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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

Letter LXXXIV. Of the complaints of friends. - One of the best comforts of old age. - Some of his letters copied in Ireland, and printed. - Of Lord Bolingbroke's retirement. Of some new friends, and ...

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ever a Court happens to have the least relish for
Virtue and Religion.

L E T T E R. LXXXIV.

To Dr. SWIFT.

Decemb. 30, 1736.

YOUR very kind letter has made me more melancholy, than almost any thing in this world now can do. For I can bear every thing in it, bad as it is, better than the complaints of my friends. Tho' others tell me you are in pretty good health, and in good spirits, I find the contrary when you open your mind to me: And indeed it is but a prudent part, to seem not so concern'd about others, nor so crazy ourselves as we really are: for we shall neither be beloved nor esteem'd the more, by our common acquaintance, for any affliction or any infirmity. But to our true friend we may, we must complain, of what ('tis a thousand to one) he complains with us; for if we have known him long, he is old, and if he has known the world long, he is out of humour at it. If you have but as much more health than others at your age, as you have more wit and good temper, you shall not have much of my Pity: But if you ever live
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to have less, you shall not have less of my Affection. A whole people will rejoyce at every year that shall be added to you, of which you have had a late instance in the public rejoycings on your birth-day. I can assure you, something better and greater than high birth and quality must go toward acquiring those demonstrations of public esteem and love. I have seen a royal birth-day uncelebrated, but by one vile Ode, and one hired bonfire. Whatever years may take away from you, they will not take away the general esteem, for your Sense, Virtue, and Charity.

The most melancholy effect of years is that you mention, the catalogue of those we lov'd and have lost, perpetually encreasing. How much that Reflection struck me, you'll see from the Motto I have prefix'd to my Book of Letters, which so much against my inclination has been drawn from me. It is from Catullus :

*Quo desiderio veteres revocamus Amores,
Atque olim amissas flemus Amicitias!*

I detain this letter till I can find some safe conveyance; innocent as it is, and as all letters of mine must be, of any thing to offend my superiors, except the reverence I bear to true merit and virtue. “ But I have much reason to fear,
“ those which you have too partially kept in

“ your hands will get out in some very disagree-
 “ able shape, in case of our mortality: and the
 “ more reason to fear it, since this last month
 “ Curl has obtain’d from Ireland two letters,
 “ (one of Lord Bolingbroke and one of mine,
 “ to you, which we wrote in the year 1723)
 “ and he has printed them, to the best of my
 “ memory, rightly, except one passage concern-
 “ ing Dawley, which must have been since in-
 “ serted, since my Lord had not that place at
 “ that time. Your answer to that letter he has
 “ not got; it has never been out of my custo-
 “ dy; for whatever is lent is lost (Wit as well
 “ as Money) to these needy poetical Readers.”

The world will certainly be the better for
 his change of life. He seems in the whole turn
 of his letters, to be a settled and principled Phi-
 losopher, thanking Fortune for the Tranquillity
 he has been led into by her aversion, like a man
 driven by a violent wind, from the sea into a
 calm harbour. You ask me, if I have got any
 supply of new Friends to make up for those
 that are gone? I think that impossible, for not
 our friends only, but so much of ourselves is
 gone by the mere flux and course of years, that,
 were the same Friends to be restored to us, we
 could not be restored to ourselves, to enjoy
 them. But as when the continual washing of
 a river takes away our flowers and plants, it
 throws

throws weeds and sedges in their room^a; so the course of time brings us something, as it deprives us of a great deal; and instead of leaving us what we cultivated, and expected to flourish and adorn us, gives us only what is of some little use, by accident. Thus I have acquired, without my seeking, a few chance-acquaintance, of young men, who look rather to the past age than the present, and therefore the future may have some hopes of them. If I love them, it is because they honour some of those whom I, and the world, have lost, or are losing. Two or three of them have distinguish'd themselves in Parliament, and you will own in a very uncommon manner, when I tell you it is by their asserting of Independency, and contempt of Corruption. One or two are link'd to me by their love of the same studies and the same authors: but I will own to you, my moral capacity has got so much the better of my poetical, that I have few acquaintance on the latter score, and none without a casting weight on the former. But I find my heart harden'd and blunt to new

^a There are some strokes in this letter, which can no otherwise be accounted for, than by the Author's extreme compassion and tenderness of heart, too much affected by the complaints of a peevish old man, labouring and impatient under his infirmities; and too intent in the friendly office of mollifying them.

impressions, it will scarce receive or retain affections of yesterday; and those friends who have been dead these twenty years, are more present to me now, than these I see daily. You, dear Sir, are one of the former sort to me in all respects, but that we can, yet, correspond together. I don't know whether 'tis not more vexatious, to know we are both in one world, without any further intercourse. Adieu. I can say no more, I feel so much: Let me drop into common things—Lord Masham has just married his son. Mr. Lewis has just buried his wife. Lord Oxford wept over your letter in pure kindness. Mrs. B. sighs more for you, than for the loss of youth. She says, she will be agreeable many years hence, for she has learn'd that secret from some receipts of your writing.—Adieu.

 LETTER LXXXV.

March 23, 1736-7.

THOU' you were never to write to me, yet what you desired in your last, that I would write often to you, would be a very easy task; for every day I talk with you, and of you, in my heart; and I need only set down what that is thinking of. The nearer I find myself verging
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