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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**

XLVII. From the same. The temper proper to men in years: An account of his own. The character of his lady. - Postscript by Mr. P. on his mother, and the effects of tender passions.

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FROM DR. SWIFT, etc. 163

juices may become salubrious, and rank poison a specific. — Pope is now in my library with me, and writes to the world, to the present and to future ages, whilst I begin this letter which he is to finish to you. What good he will do to mankind I know not; this comfort he may be sure of, he cannot do less than you have done before him. I have sometimes thought, that if preachers, hangmen, and moral-writers keep vice at a stand, or so much as retard the progress of it, they do as much as human nature admits: a real reformation is not to be brought about by ordinary means; it requires those extraordinary means which become punishments as well as lessons: National corruption must be purged by national calamities.— Let us hear from you. We deserve this attention, because we desire it, and because we believe that you desire to hear from us.

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L E T T E R. XLVII.

Lord B. to Dr. SWIFT.

March 29.

I Have delayed several posts answering your letter of January last, in hopes of being able to speak to you about a project which con-

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cerns us both, but me the most, since the success of it would bring us together. It has been a good while in my head, and at my heart; if it can be set a going, you shall hear more of it. I was ill in the beginning of the winter for near a week, but in no danger either from the nature of my distemper, or from the attendance of three physicians. Since that bilious intermitting fever, I have had, as I had before, better health than the regard I have payed to health deserves. We are both in the decline of life, my dear Dean, and have been some years going down the hill; let us make the passage as smooth as we can. Let us fence against physical evil by care, and the use of those means which experience must have pointed out to us: Let us fence against moral evil by philosophy. I renounce the alternative you propose. But we may, nay (if we will follow nature, and do not work up imagination against her plainest dictates) we shall of course grow every year more indifferent to life, and to the affairs and interests of a system out of which we are soon to go. This is much better than stupidity. The decay of passion strengthens philosophy, for passion may decay, and stupidity not succeed. *Passions* (says Pope, our Divine, as you will see one time or other) are the *Gales* of life: Let us not complain that they do not blow a storm. What  
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hurt does age do us, in subduing what we toil to subdue all our lives? It is now fix in the morning: I recall the time (and am glad it is over) when about this hour I used to be going to bed, surfeited with pleasure, or jaded with business: my head often full of schemes, and my heart as often full of anxiety. Is it a misfortune, think you, that I rise at this hour, refreshed, serene, and calm? that the past, and even the present affairs of life stand like objects at a distance from me, where I can keep off the disagreeable so as not to be strongly affected by them, and from whence I can draw the others nearer to me? Passions in their force, would bring all these, nay even future contingencies, about my ears at once, and Reason would but ill defend me in the scuffle.

I leave Pope to speak for himself, but I must tell you how much my Wife is obliged to you. She says she would find strength enough to nurse you, if you was here, and yet, God knows, she is extremely weak: The slow fever works under, and mines the constitution; we keep it off sometimes, but still it returns, and makes new breaches before nature can repair the old ones. I am not ashamed to say to you, that I admire her more every hour of my life: Death is not to her the King of Terrors; she beholds him without the least. When she suffers much, she

wishes for him as a deliverer from pain; when life is tolerable, she looks on him with dislike, because he is to separate her from those friends to whom she is more attached than to life itself. — You shall not stay for my next, as long as you have for this letter; and in every one, Pope shall write something much better than the scraps of old Philosophers, which were the presents, Munuscula, that Stoical Fop Seneca used to send in every Epistle to his friend Lucilius.

P. S. My Lord has spoken justly of his Lady: why not I of my Mother? Yesterday was her birth-day, now entering on the ninety-first year of her age; her memory much diminish'd, but her senses very little hurt, her sight and hearing good; she sleeps not ill, eats moderately, drinks water, says her prayers; this is all she does. I have reason to thank God for continuing so long to me a very good and tender parent, and for allowing me to exercise for some years, those cares which are now as necessary to her, as hers have been to me. An object of this sort daily before one's eyes very much softens the mind, but perhaps may hinder it from the willingness of contracting other ties of the like domestic nature, when one finds how painful it is even to enjoy the tender pleasures. I  
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have formerly made some strong efforts to get and to deserve a friend: perhaps it were wiser never to attempt it, but live Extempore, and look upon the world only as a place to pass thro', just pay your hosts their due, disperse a little charity, and hurry on. Yet am I just now writing (or rather planning) a book, to make mankind look upon this life with comfort and pleasure, and put morality in good humour. — And just now too, I am going to see one I love very tenderly; and to-morrow to entertain several civil people, whom if we call friends, it is by the Courtesy of England. — *Sic, sic juvat ire sub umbras.* While we do live, we must make the best of life,

*Cantantes licet usque (minus via lædet) eamus,*  
as the shepherd said in Virgil, when the road was long and heavy. I am yours.

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L E T T E R XLVIII.

Lord BOLINGBROKE to Dr. SWIFT.

**Y**OU may assure yourself, that, if you come over this spring, you will find me not only got back into the habits of study, but devoted to that historical task, which you have