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The Works Of Horatio Walpole, Earl of Orford

In Five Volumes

Walpole, Horace

London, 1798

Epistle from Florence to Thomas Ashton, Esq.

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A N

EPISTLE FROM FLORENCE.

To * THOMAS ASHTON, Esq.

TUTOR TO THE EARL OF PLIMOUTH.

[Written in the Year 1740.]

WHEN flourish'd with their state th' ATHENIAN name,
 And learning and politeness were the same,
 Philofophy with gentle arts refin'd
 The honest roughness of th' unpractis'd mind:
 She call'd the latent beams of nature forth,
 Guided their ardor and infur'd their worth.
 She pois'd th' impetuous warrior's vengeful steel,
 Mark'd true ambition from destructive zeal,
 Pointed what lustre on that laurel blows,
 Which virtue only on her sons bestows.
 Hence clement CIMON, of unspotted fame,
 Hence ARISTIDES' ever-fav'rite name;
 Heroes, who knew to wield the righteous spear,
 And guard their native tow'rs from foreign fear;
 Or in firm bands of social peace to bind
 Their country's good, and benefit mankind.

* He afterwards went into orders, was fellow London, and preacher to the society of Lincoln's-inn. of Eton college and minister of saint Botolph's,

She

She trim'd the thoughtful statesman's nightly oil,
 Confirm'd his mind beneath an empire's toil,
 Or with him to his silent villa stole,
 Gilded his ev'ning hours, and harmoniz'd his soul.

To woods and caves she never bade retreat,
 Nor fix'd in cloister'd monkeries her seat:
 No lonely precepts to her sons enjoin'd,
 Nor taught them to be men, to shun mankind.
 CYNICS there were, an uncouth selfish race,
 Of manners foul, and boastful of disgrace:
 Brutes, whom no muse has ever lov'd to name,
 Whose ignominy was their only fame.
 No hostile trophies grace their honour'd urn,
 Around their tomb no sculptur'd virtues mourn;
 Nor tells the marble into emblems grav'd
 An art discover'd or a city sav'd.

Be this the goal to which the Briton-peer
 Exalt his hope, and press his young career!
 Be this the goal to which, my friend, may you
 With gentle skill direct his early view!
 Artful the various studies to dispense,
 And melt the schoolman's jargon down to sense.

See the pedantic teacher, winking, dull,
 The letter'd tyrant of a trembling school;
 Teaching by force, and proving by a frown,
 His lifted faces ram the lesson down.
 From tortur'd strains of eloquence he draws
 Barbaric precepts and unmeaning laws,
 By his own sense would TULLY's word expound,
 And a new VANDAL tramples classic ground.

Perhaps a bigot to the learned page,
 No modern custom can his thoughts engage.

His

His little farm by * GEORGIC rules he ploughs,
 And prunes by metre the luxuriant boughs:
 Still from ARATUS' sphere or MARO's signs
 The future calm or tempest he divines:
 And fears if the prognostic raven's found
 † Expatiating alone along the dreary round.

What scanty precepts! studies how confin'd!
 Too mean to fill your comprehensive mind;
 Unsatisfy'd with knowing when or where
 Some Roman bigot rais'd a fane to FEAR;
 On what green medal VIRTUE stands exprefs'd,
 How CONCORD's pictur'd, LIBERTY how drefs'd;
 Or with wise ken judiciously define,
 When Pius marks the honorary coin
 Of CARACALLA, or of ANTONINE.

Thirsting for knowledge, but to know the right,
 Thro' judgment's optic guide th' illusive sight;
 To let in rays on Reason's darkling cell,
 And lagging mists of prejudice dispel;
 For this you turn the Greek and Roman page,
 Weigh the contemplative and active sage,
 And cull some useful flow'r from each historic age.

Thence teach the youth the necessary art,
 To know the judge's from the critic's part;
 Show how ignoble is the passion, FEAR,
 And place some patriot Roman's model near;
 Their bright examples to his soul instil,
 Who knew no fear, but that of doing ill.
 Tell him, 'tis all a cant, a trifle all,
 To know the folds that from the TOGA fall,

* This was literally the case of Dr. Weston,
 bishop of Exeter, who, when school-master of
 Eton, lost a considerable sum by the experiment.
 It is very remarkable, that Sir Thomas Over-
 bury, who wrote so many years before the time

of bishop Weston, gives this instance of the cha-
 racter of a pedant, "He gives directions for huf-
 bandry from Virgil's Georgics, for cattle from
 his Bucolics, &c."

† Et fola in sicca secum spatiatur arenâ. VIRG.

The CLAVUS' breadth, the BULLA's golden round,
 And ev'ry leaf that ev'ry VIRTUE crown'd:
 But show how brighter in each honest breast,
 Than o'er her shrine, the goddess stood confess'd.

Tell him, it is not the fantastic boy,
 Elate with pow'r, and swell'd with frantic joy,
 'Tis not a slavish senate, fawning, base,
 Can stamp with honest fame a worthless race:
 Tho' the false coin proclaim him great and wise,
 The tyrant's life shall tell that coin, it lyes.

But when your early care shall have design'd
 To plan the soul and mould the waxen mind;
 When you shall pour upon his tender breast
 Ideas that must stand an age's test,
 Oh! there imprint with strongest deepest dye
 The lovely form of goddess LIBERTY!
 For her in senates be he train'd to plead,
 For her in battles be he taught to bleed.
 Lead him where Dover's rugged cliff resounds
 With dashing seas, fair Freedom's honest bounds;
 Point to yon azure Carr bedrop'd with gold,
 Whose weight the necks of Gallia's sons uphold;
 Where proudly sits an iron-scepter'd queen,
 And fondly triumphs o'er the prostrate scene;
 Cry, That is empire! shun her baleful path,
 Her words are slavery, her touch is death!
 Thro' wounds and blood the fury drives her way,
 And murders half to make the rest her prey.

Thus spoke each Spartan matron, as she dress'd
 With the bright cuirass her young soldier's breast;
 On the new warrior's tender-finew'd thigh,
 Girt fear of shame and love of liberty.

Steel'd

Steel'd with such precepts, for a cause so good,
 What scanty bands the Persian host withstood!
 Before the sons of Greece let Asia tell
 How fled her * Monarch, how her millions fell!
 When arm'd for LIBERTY, a few how brave!
 How weak a multitude, where each a slave!
 No welcome falchion fill'd their fainting hand,
 No voice inspir'd of favourite command:
 No peasant fought for wealthy lands possess'd,
 No fond remembrance warm'd the parent's breast:
 They saw their lands for royal riot groan,
 And toil'd in vain for banquets, not their own;
 They saw their infant race to bondage rise,
 And frequent heard the ravish'd virgin's cries,
 Dishonour'd but to cool a transient gust
 Of some luxurious Satrap's barb'rous lust.

The greatest curses any age has known
 Have issued from the temple or the throne.
 Extent of ill from kings at first begins,
 But priests must aid and consecrate their sins.
 The tortur'd subject might be heard complain,
 When sinking under a new weight of chain,
 Or more rebellious might perhaps repine,
 When tax'd to dow'r a titled concubine,
 But the priest christens all a right divine. }

When at the altar a new monarch kneels,
 What conjur'd awe upon the people steals!
 The chosen HE adores the precious oil,
 Meekly receives the solemn charm, and while
 The priest some blessed nothings mutters o'er,
 Sucks in the sacred grease at every pore:
 He seems at once to shed his mortal skin,
 And feels divinity transfus'd within.

* Xerxes.

The

The trembling vulgar dread the royal nod,
And worship God's anointed more than God.

Such sanction gives the prelate to such kings!
So mischief from those hallow'd fountains springs,
But bend your eye to yonder baras'd plains,
Where king and priest in one united reign;
See fair Italia mourn her holy state,
And droop oppress'd beneath a papal weight:
Where fat celibacy usurps the soil,
And sacred sloth consumes the peasant's toil:
The holy drones monopolize the sky,
And plunder by a vow of poverty.
The Christian cause their lewd profession taints,
Unlearn'd, unchaste, uncharitable faints.

Oppression takes religion's hallow'd name,
And priestcraft knows to play the specious game.
Behold how each enthusiastic fool
Of ductile piety becomes their tool:
Observe with how much art, what fine pretence
They hallow foppery and combat sense.

Some hoary hypocrite, grown old in sin,
Whose thoughts of heav'n with his last hours begin,
Counting a chaplet with a bigot care,
And mumbling somewhat 'twixt a charm and pray'r,
Hugs a dawb'd image of his injur'd lord,
And squeezes out on the dull idol-board
A fore-cy'd gum of tears; the flannel crew
With cunning joy the fond repentance view,
Pronounce him blest'd, his miracles proclaim,
Teach the slight crowd t' adore his hallow'd name,
Exalt his praise above the saints of old,
And coin his sinking conscience into gold.

VOL. I. C Or

Or when some pontiff with imperious hand
Sends forth his edict to excise the land,
The tortur'd hind unwillingly obeys,
And mutters curses as his mite he pays!
The subtle priest th' invidious name forbears,
Asks it for holy use or venal pray'rs;
Exhibits all their trumpery to sale,
A bone, a mouldy morsel, or a nail:
Th' idolatrous devout adore the show,
And in full streams the molten off'rings flow.

No pagan object, nothing too profane
To aid the Romish zeal for christian gain.
Each temple with new weight of idols nods,
And borrow'd altars smoke to other gods.
PROMETHEUS' vulture MATTHEW's eagle proves,
And heav'nly cherubs sprout from heathen loves;
Young GANYMEDE a winged angel stands
By holy LUKE, and dictates God's commands:
APOLLO*, tho' degraded, still can blefs,
Rewarded with a sainthood, and an S.
Each convert godhead is apostoliz'd,
And JOVE himself by † PETER's name baptiz'd;
ASTARTE shines in Jewish MARY's fame,
Still queen of heav'n, another and the same.

While the proud priest the sacred tyrant reigns
Of empty cities and dispeopled plains,
Where fetter'd nature is forbid to rove
In the free commerce of productive love,
Behold imprison'd with her barren kind,
In gloomy cells the votive maid confin'd;
Faint streams of blood, by long stagnation weak,
Scarce tinge the fading damask of her cheek;

* St. Apollos.

† At saint Peter's an old statue of Jupiter is turned into one of saint Peter.

In vain the pines, the holy faith withstands
 What nature dictates and what God commands.
 But if some sanguine he, some lusty priest
 Of jollier morals taste the tempting feast,
 From the strong grasp if some poor babe arise,
 Unwelcome, unindear'd, it instant dies,
 Or poisons blasting soon the hasty joy,
 Th' imperfect seeds of infant life destroy.

Fair modesty, thou virgin tender-ey'd,
 From thee the muse the grosser acts must hide,
 Nor the dark cloister's mystic rites display,
 Whence num'rous brawny monkhoods waste away,
 And unprolific, tho' forsworn, decay.

BRITANNIA smiling views her golden plains
 From mitred bondage free and papal chains.
 Her jocund sons pass each unburthen'd day
 Securely quiet, innocently gay:
 Lords of themselves the happy rustics sing,
 Each of his little tenement the king.
 Twice did usurping Rome extend her hand,
 To re-inflame the new-deliver'd land:
 Twice were her fable bands to battle warm'd,
 With pardons, bulls, and texts, and murders arm'd:
 * With PETER's sword and MICHAEL's lance were sent,
 And whate'er stores supply'd the church's armament.
 Twice did the gallant Albion race repel
 The jesuit legions to the gates of hell;
 Or whate'er angel, friend to Britain, took
 Or WILLIAM's or ELIZA's guardian look.

Arise, young peer! shine forth in such a cause!
 Who draws the sword for freedom, justly draws.

* Addit & Herculeos Arcus Hastamque Minervæ, Quicquid habent telorum armamentaria Cæli.
 Juv.

Reflect how dearly was that freedom bought;
 For that, how oft your ancestors have fought;
 Thro' the long series of our princes down,
 How wrench'd some right from each too potent crown.

See abject JOHN, that vassal monarch, see!
 Bow down the royal neck, and crouch the supple knee!
 Oh! prostitution of imperial state!
 To a vile Romish priest's vile * delegate!
 Him the bold barons scorning to obey,
 And be the subjects of a subject sway;
 Heroes, whose names to latest fame shall shine,
 Aw'd by no visions of a right divine,
 That bond by eastern politicians wrought,
 Which ours have learnt, and rabbi doctors taught,
 To straiter banks restrain'd the royal will,
 That great prerogative of doing ill.

To late example and experience dead,
 See † HENRY in his father's footsteps tread.
 Too young to govern, immature to pow'r,
 His early follies haunt his latest hour.
 His nobles injur'd, and his realms oppress'd,
 No violated senate's wrongs redress'd,
 His hoary age sinks in the feeble wane
 Of an inglorious, slighted, tedious reign.

The muse too long with idle glories fed,
 And train'd to trumpet o'er the warlike dead,
 The wanton vain on giddy plumes would soar
 To Gallic Loire and Jordan's humbled shore;
 Again would teach the Saracen and Gaul
 At ‡ EDWARD's and at § HENRY's name to fall;
 Romantic heroes! prodigal of blood;
 What numbers stain'd each ill-disputed flood!

* The pope's nuncio.

† Henry III.

‡ Edward I. and III.

§ Henry V.

Tools to a clergy! warring but to feast
 With spoils of provinces each pamper'd priest.
 Be dumb, fond maid! thy sacred ink nor spill
 On specious tyrants, popularly ill:
 Nor be thy comely locks with roses dight
 Of either victor colour, red or white.

Foil'd the assassin * king, in union blow
 The blended flowers on seventh HENRY's brow,
 Peace 'lights again on the forsaken strand,
 And banish'd plenty re-assumes the land.
 No nodding crest the crouching infant frights,
 No clarion rudely breaks the bride's delights;
 Reposing fabres seek their ancient place
 To bristle round a gaping † Gorgon's face.
 The weary'd arms grotesquely deck the wall,
 And tatter'd trophies fret the royal ‡ hall.
 But peace in vain on the blood-fatten'd plains
 From a redundant horn her treasure rains!
 She deals her gifts; but in a useless hour,
 To glut the iron hand of griping pow'r:
 Such LANCASTER, whom haras'd Britain saw,
 Mask'd in the garb of antiquated law:
 More politic than wife, more wife than great;
 A legislator to enslave the state;
 Coolly malicious; by design a knave;
 More mean than false, ambitious more than brave;
 Attach'd to interest's more than honour's call;
 More strict than just, more covetous than all.

Not so the reveller profuse, his § son,
 His contrast course of tyranny begun;
 Robust of limb, and flush'd with florid grace,
 Strength nerv'd his youth, and squar'd his jovial face.

* Richard III.

† Medusa's head in the armory at the Tower.

‡ Westminster-hall.

§ Henry VIII.

To

To feats of arms and carpet-combats prone,
 In either field the vig'rous monarch shone;
 Mark'd out for riot each luxurious day
 In tournaments and banquets danc'd away.
 But shift the scene, and view what slaughters stain
 Each frantic period of his barb'rous reign:
 A tyrant to the people whom he rul'd,
 By ev'ry potentate he dealt with, fool'd;
 Sold by one * minister, to all unjust;
 Sway'd by each dictate of distemper'd lust;
 Changing each worship that controul'd the bent
 Of his adult'rous will, and lewd intent;
 Big in unwieldy majesty and pride,
 And smear'd with queens' and martyrs' blood, he dy'd.

Pas we the pious † youth too flightly seen;
 The murd'rous zeal of a weak Romish ‡ queen:
 Nor with faint pencil, impotently vain,
 Shadow the glories of ELIZA's reign,
 Who still too great, tho' some few faults she had,
 To catalogue with all those royal bad.

Arise, great JAMES! thy course of wisdom run!
 Image of David's philosophic son!
 He comes! on either hand in seemly state,
 Knowledge and Peace his fondled handmaids wait:
 Obscurely learn'd, elaborately dull,
 Of quibbling cant and grace fanatic full,
 Thron'd in full senates, on his pedant tongue,
 These for six hours each weighty morning hung.
 For these each string of royal pow'r he strain'd,
 For these he sold whate'er ELIZA gain'd;
 For these he squander'd ev'ry prudent store
 The frugal princess had reserv'd before,
 On pension'd sycophants and garter'd boys,
 Tools of his will, and minions of his joys.

* Cardinal Wolfey.

† Edward VI.

‡ Mary.

For these he let his beggar'd * daughter roam;
 Bubbled for these by Spanish art at home;
 For these, to sum the blessings of his reign,
 Poison'd one son †, and t'other sent to Spain.

Retire, strict muse, and thy impartial verse
 In pity spare on CHARLES's bleeding herse;
 Or all his faults in blackest note, translate
 To tombs where rot the authors of his fate;
 To lustful HENRIETTA's Romish shade
 Let all his acts of lawless pow'r be laid;
 Or to the ‡ priest more Romish still than her;
 And who'er made his gentle virtues err.

On the next § prince expell'd his native land
 In vain affliction laid her iron hand;
 Fortune, or fair or frowning, on his soul
 Could stamp no virtue, and no vice controul;
 Honour, or morals, gratitude, or truth,
 Nor learn'd his ripen'd age, nor knew his youth;
 The care of nations left to whores or chance,
 Plund'rer of Britain, pensioner of France;
 Free to Buffoons, to Ministers deny'd,
 He liv'd an atheist, and a bigot dy'd.

The reins of empire, or resign'd or stole,
 Are trusted next to JAMES's weak controul.
 Him, meditating to subvert the laws,
 His hero || son in freedom's beauteous cause
 Rose to chastise: ** unhappy still! howe'er
 Posterity the gallant action bear.

* Queen of Bohemia.

† Prince Henry and Charles I.

‡ Archbishop Laud.

§ Charles II.

|| William III.

** Infelix utcumque ferent ea facta minores! VIRG.

Thus have I try'd of kings and priests to sing,
 And all the woes that from their vices spring;
 While victor GEORGE thunders o'er either Spain,
 Revenges Britain and asserts the main;
 To * willing Indians deals our equal laws,
 And from his country's voice affects applause;
 † What time fair Florence on her peaceful shore,
 Free from the din of war and battle's roar,
 Has lap'd me trifer in inglorious ease,
 Modelling precepts that may serve and please;
 Yours is the task—and glorious is the plan,
 To build the free, the sensible, GOOD MAN.

* ————— Volentes
 Per populos dat jura, viamque affectat Olympo.
 VIRG.

† Illo Virgillum me tempore dulcis alebat
 Parthenope, studiis Florentem ignobilis oli.
 VIRG.

INSCRIPTION