



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

XI. To the Duke of Buckingham in answer to his Letter on Buckingham-house.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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which I have chosen for the subject of a letter. I dropt him as soon as I got to Oxford, and paid a visit to my Lord Carleton at Middleton.

The conversations I enjoy here are not to be prejudiced by my pen, and the pleasures from them only to be equal'd when I meet your Lordship. I hope in a few days to cast myself from your horse at your feet.

I am, &c.

L E T T E R X I.

To the Duke of BUCKINGHAM.

(In answer to a Letter in which he inclosed the Description of Buckingham-house, written by him to the D. of Sh.)

PLINY was one of those few author, who had a warm house over his heads nay two houses, as appears by two of his epistles. I believe, if any of his contemporary authors durst have inform'd the public where they lodged, we should have found the garrets of Rome as well inhabited, as those of Fleet-street; but 'tis dangerous to let creditors into such a secret, therefore we may presume that then, as well as now-a-days, no body knew where they lived but their Booksellers.

It seems, that when Virgil came to Rome, he had no lodging at all : he first introduc'd himself to Augustus by an epigram, beginning *Nocte pluit tota* — an observation which probably he had not made, unless he had lain all night in the street.

Where Juvenal lived we cannot affirm ; but in one of his satyrs he complains of the excessive price of lodgings ; neither do I believe he would have talk'd so feelingly of Codrus's bed, if there had been room for a bedfellow in it.

I believe, with all the ostentation of Pliny, he would have been glad to have changed both his houses for your Grace's one ; which is a country-house in the summer, and a town-house in the winter, and must be owned to be the properest habitation for a wise man, who sees all the world change every season without ever changing himself.

I have been reading the description of Pliny's house with an eye to yours, but, finding they will bear no comparison, will try if it can be matched by the large country seat I inhabit at present, and see what figure it may make by the help of a florid description.

You must expect nothing regular in my description, any more than in the house ; the whole vast edifice is so disjointed, and the several
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parts of it so detach'd one from the other, and yet so joining again, one cannot tell how, that, in one of my poetical fits, I imagined it had been a village in Amphion's time, where the cottages having taken a country dance together, had been all out, and stood stone-still with amazement ever since.

You must excuse me, if I say nothing of the Front; indeed I don't know which it is. A stranger would be grievously disappointed, who endeavour'd to get into this house the right way. One would reasonably expect after the entry through the Porch to be let into the hall: alas nothing less! you find yourself in the house of office. From the parlour you think to step into the drawing-room, but upon opening the iron-nail'd door, you are convinced by a flight of birds about your ears, and a cloud of dust in your eyes, that it is the Pigeon-house. If you come into the chapel, you find its altars, like those of the Ancients, continually smoaking, but it is with the steams of the adjoining kitchen.

The great hall within is high and spacious, flank'd on one side with a very long table, a true image of ancient hospitality: the walls are all over ornamented with monstrous horns of animals, about twenty broken pikes, ten or a dozen blunderbusses, and a rusty matchlock musquet

musquet or two, which we were inform'd had ferv'd in the civil wars. Here is one vast arch'd window beautifully darken'd with divers scutcheons of painted glass: one shining pane in particular bears date 1286, which alone preserves the memory of a Knight whose iron armour is long since perished with rust, and whose alabaster nose is moulder'd from his monument. The face of dame Eleanor in another piece owes more to that single pane than to all the glasses she ever consulted in her life. After this, who can say that glass is frail, when it is not half so frail as human beauty, or glory! and yet I can't but sigh to think that the most authentic record of so ancient a family should lie at the mercy of every infant who flings a stone. In former days there have dined in this hall garter'd Knights, and courtly Dames, attended by ushers, sewers, and seneschals; and yet it was but last night, that an owl flew hither and mistook it for a barn.

This hall lets you (up and down) over a very high threshold into the great parlour. Its contents are a broken-belly'd virginal, a couple of crippled velvet chairs, with two or three mildew'd pictures of mouldy ancestors, who look as dismally as if they came fresh from hell with all their brimstone about them; these are carefully set at the farther corner, for the windows being

being every where broken make it so convenient a place to dry poppies and mustard seed, that the room is appropriated to that use.

Next this parlour, as I said before, lies the pigeon-house, by the side of which runs an entry, which lets you on one hand and t'other into a bed-chamber, a buttery, and a small hole call'd the chaplain's study: then follow a brew-house, a little green and gilt parlour, and the great stairs, under which is the dairy; a little farther on the right the servants hall, and by the side of it up six steps, the old lady's closet for her private devotions; which has a lettice into the hall, intended (as we imagine) that at same time as she pray'd, she might have an eye on the men and maids. There are upon the ground-floor in all twenty six apartments, among which I must not forget a chamber which has in it a large Antiquity of timber, that seems to have been either a bedstead, or a cyder-press.

The kitchen is built in form of the Rotunda, being one vast vault to the top of the House; where one overture serves to let out the smoke, and let in the light. By the blackness of the walls, the circular fires, vast cauldrons, yawning mouths of ovens and furnaces, you would think it either the forge of Vulcan, the cave of Polypheme, or the temple of Moloch. The
horror

horror of this place has made such an impression on the country people, that they believe the Witches keep their Sabbath here, and that once a year the Devil treats them with infernal venison, a roasted Tiger stuff'd with ten-penny nails.

Above stairs we have a number of rooms: you never pass out of one into another but by the ascent or descent of two or three stairs. Our best room is very long and low, of the exact proportion of a Band-box. In most of these rooms there are hangings of the finest work in the world, that is to say, those which Arachne spins from her own bowels. Were it not for this only furniture, the whole would be a miserable scene of naked walls, flaw'd cieling, broken windows, and rusty locks. The roof is so decay'd, that after a favourable shower we may expect a crop of mushrooms between the chinks of our floors. All the doors are as little and low as those to the cabbins of Packet-boats. These rooms have for many years had no other inhabitants than certain rats, whose very age renders them worthy of this Seat, for the very rats of this venerable house are grey: since these have not yet quitted it, we hope at least that this ancient mansion may not fall during the small remnant these poor animals have to live, who are now too infirm to remove to another. There
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is yet a small subsistence left them in the few remaining books of the Library.

We had never seen half what I had described, but for a starch'd grey-headed Steward, who is as much an antiquity as any in this place, and looks like an old family picture walked out of its frame. He entertain'd us as we pass'd from room to room with several relations of the family; but his observations were particularly curious when we came to the cellar: he inform'd us where stood the triple rows of butts of sack, and where were ranged the bottles of tent, for toasts in a morning; he pointed to the stands that supported the iron-hoop'd hogsheds of strong beer; then stepping to a corner, he lugg'd out the tatter'd fragments of an unframed picture; "This (says he, with tears) was poor Sir Thomas! once master of all this drink. He had two sons, poor young masters! who never arrived to the age of his beer; they both fell ill in this very room, and never went out on their own legs." He could not pass by a heap of broken bottles without taking up a piece, to show us the Arms of the family upon it. He then led us up the Tower by dark winding stone steps, which landed us into several little rooms one above another. One of these was nail'd up, and our guide whisper'd to us as a secret the occasion of it: It seems the course of
this

this noble blood was a little interrupted about two centuries ago, by a freak of the lady Frances, who was here taken in the fact with a neighbouring Prior, ever since which the room has been nailed up, and branded with the name of the Adultery-Chamber. The ghost of lady Frances is supposed to walk there, and some prying maids of the family report that they have seen a lady in a fardingale through the key-hole; but this matter is husht up, and the servants are forbid to talk of it.

I must needs have tired you by this long description: but what engaged me in it, was a generous principle to preserve the memory of that, which itself must soon fall into dust, nay perhaps part of it, before this letter reaches your hands.

Indeed we owe this old house the same kind of gratitude that we do to an old friend, who harbours us in his declining condition, nay even in his last extremities. How fit is this retreat for uninterrupted study, where no one that passes by can dream there is an inhabitant, and even those who would dine with us dare not stay under our roof! Any one that sees it will own I could not have chosen a more likely place to converse with the dead in. I had been mad indeed if I had left your Grace for any one but Homer. But when I return to the living, I shall have the

the sense to endeavour to converse with the best of them, and shall therefore as soon as possible tell you in person how much I am, &c.

L E T T E R XII.

The D. of BUCKINGHAM to Mr. POPE.

YOU desire my opinion as to the late dispute in France concerning Homer: And I think it excusable (at an age alas! of not much pleasure) to amuse myself a little in taking notice of a controversy, than which nothing is at present more remarkable (even in a nation who value themselves so much upon the Belles Lettres) both on account of the illustrious subject of it, and of the two persons engaged in the quarrel.

The one is extraordinary in all the Lyric kind of Poetry, even in the opinion of his very adversary. The other a Lady (and of more value for being so) not only of great Learning, but with a Genius admirably turn'd to that sort of it which most becomes her Sex for softness, genteelness, and promoting of virtue; and such as (one would think) is not so liable as other parts of scholarship, to rough disputes, or violent animosity.

Yet