

## The Ideal of the Well Rounded Man

## Castiglione's Courtier

*The Greeks believed that a man ought to be well-rounded—that he should develop every aspect of his personality. Count Baldassare Castiglione, a sixteenth-century Italian diplomat, combined this ideal with Renaissance ideals in a book called *The Courtier*. As the title implies, Castiglione was writing for the people in the courts of the nobility, not for the merchants and craftsmen in the cities and towns.*

*For this evening's game, let us select someone to portray a perfect courtier. He should explain all of the conditions and special qualities that a courtier must have; if he mentions something that is not correct, anyone may correct him....*

Since doing the same thing over and over again is tiresome, we must vary our life with different occupations. For this reason, I would have our courtier sometimes take part in quiet and peaceful exercises. If he is to escape envy and appear agreeable to everyone the courtier should join others in what they are doing. Yet he should always be careful to do those things that are praiseworthy. He must use good judgment to see that he never appears foolish. But let him laugh, joke, banter, frolic, and dance, yet in such a way that he shall always appear genial and discreet. And in whatever he does or says, let him do it with grace.

I would have the courtier know literature, in particular those studies known as the humanities. He should be able to speak not only Latin but Greek, as well. Let him read and know the Roman and Greek poets, orators, and historians. Let him be proficient in writing verse and prose, particularly in our own, vulgar language. Besides gaining enjoyment for himself, the courtier will find that his writings will also entertain the ladies, who are usually fond of such things. If the Courtier cannot attain perfection in this art, he should be careful to see that no one reads what he writes so that others will not laugh at him. Instead, he should show his writings only to a trusted friend. Even if the Courtier cannot attain perfection in the art of writing verse and prose, he should still practice it so that he will at least be able to judge the work of others.

My lords, you must know that I am not content with the courtier unless he is also a musician. Besides being able to read and understand the music, he must be able to play the different instruments. Music is the best relaxation or medicine for a troubled man. Moreover, it is a most becoming and praiseworthy pastime during leisure hours, especially in the court, where it relieves the boredom and pleases the ladies, whose tender and gentle spirits are affected by the harmony and are filled with sweetness....

I wish to discuss another matter, which I think is very important and should not be overlooked by our courtier. He should know how to draw and paint.

Do not be surprised that I believe the courtier should know this art, which today seems to be practiced only by artisans and not by gentlemen. I remember having read that the ancients, especially in Greece, had the boys of noble birth study painting in school. They believed it was an honorable and necessary thing, and it was recognized as the first of the liberal arts. At the same time they forbade slaves to practice the art. Among the Romans, too, it was held in highest honor....

And truly one who does not honor this art seems unreasonable to me. This universe that we see—the vast heaven so richly adorned with shining stars, the earth circled by seas, varied with mountains, valleys, and rivers and decorated with so many different trees, beautiful flowers, and grasses—is a great and noble picture, painted by the hand of nature and of God. Whoever is capable of copying the picture in his own painting seems to me to deserve great praise.

