



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

Letter I. To the Hon. J. C. Esq. Reflections on the Essay on Criticism.

Nutzungsbedingungen

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-56122](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-56122)

LETTERS

TO AND FROM

SEVERAL PERSONS.

From 1711, to 1714.

LETTER I.

To the Hon. J. C. Esq.

June 15, 1711.

I Send you Dennis's remarks on the ^a 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

^a 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 ^b 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

^b 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^c. 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

^c 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 ^c 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.*

^a 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.

L E T T E R II.

To the same.

June 18, 1711.

IN 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