



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 Second of his Letters

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

V. Contemplations on the pleasures of separate spirits, on the narrow conceptions of men, the vanity of human knowledge, the variety of opinions in religions, and the great duty of charity.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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it, he told her, "My dear, it is only this, that
 "you will never marry an old man again." I
 cannot help remarking, that sickness, which of-
 ten destroys both wit and wisdom, yet seldom
 has power to remove that talent which we call
 humour: Mr. Wycherley shew'd his, even in
 this last compliment; tho' I think his request
 a little hard, for why should he bar her from
 doubling her Jointure on the same easy terms?

So trivial as these circumstances are, I should
 not be displeas'd myself to know such trifles,
 when they concern or characterise any eminent
 person. The wisest and wittiest of men are
 seldom wiser or wittier than others in these so-
 ber moments: At least, our friend ended much
 in the character he had lived in: and Horace's
 rule for a play, may as well be apply'd to him
 as a play-wright,

Servetur ad imum

Qualis ab inceptu processerit, et sibi constet.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Feb. 10, 1715-16.

I Am just return'd from the country, whither
 Mr. Rowe accompanied me, and pass'd a
 week in the forest. I need not tell you how
 much

much a man of his turn entertain'd me; but I must acquaint you there is a vivacity and gaiety of disposition almost peculiar to him, which make it impossible to part from him without that uneasiness which generally succeeds all our pleasures. I have been just taking a solitary walk by moon-shine, full of reflections on the transitory nature of all human delights; and giving my thoughts a loose in the contemplation of those satisfactions which probably we may hereafter taste in the company of separate spirits, when we shall range the walks above, and perhaps gaze on this world at as vast a distance as we now do on those worlds. The pleasures we are to enjoy in that conversation must undoubtedly be of a nobler kind, and (not unlikely) may proceed from the discoveries each shall communicate to another, of God and of Nature; for the happiness of minds can surely be nothing but knowledge.

The highest gratification we receive here from company is Mirth, which at the best is but a fluttering unquiet motion, that beats about the breast for a few moments, and after leaves it void and empty. Keeping good company, even the best, is but a less shameful art of losing time. What we here call science and study, are little better: the greater number of arts to which we apply ourselves are mere groping
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in the dark; and even the search of our most important concerns in a future being, is but a needless, anxious, and uncertain haste to be knowing, sooner than we can, what without all this solicitude we shall know a little later. We are but curious impertinents in the case of futurity. 'Tis not our business to be guessing what the state of souls shall be, but to be doing what may make our own state happy; we cannot be knowing, but we can be virtuous.

If this be my notion of a great part of that high science, Divinity, you will be so civil as to imagine I lay no mighty stress upon the rest. Even of my darling poetry I really make no other use, than horses of the bells that gingle about their ears (tho' now and then they toss their heads as if they were proud of them) only to jog on, a little more merrily.

Your observations on the narrow conceptions of mankind in the point of Friendship, confirm me in what I was so fortunate as at my first knowledge of you to hope, and since so amply to experience. Let me take so much decent pride and dignity upon me, as to tell you, that but for opinions like these which I discover'd in your mind, I had never made the trial I have done; which has succeeded so much to mine, and, I believe, not less to your satisfaction: for, if I know you right, your pleasure is greater
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in obliging me, than I can feel on my part, till it falls in my power to oblige you.

Your remark, that the variety of opinions in politics or religion is often rather a gratification, than an objection, to people who have sense enough to consider the beautiful order of nature in her variations; makes me think you have not construed Joannes Secundus wrong, in the verse which precedes that which you quote: *Bene nota Fides*, as I take it, does no way signify the Roman Catholic Religion, tho' Secundus was of it. I think it was a generous thought, and one that flow'd from an exalted mind, That it was not improbable but God might be delighted with the various methods of worshipping him, which divided the whole world^a. I am pretty sure you and I should no more make good Inquisitors to the modern tyrants in faith, than we could have been quali-

^a This was an opinion taken up by the old Philosophers, as the last support of Paganism against Christianity: And the Missionaries, to both the Indies, tell us, it is the first answer modern barbarians give to the offer made them of the Gospel. But Christians might see that the notion is not only *improbable*, but impossible to be true, if the redemption of

mankind was purchased by the death of Jesus, which is the gospel idea of his Religion. Nor is there any need of this opinion to discredit persecution. For the iniquity of that practice does not arise from restraining what God permits or delights in, but from usurping a jurisdiction over conscience, which belongs only to his tribunal.

FROM EDW. BLOUNT, Esq. 17

fied for Lictors to Procrustes, when he converted refractory members with the rack. In a word, I can only repeat to you what, I think, I have formerly said; that I as little fear God will damn a man who has Charity, as I hope that any Priest can save him without it.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R VI.

March 20, 1715-16.

I Find that a real concern is not only a hindrance to speaking, but to writing too: the more time we give ourselves to think over one's own or a friend's unhappiness, the more unable we grow to express the grief that proceeds from it. It is as natural to delay a letter, at such a season as this, as to retard a melancholy visit to a person one cannot relieve. One is ashamed in that circumstance, to pretend to entertain people with trifling, insignificant affectations of sorrow on the one hand, or unseasonable and forced gaieties on the other. 'Tis a kind of profanation of things sacred, to treat so solemn a matter as a generous voluntary suffering, with compliments, or heroic gallantries. Such a mind as your's has no need of being spirited up into honour, or like

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