



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 XIII. Answer to the former.

Nutzungsbedingungen

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The best excuse for all this violence is, its being in a cause which gives a kind of reputation even to suffering, notwithstanding ever so ill a management of it.

The worst of defending even Homer in such a passionate manner, is its being more a proof of her weakness, than of his being liable to none. For what is it can excuse Homer any more than Hector, for flying at the first sight of Achilles? whose terrible aspect sure needed not such an inexcusable fright to set it off; and methinks all that account of Minerva's restoring his dart to Achilles, comes a little too late, for excusing Hector's so terrible apprehension at the very first.

LETTER XIII.

To the Duke of BUCKINGHAM.

Sept. 1, 1718.

I Am much honour'd by your Grace's compliance with my request, in giving me your opinion of the French dispute concerning Homer. And I shall keep my word, in fairly telling wherein I disagree from you. It is but in two or three very small points, not so much of the dispute, as of the parties concern'd in it. I

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cannot

cannot think quite so highly of the Lady's learning, tho' I respect it very much. It is great complaisance in that polite nation, to allow her to be a Critic of equal rank with her husband. To instance no further, his remarks on Horace shew more good Sense, Penetration, and a better Taste of his author, and those upon Aristotle's Art of poetry more Skill and Science, than any of her's on any author whatever^a. In truth, they are much more slight, dwell more in generals, and are, besides, for the most part less her own; of which her Remarks upon Homer are an example, where Eustathius is transcribed ten times for once that he is quoted. Nor is there at all more depth of learning in those upon Terence, Plautus, (or where they were most wanted) upon Aristophanes, only the Greek scholia upon the latter are some of the best extant.

Your Grace will believe me, that I did not search to find defects in a Lady; my employment upon the Iliad forced me to see them; yet I have had so much of the French complaisance as to conceal her thefts; for wherever I have found her notes to be wholly another's (which is the case in some hundreds) I have barely quoted the true Proprietor without observing upon it. If Madam Dacier has ever seen my

^a This is a just Character of that excellent Critic.

observations, she will be sensible of this conduct, but what effect it may have upon a Lady, I will not answer for.

In the next place, as to M. de la Motte, I think your Grace hardly does him right, in supposing he could have no Idea of the beauties of Homer's Epic Poetry, but what he learn'd from Madam Dacier's Prose-translation. There had been a very elegant Prose-translation before, that of Monsieur de la Valterie; so elegant, that the style of it was evidently the original and model of the famous *Telemaque*. Your Grace very justly animadvertes against the too great disposition of finding faults, in the one; and of confessing none in the other: But doubtless, as to Violence, the Lady has infinitely the better of the Gentleman. Nothing can be more polite, dispassionate, or sensible, than M. de la Motte's manner of managing the dispute: and so much as I see your Grace admires the beauty of his verse (in which you have the suffrage too of the Archbishop of Cambray) I will venture to say, his prose is full as good. I think therefore when you say, no disputants even in Divinity could be more outrageous and uncharitable than these two authors, you are a little too hard upon M. de la Motte. Not but that (with your Grace) I doubt as little of the zeal of Commentators as of the zeal of Divines, and am as ready to be-

lieve of the passions and pride of mankind in general, that (did but the same interests go along with them) they would carry the learned world to as violent extremes, animosities, and even persecutions, about variety of opinions in Criticism, as ever they did about Religion: and that, in defect of Scripture to quarrel upon, we should have French, Italian, and Dutch Commentators ready to burn one another about Homer, Virgil, Terence, and Horace.

I do not wonder your Grace is shock'd at the flight of Hector upon the first appearance of Achilles in the twenty-second Iliad. However (to shew myself a true Commentator, if not a true Critic) I will endeavour to excuse, if not to defend it in my Notes on that book. And to save myself what trouble I can, instead of doing it in this letter, I will draw up the substance of what I have to say for it in a separate paper, which I'll shew your Grace when next we meet. I will only desire you to allow me, that Hector was in an absolute certainty of death, and depress'd over and above with the conscience of being in an ill cause. If your heart be so great, as not to grant the first of these will sink the spirit of a Hero, you'll at least be so good, as to allow the second may. But, I can tell your Grace, no less a Hero than my Lord Peterborow, when a person complimented

mented him for never being afraid, made this answer; "Sir, shew me a danger that I think
"an imminent and real one, and I promise you
"I'll be as much afraid as any of you."

I am your Grace's, &c.

LETTER XIV.

From Dr. ARBUTHNOT.

London, Sept. 7, 1714.

I Am extremely obliged to you for taking notice of a poor old distressed courtier, commonly the most despiseable thing in the world. This blow has so rous'd *Scriblerus* that he has recover'd his senses, and thinks and talks like other men. From being frolicksome and gay he is turn'd grave and morose. His lucubrations lie neglected among old news-papers, cases, petitions, and abundance of unanswerable letters. I wish to God they had been among the papers of a noble Lord sealed up. Then might *Scriblerus* have pass'd for the Pretender, and it would have been a most excellent and laborious work for the Flying Post or some such author, to have allegoriz'd all his adventures into a plot, and found out mysteries somewhat like the Key to the Lock. Martin's
office