



## **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**

XXV. From Mr. Cleland to Mr. Gay.

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**Nutzungsbedingungen**

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## LETTER XXV.

Mr. CLELAND to Mr. GAY<sup>a</sup>.

Decemb. 16, 1731.

I Am astonish'd at the complaints occasion'd by a late Epistle to the Earl of Burlington; and I should be afflicted were there the least just ground for them. Had the writer attack'd Vice, at a time when it is not only tolerated but triumphant, and so far from being conceal'd as a Defect, that it is proclaimed with ostentation as a Merit; I should have been apprehensive of the consequence: Had he satirized Gamesters of a hundred thousand pounds fortune, acquir'd by such methods as are in daily practice, and almost universally encouraged: had he overwarmly defended the Religion of his country, against such books as come from every press, are publickly vendid in every shop, and greedily bought by almost every rank of men; or had he called our excellent weekly writers by the same names which they openly bestow on the greatest men in the Ministry, and out of the Ministry, for which they are all unpunished, and most rewarded: In any of these cases, in-

<sup>a</sup> This was written by the same hand that wrote the | *Letter to the Publisher*, prefixed to the *Dunciad*.

deed,

deed, I might have judged him too presumptuous, and perhaps have trembled for his rashness.

I could not but hope better for this small and modest Epistle, which attacks no one Vice whatsoever; which deals only in Folly, and not Folly in general, but a single species of it; that only branch, for the opposite excellency to which, the Noble Lord to whom it is written must necessarily be celebrated. I fancied it might escape censure, especially seeing how tenderly these Follies are treated, and really less accused than apologized for.

*Yet hence the Poor are cloath'd, the Hungry fed,  
Health to himself, and to his Infants Bread  
The Lab'rer bears.*

Is this such a crime, that to impute it to a man must be a grievous offence? 'Tis an innocent Folly, and much more beneficent than the want of it; for ill Taste employs more hands, and diffuses expence more than a good one. Is it a moral defect? No, it is but a natural one; a want of taste. It is what the best good man living may be liable to. The worthiest Peer may live exemplarily in an ill-favour'd house, and the best reputed citizen be pleased with a vile garden. I thought (I say) the author had the common liberty to observe a defect, and to  
compliment

compliment a friend for a quality that distinguishes him : which I know not how any quality should do, if we were not to remark that it was wanting in others.

But, they say, the satire is personal. I thought it could not be so, because all its reflections are on things. His reflections are not on the man, but his house, garden, &c. Nay, he respects (as one may say) the Persons of the Gladiator, the Nile, and the Triton : he is only sorry to see them (as he might be to see any of his friends) ridiculous by being in the wrong place, and in bad company. Some fancy, that to say, a thing is Personal, is the same as to say, it is Injust, not considering, that nothing can be Just that is not personal. I am afraid that "all such writings and discourses as touch no man, will mend no man." The good-natured, indeed, are apt to be alarmed at any thing like satire ; and the guilty readily concur with the weak for a plain reason, because the vicious look upon folly as their frontier :

*Jam proximus ardet*

Ucalegon.

No wonder those who know ridicule belongs to them, find an inward consolation in removing it from themselves as far as they can ; and it is never so far, as when they can get it fixed on the best characters.

ractions. No wonder those who are Food for Satirists should rail at them as creatures of prey; every beast born for our use would be ready to call a man so.

I know no remedy, unless people in our age would as little frequent the theatres, as they begin to do the churches; unless comedy were forsaken, satire silent, and every man left to do what seems good in his own eyes, as if there were no King, no Priest, no Poet, in Israel.

But I find myself obliged to touch a point, on which I must be more serious; it well deserves I should: I mean the malicious application of the character of Timon, which, I will boldly say, they would impute to the person the most different in the world from a Man-hater, to the person whose taste and encouragement of wit have often been shewn in the rightest place. The author of that epistle must certainly think so, if he has the same opinion of his own merit as authors generally have; for he has been distinguished by this very person.

Why, in God's name, must a Portrait, apparently collected from twenty different men, be applied to one only? Has it his eye? no, it is very unlike. Has it his nose or mouth? no, they are totally differing. What then, I beseech you? Why, it has the mole on his chin. Very well;

well; but must the picture therefore be his, and has no other man that blemish?

Could there be a more melancholy instance how much the taste of the public is vitiated, and turns the most salutary and seasonable physic into poison, than if amidst the blaze of a thousand bright qualities in a great man, they should only remark there is a shadow about him; as what eminence is without? I am confident the author was incapable of imputing any such to one, whose whole life (to use his own expression in print of him) is a *continued series of good and generous actions*.

I know no man who would be more concerned, if he gave the least pain or offence to any innocent person; and none who would be less concerned, if the satire were challenged by any one at whom he would really aim it. If ever that happens, I dare engage, he will own it, with all the freedom of one whose censures are just, and who sets his name to them.