



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

Containing His Satires &c.

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

[Epistle To Dr. Arbuthnot.]

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E P I S T L E

T O

Dr. ARBUTHNOT.

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THE TESTAMENT

OF

TO

DR. ARBUTHNOT

ADVERTISEMENT

T O

The first publication of this *Epistle*.

THIS paper is a sort of bill of complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches, as the several occasions offered. I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleased some Persons of Rank and Fortune [the Authors of *Verses to the Imitator of Horace*, and of an *Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court*] to attack, in a very extraordinary manner, not only my Writings (of which, being public, the Public is judge) but my *Person, Morals, and Family*, whereof, to those who know me not, a truer information may be requisite. Being divided between the necessity to say something of *myself*, and my own laziness to undertake so awkward a task, I thought it the shortest way to put the last hand to this *Epistle*. If it have any thing pleasing, it will be that by which I am most desirous to please, the *Truth* and the *Sentiment*; and if any thing offensive, it will be only to those I am least sorry to offend, *the vicious or the ungenerous*.

Many will know their own pictures in it, there being not a circumstance but what is true; but I have,

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for the most part, spared their *Names*, and they may escape being laughed at, if they please.

I would have some of them know, it was owing to the request of the learned and candid Friend to whom it is inscribed, that I make not as free use of theirs as they have done of mine. However, I shall have this advantage, and honour, on my side, that whereas, by their proceeding, any abuse may be directed at any man, no injury can possibly be done by mine, since a nameless Character can never be found out, but by its *truth* and *likeness*.

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E P I S T L E

T O

Dr. ARBUTHNOT.

An Apology for himself and his Writings.

Ep. to Dr. Arbuthnot.] AT the time of publishing this Epistle, the Poet's patience was quite exhausted by the endless impertinence of Poetafters of all ranks and conditions; as well those who courted his favour, as those who envied his reputation. So that now he had resolved to quit his hands of both together, by the publication of a DUNCIAD. This design he communicated to his excellent Friend Dr. ARBUTHNOT, who, although as a man of Wit and Learning he might not have been displeas'd to see their common injuries revenged on this pernicious Tribe; yet, as our Author's Friend and Physician, was solicitous of his ease and health; and therefore unwilling he should provoke so large and powerful a party.

Their difference of opinion, in this matter, gives occasion to the following *Dialogue*. Where, in a natural and familiar detail of all his Provocations, both from flatterers and slanderers, our Author has artfully interwoven an Apology for his *moral and poetic* Character.

For after having told his case, and humourously applied to his Physician in the manner one would ask for a Receipt to kill Vermin, he strait goes on, in the common Character of Askers of advice, to tell his Doctor that he had already taken his party, and determin'd of his remedy. But using a preamble, and introducing it (in the way of Poets) with a Simile, in which he names *Kings, Queens, and Ministers of State*, his Friend takes the alarm, begs him to forbear, to stick to his subject, and to be easy under so common a calamity.

To make so light of his disaster provokes the Poet: he breaks the thread of his discourse, which was to lead his Friend gently, and by degrees, into his project; and abruptly tells him the application of his Simile, at once,

Out with it, Dunciad! let the secret pass, &c.

But recollecting the humanity and tenderness of his Friend, which, he apprehends, might be a little shocked at the apparent severity of such a proceeding, he assures him, that his good-nature is alarmed without a cause, for that nothing has less feeling than this sort of Offenders; which he illustrates in the Examples of a *damn'd Poet*, a *detected Slanderer*, a *Table-Parasite*, a *Church-Buffoon*, and a *Party-Writer* [from ψ 1 to 100.]

But, in this enumeration, coming again to *Names*, his Friend once more stops him, and bids him consider what hostilities this general attack will set on foot. So much the better, replies the Poet; for, considering *the strong antipathy of bad to good*, enemies they will always be, either open or secret: and it admits of no question, but a Slanderer is less hurtful than a Flatterer. For, says he (in a pleasant Simile addressed to his Friend's profession)

*Of all mad creatures, if the learn'd are right,
It is the flaver kills, and not the bite.*

And how abject and excessive the flattery of these creatures was, he shews, by observing, that they praised him even for his infirmities; his bad health, and his inconvenient shape [ψ 100 to 125.]

But still it might be said, that if he could bear this evil of Authorship no better, he should not have wrote at all. To this he answers, by lamenting the natural bent of his disposition, which, from his very birth, had drawn him so strongly towards *Poetry*, as if it were in execution of some secret decree of Heaven for crimes unknown. But though he offended in becoming an Author, he offended in nothing else. For his early verses were perfectly innocent and harmless,

*Like gentle Fanny's was my flowing theme,
A painted mistress, or a purling stream.*

Yet even then, he tells us, two enraged and hungry Critics fell upon him, without the least provocation. But this might have been borne, as the common lot of distinction. But it was *his* peculiar ill-fortune to create a Jealousy in One, whom not only many good offices done by our Author to him and his friends, but a similitude of genius and studies might have inclined to a reciprocal affection and support. On the contrary, that otherwise amiable Person, being, by nature, timorous and suspicious; by education a party-man; and, by the circumstances of fortune, beset with flatterers and pick-thanks; regarded our Author as his Rival, set up by a contrary Faction, with views destructive of public liberty, and his friends reputation. And all this, with as

little provocation from Mr. Pope's conduct in his poetic, as in his civil character.

For though he had got a Name (the reputation of which he agreeably rallies in the description he gives of it) yet he never, even when most in fashion, set up for a Patron, or a Dictator amongst the Wits; but still kept in his usual privacy; leaving *the whole Castalian state*, as he calls it, to a Mock-Mecenas, whom he next describes [§ 125 to 261.]

And, struck with the sense of that dignity and felicity inseparable from the character of a true Poet, he breaks out into a passionate vow for a continuance of the full Liberty attendant on it. And to shew how well he deserves it, and how safely he might be trusted with it, he concludes his wish with a description of his temper and disposition [§ 261 to 271.]

This naturally leads him to complain of his Friends, when they consider him in no other view than that of an *Author*: as if he had neither the same right to the enjoyments of life, the same concern for his highest interests, or the same dispositions of benevolence, with other people.

Besides, he now admonishes them, in his turn, that they do not consider to what they expose him, when they urge him to write on; namely, to the *suspensions* and the *displeasure* of a Court; who are made to believe, he is always writing; or at least to the foolish *criticisms* of court sycophants, who pretend to find him, by his style, in the immoral libels of every idle scribler: though he, in the mean time, be so far from countenancing such worthless trash in others, that he would be ready to execrate even his own best vein of poetry, if made at the expence of Truth or Innocence.

*Curst be the verse, how well so e'er it flow,
That tends to make one worthy man my foe;
Give Virtue scandal, Innocence a fear,
Or from the soft-ey'd virgin steal a tear.*

(Sentiments, which no efforts of genius, without the concurrence of the heart, could have expressed in strains so exquisitely sublime) that the sole object of his resentment was *vice* and *baseness*. In the detection of which, he artfully takes occasion to speak of *that* by which he himself had been injured and offended: and concludes with the character of one who had wantonly outraged him, and in the most sensible manner [§ 271 to 334.]

And here, moved again with fresh indignation at his slanderers, he takes the advice of Horace, *sume superbiam quæsitam meritis*, and draws a fine picture of his moral and poetic conduct through life. In which he shews that not *fame*, but VIRTUE was the constant object of his ambition: that for this he opposed himself to all the violence of Cabals, and the treacheries of Courts: the various iniquities of which having distinctly specified, he sums them up in that most atrocious and sensible of all, [y 334 to 359]

*The whisper, that to greatness still too near,
Perhaps yet vibrates on his SOV'REIGN'S ear.
Welcome for thee, fair Virtue! all the past:
For thee, fair Virtue! welcome ev'n the last.*

But here again his Friend interrupts the strains of his divine enthusiasm, and desires him to clear up an objection made to his conduct, at Court. "That it was inhumane to insult the Poor, and ill-breeding to affront the Great." To which he replies, That indeed, in his pursuit of *Vice*, he rarely considered how Knavery was circumstanced; but followed it, with his Vengeance, indifferently, whether it led to the Pillory, or the Drawing-Room [y 359 to 368.]

But lest this should give his Reader the idea of a savage intractable Virtue, which could bear with nothing, and would pardon nothing, he takes to himself the shame of owning that he was of so easy a nature, as to be duped by the slenderest appearances, a pretence to *Virtue* in a *witty Woman*: so forgiving, that he had sought out the object of his beneficence in a *personal Enemy*: so humble, that he had submitted to the conversation of *bad Poets*: and so forbearing, that he had curbed in his resentment under the most shocking of all calumnies, *abuses on his Father and Mother* [y 368 to 388.]

This naturally leads him to give a short account of their births, fortunes, and dispositions; which ends with the tenderest wishes for the happiness of his Friend; intermixed with the most pathetic description of that filial Piety, in the exercise of which he makes his own happiness to consist.

*Me let the tender office long engage
To rock the Cradle of reposing Age;
With lenient arts extend a Mother's breath,
Make Languor smile, and smooth the bed of Death;
Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,
And keep a while one Parent from the sky!*