



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

XIV. Of the freedom of a friend, The incongruity of Man, and the vanity of
the Word.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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I generally employ the mornings in painting with Mr. Jervas^a, and the evenings in the conversation of such as I think can most improve my mind, of whatever denomination they are. I ever must set the highest value upon men of truly great, that is honest principles, with equal capacities. The best way I know of overcoming calumny and misconstruction, is by a vigorous perseverance in every thing we know to be right, and a total neglect of all that can ensue from it. 'Tis partly from this maxim that I depend upon your friendship, because I believe it will do justice to my intention in every thing; and give me leave to tell you, that (as the world goes) this is no small assurance I repose in you. I am Your, &c.

L E T T E R XIV.

T O M R. A D D I S O N.

Dec. 14, 1713.

I Have been lying in wait for my own imagination, this week and more, and watching what thoughts came up in the whirl of the fancy, that were worth communicating to you in a letter. But I am at length convinced that

^a See the Epistle to him in verse, writ about this time. P.
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my rambling head can produce nothing of that sort; so I must e'en be contented with telling you the old story, that I love you heartily. I have often found by experience, that nature and truth, tho' never so low or vulgar, are yet pleasing when openly and artlessly represented: It would be diverting to me to read the very letters of an infant, could it write its innocent inconsistencies and tautologies just as it thought them. This makes me hope a letter from me will not be unwelcome to you, when I am conscious I write with more unreservedness than ever man wrote, or perhaps talk'd to another. I trust your good-nature with the whole range of my follies, and really love you so well, that I would rather you should pardon me than esteem me; since one is an act of goodness and benevolence, the other a kind of constrained deference.

You can't wonder my thoughts are scarce consistent, when I tell you how they are distracted. Every hour of my life my mind is strangely divided; this minute perhaps I am above the stars, with a thousand systems round about me, looking forward into a vast abyss, and losing my whole comprehension in the boundless space of Creation, in dialogues with Whiston and the Astronomers; the next moment I am below all trifles groveling with T*

in the very centre of nonsense : Now I am recreated with the brisk fallies and quick turns of wit, which Mr. Steele in his liveliest and freest humours darts about him ; and now levelling my application to the insignificant observations and quirks of Grammar of C* and D*.

Good God ! what an incongruous animal is man ! how unsettled in his best part, his soul ; and how changing and variable in his frame of body ? the constancy of the one shook by every notion, the temperament of the other affected by every blast of wind ! What is he altogether but one mighty inconsistency ; sickness and pain is the lot of one half of him : doubt and fear the portion of the other ! What a bustle we make about passing our time, when all our space is but a point ? what aims and ambitions are crowded into this little instant of our life, which (as Shakespear finely words it) is rounded with a sleep ? Our whole extent of being is no more, in the eye of him who gave it, than a scarce perceptible moment of duration. Those animals whose circle of living is limited to three or four hours, as the naturalists tell us, are yet as long-lived and possess as wide a scene of action as man, if we consider him with a view to all Space, and all Eternity. Who knows what plots, what achievements a mite

mite may perform in his kingdom of a grain of dust, within his life of some minutes; and of how much less consideration than even this, is the life of man in the sight of God, who is from ever, and for ever?

Who that thinks in this train, but must see the world and its contemptible grandeurs, lessen before him at every thought? 'Tis enough to make one remain stupify'd in a poize of inaction, void of all desires, of all designs, of all friendships.

But we must return (thro' our very condition of being) to our narrow selves, and those things that affect ourselves: our passions, our interests flow in upon us, and unphilosophize us into mere mortals. For my part, I never return so much into myself, as when I think of you, whose friendship is one of the best comforts I have for the insignificancy of myself. I am

Your, &c.

LETTER XV.

To Mr. ADDISON.

Jan. 30, 1713-14.

YOUR letter found me very busy in my grand undertaking, to which I must wholly

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