are presented to them for their upbringing.

The children must not gossip

The children must not go spread things from one to the other – something usually a fault of women that may hold many sins, they must not be disdainful, want to be precocious, but get used to overlooking many things, remain silent about many things; they must not allow themselves to be instructed to be foul-mouthed, to offer up information, to hold animated talks, to chat constantly, not ever remain completely silent, because anyone with a knack to chat a lot must know a lot or lie a lot, with the latter

being the case on the whole.

Concerning reviewing. Calculating money

Upon arriving from the Rhine, I will have the older children invited for reviewing them; how are they doing with respect to arithmetic? They will be given money to calculate; the question is how to go about it; perhaps one also has to consult with my wife, from what sources the children ought to make money.

The children's behavior

The children must not be complicated but behave as they are.

Concerning writing and composition

Things are not going very well with respect to my daughters' writing and character. The question is whether P. Plaudus or Dingerkus ought to give an instruction? The letters must also be composed on different contents and not solely on the same content.

Moreover, in the course of time they will have to write both German and French letters.

Concerning Marie-Elisabeth and other nannies

One will need to talk to the Mademoiselle about Maria Elisabeth, as the latter now is not responsible for one or two children but for all children, how she is now not a waiting girl but the first nanny. The question is what her pay is. This should be properly reduced for her, or otherwise she would have to express thanks for it and perform waiting services all the more diligently. On this matter, one finds something noted in the enclosed *quart foliis volantibus* [four loose sheets] just as there is on the distribution of my daughters' clothes. I could then put aside these loose sheets, enclosing them into *a pro memoria pro me*; in the course of time, the children decide about their clothes themselves; in the course of time, one disposes in a different way over the more valuable clothes for sons and daughters than simply wanting to leave these items as prey for the servants.

Concerning the number of maids

When Wilhelmina departs, Maria Elisabeth and French Elisabeth will suffice for four daughters.

When Bernhardina departs, another domestic servant will have to be present, of which my wife will take care. In the course of time, the two wet nurses will have to cut, and the fewer women are together, the quieter things will be. Once the daughters are finally 21 years old etc., one can hire a separate maid for each one of them.

Ita finio [Thus I conclude] on January 29, 1743

Source: Archive of the Counts of Fürstenberg-Stammheim, Opladen, No. 23/10m; reprinted in Jürgen Schlumbohm, ed., *Kinderstuben, Wie Kinder zu Bauern, Bürgern, Aristokraten wurden 1700–1850*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983, pp. 181–86.

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