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The Works Of Alexander Pope Esq.

In Nine Volumes Complete. With His Last Corrections, Additions, And Improvements; As they were delivered to the Editor a little before his Death

Being The Third of his Letters

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

VI. Dr. Swift to Mr. Gay.

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may have been soured by personal ill treatment, or by melancholy prospects for the public, I am too much a politician to expose my own safety by offensive words. And, if my genius and spirit be sunk by encreasing years, I have at least enough discretion left, not to mistake the measure of my own abilities, by attempting subjects where those Talents are necessary, which perhaps I may have lost with my youth.

L E T T E R VI.

Dr. SWIFT to Mr. GAY.

Dublin, Jan. 8, 1722-3.

C O M I N G home after a short Christmas ramble, I found a letter upon my table, and little expected when I opened it to read your name at the bottom. The best and greatest part of my life, until these last eight years, I spent in England; there I made my friendships, and there I left my desires. I am condemned for ever to another country; what is in prudence to be done? I think, to be *oblitusque meorum, obliviscendus & illis*. What can be the design of your letter but malice, to wake me out of a scurvy sleep, which however is better
D than

than none? I am towards nine years older since I left you, yet that is the least of my alterations; my business, my diversions, my conversations, are all entirely changed for the worse, and so are my studies and my amusements in writing; yet, after all, this humdrum way of life might be passable enough, if you would let me alone. I shall not be able to relish my wine, my parsons, my horses, nor my garden for three months, until the spirit you have raised shall be dispossessed. I have sometimes wondered that I have not visited you, but I have been stopt by too many reasons, besides years and laziness, and yet these are very good ones. Upon my return after half a year amongst you, there would be to me *Desiderio nec pudor nec modus*. I was three years reconciling myself to the scene, and the business, to which fortune hath condemned me, and stupidity was what I had recourse to. Besides, what a figure should I make in London, while my friends are in poverty, exile, distress, or imprisonment, and my enemies with rods of iron? Yet I often threaten myself with the journey, and am every summer practising to get health to bear it: The only inconvenience is, that I grow old in the experiment. Although I care not to talk to you as a Divine, yet I hope you have not been author of your colic: do you drink bad wine, or keep
bad

bad company? Are you not as many years older as I? It will not be always *Et tibi quos mibi dempsert Apponet annos*. I am heartily sorry you have any dealings with that ugly distemper, and I believe our friend Arbuthnot will recommend you to temperance and exercise. I wish they could have as good an effect upon the giddiness I am subject to, and which this moment I am not free from. I should have been glad if you had lengthened your letter by telling me the present condition of many of my old acquaintance, Congreve, Arbuthnot, Lewis, &c. but you mention only Mr. Pope, who I believe is lazy, or else he might have added three lines of his own. I am extremely glad he is not in your case of needing great mens favour, and could heartily wish that you were in his. I have been considering why Poets have such ill success in making their Court, since they are allowed to be the greatest and best of all flatterers: The defect is, that they flatter only in print or in writing, but not by word of mouth: They will give things under their hand which they make a conscience of speaking. Besides, they are too libertine to haunt anti-chambers, too poor to bribe Porters and footmen, and too proud to cringe to second-hand favourites in a great family. Tell me, are you not under Original sin by the dedication of your

Eclogues to Lord Bolingbroke? I am an ill Judge at this distance; and besides, am, for my ease, utterly ignorant of the commonest things that pass in the world; but if all Courts have a sameness in them (as the Parsons phrase it) things may be as they were in my time, when all employments went to Parliament-mens Friends, who had been useful in Elections, and there was always a huge List of names in arrears at the Treasury, which would at least take up your seven years expedient to discharge even one half. I am of opinion, if you will not be offended, that the surest course would be to get your Friend who lodgeth in your house to recommend you to the next chief Governor who comes over here for a good civil employment, or to be one of his Secretaries, which your Parliament-men are fond enough of, when there is no room at home. The wine is good and reasonable; you may dine twice a week at the Deanry-house; there is a sett of company in this town sufficient for one man; folks will admire you, because they have read you, and read of you; and a good employment will make you live tolerably in London, or sumptuously here; or if you divide between both places, it will be for your health.

I wish I could do more than say I love you. I left you in a good way both for the late
Court,

FROM DR. SWIFT, etc. 37

Court, and the Successors; and by the force of too much honesty or too little sublunary wisdom, you fell between two stools. Take care of your health and money; be less modest and more active; or else turn Parson and get a Bishoprick here: Would to God they would send us as good ones from your side!

I am ever, &c.

LETTER VII.

Mr. POPE to Dr. SWIFT.

Jan. 12, 1723.

I Find a rebuke in a late Letter of yours, that both stings and pleaseth me extremely. Your saying that I ought to have writ a Postscript to my friend Gay's, makes me not content to write less than a whole Letter; and your seeming to take his kindly, gives me hopes you will look upon this as a sincere effect of Friendship. Indeed as I cannot but own the Laziness with which you tax me, and with which I may equally charge you, for both of us have had (and one of us hath both had and givenⁱ) a Surfeit of writing; so I

ⁱ Alluding to his large work on Homer.