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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

XL. Lord Bolingbroke to Dr. Swift; A review of his life, his thoughts of œconomy, and concerning fame.

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LETTER XL.

LORD BOLINGBROKE TO DR. SWIFT.

Brussels, Sept. 27, 1729.

I Have brought your French acquaintance thus far on her way into her own country, and considerably better in health than she was when she went to Aix. I begin to entertain hopes that she will recover such a degree of health as may render old age supportable. Both of us have closed the tenth Luster, and it is high time to determine how we shall play the last act of the Farce. Might not my life be entituled much more properly a *What-d'ye-call-it* than a *Farce*? some Comedy, a great deal of Tragedy, and the whole interspersed with scenes of Harlequin, Scaramouch, and Dr. Baloardo, the prototype of your Hero. — I used to think sometimes formerly of old age and of death: enough to prepare my mind, not enough to anticipate sorrow, to dash the joys of youth, and to be all my life a dying. I find the benefit of this practice now, and find it more as I proceed on my journey: little regret when I look backwards, little apprehension when I look forward. You complain grievously of your situation in Ireland: I would complain of mine too in England, but I will
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not, nay, I ought not; for I find by long experience that I can be unfortunate without being unhappy. I do not approve your joining together the *figure of living*, and the *pleasure of giving*, tho' your old prating friend Montagne does something like it in one of his Rhapsodies. To tell you my reasons would be to write an Essay, and I shall hardly have time to write a Letter; but if you will come over, and live with Pope and me, I'll shew you in an instant why those two things should not *aller de pair*, and that forced retrenchments on both may be made, without making us even uneasy. You know that I am too expensive, and all mankind knows that I have been cruelly plundered; and yet I feel in my mind the power of descending without anxiety two or three stages more. In short (Mr. Dean) if you will come to a certain farm in Middlesex, you shall find that I can live frugally without growling at the world, or being peevish with those whom fortune has appointed to eat my bread, instead of appointing me to eat theirs; and yet I have naturally as little disposition to frugality as any man alive. You say you are no philosopher, and I think you are in the right to dislike a word which is so often abused; but I am sure you like to follow reason, not custom, (which is sometimes the reason and ost-
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ner the caprice of others, of the mob of the world.) Now to be sure of doing this, you must wear your philosophical spectacles as constantly as the Spaniards used to wear theirs. You must make them part of your dress, and sooner part with your broad-brimm'd beaver, your gown, your scarf, or even that emblematical vestment your surplice. Thro' this medium you will see few things to be vexed at, few persons to be angry at: and yet there will frequently be things which we ought to wish altered, and persons whom we ought to wish hanged.

In your letter to Pope, you agree that a regard for Fame becomes a man more towards his Exit, than at his entrance into life; and yet you confess, that the longer you live, the more you grow indifferent about it. Your sentiment is true and natural; your reasoning, I am afraid, is not so upon this occasion. Prudence will make us desire Fame, because it gives us many real and great advantages in all the affairs of life. Fame is the wise man's means; his ends are his own good, and the good of society. You Poets and Orators have inverted this order; you propose Fame as the end; and good, or at least great actions, as the means. You go further: You teach our self-love to anticipate the applause which we suppose will be
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paid by posterity to our names; and with idle notions of immortality you turn other heads besides your own: I am afraid this may have done some harm in the world.

Fame is an object which men pursue successfully by various and even contrary courses. Your doctrine leads them to look on this end as essential, and on the means as indifferent; so that Fabricius and Crassus, Cato and Cæsar pressed forward to the same goal. After all perhaps it may appear, from a consideration of the depravity of mankind, that you could do no better, nor keep up virtue in the world without calling this passion or this direction of self-love, in to your aid: *Tacitus* has crowded this excuse for you, according to his manner, into a maxim, *Contemptu famæ, contemni virtutes*. But now whether we consider Fame as an useful instrument in all the occurrences of private and public life, or whether we consider it as the cause of that pleasure which our self-love is so fond of; methinks our entrance into life, or (to speak more properly) our youth, not our old age, is the season when we ought to desire it most, and therefore when it is most becoming to desire it with ardor. If it is useful, it is to be desired most when we have, or may hope to have, a long scene of action open before us: Towards our exit, this
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scene of action is or should be closed ; and then, methinks, it is unbecoming to grow fonder of a thing which we have no longer occasion for. If it is pleasant, the sooner we are in possession of fame the longer we shall enjoy this pleasure. When it is acquired early in life it may tickle us on till old age ; but when it is acquired late, the sensation of pleasure will be more faint, and mingled with the regret of our not having tasted it sooner.

From my Farm, Oct. 5.

I am here ; I have seen Pope, and one of my first enquiries was after you. He tells me a thing I am sorry to hear : You are building, it seems, on a piece of land you have acquired for that purpose, in some county of Ireland. Tho' I have built in a part of the world, which I prefer very little to that where you have been thrown and confined by our ill fortune and yours, yet I am sorry you do the same thing. I have repented a thousand times of my resolution, and I hope you will repent of yours before it is executed. Adieu, my old and worthy friend ; may the physical evils of life fall as easily upon you, as ever they did on any man who lived to be old ; and may the moral evils which surround us, make as little impression on you, as they ought to make on one who has such superior sense to estimate things by, and so much virtue to wrap himself up in.

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My wife desires not to be forgotten by you ; she's faithfully your servant, and zealously your admirer. She will be concerned and disappointed not to find you in this Island at her return, which hope both she and I had been made to entertain before I went abroad.

L E T T E R X L I .

Dr. SWIFT to Lord BOLINGBROKE.

Dublin, Oct. 31, 1729.

I Receiv'd your Lordship's travelling letter of several dates, at several stages, and from different nations, languages, and religions. Neither could any thing be more obliging than your kind remembrance of me in so many places. As to your ten Lustres, I remember, when I complain'd in a letter to Prior, that I was fifty years old, he was half angry in jest, and answered me out of Terence, *ista commemoratio est quasi exprobratio*. How then ought I to rattle you, when I have a dozen years more to answer for, all monastically pass'd in this Country of liberty and delight, and money, and good company ! I go on answering your letter ; It is you were my Hero, but the other ^a never was ; yet if he were, it was your own fault, who taught me to love him, and often vindi-

^a L. Ox.

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