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The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

XX. Alexander The Great - Charles the Twelfth, King of Sweden.

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MERCURY.

No: one was a Spartan foldier, and the other an English farmer.—I see you both look astonifhed. But what I tell you is truth. Labour and hunger gave a relifh to the *black broth* of the former, and the *ſalt beef* of the latter, beyond what you ever found in the *tripotaniums* or *ham pyes*, that vainly ſtimulated your forced and languid appetites, which perpetual indolence weakened, and conſtant luxury overcharged.

DARTENEUR.

This, Apicius, is more mortifying than not to have ſhared a turtle feaſt.

APICIUS.

I wiſh, Mercury, you had taught me your *art of cookery* in my life-time: but it is a ſad thing not to know what *good living* is till after one is *dead*.

DIALOGUE XX.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT.

CHARLES the Twelfth, King of Sweden.

ALEXANDER.

YOUR majeſty ſeems in great wrath! Who has offended you?

CHARLES.

The offence is to you as much as me. Here is a fellow admitted into Elyſium, who has affronted us both: an Engliſh poet, one Pope. He has called us *two madmen*!

Pope's Eſſay
on Man, ep.
3v. l. 229, 20.

ALEXANDER.

I have been unlucky in poets. No prince ever was fonder of the Muſes than I, or has received from them a more ungrateful

grateful return! When I was alive, I declared that I envied Achilles, because he had a Homer to celebrate his exploits; and I most bountifully rewarded Chœrilus, a pretender to poetry, for writing verses on mine: but my liberality, instead of doing me honour, has since drawn upon me the ridicule of Horace, a witty Roman poet; and Lucan, another versifier of the same nation, has loaded my memory with the harshest invectives.

CHARLES.

I know nothing of these; but I know that in my time, a pert French satirist, one Boileau, made so free with your character, that I tore his book for having abused my favourite hero. And now this saucy Englishman has libelled us both. —But I have a proposal to make to you for the reparation of our honour. If you will join with me, we will turn all these insolent scribblers out of Elysium, and throw them down headlong to the bottom of Tartarus, in spite of Pluto and all his guards.

ALEXANDER.

This is just such a scheme as that you formed at Bender, to maintain yourself there, with the aid of three hundred Swedes, against the whole force of the Ottoman empire. And I must say, that such follies gave the English poet too much cause to call you a madman.

CHARLES.

If my heroism was madness, your's, I presume, was not wisdom.

ALEXANDER.

There was a vast difference between your conduct and mine. Let poets or declaimers say what they will, history shews, that I was not only the bravest foldier, but one of the ablest commanders the world has ever seen. Whereas you, by imprudently leading your army into vast and barren deserts, at the approach of the winter, exposed it to perish in its march for

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a See Porriatowski's remarks on Voltaire's History of Charles XII.

want of subsistence, lost your artillery, lost a great number of your soldiers, and were forced to fight with the Muscovites under such disadvantages, as made it almost impossible for you to conquer.

C H A R L E S.

I will not dispute your superiority as a general. It is not for me, a mere mortal, to contend with the *son of Jupiter Ammon*.

A L E X A N D E R.

I suppose you think my pretending that *Jupiter* was my father as much entitles me to the name of a madman, as your extravagant behaviour at Bender does you. But you are greatly mistaken. It was not my vanity, but my policy, which set up that pretension. When I proposed to undertake the conquest of Asia, it was necessary for me to appear to the people something more than a man. They had been used to the idea of *demigod heroes*. I therefore claimed an equal descent with Osiris and Sesostris, with Bacchus and Hercules, the former conquerors of the East. The opinion of my divinity assisted my arms, and subdued all nations before me, from the Granicus to the Ganges. But, though I called myself *the son of Jupiter*, and kept up the veneration that name inspired, by a courage which seemed more than human, and by the sublime magnanimity of all my behaviour, I did not forget that I was *the son of Philip*. I used the policy of my father, and the wise lessons of Aristotle, whom he had made my preceptor, in the conduct of all my great designs. It was *the son of Philip* who planted Greek colonies in Asia, as far as the Indies; who formed projects of trade more extensive than his empire itself; who laid the foundations of them in the midst of his wars; who built Alexandria, to be the centre and staple of commerce between Europe, Asia, and Africk; who sent Nearchus to navigate the unknown Indian seas, and intended to have gone himself from those seas to the pillars of Hercules,

Hercules, that is, to have explored the passage round Africk, the discovery of which has since been so glorious to Vasco de Gama. It was *the son of Philip*, who, after subduing the Persians, governed them with such lenity, such justice, and such wisdom, that they loved him even more than ever they had loved their natural kings; and who, by intermarriages, and all methods that could best establish a coalition between the conquerors and the conquered, united them into one people. But what, sir, did you do, to advance the trade of your subjects, to procure any benefit to those you had vanquished, or to convert any enemy into a friend?

See Plutarch's Life of Alexander.

CHARLES.

I might easily have made myself king of Poland, and was advised to do so, by count Piper, my favourite minister; I generously gave that kingdom to Stanislaus, as you had given a great part of your conquest in India to Porus, besides his own dominions, which you restored to him entire, after you had beaten his army and taken him captive.

ALEXANDER.

I gave him the government of those countries under me, and as my lieutenant; which was the best method of preserving my power in conquests, where I could not leave garrisons sufficient to maintain them. The same policy was afterwards practised by the Romans, who of all conquerors, except me, were the greatest politicians. But neither was I, nor were they, so extravagant, as to conquer only for others, or dethrone kings with no view, but merely to have the pleasure of bestowing their crowns on some of their subjects, without any advantage to ourselves. Nevertheless, I will own, that my expedition to India was an exploit of *the son of Jupiter*, not of *the son of Philip*. I had done better if I had staid to give more consistency to my Persian and Grecian empires, instead of attempting new conquests, and at such a distance, so soon.

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Yet even this war was of use to hinder my troops from being corrupted by the effeminacy of Asia, and to keep up that universal awe of my name, which in those countries was the great support of my power.

CHARLES.

In the unwearied activity with which I proceeded from one enterprize to another, I dare call myself your equal. Nay, I may pretend to higher glory than you, because you only went on from victory to victory; but the greatest losses were not able to diminish my ardour, or stop the efforts of my daring and invincible spirit.

ALEXANDER.

You shewed in adversity much more magnanimity than you did in prosperity. How unworthy of a prince who imitated me was your behaviour to the king your arms had vanquished! The compelling Augustus to write himself a letter of congratulation to one of his vassals, whom you had placed in his throne, was the very reverse of my treatment of Porus and Darius. It was an ungenerous insult upon his ill fortune! It was the triumph of a little and a low mind! The visit you made him immediately after that insult was a farther contempt, offensive to him, and both useless and dangerous to yourself.

CHARLES.

I feared no danger from it.—I knew he durst not use the power I gave him to hurt me.

ALEXANDER.

If his resentment, in that instant, had prevailed over his fear, as it was likely to do, you would have perished deservedly by your insolence and presumption. For my part, intrepid as I was in all dangers which I thought it was necessary or proper for me to meet, I never put myself one moment in the power of an enemy whom I had offended. But you had the rashness of *folly* as well as of *heroism*. A false opinion conceived of
your

See Vol-
taire's
Charles XII.

your enemy's weakness proved at last your undoing. When, in answer to some reasonable propositions of peace, sent to you by the czar, you said, "*You would come and treat with him at Moscow;*" he replied very justly, "*That you affected to act like Alexander, but should not find in him a Darius.*" And, doubtless, you ought to have been better acquainted with the character of that prince. Had Persia been governed by a *Peter Alexowitz* when I made war against it, I should have acted more cautiously, and not have counted so much on the superiority of my troops, in valour and discipline, over an army commanded by a king, who was so capable of instructing them in all they wanted.

CHARLES.

The battle of Narva, won by eight thousand Swedes against fourscore thousand Muscovites, seemed to authorize my contempt of the nation and their prince.

ALEXANDER.

It happened that their prince was not present in that battle. But he had not as yet had the time, which was necessary to instruct his barbarous soldiers. You gave him that time, and he made so good a use of it, that you found at Pultowa the Muscovites become a different nation. If you had followed the blow you gave them at Narva, and marched directly to Moscow, you might have destroyed their Hercules in his cradle. But you suffered him to grow, till his strength was mature, and then acted as if he had been still in his childhood.

CHARLES.

I must confess you excelled me in conduct, in policy, and in true magnanimity. But my liberality was not inferior to your's; and neither you nor any mortal ever surpassed me in the enthusiasm of courage. I was also free from those vices which sullied your character. I never was drunk; I killed no friend in the riot of a feast; I fired no palace at the instigation of a harlot.

ALEX.

See Plu-
tarch's Mo-
rals and Xe-
nophon.

See Vol-
taire's
Charles XII.

It may perhaps be admitted as some excuse for my drunkenness, that the Persians esteemed it an excellence in their kings to be able to drink a great quantity of wine, and the Macedonians were far from thinking it a dishonour. But you were as frantic, and as cruel, when sober, as I was, when drunk. You were sober when you resolved to continue in Turkey against the will of your host, the *grand signor*. You were sober when you commanded the unfortunate Patkull, whose only crime was his having maintained the liberties of his country, and who bore the sacred character of an ambassador, to be broken alive on the wheel, against the laws of nations, and those of humanity, more inviolable still to a generous mind. You were likewise sober when you wrote to the senate of Sweden, who, upon a report of your death, endeavoured to take some care of your kingdom, *That you would send them one of your boots, and from that they should receive their orders, if they pretended to meddle in government*: an insult much worse than any the Macedonians complained of from me, when I was most heated with wine and with adulation! As for my chastity, it was not so perfect as your's, though on some occasions I obtained great praise for my continence: but, perhaps, if you had been not quite so insensible to the charms of the fair sex, it would have mitigated and softened the fierceness, the pride, and the obstinacy of your nature.

C H A R L E S.

It would have softened me into a woman, or, what I think still more contemptible, the slave of a woman. But you seem to insinuate that you never were cruel or frantic unless when you were drunk. This I absolutely deny.—You were not drunk, when you crucified Hephæstion's physician, for not curing a man who killed himself by his intemperance in his sickness; nor when you sacrificed to the manes of that fa-
vourite.

See Plu-
tarch's Life
of Alex-
ander.

yourite officer the whole nation of Cusseans, men, women, and children, who were entirely innocent of his death; because you had read in Homer, that Achilles had immolated some Trojan captives on the tomb of Patroclus. I could mention other proofs that your passions inflamed you as much as wine: but these are sufficient.

ALEXANDER.

I can't deny that my passions were sometimes so violent as to deprive me for a while of the use of my reason; especially when the pride of such amazing successes, the servitude of the Persians, and barbarian flattery, had intoxicated my mind. To bear, at my age, with continual moderation, such fortune as mine, was hardly inhuman nature. As for you, there was an excess and intemperance in your virtues, which turned them all into vices. And one virtue you wanted, which in a prince is very commendable, and beneficial to the public, I mean the love of science and of the elegant arts. Under my care and patronage they were carried in Greece to their utmost perfection. Aristotle, Apelles, and Lyfippus, were among the glories of my reign: your's was illustrated only by battles.—Upon the whole, though, from some resemblance between us, I should naturally be inclined to decide in your favour, yet I must give the priority in renown to your enemy, Peter Alexowitz. That great monarch *raised* his country; You *ruined* your's. He was a *legislator*; you were a *tyrant*.

DIALOGUE XXI.

Cardinal XIMENES—Cardinal WOLSEY.

WOLSEY.

YOU seem to look on me, Ximenes, with an air of superiority, as if I was not your equal. Have you forgotten that I was the favourite and first minister of a great king of England?