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### **The Works of George Lord Lyttleton**

**Lyttelton, George <Lord>**

**London, 1774**

VIII. Fernando Cortez - William Penn.

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every rich, luxurious state! While the inhabitants of it are sunk in voluptuousness, while all is smiling around them, and they imagine that no evil, no danger is nigh, the latent seeds of destruction are fermenting within; till, breaking out on a sudden, they lay waste all their opulence, all their boasted delights; and leave them a sad monument of the fatal effects of internal tempests and convulsions.

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DIALOGUE VIII.

FERNANDO CORTEZ—WILLIAM PENN.

CORTEZ.

**I**S it possible, William Penn, that you should seriously compare your glory with mine! the planter of a small colony in North-America presume to vie with the conqueror of the great Mexican empire!

PENN.

Friend, I pretend to no glory,—the LORD preserve me from it!—All glory is *his*;—but this I say, that I was *his instrument* in a more glorious work than that performed by thee: incomparably more glorious.

CORTEZ.

Doest thou not know, William Penn, that with less than six hundred Spanish foot, eighteen horse, and a few small pieces of cannon, I fought and defeated innumerable armies of very brave men, dethroned an emperor who had been raised to the throne by his valour, and excelled all his countrymen in the science of war, as much as they excelled all the rest of the West Indian nations? that I made him my prisoner in his own capital;

pital; and, after he had been deposed and slain by his subjects, vanquished and took Guatimozin, his successor, and accomplished my conquest of the whole empire of Mexico, which I loyally annexed to the Spanish crown? Dost thou not know, that, in doing these wonderful acts, I shewed as much courage as Alexander the Great, as much prudence as Cæsar? that, by my policy, I ranged under my banners the powerful commonwealth of Tlascalala, and brought them to assist me in subduing the Mexicans, though with the loss of their own beloved independence? and that, to consummate my glory, when the governor of Cuba, Velasquez, would have taken my command from me, and sacrificed me to his envy and jealousy, I drew from him all his forces, and joined them to my own, shewing myself as superior to all other Spaniards as I was to the Indians?

P E N N.

I know very well that thou wast as fierce as a lion, and as subtle as a serpent. The devil, perhaps, may place thee as high *in his black list of heroes* as Alexander or Cæsar. It is not my business to interfere with him in settling thy rank. But hark thee, friend Cortez—What right hadst thou, or had the king of Spain himself, to the Mexican empire? Answer me that, if thou canst.

C O R T E Z.

The pope gave it to my master.

P E N N.

The devil offered to give our LORD all the kingdoms of the earth; and I suppose the pope, as *his vicar*, gave thy master this: in return for which he *fell down and worshipped him*, like an idolater as he was. But suppose the high priest of Mexico had taken it into his head to give Spain to Motezuma, would his grant have been good?

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C O R-

C O R T E Z.

These are questions of casuistry, which it is not the business of a soldier to decide. We leave that to gownsmen. But pray, Mr. Penn, what right had you to the province you settled?

P E N N.

An honest right of fair purchase. We gave the native savages some things they wanted, and they in return gave us lands they did not want. All was amicably agreed on, not a drop of blood shed to stain our acquisition.

C O R T E Z.

I am afraid there was a little *fraud* in the purchase. Thy followers, William Penn, are said to think cheating in a quiet and sober way no mortal sin.

P E N N.

The saints are always calumniated by the ungodly. But it was a sight which an angel might contemplate with delight, to behold the colony I settled! to see us living with the Indians like innocent lambs, and taming the ferocity of their barbarous manners by the gentleness of ours! to see the whole country, which before was an uncultivated wilderness, rendered as fertile and fair as the garden of God! O Fernando Cortez, Fernando Cortez! didst thou leave the great empire of Mexico in that state? No, thou hadst turned those delightful and populous regions into a desert, a desert flooded with blood. Dost thou not remember that most infernal scene, when the noble emperor Guatimozin was stretched out by thy soldiers upon hot burning coals, to make him discover into what part of the lake of Mexico he had thrown the royal treasures? are not his groans ever sounding in the ears of thy conscience? do not they rend thy hard heart, and strike thee with more horror than the yells of the Furies?

C O R-

C O R T E Z.

Alas! I was not present when that dire act was done. Had I been there, I would have forbidden it. My nature was mild.

P E N N.

Thou wast the captain of that band of robbers, who did this horrid deed. The advantage they had drawn from thy counsels and conduct enabled them to commit it: and thy skill saved them afterwards from the vengeance that was due to so enormous a crime. The enraged Mexicans would have properly punished them for it, if they had not had thee for their general, thou *lieutenant of Satan*.

C O R T E Z.

The *saints* I find can *rail*, William Penn. But how do you hope to preserve this *admirable* colony which you have settled? Your people, you tell me, live *like innocent lambs*. Are there no *wolves* in North America to devour those *lambs*? But if the Americans should continue in perpetual peace with all your successors there, the French will not. Are the inhabitants of Pennsylvania to make war against *them* with prayers and preaching? If so, that garden of God, which you say you have planted, will undoubtedly be their prey, and they will take from you your property, your laws, and your religion.

P E N N.

The LORD's will be done! The LORD will defend us, against the rage of our enemies, if it be his good pleasure.

C O R T E Z.

Is this the wisdom of a great legislator? I have heard some of your countrymen compare you to Solon: did Solon, think you, give laws to a people, and leave those laws and that people  
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at the mercy of every invader? The first business of legislature is, to provide a military strength that may defend the whole system. If a house is built in a land of robbers, without a gate to shut, or a bolt or bar to secure it, what avails it how well-proportioned, or how commodious, the architecture of it may be? Is it richly furnished within? the more it will tempt the hands of violence and of rapine to seize its wealth. The world, William Penn, is all a land of robbers. Any state or commonwealth erected therein must be well fenced and secured by good military institutions; or, the happier it is in all other respects, the greater will be its danger, the more speedy its destruction. Perhaps the neighbouring English colonies may for a while protect your's: but that precarious security cannot always preserve you. Your plan of government must be changed, or your colony will be lost. What I have said is also applicable to Great Britain itself. If an increase of its wealth be not accompanied with an increase of its force, that wealth will become the prey of some of the neighbouring nations, in which the martial spirit is more prevalent than the commercial. And whatever praise may be due to its civil institutions, if they are not guarded by a wise system of military policy, they will be found of no value, being unable to prevent their own dissolution.

P E N N.

These are suggestions of human wisdom. The doctrines I held were *inspired*; they came *from above*.

C O R T E Z.

It is blasphemy to say, *that any folly could come from the Fountain of Wisdom*. Whatever is inconsistent with the great laws of nature, and with the necessary state of human society, cannot possibly have been inspired by G O D. Self-defence is as necessary to nations as to men. And shall particulars have a right which nations have not? True religion, William Penn,

is the perfection of reason. Fanaticism is the disgrace, the destruction of reason.

P E N N.

Though what thou sayest should be true, it does not come well from thy mouth. A *Papist* talk of *reason*! Go to the Inquisition, and tell *them* of *reason*, and *the great laws of nature*. They will broil thee, as thy soldiers broiled the unhappy Guatimozin. Why dost thou turn pale? Is it the name of the Inquisition, or the name of Guatimozin, that troubles and affrights thee? O wretched man! who madest thyself a voluntary instrument to carry into a new-discovered world that hellish tribunal! Tremble and shake when thou thinkest, that every murder the inquisitors have committed, every torture they have inflicted on the innocent Indians, is originally owing to thee. Thou must answer to God for all their inhumanity, for all their injustice. What wouldst thou give to part with the renown of thy conquests, and to have a conscience as pure and undisturbed as mine?

C O R T E Z.

I feel the force of thy words. They pierce me like daggers. I can never, never be happy, while I retain any memory of the ills I have caused.—Yet I thought I did right. I thought I laboured to advance the glory of God, and propagate in the remotest parts of the earth his holy Religion. He will be merciful to well-defigning and pious error. Thou also wilt have need of that gracious indulgence; though not, I own, so much as I.

P E N N.

Ask thy heart, whether ambition was not thy real motive, and zeal the pretence?

C O R T E Z.

Ask thine, whether thy zeal had no worldly views, and whether thou didst believe all the nonsense of the sect, at the  
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head of which thou wast pleased to become a legislator. Adieu!  
—Self-examination requires retirement.

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DIALOGUE IX.

MARCUS PORTIUS CATO.—MESSALLA CORVINUS.

C A T O.

O H Messalla!—is it then possible that what some of our countrymen tell me should be true? Is it possible that you could live the courtier of Octavius, that you could accept of employments and honours from him, from the tyrant of your country; you, the brave, the noble-minded, the virtuous Messalla; you, whom, I remember, my son-in-law Brutus has frequently extolled, as the most promising youth in Rome, tutored by philosophy, trained up in arms, scorning all those soft, effeminate pleasures, that reconcile men to an easy and indolent servitude, fit for all the roughest tasks of honour and virtue, fit to live or to *die* a freeman?

M E S S A L L A.

Marcus Cato, I revere both your life and your death: but the last, permit me to tell you, did no good to your country; and the former would have done more, if you could have mitigated a little the sternness of your virtue, I will not say of your pride. For my own part, I adhered with constant integrity and unwearied zeal to the republic, while the republic existed. I fought for her at Philippi, under the only commander, who, if he had conquered, would have conquered for her, not for himself. When he was dead, I saw that nothing remained to my country but *the choice of a master*. I chose *the best*.

C A T O.

The best!—What! a man who had broken all laws, who had violated all trusts, who had led the armies of the commonwealth