The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

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XIV. Boileau - Pope.

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my ſport with him, I think it will be charity to reſtore him to his ſenſes; or rather to beſtow what nature denied him, a ſound judgement. Come hither, Scaliger.—By this touch of my caduceus I give thee power to ſee things as they are, and among others thyſelf.—Look, gentlemen, how his countenance is fallen in a moment! Hear what he ſays:—He is talking to himſelf.

SCALIGER.

Bleſs me! with what perſons have I been diſcourſing! with Virgil and Horace! How could I venture to open my lips in their preſence? Good Mercury, I beſeech you, let me retire from a company for which I am very unfit. Let me go and hide my head in the deepeſt ſhade of that grove which I ſee in the valley. After I have performed a penance there, I will crawl on my knees to the feet of thoſe illuſtrious ſhades, and beg them to ſee me burn my impertinent books of criticiſm, in the fiery billows of Phlegethon, with my own hands.

MERCURY.

They will both receive thee into favour. This mortification of truly knowing thyſelf is a ſufficient atonement for thy former preſumption.

DIALOGUE XIV.

BOILEAU.——POPE.

BOILEAU.

MR. Pope, you have done me great honour. I am told, that you made me your model in poetry, and walked on Parnaſſus in the ſame paths which I had trod.

POPE.

We both followed Horace: but in our manner of imitation, and in the turn of our natural genius, there was, I believe, much

much reſemblance. We both were too irritable, and too eaſily hurt by offences, even from the loweſt of men. The keen edge of our wit was frequently turned againſt thoſe whom it was more a ſhame to contend with than an honour to vanquiſh.

BOILEAU.

Yes:—But in general we were the champions of good morals, good ſenſe, and good learning. If our love of theſe was ſometimes heated into anger againſt thoſe who offended them no leſs than us, is that anger to be blamed?

POPE.

It would have been nobler, if we had not been parties in the quarrel. Our enemies obſerve, that neither our cenſure, nor our praiſe, was always impartial.

BOILEAU.

It might perhaps have been better if in ſome inſtances we had not praiſed or blamed ſo much. But in panegyric and ſatire moderation is inſipid.

POPE.

Moderation is a cold *unpoetical* virtue. Mere hiſtorical truth is better written in proſe. And therefore I think you did judiciouſly, when you threw into the fire your hiſtory of Louis le Grand, and truſted his fame to your poems.

BOILEAU.

When thoſe poems were publiſhed, that monarch was the idol of the French nation. If you and I had not known, in our occaſional compoſitions, how to ſpeak to the paſſions, as well as to the ſober reaſon of mankind, we ſhould not have acquired that deſpotic authority in the empire of wit, which made us ſo formidable to all the inferior tribe of poets in England and France. Beſides, ſharp ſatiriſts want great patrons.

POPE.

All the praiſe which my friends received from me was *unbought*. In *this*, at leaſt, I may boaſt a ſuperiority over the *penſioned Boileau*.

BOILEAU.

BOILEAU.

A *penſion* in France was an honourable diſtinction. Had you been a Frenchman, you would have ambitiouſly ſought it; had I been an Engliſhman, I ſhould have proudly declined it. If our merit in other reſpects be not unequal, this difference will not ſet me much below you in the temple of virtue or of fame.

POPE.

It is not for me to draw a compariſon between our works. But, if I may believe the beſt critics who have talked to me on the ſubject, my *Rape of the Lock* is not inferior to your *Lutrin*; and my *Art of Criticiſm* may well be compared with your *Art of Poetry:* my *Ethic Epiſtles* are eſteemed at leaſt equal to your's, and my *Satires* much better.

BOILEAU.

Hold, Mr. Pope.——If there is really ſuch a ſympathy in our natures as you have ſuppoſed, there may be reaſon to fear, that, if we go on in this manner comparing our works, we ſhall not part in good friendſhip.

POPE.

No, no:—the mild air of the Elyſina fields has mitigated my temper, as I preſume it has your's. But in truth our reputations are nearly on a level. Our writings are admired, almoſt equally (as I hear) for *energy and juſtneſs of thought*. We both of us carried the beauty of our *diction*, and the harmony of our *numbers*, to the higheſt perfection that our languages would admit. Our poems were poliſhed to the utmoſt degree of correctneſs, yet without loſing their fire, or the agreeable appearance of freedom and eaſe. We borrowed much from the ancients, though you, I believe, more than I: but our imitations (to uſe an expreſſion of your own) *had ſtill an original air*. See Boileau's epigram on himſelf.

BOILEAU.

I will confeſs, ſir, (to ſhew you that the Elyſian climate has had its effects upon me) I will fairly confeſs, without the leaſt

ill humour, that in your *Eloisa to Abelard*, your *Verses to the Memory of an unfortunate Lady*, and some others you wrote in your youth, there is more fire of poetry, than in any of mine. You excelled in *the pathetic*, which I never approached. I will also allow, that you hit the *manner* of Horace, and *the sly delicacy* of his wit, more exactly than I, or than any other man who has written since his time. Nor could I, nor did even Lucretius himself, make *philosophy* so *poetical*, and embellish it with such charms as you have given to that of Plato, or (to speak more properly) of some of his modern disciples, in your celebrated *Essay on Man*.

POPE.

What do you think of my *Homer?*

BOILEAU.

Your *Homer* is the most spirited, the most poetical, the most elegant, and the most pleasing translation, that ever was made of any ancient poem; though not so much in the *manner* of the original, or so exactly agreeable to the *sense* in all places, as might perhaps be desired. But when I consider the years you spent in this work, and how many excellent original poems you might, with less difficulty, have produced in that time, I can't but regret that your talents were thus employed. A great poet, so tied down to a tedious translation, is *a Columbus chained to an oar*. What new regions of fancy, full of treasures yet untouched, might you have explored, if you had been at liberty to have boldly expanded your sails, and steered your own course, under the conduct and direction of your own genius!—But I am still more angry with you for your edition of Shakespear. The office of an *editor* was below you, and your mind was unfit for the drudgery it requires. Would any body think of employing a Raphael to clean an old picture?

POPE.

The principal cause of my undertaking that task was zeal for the honour of Shakespear: and, if you knew all his beauties as well

well as I, you would not wonder at this zeal. No other author had ever ſo copious, ſo bold, ſo *creative* an imagination, with ſo perfect a knowledge of the paſſions, the humours, and ſentiments of mankind. He painted all characters, from kings down to peaſants, with equal truth and equal force. If human nature were deſtroyed, and no monument were left of it except his works, other beings might know *what man was* from thoſe writings.

BOILEAU.

You ſay he painted all characters, from kings down to peaſants, with equal truth and equal force. I can't deny that he did ſo: but I wiſh he had not jumbled thoſe characters together, in the compoſition of his pictures, as he has frequently done.

POPE.

The ſtrange mixture of tragedy, comedy, and farce, in the ſame play, nay ſometimes in the ſame ſcene, I acknowledge to be quite inexcuſable. But this was the taſte of the times when Shakeſpear wrote.

BOILEAU.

A great genius ought to guide, not ſervilely follow, the taſte of his contemporaries.

POPE.

Conſider from how thick a darkneſs of barbariſm the genius of Shakeſpear broke forth! What were the Engliſh, and what (let me aſk you) were the French dramatic performances, in the age when he flouriſhed? The advances he made towards the higheſt perfection both of tragedy and comedy are amazing! In the principal points, in the power of exciting terror and pity, or raiſing laughter in an audience, none yet has excelled him, and very few have equalled.

BOILEAU.

Do you think that he was equal in comedy to Moliere?

POPE.

In *comic force* I do: but in the fine and delicate ſtrokes of ſatire, and what is called *genteel comedy*, he was greatly inferior

to that admirable writer. There is nothing in him to compare with the *Miſanthrope*, the *Ecole des Femmes*, or *Tartuffe*.

BOILEAU.

This, Mr. Pope, is a great deal for an Engliſhman to acknowledge. A veneration for Shakeſpear ſeems to be a part of your national religion, and the only part in which even your men of ſenſe are fanatics.

POPE.

He who can read Shakeſpear, and be cool enough for all the accuracy of ſober criticiſm, has more of reaſon than taſte.

BOILEAU.

I join with you in admiring him as a prodigy of genius, though I find the moſt ſhocking abſurdities in his plays; abſurdities which no critic of my nation can pardon.

POPE.

We will be ſatisfied with your feeling the excellence of his beauties. But you would admire him ſtill more, if you could ſee the chief characters in all his beſt tragedies repreſented by an actor, who appeared on the ſtage a little before I left the world. He has ſhewn the Engliſh nation more excellencies in Shakeſpear, than the quickeſt wits could diſcern, and has imprinted them on the heart with a livelier feeling than the moſt ſenſible natures had ever experienced without his help.

BOILEAU.

The variety, ſpirit, and force of Mr. Garrick's action have been much praiſed to me by many of his countrymen, whoſe ſhades I converſe with, and who agree in ſpeaking of him as we do of *Baron*, our moſt natural and moſt admired actor. I have alſo heard of another, who has now quitted the ſtage, but who had filled, with great dignity, force, and elevation, ſome tragic parts; and excelled ſo much in the comic, that none ever has deſerved a higher applauſe.

POPE.

POPE.

Mr. Quin was indeed a moſt perfect comedian. In the part of *Falſtaff* particularly, wherein the utmoſt force of Shakeſpear's *humour* appears, he attained to ſuch perfection, that he was not an actor; he was the man deſcribed by Shakeſpear; he was *Falſtaff* himſelf! When I ſaw him do it, the pleaſantry of the *fat knight* appeared to me ſo bewitching, all his vices were ſo mirthful, that I could not much wonder at his having ſeduced a young prince even to *rob* in his company.

BOILEAU.

That character is not well underſtood by the French. They ſuppoſe it belongs, not to comedy, but to farce: whereas the Engliſh ſee in it the fineſt and higheſt ſtrokes of wit and humour. Perhaps theſe different judgements may be accounted for, in ſome meaſure, by the diverſity of manners in different countries. But don't you allow, Mr. Pope, that our writers, both of tragedy and comedy, are, upon the whole, more perfect maſters of their art than your's? If you deny it, I will appeal to the Athenians, the only judges qualified to decide the diſpute. I will refer it to Euripides, Sophocles, and Menander.

POPE.

I am afraid of thoſe judges: for I ſee them continually walking hand in hand, and engaged in the moſt friendly converſation with Corneille, Racine, and Moliere. Our dramatic writers ſeem, in general, not ſo fond of their company: they ſometimes ſhove rudely by them, and give themſelves airs of ſuperiority. They ſlight their reprimands, and laugh at their precepts. In ſhort, they will be tried by *their country* alone; and that judicature is partial.

BOILEAU.

I will preſs this queſtion no farther.—But let me aſk you, to which of our rival tragedians, Racine and Corneille, do you give the preference?

POPE.

POPE.

The ſublimeſt plays of Corneille are, in my judgement, equalled by the Athalia of Racine; and the tender paſſions are certainly touched by that elegant and moſt pathetic writer, with a much finer hand. I need not add that he is infinitely more correct than Corneille, and more harmonious and noble in his verſification. Corneille formed himſelf entirely upon Lucan; but the maſter of Racine was Virgil. How much better a taſte had the former than the latter in chuſing his model!

BOILEAUX.

My friendſhip with Racine, and my partiality for his writings, make me hear with great pleaſure the preference given to him above Corneille by ſo judicious a critic.

POPE.

That he excelled his competitor in the particulars I have mentioned, can't I think be denied. But yet the ſpirit and the majeſty of ancient Rome were never ſo well expreſſed as by Corneille. Nor has any other French dramatic writer, in the general character of his works, ſhewn ſuch a maſculine ſtrength and greatneſs of thought.—Racine is the ſwan deſcribed by ancient poets, which riſes to the clouds on downy wings, and ſings a ſweet, but a gentle and plaintive note. Corneille is the eagle, which ſoars to the ſkies on bold and ſounding pinions, and fears not to perch on the ſceptre of Jupiter, or to bear in his pounces the lightning of the God.

BOILEAUX.

I am glad to find, Mr. Pope, that in praiſing Corneille you run into poetry, which is not the language of *ſober criticiſm*, though ſometimes uſed by Longinus.

POPE.

I caught the fire from the idea of Corneille.

BOILEAU.

He has bright flashes; yet I think that in *his thunder* there is often more *noise* than *fire*. Don't you find him too declamatory, too turgid, too unnatural, even in his best tragedies?

POPE.

I own I do—Yet the greatness and elevation of his sentiments, and the nervous vigour of his sense, atone, in my opinion, for all his faults. But let me now, in my turn, desire your opinion of our epic poet, Milton.

BOILEAU.

Longinus perhaps would prefer him to all other writers: for he surpasses even Homer in the *sublime*. But other critics, who require variety, and agreeableness, and a correct regularity of thought and judgement in an epic poem; who can endure no absurdities, no extravagant fictions, would place him far below Virgil.

POPE.

His genius was indeed so vast and sublime, that his poem seems beyond the limits of criticism; as his subject is beyond the limits of nature. The bright and excessive blaze of poetical fire, which shines in so many parts of the *Paradise Lost*, will hardly permit the dazzled eye to see its faults.

BOILEAU.

The taste of your countrymen is much changed since the days of Charles II, when Dryden was thought a greater poet than Milton!

POPE.

The politics of Milton at that time brought his poetry into disgrace: for it is a rule with the English; they see no good in a man whose politics they dislike. But, as their notions of government are apt to change, men of parts, whom they have slighted, become their favourite authors, and others, who have possest their warmest admiration, are in their turn under-valued. This revolution of favour

favour was experienced by Dryden as well as Milton. He lived to ſee his writings, together with his politics, quite out of faſhion. But even in the days of his higheſt proſperity, when the generality of the people admired his Almanzor, and thought his Indian Emperor the perfection of tragedy, the duke of Buckingham, and lord Rocheſter, the two wittieſt noblemen our country has produced, attacked his fame, and turned the rants of his heroes, the jargon of his ſpirits, and the abſurdity of his plots, into juſt ridicule.

BOILEAU.

You have made him good amends by the praiſe you have given him in ſome of your writings.

POPE.

I owed him that praiſe, as my maſter in the art of verſification. Yet I ſubſcribe to the cenſures which have been paſſed by other writers on many of his works. They are good critics, but he is ſtill a great poet. You, Sir, I am ſure, muſt particularly admire him as an excellent ſatiriſt. His *Abſalom and Achitophel* is a maſter-piece in that way of writing, and his *Mac Flecno* is, I think, inferior to it in nothing, but the meanneſs of the ſubject.

BOILEAU.

Did not you take the model of your *Dunciad* from the latter of thoſe very ingenious ſatires?

POPE.

I did—but my work is more extenſive than his, and my imagination has taken in it a greater ſcope.

BOILEAU.

Some critics may doubt whether the length of your poem was ſo properly ſuited to the meanneſs of the ſubject as the brevity of his. Three cantos to expoſe a dunce crowned with laurel! I have not given above three lines to the author of the *Pucelle*.

POPE.

POPE.

My intention was to expoſe, not one author alone, but all the dullneſs and falſe taſte of the Engliſh nation in my times. Could ſuch a deſign be contracted into a narrower compaſs?

BOILEAU.

We will not diſpute on this point, nor whether the hero of your *Dunciad* was really a dunce. But has not Dryden been accuſed of immorality and prophaneneſs in ſome of his writings?

POPE.

He has, with too much reaſon: and I am ſorry to ſay, that all our beſt comic writers after Shakeſpear and Jonſon, except Addiſon and Steele, are as liable as he to that heavy charge. Fletcher is ſhocking. Etheridge, Wycherly, Congreve, Vanburgh, and Farquhar, have painted the manners of the times in which they wrote, with a maſterly hand; but they are too often ſuch manners, that a virtuous man, and much more a virtuous woman, muſt be greatly offended at the repreſentation.

BOILEAU.

In this reſpect our ſtage is far preferable to your's. It is a ſchool of morality. Vice is expoſed to contempt and to hatred. No falſe colours are laid on, to conceal its deformity; but thoſe with which it paints itſelf are there taken off.

POPE.

It is a wonderful thing, that in France the *Comic Muſe* ſhould be *the graveſt lady in the nation*. Of late ſhe is ſo *grave*, that one might almoſt miſtake her for her ſiſter Melpomené. Moliere made her indeed a good moral philoſopher; but then ſhe philoſophized, like Democritus, with a merry laughing face. Now ſhe weeps over vice, inſtead of ſhewing it to mankind, as I think ſhe generally ought to do, in ridiculous lights.

BOILEAU.

Her buſineſs is more with folly than with vice; and when ſhe attacks the latter, it ſhould be rather with ridicule than invective. But ſometimes ſhe may be allowed to raiſe her voice, and change her uſual ſmile into a frown of juſt indignation.

POPE.

I like her beſt when ſhe ſmiles. But did you never reprove your witty friend La Fontaine for the vicious levity that appears in many of his Tales? He was as guilty of the crime of *debauching the Muſes*, as any of our comic poets.

BOILEAU.

I own he was was; and bewail the proſtitution of his genius, as I ſhould that of an innocent and beautiful country girl. He was all nature, all ſimplicity! yet in that ſimplicity there was a grace, and unaffected vivacity, with a juſtneſs of thought and eaſy elegance of expreſſion, that can hardly be found in any other writer. His *manner* is quite original, and peculiar to himſelf, though all the *matter* of his writings is borrowed from others.

POPE.

In that *manner* he has been imitated by my friend Mr. Prior.

BOILEAU.

He has, very ſucceſsfully. Some of Prior's tales have the ſpirit of La Fontaine's with more judgement, but not, I think, with ſuch an amiable and graceful ſimplicity.

POPE.

Prior's harp had more ſtrings than La Fontaine's. He was a fine poet in many different ways: La Fontaine but in one. And, though in ſome of his tales he imitated that author, his Alma was an original, and of ſingular beauty.

BOILEAU.

BOILEAU.

There is a writer of *heroic poetry*, who lived before Milton, and whom ſome of your countrymen place in the higheſt claſs of your poets, though he is little known in France. I ſee him ſometimes in company with Homer and Virgil, but oftener with Taſſo, Arioſto, and Dante.

POPE.

I underſtand you mean *Spenſer*. There is a force and beauty in ſome of his *images* and *deſcriptions*, equal to any in thoſe writers you have ſeen him converſe with. But he had not the art of properly *ſhading* his pictures. He brings the minute and diſagreeable parts too much into ſight; and mingles too frequently vulgar and mean ideas with noble and ſublime. Had he choſen a ſubject proper for *epic poetry*, he ſeems to have had a ſufficient elevation and ſtrength in his genius to make him *a great epic poet:* but the allegory, which is continued throughout the whole work, fatigues the mind, and cannot intereſt the heart ſo much as thoſe poems, the chief actors in which are ſuppoſed to have really exiſted. The Syrens and Circe in the Odyſſey are allegorical perſons; but Ulyſſes, the hero of the poem, was a man renowned in Greece, which makes the account of his adventures affecting and delightful. To be now and then in Fairy-land, among imaginary beings, is a pleaſing variety, and helps to diſtinguiſh the poet from the orator or hiſtorian: but to be always there, is irkſome.

BOILEAU.

Is not Spenſer likewiſe blameable for confounding the Chriſtian with the Pagan theology, in ſome parts of his poem?

POPE.

Yes; he had that fault in common with Dante, with Arioſto, and with Camoens.

BOILEAU.

Who is the poet that arrived ſoon after you in Elyſium, whom I ſaw Spenſer lead in and preſent to Virgil, as the author of a poem reſembling the *Georgics?* On his head was a garland of the ſeveral kinds of flowers that blow in each ſeaſon, with evergreens intermixed.

POPE.

Your deſcription points out *Thomſon*. He painted nature exactly, and with great ſtrength of pencil. His imagination was rich, extenſive, and ſublime: his diction bold and glowing, but ſometimes *obſcure* and *affected*. Nor did he always know when to *ſtop*, or what to *reject*.

BOILEAU.

I ſhould ſuppoſe that he wrote tragedies upon the *Greek model*. For he is often admitted into the grove of Euripides.

POPE.

He enjoys that diſtinction both as a *tragedian*, and as a *moraliſt*. For, not only in his plays, but all his other works, there is the pureſt *morality*, animated by *piety*, and rendered more touching by the fine and delicate ſentiments of a moſt *tender* and *benevolent heart*.

BOILEAU.

St. Evremond has brought me acquainted with Waller.—I was ſurprized to find in his writings a politeneſs and *gallantry* which the French ſuppoſe to be appropriated only to their's. His genius was a compoſition, which is ſeldom to be met with, of the *ſublime* and the *agreeable*. In his compariſon between himſelf and Apollo, as the lover of Daphne, and in that between Amoret and Sachariſſa, there is a *fineſſe* and delicacy of wit, which the moſt elegant of our writers have never exceeded. Nor had Sarrazin or Voiture the art of praiſing more *genteely* the ladies they admired. But his epiſtle to Cromwell,

and

and his poem on the death of that extraordinary man, are written with a force and greatneſs of manner, which give him rank among the poets of the firſt claſs.

POPE.

Mr. Waller was unqueſtionably a very fine writer. His Muſe was as well qualified as the Graces themſelves to dreſs out a Venus; and he could even adorn the brows of a conqueror with fragrant and beautiful wreaths. But he had ſome puerile and low thoughts, which unaccountably mixed with the elegant and the noble, like ſchool-boys or mob admitted into a palace. There was alſo an intemperance and a luxuriancy in his wit, which he did not enough reſtrain. He wrote little to the underſtanding, and leſs to the heart; but he frequently delights the imagination, and ſometimes ſtrikes it with flaſhes of the higheſt *ſublime*.—We had another poet of the age of Charles the Firſt, extreamly admired by all his contemporaries, in whoſe works there is ſtill more affectation of wit, a greater redundancy of imagination, a worſe taſte, and leſs judgement: but he touched the heart more, and had finer feelings than Waller.——I mean Cowley.

BOILEAU.

I have been often ſolicited to admire his writings by his learned friend Dr. Spratt. He ſeems to me a great wit, and a very amiable man, but not a good poet.

POPE.

The *ſpirit* of poetry is ſtrong in ſome of his odes; but in the *art* of poetry he is always extremely deficient.

BOILEAU.

I hear that of late his reputation is much lowered in the opinion of the Engliſh. Yet I cannot but think, that if a moderate portion of the ſuperfluities of his wit were given by Apollo to ſome of their modern bards, who write common-place morals in very ſmooth verſe, without any abſurdity, but without

without a ſingle new thought, or one enlivening ſpark of imagination, it would be a great favour to them, and do them more ſervice, than all the rules laid down in my Art of Poetry, and your's of Criticiſm.

POPE.

I am much of your mind.——But I left in England ſome poets, whom you, I know, will admire, not only for the harmony, and correctneſs of ſtyle, but the ſpirit, and genius, you will find in their writings.

BOILEAU.

France too has produced ſome very excellent writers, ſince the time of my death.——Of one particularly I hear wonders. Fame to him is as kind as if he had been dead a thouſand years. She brings his praiſes to me from all parts of Europe.——You know I ſpeak of Voltaire.

POPE.

I do: the Engliſh nation yields to none in admiration of his extenſive genius. Other writers excell in ſome one particular branch of wit or ſcience; but when the king of Pruſſia drew Voltaire from Paris to Berlin, he had a whole Academy of *Belles Lettres* in *him* alone.

BOILEAU.

That prince himſelf has ſuch talents for poetry as no other monarch, in any age or country, has ever poſſeſſed. What an aſtoniſhing compaſs muſt there be in his mind, what an heroic tranquillity and firmneſs in his heart, that he can, in the evening, compoſe an ode or epiſtle in the moſt elegant verſe, and the next morning fight a battle with the conduct of Cæſar, or Guſtavus Adolphus!

POPE.

I envy Voltaire ſo noble a ſubject both for his verſe and his proſe. But if that prince will write his own *Commentaries*, he will want no hiſtorian. I hope that in writing them, he will not

not reſtrain his pen, as Cæſar has done, to a mere account of his wars, but let us ſee the politician, and the benignant protector of arts and ſciences, as well as the warriour, in that picture of himſelf. Voltaire has ſhewn us, that the events of battles and ſieges are not the moſt intereſting parts of good hiſtory, but that all the improvements and embelliſhments of human ſociety ought to be carefully and particularly recorded there.

BOILEAU.

The progreſs of arts and knowledge, and the great changes that have happened in the manners of mankind, are objects far more worthy of a reader's attention than the revolutions of fortune. And it is chiefly to Voltaire that we owe this inſtructive ſpecies of hiſtory.

POPE.

He has not only been the father of it among the moderns, but has carried it himſelf to it's utmoſt perfection.

BOILEAU.

Is he not too *univerſal?* Can any writer be *exact*, who is ſo comprehenſive?

POPE.

A traveler round the world cannot inſpect every region with ſuch an accurate care, as exactly to deſcribe each ſingle part. If the outlines are well marked, and the obſervations on the principal points are judicious, it is all that can be required.

BOILEAU.

I would however adviſe and exhort the French and Engliſh youth, to take a fuller ſurvey of ſome particular provinces, and to remember, that although, in travels of this ſort, a lively imagination is a very agreeable companion, it is not the beſt guide. To ſpeak without a metaphor, the ſtudy of hiſtory, both ſacred and profane, requires a critical and laborious inveſtigation. The compoſer of a ſet of lively and witty remarks on facts ill examined, or incorrectly delivered, is not an hiſtorian.

POPE.

We cannot, I think, deny that name to the author of the Life of Charles the XIIth, king of Sweden.

BOILEAU.

No, certainly.—I eſteem it the very beſt hiſtory that this age has produced. As full of ſpirit as the hero whoſe actions it relates, it is nevertheleſs moſt exact in all matters of importance. The ſtyle of it is elegant, perſpicuous, unaffected; the diſpoſition and method are excellent, the judgements given by the writer acute and juſt.

POPE.

Are you not pleaſed with that philoſophical freedom of thought, which diſcovers itſelf in all the works of Voltaire, but more particularly in thoſe of an hiſtorical nature?

BOILEAU.

If it were properly regulated, I ſhould reckon it among their higheſt perfections. Superſtition, and bigotry, and party ſpirit, are as great enemies to the truth and candour of hiſtory, as malice or adulation. To think freely, is therefore a moſt neceſſary quality in a perfect hiſtorian. But all liberty has it's bounds, which, in ſome of his writings, Voltaire, I fear, has not obſerved. Would to heaven he would reflect, while it is yet in his power to correct what is faulty, that all his works will outlive him; that many nations will read them; and that the judgement pronounced here upon the writer himſelf will be according to the ſcope and tendency of them, and to the extent of their good or evil effects on the great ſociety of mankind!

POPE.

It would be well for all Europe, if ſome other *wits* of your country, who give the tone to this age in all polite literature, had the ſame ſerious thoughts you recommend to Voltaire. Witty writings, when directed to ſerve the good ends of virtue and religion, are like the lights hung out in a *pharos*, to guide the mariners ſafe through dangerous ſeas: but the

brightneſs of thoſe, that are impious or immoral, ſhines only to betray, and lead men to deſtruction.

BOILEAU.

Has England been free from all ſeductions of this nature?

POPE.

No.—But the French have the art of rendering vice and impiety more agreeable than the Engliſh.

BOILEAU.

I am not very proud of this ſuperiority in the talents of my countrymen. But, as I am told that the *good ſenſe* of the Engliſh is now admired in France, I hope it will ſoon convince both nations, *that true wiſdom is virtue, and true virtue is religion.*

POPE.

I think it alſo to be wiſhed, that a taſte for *the frivolous* may not continue too prevalent among the French. There is a great difference between gathering flowers at the foot of Parnaſſus, and aſcending the arduous heights of the mountain. The palms and laurels grow there; and if any of your countrymen aſpire to gain them, they muſt no longer enervate all the vigour of their minds by this habit of trifling. I would have them be perpetual competitors with the Engliſh in manly wit and ſubſtantial learning. But let the competition be friendly. There is nothing which ſo contracts and debaſes the mind as national envy. True wit, like true virtue, naturally loves its own image, in whatever place it is found.

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DIALOGUE XV.

OCTAVIA—PORTIA—ARRIA.

PORTIA.

HOW has it happened, Octavia, that Arria and I, who have a higher rank than you in the temple of Fame, ſhould have a lower here in Elyſium? We are told, that the virtues,