



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

The Works of George Lord Lyttleton

Lyttelton, George <Lord>

London, 1774

XXVI. Cadmus - Hercules.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-50364](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-50364)

must take the pencil of Guercino or Salvator Rosa. But the most agreeable imagination can hardly figure to itself a more pleasing scene of private and public felicity, than will naturally result from the Union, if all the prejudices against it, and all distinctions that may tend, on either side, to keep up an idea of separate interests, or to revive a sharp remembrance of national animosities, can be removed.

DOUGLAS.

If they can be removed! I think it impossible they can be retained. To resist the Union is indeed to rebel against nature. —She has joined the two countries, has fenced them both with the sea, against the invasion of all other nations; but has laid them entirely open the one to the other. Accursed be he who endeavours to divide them.—*What God has joined, let no man put asunder.*

The three following DIALOGUES are by another hand.

DIALOGUE XXVI.

CADMUS — HERCULES.

CADMUS.

DO you pretend to sit as high on Olympus as Hercules? did you kill the Nemean lion, the Erymanthian boar, the Lernean serpent, and Stymphalian birds? did you destroy tyrants and robbers? You value yourself greatly on subduing one serpent: I did as much as that while I lay in my cradle.

CADMUS.

It is not on account of the serpent I boast myself a greater benefactor to Greece than you. Actions should be valued by their utility rather than their éclat. I taught Greece the art of writing, to which laws owe their precision and permanency.

You

You subdued monsters; I civilized men. It is from untamed passions, not from wild beasts, that the greatest evils arise to human society. By wisdom, by art, by the united strength of civil community, men have been enabled to subdue the whole race of lions, bears, and serpents, and, what is more, to bind in laws and wholesome regulations the ferocious violence and dangerous treachery of the human disposition. Had lions been destroyed only in single combat, men had had but a bad time of it; and what but laws could awe the men who killed the lions? The genuine glory, the proper distinction of the rational species, arises from the perfection of the mental powers. Courage is apt to be fierce, and strength is often exerted in acts of oppression. But wisdom is the associate of justice; it assists her to form equal laws, to pursue right measures, to correct power, protect weakness, and to unite individuals in a common interest and general welfare. Heroes may kill tyrants; but it is wisdom and laws that prevent tyranny and oppression. The operations of policy far surpass the labours of Hercules, preventing many evils which valour and might cannot even redress. You heroes consider nothing but glory, and hardly regard whether the conquests which raise your fame are really beneficial to your country. Unhappy are the people who are governed by valour, not by prudence, and not mitigated by the gentle arts!

HERCULES.

I do not expect to find an admirer of my strenuous life in the man who taught his countrymen to sit still and read, and to lose the hours of youth and action in idle speculation and the sport of words.

CADMUS.

An ambition to have a place in the registers of fame is the Eurystheus which imposes heroic labours on mankind. The Muses incite to action, as well as entertain the hours of repose; and I think you should honour them for presenting to heroes

T t t

such

such a noble recreation, as may prevent their taking up *the distaff*, when they lay down the club.

HERCULES.

Wits as well as heroes can take up *the distaff*. What think you of their thin-spun systems of philosophy, or lascivious poems, or Milesian fables? Nay, what is still worse, are there not panegyrics on tyrants, and books that blaspheme the gods, and perplex the natural sense of right and wrong? I believe, if Euristheus was to set me to work again, he would find me a worse task than any he imposed; he would make me read through a great library; and I would serve it as I did the Hydra, I would burn as I went on, that one chimera might not rise from another, to plague mankind. I should have valued myself more on clearing the library, than on cleansing the Augean stables.

CADMUS.

It is in those libraries only that the memory of your labours exists. The heroes of Marathon, the patriots of Thermopylæ, owe their immortality to me. All the wise institutions of lawgivers, and all the doctrines of sages, had perished in the ear, like a dream related, if letters had not preserved them. Oh Hercules! it is not for the man who preferred virtue to pleasure to be an enemy to the Muses. Let Sardanapalus, and the silken sons of luxury, who have wasted life in inglorious ease, despise the records of action, which bear no honourable testimony to their lives. But true merit, heroic virtue, each genuine offspring of immortal Jove, should honour the sacred source of lasting fame.

HERCULES.

Indeed, if writers employed themselves only in recording the acts of great men, much might be said in their favour. But why do they trouble people with their meditations? can it signify to the world what an idle man has been thinking?

5

CADMUS.

Yes it may. The most important and extensive advantages mankind enjoy are greatly owing to men who have never quitted their closets. To them mankind is obliged for the facility and security of navigation. The invention of the compass has opened to them new worlds. The knowledge of the mechanical powers has enabled them to construct such wonderful machines, as perform what the united labour of millions by the severest drudgery could not accomplish. Agriculture too, the most useful of arts, has received it's share of improvement from the same source. Poetry likewise is of excellent use, to enable the memory to retain with more ease, and to imprint with more energy upon the heart, precepts of virtue and virtuous actions. Since we left the world, from the little root of a few letters, science has spread it's branches over all nature, and raised its head to the heavens. Some philosophers have entered so far into the counsels of Divine Wisdom, as to explain much of the great operations of nature. The dimensions and distances of the planets, the causes of their revolutions, the path of comets, and the ebbing and flowing of tides, are understood and explained. Can any thing raise the glory of the human species more, than to see a little creature, inhabiting a small spot, amidst innumerable worlds, taking a survey of the universe, comprehending its arrangement, and entering into the scheme of that wonderful connexion and correspondence of things so remote, and which it seems the utmost exertion of Omnipotence to have established? What a volume of wisdom, what a noble theology, do these discoveries open to us! While some superior geniuses have soared to these sublime subjects, other sagacious and diligent minds have been enquiring into the most minute works of the infinite Artificer: the same care, the same providence, is exerted thro' the whole, and we should learn from it that to true wisdom, utility and fitness appear perfection, and whatever is beneficial is noble.

TIT 2

HERCULES.

HERCULES.

I approve of science as far as it is assistant to action. I like the improvement of navigation, and the discovery of the greater part of the globe, because it opens a wider field for the master spirits of the world to baffle in.

CADMUS.

There spoke the soul of Hercules. But if learned men are to be esteemed for the assistance they give to active minds in their schemes, they are not less to be valued for their endeavours to give them a right direction, and moderate their too great ardour. The study of history will teach the warrior and the legislator by what means armies have been victorious, and states have become powerful; and in the private citizen, they will inculcate the love of liberty and order. The writings of sages point out a private path of virtue, and shew that the best empire is self-government, and subduing our passions the noblest of conquests.

HERCULES.

The true spirit of heroism acts by a sort of inspiration, and wants neither the experience of history, nor the doctrines of philosophers, to direct it. But do not arts and sciences render men effeminate, luxurious, and inactive; and can you deny that wit and learning are often made subservient to very bad purposes?

CADMUS.

I will own that there are some natures so happily formed, they hardly want the assistance of a master, and the rules of art, to give them force or grace in every thing they do. But these heaven-inspired geniuses are few. As learning flourishes only where ease, plenty, and mild government subsist, in so rich a soil, and under so soft a climate, the weeds of luxury will spring up among the flowers of art; but the spontaneous weeds would grow more rank, if they were allowed the undisturbed possession of the field. Letters keep a frugal tem-
perate

perate nation from growing ferocious, a rich one from becoming entirely sensual and debauched. Every gift of the gods is sometimes abused; but wit and fine talents by a natural law gravitate towards virtue: accidents may drive them out of their proper direction; but such accidents are a sort of prodigies, and, like other prodigies, it is an alarming omen, and of dire portent to the times. For if virtue cannot keep to her allegiance those men, who in their hearts confess her divine right, and know the value of her laws, on whose fidelity and obedience can she depend? May such geniuses never descend to flatter vice, encourage folly, or propagate irreligion; but exert all their powers in the service of virtue, and celebrate the noble choice of those, who, like you, preferred her to pleasure!

D I A L O G U E XXVII.

MERCURY—And a modern fine LADY.

MRS. MODISH.

INDEED, Mr. Mercury, I cannot have the pleasure of waiting upon you now. I am engaged, absolutely engaged.

MERCURY.

I know you have an amiable affectionate husband, and several fine children; but you need not be told, that neither conjugal attachments, maternal affections, nor even the care of a kingdom's welfare or a nation's glory, can excuse a person who has received a summons to the realms of death. If the grim messenger was not as peremptory as unwelcome, Charon would not get a passenger (except now and then an hypochondriacal Englishman) once in a century. You must be content to leave your husband and family, and pass the Styx.

MRS.