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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

VIII. From the L. Bolingbroke, a postscript to the foregoing letter, with some account of his own sentiments and situation in private life.

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L E T T E R V I I I .

L O R D B O L I N G B R O K E t o D r . S W I F T .

I Am not so lazy as Pope, and therefore you must not expect from me the same indulgence to Laziness; in defending his own cause he pleads yours, and becomes your Advocate while he appeals to you as his Judge: You will do the same on your part; and I, and the rest of your common Friends, shall have great justice to expect from two such righteous Tribunals: You resemble perfectly the two Alehouse-keepers in Holland, who were at the same time Burgomasters of the Town, and taxed one another's Bills alternately. I declare before-hand I will not stand to the award; my Title to your Friendship is good, and wants neither Deeds nor Writings to confirm it: but annual Acknowledgments at least are necessary to preserve it: and I begin to suspect by your defrauding me of them, that you hope in time to dispute it, and to urge Prescription against me. I would not say one word to you about myself (since it is a subject on which you appear to have no curiosity) was it not to try how far the contrast between Pope's fortune and manner of life, and mine, may be carried.

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I have been, then, infinitely more uniform and less dissipated than when you knew me and cared for me. That Love which I used to scatter with some profusion among the female kind, has been these many years devoted to one object. A great many misfortunes (for so they are called, though sometimes very improperly) and a retirement from the world, have made that just and nice discrimination between my Acquaintance and my Friends, which we have seldom sagacity enough to make for our selves; those insects of various hues, which used to hum and buz about me while I stood in the sunshine, have disappeared since I lived in the shade. No man comes to a Hermitage but for the sake of the Hermit; a few philosophical Friends come often to mine, and they are such as you would be glad to live with, if a dull climate and duller company have not altered you extremely from what you was nine years ago.

The hoarse voice of Party was never heard in this quiet place; Gazettes and Pamphlets are banished from it, and if the Lucubrations of Isaac Bickerstaff be admitted, this distinction is owing to some strokes by which it is judged that this illustrious Philosopher had (like the Indian Fohu, the Grecian Pythagoras, the Persian Zoroaster, and others his Precursors among
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the Zabians, Magians, and the Egyptian Seers) both his outward and his inward Doctrine, and that he was of no side at the bottom. When I am there, I forget I ever was of any party myself; nay, I am often so happily absorbed by the abstracted reason of things, that I am ready to imagine there never was any such monster as Party. Alas, I am soon awakened from that pleasing dream by the Greek and Roman Historians, by Guicciardine, by Machiavel, and Thuanus; for I have vowed to read no History of our own country, till that body of it which you promise to finish, appears ⁿ.

I am under no apprehension that a glut of Study and Retirement should cast me back into the hurry of the world; on the contrary, the single regret which I ever feel, is that I fell so late into this course of life; my Philosophy grows confirmed by habit, and if you and I meet again, I will extort this approbation, from you: *Jam non consilio bonus, sed more eo perductus, ut non tantum recte facere possim, sed nisi recte facere non possim.* The little incivilities I have met with from opposite sets of people, have been so far from rendering me violent or sour to any, that I think myself obliged to them all; some have cured me of my fears, by shewing me how impotent the malice of the

ⁿ See the first note on Lett. V. of this Vol.

world

world is; others have cured me of my hopes, by shewing how precarious popular friendships are; all have cured me of surprize: In driving me out of party, they have driven me out of cursed company; and in stripping me of Titles and Rank, and Estate, and such trinkets, which every man that will may spare, they have given me that which no man can be happy without.

Reflection and habit have rendered the world so indifferent to me, that I am neither afflicted nor rejoiced, angry nor pleased at what happens in it, any farther than personal friendships interest me in the affairs of it, and this principle extends my cares but a little way. Perfect Tranquillity is the general tenour of my life: good digestions, serene weather, and some other mechanic springs, wind me above it now and then, but I never fall below it; I am sometimes gay, but I am never sad. I have gained new friends, and have lost some old ones; my acquisitions of this kind give me a good deal of pleasure, because they have not been made lightly: I know no vows so solemn as those of friendship, and therefore a pretty long noviciate of acquaintance should methinks precede them: My losses of this kind give me but little trouble, I contributed nothing to them, and a friend who breaks with me unjustly, is not worth preserving. As soon as I
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leave this Town (which will be in a few days) I shall fall back into that course of life, which keeps knaves and fools at a great distance from me: I have an aversion to them both, but in the ordinary course of life I think I can bear the sensible knave better than the fool. One must indeed with the former be in some or other of the attitudes of those wooden men whom I have seen before a sword-cutler's shop in Germany; but even in these constrained postures the witty Rascal will divert me; and he that diverts me does me a great deal of good, and lays me under an obligation to him, which I am not obliged to pay him in another coin: The Fool obliges me to be almost as much upon my guard as the knave, and he makes me no amends; he numbs me like the Torpor, or he teazes me like the Fly. This is the Picture of an old Friend, and more like him than that will be which you once asked, and which he will send you, if you continue still to desire it. —Adieu, dear Swift, with all thy faults I love thee intirely; make an effort, and love me on with all mine.

L E T T E R