



## **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**

XVIII. The vanity of poetical fame, serious thoughts.

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**Nutzungsbedingungen**

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

## L E T T E R   X V I I I .

July 13, 1714.

**Y**O U mention the account I gave you some time ago of the things which Philips said in his foolishness : but I can't tell from any thing in your letter, whether you received a long one from me about a fortnight since. It was principally intended to thank you for the last obliging favour you did me ; and perhaps for that reason you pass it in silence. I there launch'd into some account of my temporal affairs, and intend now to give you some hints of my spiritual. The conclusion of your letter draws this upon you, where you tell me, you prayed for me. Your proceeding, Sir, is contrary to that of most other friends, who never talk of praying for a man after they have done him a service, but only when they will do him none. Nothing can be more kind than the hint you give me of the vanity of human sciences, which, I assure you, I am daily more convinced of ; and indeed I have, for some years past, look'd upon all of them no better than amusements. To make them the ultimate end of our pursuit, is a miserable and short ambition, which will drop from us at every little disappointment here, and even, in case of no  
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disappointments here, will infallibly desert us hereafter. The utmost fame they are capable of bestowing, is never worth the pains they cost us, and the time they lose us. If you attain the top of your desires that way, all those who envy you will do you harm; and of those who admire you, few will do you good. The unsuccessful writers are your declared enemies, and probably the successful your secret ones: for those hate not more to be excell'd, than these to be rival'd: And at the upshot, after a life of perpetual application, you reflect that you have been doing nothing for yourself, and that the same or less industry might have gain'd you a friendship that can never deceive or end, a satisfaction, which praise cannot bestow nor vanity feel, and a glory, which (tho' in one respect like fame, not to be had till after death) yet shall be felt and enjoy'd to eternity. These, dear Sir, are unfeignedly my sentiments, whenever I think at all: for half the things that employ our heads deserve not the name of thoughts, they are only stronger dreams of impressions upon the imagination: our schemes of government, our systems of philosophy, our golden worlds of poetry, are all but so many shadowy images, and airy prospects, which arise to us but so much the livelier and more frequent, as

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we



we are more overcast with the darkness, and disturbed with the fumes, of human vanity.

The same thing that makes old men willing to leave this world, makes me willing to leave poetry, long habit, and weariness of the same track. Homer will work a cure upon me; fifteen thousand verses are equivalent to fourscore years, to make one old in rhyme: and I should be sorry and ashamed, to go on jingling to the last step, like a waggoner's horse, in the same road, and so leave my bells to the next silly animal that will be proud of them. That man makes a mean figure in the eyes of Reason, who is measuring syllables and coupling rhymes, when he should be mending his own soul, and securing his own immortality. If I had not this opinion, I should be unworthy even of those small and limited parts which God has given me; and unworthy of the friendship of such a man as you. I am

Your, &c.

L E T T E R XIX.

July 25, 1714.

**I** Have no better excuse to offer you, that I have omitted a task naturally so pleasing to me as conversing upon paper with you, but that