



## **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**

Letters to and from Several Persons. From 1711 to 1714.

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# LETTERS

TO AND FROM

## SEVERAL PERSONS.

From 1711, to 1714.

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### LETTER I.

To the Hon. J. C. Esq.

June 15, 1711.

I Send you Dennis's remarks on the <sup>a</sup> Essay; which equally abound in just criticisms and fine railleries. The few observations in my hand in the margins, are what a morning's leisure permitted me to make purely for your perusal. For I am of opinion that such a critic, as you will find him by the latter part of his Book, is but one way to be properly answer'd, and that way I would not take after what he informs me in his preface, that he is at this time

<sup>a</sup> On Criticism.



persecuted by fortune. This I knew not before ; if I had, his name had been spared in the Essay, for that only reason. I can't conceive what ground he has for so excessive a resentment ; nor imagine how those <sup>b</sup> three lines can be called a reflection on his person, which only describe him subject a little to anger on some occasions. I have heard of combatants so very furious, as to fall down themselves with that very blow which they design'd to lay heavy on their antagonists. But if Mr. Dennis's rage proceeds only from a zeal to discourage young and unexperienced writers from scribbling, he should frighten us with his verse, not prose : for I have often known, that, when all the precepts in the world would not reclaim a sinner, some very sad example has done the business. Yet to give this man his due, he has objected to one or two lines with reason, and I will alter them in case of another edition ; I will make my enemy do me a kindness where he meant an injury, and so serve instead of a friend. What he observes at the bottom of page 20 of his reflections, was objected to by yourself, and had been mended but for the haste of the press : I confess it what the English call a Bull, in the

<sup>b</sup> But Appius reddens at each word you speak,  
And stares tremendous with a threat'ning eye,  
Like some fierce tyrant in old tapestry.

expression,



expression, tho' the sense be manifest enough : Mr. Dennis's Bulls are seldom in the expression, they are generally in the sense.

I shall certainly never make the least reply to him ; not only because you advise me, but because I have ever been of opinion, that, if a book can't answer for itself to the public, 'tis to no sort of purpose for its author to do it<sup>c</sup>. If I am wrong in any sentiment of that Essay, I protest sincerely, I don't desire all the world should be deceived (which would be of very ill consequence) merely that I myself may be thought right (which is of very little consequence.) I would be the first to recant, for the benefit of others, and the glory of myself ; for (as I take it) when a man owns himself to have been in an error, he does but tell you in other words, that he is wiser than he was. But I have had an advantage by the publishing that book, which otherwise I should never have known ; it has been the occasion of making me friends and open abettors, of several gentlemen of known sense and wit ; and of proving

<sup>c</sup> In works of Poetry, and generally, in whatever concerns the *Composition* of a book, this rule is a very good one. In controverted *Opinions* the case is different. The advancement of truth,

or the defence of an Author's honest fame, may sometimes make it necessary, or expedient for him to answer the Objections made to his book.



to me what I have till now doubted, that my writings are taken some notice of by the world, or I should never be attacked thus in particular. I have read that 'twas a custom among the *Romans*, while a General rode in triumph, to have the common soldiers in the streets that railed at him and reproached him; to put him in mind, that tho' his services were in the main approved and rewarded, yet he had faults enough to keep him humble.

You will see by this, that whoever sets up for wit in these days ought to have the constancy of a primitive Christian, and be prepared to suffer martyrdom in the cause of it. But sure this is the first time that a Wit was attacked for his *Religion*, as, you'll find, I am most zealously in this treatise; and you know, Sir, what alarms I have had from the <sup>c</sup> opposite side on this account. Have I not reason to cry out with the poor fellow in *Virgil*,

*Quid jam misero mihi denique restat?  
Cui neque apud Danaos usquam locus, et super ipsi  
Dardanidæ infensi pœnas cum sanguine poscunt!*

'Tis however my happiness that you, Sir, are impartial,

*Jove was alike to Latian and to Phrygian,  
For you well know, that Wit's of no Religion.*

<sup>a</sup> See the ensuing Letter.

The



The manner in which Mr. D. takes to pieces several particular lines, detached from their natural places, may shew how easy it is to a caviller to give a new sense, or a new nonsense to any thing. And indeed his constructions are not more wrested from the genuine meaning, than theirs who objected to the heterodox parts, as they called them.

Our friend the Abbe is not of that sort, who with the utmost candour and freedom has modestly told me what others thought, and shewn himself one (as he very well expresses it) rather of a number than a party. The only difference between us in relation to the Monks, is, that he thinks most sorts of learning flourished among them, and I am opinion, that only some sort of learning was barely kept alive by them: he believes that in the most natural and obvious sense, that line (A second deluge learning over-run) will be understood of learning in general; and I fancy 'twill be understood only (as 'tis meant) of polite learning, criticism, poetry, &c. which is the only learning concerned in the subject of the Essay. It is true, that the monks did preserve what learning there was, about Nicholas the fifth's time; but those who succeeded fell into the depth of barbarism, or at least stood at a stay while others arose from thence, insomuch that even Erasmus and Reuchlin could hardly



laugh them out of it. I am highly obliged to the Abbe's zeal in my commendation, and goodness in not concealing what he thinks my error. And his testifying some esteem for the book just at a time when his brethren rais'd a clamour against it, is an instance of great generosity and candour, which I shall ever acknowledge.

Your, &c.

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L E T T E R II.

To the same.

June 18, 1711.

**I**N your last you informed me of the mistaken zeal of some people, who seem to make it no less their business to persuade men they are erroneous, than doctors do that they are sick; only that they may magnify their own cure, and triumph over an imaginary distemper. The simile objected to in my Essay,

*(Thus wit, like faith, by each man is apply'd  
To one small sect, and all are damn'd beside.)*

plainly concludes at this second line, where stands a full stop: and what follows (*Meanly they seek, &c.*) speaks only of wit (which is meant by that blessing, and that fun) for how  
can



can the sun of faith be said to sublime the southern wits, and to ripen the genius's of northern climates? I fear, these gentlemen understand grammar as little as they do criticism: and, perhaps, out of good-nature to the monks, are willing to take from them the censure of ignorance, and to have it to themselves. The word *they* refers (as, I am sure, I meant, and as I thought every one must have known) to those Critics there spoken of, who are partial to some particular sett of writers, to the prejudice of all others. And the very simile itself, if twice read, may convince them, that the censure here of damning, lies not on our church at all, unless they call our church *one small sect*: and the cautious words (*by each man*) manifestly show it a general reflection on all such (whoever they are) who entertain those narrow and limited notions of the mercy of the Almighty; which the reformed ministers and presbyterians are as guilty of as any people living.

Yet after all, I promise you, Sir, if the alteration of a word or two will gratify any man of sound faith tho' weak understanding, I will (though it were from no other principle than that of common good-nature) comply with it. And if you please but to particularize the spot where their objection lies (for it is in a very narrow compass) that stumbling-block, tho' it



be but a little pebble, shall be removed out of their way. If the heat of these good disputants (who, I am afraid, being bred up to wrangle in the schools, cannot get rid of the humour all their lives) should proceed so far as to personal reflections upon me, I assure you, notwithstanding, I will do or say nothing, however provok'd (for some people can no more provoke than oblige) that is unbecoming the true character of a Catholic. I will set before me the example of that great man, and great saint, Erasmus; who in the midst of calumny proceeded with all the calmness of innocence<sup>a</sup>, and the unrevenging spirit of primitive christianity. However, I would advise them to suffer the mention of him to pass unregarded, lest I should be forced to do that for his reputation which I would never do for my own; I mean, to vindicate so great a light of our church from the malice of past times, and the ignorance of the present, in a language which may extend farther than that in which the trifle about criticism is written. I wish these gentlemen would be contented with finding fault with me only, who will submit to them right or wrong, as far as I only am concerned; I have a greater regard to the quiet of mankind than to disturb

<sup>a</sup> I doubt this is not strictly true. See his Answers to Lee, archbishop of York.



it for things of so little consequence as my credit and my sense. A little humility can do a poet no hurt, and a little charity would do a priest none: for, as St. Austin finely says, *Ubi charitas, ibi humilitas; ubi humilitas, ibi pax.*

Your, &c.

### LETTER III.

To the same.

July 19, 1711.

**T**HE concern which you more than seem to be affected with for my reputation, by the several accounts you have so obligingly given of what reports and censures the holy Vandals have thought fit to pass upon me, makes me desirous of telling so good a friend my whole thoughts of this matter; and of setting before you, in a clear light, the true state of it.

I have ever believed the best piece of service one could do to our religion, was openly to express our detestation and scorn of all those mean artifices and *piæ fraudes*, which it stands so little in need of, and which have laid it under so great a scandal among its enemies.

Nothing has been so much a scarecrow to them, as that too peremptory and uncharitable  
assertion



assertion of an utter impossibility of salvation to all but ourselves: invincible ignorance excepted, which indeed some people define under so great limitations, and with such exclusions, that it seems as if that word were rather invented as a salvo, or expedient, not to be thought too bold with the thunder-bolts of God (which are hurled about so freely on almost all mankind by the hands of ecclesiastics) than as a real exception to almost universal damnation. For besides the small number of the truly faithful in our Church, we must again subdivide; the Jansenist is damned by the Jesuit, the Jesuit by the Jansenist, the Scotist by the Thomist, and so forth.

There may be Errors, I grant, but I can't think them of such consequence as to destroy utterly the Charity of mankind; the very greatest bond in which we are engaged by God to one another: therefore, I own to you, I was glad of any opportunity to express my dislike of so shocking a sentiment as those of the religion I profess are commonly charged with; and I hoped, a slight insinuation, introduced so easily by a casual similitude only, could never have given offence; but on the contrary must needs have done good; in a nation and time, wherein we are the smaller party, and consequently  
most



most misrepresented, and most in need of vindication.

For the same reason, I took occasion to mention the superstition of some ages after the subversion of the Roman Empire, which is too manifest a truth to be denied, and does in no sort reflect upon the present professors of our faith, who are free from it. Our silence in these points may, with some reason, make our adversaries think we allow and persist in those bigotries; which yet in reality all good and sensible men despise, tho' they are persuaded not to speak against them, I can't tell why, since now 'tis no way the interest even of the worst of our priesthood (as it might have been then) to have them smothered in silence: For, as the opposite sects are now prevailing, 'tis too late to hinder our church from being slander'd; 'tis our business now to vindicate ourselves from being thought abettors of what they charge us with. This can't so well be brought about with serious faces; we must laugh with them at what deserves it, or be content to be laughed at, with such as deserve it.

As to particulars: you cannot but have observed, that at first the whole objection against the simile of Wit and Faith lay to the word They: when that was beyond contradiction removed (the very grammar serving to confute them)



them) then the objection was against the simile itself; or if that simile will not be objected to (sense and common reason being indeed a little stubborn, and not apt to give way to every body) next the mention of Superstition must become a crime; as if Religion and she were sisters, or that it were scandal upon the family of Christ, to say a word against the devil's bastard. Afterwards, more mischief is discover'd in a place that seem'd innocent at first, the two lines about *Schismatics*. An ordinary man would imagine the author plainly declared against those schismatics, for quitting the true faith out of a contempt of the understanding of some few of its believers: but these believers are called *dull*, and because I say that those schismatics think some believers dull, therefore these charitable interpreters of my meaning will have it, that I think all believers dull. I was lately telling Mr. \* \* these objections: who assured me I had said nothing which a catholic need to disown; and I have cause to know that gentleman's fault (if he has any) is not want of zeal: He put a notion into my head, which, I confess, I can't but acquiesce in; that when a sett of people are piqued at any truth which they think to their own disadvantage, their method of revenge on the truth-speaker is to attack his reputation a by-way, and not openly to ob-

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ject



ject to the place they are really galled by: what these therefore (in his opinion) are in earnest angry at, is, that Erasmus, whom their tribe oppressed and persecuted, should be vindicated after an age of obloquy by one of their own people, willing to utter an honest truth in behalf of the dead, whom no man sure will flatter and to whom few will do justice. Others, you know, were as angry that I mentioned Mr. Walsh with honour; who as he never refused to any one of merit of any party the praise due to him, so honestly deserved it from all others, tho' of ever so different interests or sentiments. May I be ever guilty of this sort of liberty, and latitude of principle! which gives us the hardiness of speaking well of those whom envy oppresses even after death. As I would always speak well of my living friends when they are absent, nay because they are absent, so would I much more of the dead, in that eternal absence; and the rather because I expect no thanks for it.

Thus, Sir, you see I do in my conscience persist in what I have written; yet in my friendship I will recant and alter whatever you please, in case of a second edition (which I think the book will not so soon arrive at, for Tonson's printer told me he drew off a thousand copies in this first impression, and, I fancy,  
a trea-



a treatise of this nature, which not one gentleman in threescore even of a liberal education can understand, can hardly exceed the vent of that number.) You shall find me a true Trojan in my faith and friendship, in both which I will persevere to the end

Your, &c.

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L E T T E R I V.

To my Lord L A N S D O W N.

Binfield, Jan. 10, 1712.

**I** Thank you for having given my poem of Windsor Forest its greatest ornament, that of bearing your name in the front of it. 'Tis one thing when a person of true merit permits us to have the honour of drawing him as like as we can; and another, when we make a fine thing at random, and persuade the next vain creature we can find that 'tis his own likeness; which is the case every day of my fellow scribblers. Yet, my Lord, this honour has given me no more pride than your honours have given you; but it affords me a great deal of pleasure, which is much better than a great deal of pride; and it indeed would give me some pain, if I was not sure of one advantage; that



that whereas others are offended if they have not more than justice done them, you would be displeased if you had so much: therefore I may safely do you as much injury in my word, as you do yourself in your own thoughts. I am so vain as to think I have shewn you a favour, in sparing your modesty, and you cannot but make me some return for prejudicing the truth to gratify you: This I beg may be the free correction of these verses, which will have few beauties, but what may be made by your blots. I am in the circumstance of an ordinary painter drawing Sir Godfrey Kneller, who by a few touches of his own could make the piece very valuable. I might then hope, that many years hence the world might read, in conjunction with your name, that of

Your Lordship's, &c.

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L E T T E R V.

The Hon. J. C. to Mr. P O P E

May 23, 1712.

**I** AM very glad for the sake of the widow, and for the credit of the deceased, that<sup>a</sup> Betterton's remains are fallen into such hands as

<sup>a</sup> A Translation of some part of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the Prologues, &c. | printed in a Miscellany with some works of Mr. Pope, in 2 Vol. 12<sup>o</sup> by B. Lintot. P.

may



may render them reputable to the one, and beneficial to the other. Besides the public acquaintance I long had with that poor man, I also had a slender knowledge of his parts and capacity by private conversation, and ever thought it pity he was necessitated by the straitness of his fortune, to act (and especially to his latest hours) an imaginary and fictitious part, who was capable of exhibiting a real one, with credit to himself, and advantage to his neighbour.

I hope your health permitted you to execute your design of giving us an imitation of Pollio; I am satisfied 'twill be doubly divine, and I shall long to see it. I ever thought church-music the most ravishing of all harmonious compositions, and must also believe sacred subjects, well handled, the most inspiring of all poetry.

But where hangs the *Lock* now? (tho' I know, that rather than draw any just reflection upon yourself of the least shadow of ill-nature, you would freely have suppress'd one of the best of poems.) I hear no more of it—will it come out in Lintot's Miscellany or not? I wrote to Lord Petre upon the subject of the *Lock*, some time since, but have as yet had no answer, nor indeed do I know when he'll be in London. I have, since I saw you, corresponded with Mrs. W. I hope she is now with her  
Aunt,



Aunt, and that her journey thither was something facilitated by my writing to that lady as pressingly as possible, not to let any thing whatsoever obstruct it. I sent her obliging answer to the party it most concern'd; and when I hear Mrs. W. is certainly there, I will write again to my Lady, to urge as much as possible the effecting the only thing that in my opinion can make her niece easy. I have run out my extent of paper, and am

Your, &c.

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## LETTER VI.

### The Answer.

May 28, 1712.

**I**T is not only the disposition I always have of conversing with you, that makes me so speedily answer your obliging letter, but the apprehension lest your charitable intent of writing to my Lady A. on Mrs. W.'s affair should be frustrated, by the short stay she makes there. She went thither on the 25th with that mixture of expectation and anxiety, with which people usually go into unknown or half-discovered countries, utterly ignorant of the dispositions of the inhabitants, and the treatment they

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are



are to meet with. The unfortunate of all people are the most unfit to be left alone ; yet, we see, the world generally takes care they shall be so : whereas, if we took a considerate prospect of the world, the business and study of the happy and easy should be to divert and humour, as well as comfort and pity, the distressed. I cannot therefore excuse some near Allies of mine for their conduct of late towards this Lady, which has given me a great deal of anger as well as sorrow : all I shall say to you of them at present is, that they have not been my Relations these two months. The consent of opinions in our minds, is certainly a nearer tie than can be contracted by all the blood in our bodies ; and I am proud of finding I have something congenial with you. Will you permit me to confess to you, that all the favours and kind offices you have shewn towards me, have not so strongly cemented me yours, as the discovery of that generous and manly compassion you manifested in the case of this unhappy Lady ? I am afraid to insinuate to you how much I esteem you : Flatterers have taken up the style which was once peculiar to friends, and an honest man has now no way left to express himself besides the common one of knaves : so that true friends now-a-days differ in their address from flatterers, much as right mastiffs do



do from spaniels, and show themselves by a dumb surly sort of fidelity, rather than by a complaisant and open kindness.—Will you never leave commending my poetry? In fair truth, Sir, I like it but too well myself already: expose me no more, I beg you, to the great danger of Vanity, (the rock of all men, but most of young men) and be kindly content for the future, when you would please me thoroughly, to say only you like what I write.

Yours, &c.

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## LETTER VII.

Dec. 5, 1712.

**Y**OU have at length complied with the request I have often made you, for you have shown me, I must confess, several of my faults in the sight of those letters. Upon a review of them, I find many things that would give me shame, if I were not more desirous to be thought honest than prudent; so many things freely thrown out, such lengths of unreserved friendship, thoughts just warm from the brain, without any polishing or dress, the very dishabile of the understanding. You have proved yourself more tender of another's embryo's than the fondest mothers are of their own, for you have



preserv'd every thing that I miscarried of. Since I know this, I shall in one respect be more afraid of writing to you than ever, at this careless rate, because I see my evil works may again rise in judgment against me; yet in another respect I shall be less afraid, since this has given me such a proof of the extreme indulgence you afford to my slightest thoughts. The revisal of these letters has been a kind of examination of conscience to me; so fairly and faithfully have I set down in them from time to time the true and undisguised state of my mind. But I find, that these, which were intended as sketches of my friendship, give as imperfect images of it, as the little landscapes we commonly see in black and white do of a beautiful country; they can represent but a very small part of it, and that deprived of the life and lustre of nature. I perceive that the more I endeavour'd to render manifest the real affection and value I ever had for you, I did but injure it by representing less and less of it: as glasses which are design'd to make an object very clear, generally contract it. Yet as when people have a full idea of a thing first upon their own knowledge, the least traces of it serve to refresh the remembrance, and are not displeasing on that score; so, I hope, the foreknowledge  
you



you had of my esteem for you, is the reason that you do not dislike my letters.

They will not be of any great service (I find) in the design I mentioned to you: I believe I had better steal from a richer man, and plunder your letters (which I have kept as carefully as I would Letters Patents, since they intitle me to what I more value than titles of honour.) You have some cause to apprehend this usage from me, if what some say be true, that I am a great borrower; however I have hitherto had the luck that none of my creditors have challenged me for it: and those who say it are such, whose writings no man ever borrow'd from, so have the least reason to complain; and whose works are granted on all hands to be but too much their own. Another has been pleas'd to declare, that my verses are corrected by other men: I verily believe theirs were never corrected by any man: but indeed if mine have not, 'twas not my fault; I have endeavour'd my utmost that they should. But these things are only whisper'd, and I will not encroach upon Bays's province and *pen-whispers*, so hasten to conclude

Your, &c.



## L E T T E R   V I I I .

From my Lord LANDSDOWN.

Oct. 21, 1713.

**I** Am pleas'd beyond measure with your design of translating Homer. The trials which you have already made and published on some parts of that author, have shewn that you are equal to so great a task : and you may therefore depend upon the utmost services I can do you in promoting this work, or any thing that may be for your service.

I hope Mr. Stafford, for whom you was pleas'd to concern yourself, has had the good effects of the Queen's Grace to him. I had notice the night before I began my journey, that her Majesty had not only directed his pardon, but order'd a Writ for reversing his Outlawry.

Your, &amp;c.



LETTER IX.

To General ANTHONY HAMILTON<sup>a</sup>

Upon his having translated into French Verse the  
*Essay on Criticism*.

Oct. 10, 1713.

IF I could as well express, or (if you will allow me to say it) translate the sentiments of my heart as you have done those of my head, in your excellent version of my *Essay*; I should not only appear the best writer in the world, but, what I much more desire to be thought, the most your servant of any man living. 'Tis an advantage very rarely known, to receive at once a great honour and a great improvement. This, Sir, you have afforded me, having at the same time made others take my sense, and taught me to understand my own; if I may call that my own which is indeed more properly yours. Your verses are no more a translation of mine, than Virgil's are of Homer's; but are, like his, the justest imitation and the noblest Commentary.

In putting me into a French dress, you have not only adorned my outside, but mended my shape; and, if I am now a good figure, I must

<sup>a</sup> Author of the *Memoirs* of the Count de Grammont, | *Contas*, and other pieces of note in French.



consider you have naturaliz'd me into a country which is famous for making every man a fine gentleman. It is by your means, that (contrary to most young travellers) I am come back much better than I went out.

I cannot but wish we had a bill of commerce for translation established the next parliament; we could not fail of being gainers by that, nor of making ourselves amends for any thing we have lost by the war. Nay, tho' we should insist upon the demolishing of Boileau's works, the French, as long as they have writers of your form, might have as good an equivalent.

Upon the whole, I am really as proud, as our ministers ought to be, of the terms I have gain'd from abroad; and I design, like them, to publish speedily to the world the benefits accruing from them; for I cannot resist the temptation of printing your admirable translation here<sup>b</sup>; to which if you will be so obliging to give me leave to prefix your name, it will be the only addition you can make to the honour already done me. I am, Your, &c.

<sup>b</sup> This was never done, for the two printed French versions are neither of this hand. The one was done by Monsieur Roboton, private secretary to king George the first, printed in quarto at Amsterdam, and at London 1717. The other by the Abbé Resnel, in octavo, with a large preface and notes, at Paris, 1730. P.