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The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

IV. Mr. Addison - Dr. Swift.

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I had my *feelings* too, as fine and as lively as your's. But we should both have done better to have avoided those subjects, in which *sentiment* took the place of *reason*.

DIALOGUE IV.

Mr. ADDISON — Dr. SWIFT.

DR. SWIFT.

SURELY, Addison, Fortune was exceedingly inclined to play the fool (a humour her ladyship, as well as most other ladies of very great quality, is frequently in) when she made you a *minister of state*, and me a *divine*!

ADDISON.

I must confess we were both of us out of our elements. But you don't mean to insinuate, that all would have been right, if our destinies had been reversed?

SWIFT.

Yes, I do.—You would have made an excellent bishop; and I should have governed Great Britain, as I did Ireland, with an absolute sway, while I talked of nothing but liberty, property, and so forth.

ADDISON.

You governed the mob of Ireland; but I never understood that you governed the kingdom. A nation and a mob are very different things.

SWIFT.

Ay; so you fellows that have no genius for politics may suppose. But there are times when, by seasonably putting himself at the head of the mob, an able man may get to the head

DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD.

of the nation. Nay, there are times, when the nation itself is a mob, and ought to be treated as such by a skilful observer.

ADDISON.

I don't deny the truth of your proposition. But is there no danger, that, from the natural vicissitudes of human affairs, the favourite of the mob should be mobbed in his turn?

S W I F T.

Sometimes there may: but I risked it; and it answered my purpose. Ask the lord lieutenants, who were forced to pay court to me, instead of my courting them, whether they did not feel my superiority. And if I could make myself so considerable, when I was only a dirty dean of St. Patrick's, without a seat in either house of parliament, what should I have done, if fortune had placed me in England, unincumbered with a gown, and in a situation that would have enabled me to make myself heard in the house of lords or of commons?

A D D I S O N.

You would undoubtedly have done very marvellous acts! Perhaps you might then have been as zealous a whig as my lord Wharton himself. Or, if the whigs had unhappily offended *the statesman*, as they did *the doctor*, who knows whether you might not have brought in the pretender? Pray let me ask you one question between you and me. If your great talents had raised you to the office of first minister under that prince, would you have tolerated the Protestant religion, or not?

S W I F T.

Ha! Mr. Secretary; are you witty upon me? do you think, because Sunderland took a fancy to make you a great man in the state, that he, or his master, could make you as great in wit, as nature made me? No, no; wit is like grace, it must be given *from above*. You can no more get that from the

king, than my lords the bishops can the other. And, though I will own you had some, yet believe me, my good friend, it was no match for mine. I think you have not vanity enough in your nature, to pretend to a competition in that point with me.

A D D I S O N.

I have been told by my friends that I was rather too modest. So I will not determine this dispute for myself, but refer it to Mercury, the God of wit, who fortunately happens to be coming this way, with a soul he has brought to the shades.

Hail, divine Hermes! a question of precedence in the class of wit and humour, over which you preside, having arisen between me and my countryman, Dr. Swift, we beg leave—

MERCURY—Dr. Swift, I rejoice to see you—How does my old lad? how does honest Lemuel Gulliver? have you been in Lilliput lately, or in the *flying island*, or with your good nurse Glumdalclitch? Pray when did you *eat a crust with lord Peter*? is Jack as mad still as ever? I hear that, since you published the history of his case, the poor fellow, by more gentle usage, is almost got well. If he had but more food, he would be as much in his senses as *brother Martin* himself. But Martin, they tell me, has lately spawned a strange brood of Methodists, Moravians, Hutchinsonians, who are madder than ever Jack was in his worst days. It is a great pity you are not alive again, to make a new edition of your *Tale of the Tub* for the use of these fellows.—Mr. Addison, I beg your pardon, I should have spoken to you sooner; but I was so struck with the sight of my old friend the doctor, that I forgot for a time the respects due to you.

S W I F T.

Addison, I think our dispute is decided, before the judge has heard the cause.

A D D I S O N.

I own it is, in your favour;—but—

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M E R-

MERCURY.—Don't be discouraged, friend Addison. Apollo perhaps would have given a different judgement. I am a wit, and a rogue, and a foe to all dignity. Swift and I naturally like one another. He worships me more than Jupiter, and I honour him more than Homer. But yet, I assure you, I have a great value for you.—Sir Roger de Coverly, Will Honeycomb, Will Wimble, the country gentleman in the Freeholder, and twenty more characters, drawn with the finest strokes of unaffected wit and humour in your admirable writings, have obtained for you a high place in the class of *my authors*, though not quite so high a one as the dean of St. Patrick's. Perhaps you might have got before him, if the decency of your nature and the cautiousness of your judgement would have given you leave. But, allowing, that in the force and spirit of his wit he has really the advantage, how much does he yield to you in all the elegant graces; in the fine touches of delicate sentiment; in developing the secret springs of the soul; in shewing the mild lights and shades of a character; in distinctly marking each line, and every soft gradation of tints, which would escape the common eye! Who ever painted like you the beautiful parts of human nature, and brought them out from under the shade even of the greatest simplicity, or the most ridiculous weaknesses; so that we are forced to admire, and feel that we *venerate*, even while we are *laughing*! Swift was able to do nothing that approaches to this.—He could draw an ill face, or caricature a good one, with a masterly hand: but there was all his power: and, if I am to speak as a *god*, a worthless power it is. Your's is divine. It tends to exalt human nature.

S W I F T.

Pray, good Mercury, (if I may have liberty to say a word for myself) do you think that my talent was not highly beneficial to *correct* human nature? is whipping of no use to mend naughty boys?

M E R—

MERCURY—Men are generally not so patient of whipping as boys: and a *rough satirist* is seldom known to mend them. Satire, like antimony, if it be used as a medicine, must be rendered less corrosive. Your's is often rank poison. But I will allow that you have done some good in your way, though not half so much as Addison did in his.

A D D I S O N.

Mercury, I am satisfied. It matters little what rank you assign me as a wit, if you give me the precedence as a friend and benefactor to mankind.

MERCURY—I pass sentence on the *writers*, not the *men*. And my decree is this. When any hero is brought hither, who wants to be humbled, let the task of lowering his arrogance be assigned to Swift. The same good office may be done to a philosopher vain of his wisdom and virtue, or to a bigot puffed up with spiritual pride. The doctor's discipline will soon convince the first, that with all his boasted morality, he is but a *yaboo*; and the latter, that to be *holy* he must necessarily be *humble*. I would also have him apply his *antico-smetic wash* to the painted face of female vanity, and his rod, which draws blood at every stroke, to the hard back of insolent folly or petulant wit. But Addison should be employed to comfort those, whose delicate minds are dejected with too painful a sense of some infirmities in their nature. To them he should hold his fair and charitable mirror, which would bring to their sight their hidden excellencies, and put them in a temper fit for Elysium.—Adieu: continue to esteem and love each other as you did in the other world, though you were of opposite parties, and (what is still more wonderful) *rival wits*. This alone is sufficient to entitle you both to Elysium.

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