



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

VI. From the Bishop of Rochester. Of Mr. Dryden's monument: The Arabian Tales: The South-Sea scheme.

Nutzungsbedingungen

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-55314](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-55314)

L E T T E R V I.

From the Bishop of ROCHESTER.

TH E Arabian Tales, and Mr. Gay's books, I receiv'd not till Monday night, together with your letter; for which I thank you. I have had a fit of the gout upon me ever since I returned hither from Westminster on Saturday night last: it has found its way into my hands as well as legs, so that I have been utterly incapable of writing. This is the first letter that I have ventured upon; which will be written, I fear, *vacillantibus literis*, as, Tully says, Tyro's letters were, after his Recovery from an illness. What I said to you in mine about the Monument, was intended only to quicken, not to alarm you. It is not worth your while to know what I meant by it: but when I see you, you shall. I hope you may be at the Deanry, towards the end of October, by which time, I think of settling there for the winter. What do you think of some such short inscription as this in latin, which may, in a few words, say all that is to be said of Dryden, and yet nothing more than he deserves?

I O H A N N I

I O H A N N I D R I D E N O,

CVI POESIS ANGLICANA
VIM SVAM AC VENERES DEBET;
ET SI QVA IN POSTERVM AVGEBITVR LAVDE,
EST ADHVC DEBITVRA:
HONORIS ERGO P. &c.

To shew you that I am as much in earnest in the affair, as you yourself, something I will send you too of this kind in English. If your design holds of fixing Dryden's name only below, and his Busto above — may not lines like these be grav'd just under the name?

*This Sheffield rais'd, to Dryden's ashes just,
Here fix'd his Name, and there his lawrel'd Bust.
What else the Muse in Marble might express,
Is known already; Praise would make him less.*

Or thus —

*More needs not; where acknowledg'd Merits reign,
Praise is impertinent; and Censure vain.*

This you'll take as a proof of my zeal at least, tho' it be none of my talent in Poetry. When you have read it over, I'll forgive you if you should not once in your life-time again think of it.

And now, Sir, for your *Arabian Tales*. Ill as I have been, almost ever since they came to
hand,

hand, I have read as much of them, as ever I shall read while I live. Indeed they do not please my taste: they are writ with so romantic an air, and, allowing for the difference of eastern manners, are yet, upon any supposition that can be made, of so wild and absurd a contrivance (at least to my northern understanding) that I have not only no pleasure, but no patience, in perusing them. They are to me like the odd paintings on Indian screens, which at first glance may surprize and please a little: but, when you fix your eye intently upon them, they appear so extravagant, disproportion'd, and monstrous, that they give a judicious eye pain, and make him seek for relief from some other object.

They may furnish the mind with some new images: but I think the purchase is made at too great an expence: for to read those two volumes through, liking them as little as I do, would be a terrible penance, and to read them with pleasure would be dangerous on the other side, because of the infection. I will never believe, that you have any keen relish of them, till I find you write worse than you do, which, I dare say, I never shall. Who that *Petit de la Croise* is, the pretended author of them^a, I

^a Not the pretended Author, but the real translator, | from an Arabic MS of the | tales, which is in the French | cannot

cannot tell: but observing how full they are in the descriptions of dress, furniture, &c. I cannot help thinking them the product of some Woman's imagination: and, believe me, I would do any thing but break with you, ra-

King's library. What was translated in ten small Volumes, is not more than the tenth part of the Original. The Eastern people have been always famous for this sort of Composition: in which much fine morality is conveyed; not indeed in a story always representing life and manners, but such as the eastern superstitions made pass amongst the people for such. Their great genius for this kind of writing appears from these very tales. But the policy of some of the later princes of the East greatly hurt it, by setting all men upon composing them, to furnish matter for their coffee-houses and places of resort; which were enjoined to give this entertainment to the people, with design to divert them from politics, and matters of state. This Collection is so strange a medley of sense and nonsense, that one would be tempted to think the Collector was some Coffee-man, who ga-

thered indifferently from the best and worst. The contrivance he has invented of tying them together has led him into such a blunder that often one could not be surprized at anything. The tales are supposed to be told to one of the Kings of Persia of the ancient race before Mahomet, and yet the scene of some of them is laid in the Court of *Harown Alraschid* the 26th Chalif, and the 5th of the Race of *Abbasides*. These are amongst the best, and, indeed, it is no wonder. He was, of all the Chalifs, the most munificent, and the greatest encourager of Letters; so that it was natural for men of genius in after times, to do this honour to his memory. But the Bishop talks of *Petit de la Croise*. M. Galland was the translator of the *Arabian tales*. The name of the other is to the collection, called the *Persian tales*, of which I have nothing to say.

ther

ther than be bound to read them over with attention.

I am sorry that I was so true a prophet in respect of the S. Sea, sorry, I mean, as far as your loss is concern'd: for in the general I ever was and still am of opinion, that had that project taken root and flourish'd, it would by degrees have overturn'd our constitution. Three or four hundred millions was such a weight, that whichever way it had leaned, must have born down all before it— But of the dead we must speak gently; and therefore, as Mr. Dryden says somewhere, *Peace be to its Manes!*

Let me add one reflection, to make you easy in your ill luck. Had you got all that you have lost beyond what you ventur'd, consider that your superfluous gains would have sprung from the ruin of several families that now want necessaries! a thought, under which a good and good-natured man that grew rich by such means, could not, I persuade myself, be perfectly easy. Adieu, and believe me, ever

Your, &c.

L E T T E R