



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

XIX. Concerning the translation of Homer.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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

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
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that my time and eyes have been wholly employ'd upon Homer, whom, I almost fear, I shall find but one way of imitating, which is, in his blindness. I am perpetually afflicted with head-achs, that very much affect my sight, and indeed since my coming hither I have scarce past an hour agreeably, except that in which I read your letter. I would seriously have you think, you have no man who more truly knows to place a right value on your friendship, than he who least deserves it on all other accounts than his due sense of it. But, let me tell you, you can hardly guess what a task you undertake, when you profess yourself my friend; there are some Tories who will take you for a Whig, some Whigs who will take you for a Tory, some Protestants who will esteem you a rank Papist, and some Papists who will account you a Heretic.

I find by dear experience, we live in an age, where it is criminal to be moderate; and where no one man can be allowed to be just to all men. The notions of right and wrong are so far strain'd, that perhaps to be in the right so very violently, may be of worse consequence than to be easily and quietly in the wrong. I really wish all men so well, that, I am satisfied, but few can wish me so; but if those few are such as tell me they do, I am content, for they are
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the best people I know. While you believe me what I profess as to religion, I can bear any thing the bigotted may say; while Mr. Congreve likes my poetry, I can endure Dennis, and a thousand more like him; while the most honest and moral of each party think me no ill man, I can easily bear that the most violent and mad of all parties rise up to throw dirt at me.

I must expect an hundred attacks upon the publication of my Homer. Whoever in our times would be a professor of learning above his fellows, ought at the very first to enter the world with the constancy and resolution of a primitive Christian, and be prepared to suffer all sort of public persecution. It is certainly to be lamented, that if any man does but endeavour to distinguish himself, or gratify others by his studies, he is immediately treated as a common enemy, instead of being looked upon as a common friend; and assaulted as generally as if his whole design were to prejudice the State or ruin the Public. I will venture to say, no man ever rose to any degree of perfection in writing, but thro' obstinacy, and an inveterate resolution against the stream of mankind: So that if the world has received any benefit from the labours of the learned, it was in its own despite. For when first they essay their parts,

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all people in general are prejudiced against new beginners; and when they have got a little above contempt, then some particular persons, who were before unfortunate in their own attempts, are sworn foes to them only because they succeed.—Upon the whole, one may say of the best writers, that they pay a severe fine for their fame, which it is always in the power of the most worthless part of mankind to levy upon them when they please.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

TO MR. JERVAS.

July 28, 1714.

I Am just enter'd upon the old way of life again, sleep and musing. It is my employment to revive the old of past ages to the present, as it is yours to transmit the young of the present, to the future. I am copying the great Master in one art, with the same love and diligence with which the Painters hereafter will copy you in another.

Thus I should begin my Epistle to you, if it were a Dedicatory one. But as it is a friendly letter, you are to find nothing mention'd in
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