



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 The First of his Letters

Pope, Alexander

London, 1751

Preface Prefixed to the First Genuine Edition in quarto, 1737.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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P R E F A C E

Prefixed to the First Genuine Edition
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IF what is here offered the reader, should happen in any degree to please him, the thanks are not due to the author, but partly to his friends, and partly to his enemies: it was wholly owing to the affection of the former, that so many Letters, of which he never kept copies, were preserved; and to the malice of the latter, that they were produced in this manner.

He had been very disagreeably used, in the publication of some Letters written in his youth, which fell into the hands of a woman who printed them, without his, or his correspondent's consent, in 1727. This treatment, and the apprehension of more of the same kind, put him upon recalling as many as he could from those who he imagined had kept any. He was sorry to find the number so great, but immediately lessened it by burning three parts in four of them: the rest he spared,

spared, not in any preference of their style or writing, but merely as they preserved the memory of some friendships which will ever be dear to him, or set in a true light some matters of fact, from which the scriblers of the times had taken occasion to asperse either his friends or himself. He therefore lay'd by the Originals, together with those of his correspondents, and caused a copy to be taken to deposite in the library of a noble friend; that in case either of the revival of slanders, or the publication of surreptitious Letters, during his life or after, a proper use might be made of them.

The next year, the posthumous works of Mr. Wycherley were printed, in a way disreputable enough to his memory. It was thought a justice due to him, to shew the world his better judgment; and that it was his last resolution to have suppressed those poems. As some of the Letters which had passed between him and our author cleared that point, they were published in 1729, with a few marginal notes added by a friend.

If in these Letters, and in those which were printed without his consent, there appear too much of a juvenile ambition of wit, or affectation of gaiety, he may reasonably hope it will be considered to *whom*, and at *what age*,
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he was guilty of it, as well as how soon it was over. The rest, every judge of writing will see, were by no means efforts of the genius, but emanations of the heart: and this alone may induce any candid reader to believe their publication an act of necessity, rather than of vanity.

It is notorious, how many volumes have been published under the title of his correspondence, with promises still of more, and open and repeated offers of encouragement to all persons who should send any letters of his for the press. It is as notorious what methods were taken to procure them, even from the publisher's own accounts in his prefaces, viz. by transacting with people in necessities, ^a or of abandoned ^b characters, or such as dealt without names in the ^c dark. Upon a quarrel with one of these last, he betrayed himself so far, as to appeal to the public in Narratives and Advertisements: like that Irish highway-man a few years before, who preferr'd a bill against his companion, for not sharing equally in the money, rings and watches, they had traded for in partnership upon Hounslow-heath.

^a See the Preface to vol. i. of a Book called Mr. Pope's Literary Correspondence.

^b Postscript to the Preface to vol. iv.

^c Narrative and Anecdotes before vol. ii.

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Several have been printed in his name which he never writ, and address'd to persons to whom they never were written^d; counterfeited as from bishop Atterbury to him, which neither that bishop nor he ever saw^e; and advertized even after that period when it was made felony to correspond with him.

I know not how it has been this author's fate, whom both his situation and his temper have all his life excluded from rivalling any man, in any pretension, (except that of pleasing by poetry) to have been as much aspersed and written at, as any First Minister of his time: pamphlets and news-papers have been full of him, nor was it *there only* that a private man, who never troubled either the world or common conversation with his opinions of Religion or Government, has been represented as a dangerous member of Society, a bigotted Papist, and an enemy to the Establishment. The unwarrantable publication of his Letters hath at least done him this service, to shew he has constantly enjoyed the friendship of worthy men; and that if a catalogue were to be taken of his

^d In Vol. iii. Letters from Mr. Pope to Mrs. Blount, &c.

^e Vol. ii. of the same, 8°. pag. 20. and at the end of the Edition of his Letters in 12°, by the booksellers of London and Westminster; and of the last Edition in 12°, printed for T. Cooper, 1725.

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friends and his enemies, he needs not to blush at either. Many of them having been written on the most trying occurrences, and all in the openness of friendship, are a proof what were his real sentiments, as they flowed warm from the heart, and fresh from the occasion; without the least thought that ever the world should be witness to them. Had he sat down with a design to draw his own picture, he could not have done it so truly; for whoever sits for it (whether to himself or another) will inevitably find the features more composed, than his appear in these letters. But if an author's hand, like a painter's, be more distinguishable in a slight sketch than in a finished picture, this very carelessness will make them the better known from such counterfeits, as have been, and may be imputed to him, either through a mercenary or a malicious design.

We hope it is needless to say, he is not accountable for several passages in the surreptitious editions of those Letters, which are such as no man of common sense would have published himself. The errors of the press were almost innumerable, and could not but be extremely multiplied in so many repeated editions, by the avarice and negligence of piratical printers, to not one of whom he ever gave

gave the least Title, or any other encouragement than that of not prosecuting them.

For the *Chasms* in the correspondence, we had not the means to supply them, the Author having destroyed too many Letters to preserve any Series. Nor would he go about to amend them, except by the omission of some passages, improper, or at least impertinent, to be divulged to the publick: or of such entire Letters, as were either not his, or not approved of by him.

He has been very sparing of those of his Friends, and thought it a respect shown to their memory, to suppress in particular such as were most in his favour. As it is not to *Vanity* but to *Friendship* that he intends this Monument, he would save his enemies the mortification of showing any further how well their Betters have thought of him: and at the same time secure from their censure his living Friends, who (he promises them) shall never be put to the blush, this way at least, for their partiality to him.

But however this Collection may be received, we cannot but lament the *Cause*, and the *Necessity* of such a publication, and heartily wish no honest man may be reduced to the same. To state the case fairly in the present situation. A Bookseller advertizes his intention to publish
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your Letters: he openly promises encouragement, or even pecuniary rewards, to those who will help him to any; and engages to insert whatever they shall send. Any scandal is sure of a reception, and any enemy who sends it screened from a discovery. Any domestic or servant, who can snatch a letter from your pocket or cabinet, is encouraged to that vile practice. If the quantity falls short of a volume, any thing else shall be joined with it (more especially scandal) which the collector can think for his interest, all recommended under your Name: you have not only Theft to fear, but Forgery. Any Bookseller, tho' conscious in what manner they were obtained, not caring what may be the consequence to your Fame or Quiet, will sell and disperse them in town and country. The better your Reputation is, the more your Name will cause them to be demanded, and consequently the more you will be injured. The injury is of such a nature, as the Law (which does not punish for *Intentions*) cannot prevent; and when done, may punish, but not redress. You are therefore reduced, either to enter into a personal treaty with such a man (which tho' the readiest, is the meanest of all methods) or to take such other measures to suppress them, as are contrary to your Inclination, or to publish them,

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as are contrary to your Modesty. Otherwise your Fame and your Property suffer alike; you are at once exposed and plundered. As an *Author*, you are deprived of that Power, which above all others constitutes a good one, the power of rejecting, and the right of judging for your self, what pieces it may be most useful, entertaining, or reputable to publish, at the time and in the manner you think best. As a *Man*, you are deprived of the right even over your own Sentiments, of the privilege of every human creature to divulge or conceal them; of the advantage of your Second thoughts; and of all the benefit of your Prudence, your Candour, or your Modesty. As a *Member of Society*, you are yet more injured; your private conduct, your domestic concerns, your family secrets, your passions, your tenderneſſes, your weakneſſes, are exposed to the Miſconſtruction or Reſentment of ſome, to the Censure or Impertinence of the whole world. The printing private letters in ſuch a manner, is the worſt ſort of *betraying Converſation*, as it has evidently the moſt extenſive, and the moſt laſting, ill conſequences. It is the higheſt offence againſt *Society*, as it renders the moſt dear and intimate intercourſe of friend with friend, and the moſt neceſſary commerce of man with man, unſafe, and to be dreaded. To

open Letters is esteemed the greatest breach of honour; even to look into them already opened or accidentally dropt, is held an ungenerous, if not an immoral Act. What then can be thought of the procuring them merely by Fraud, and the printing them merely for Lucre? We cannot but conclude every honest man will wish, that, if the Laws have as yet provided no adequate remedy, one at least may be found, to prevent so great and growing an evil.

