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**The Works Of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John,
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke**

In Five Volumes, complete.

Bolingbroke, Henry St. John

London, 1754

The Occasional Writer, N° 1.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60759](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-60759)

T H E
OCCASIONAL WRITER.

N U M B E R I.

Inscribed to the PERSON, to whom alone it can belong.

Most Noble S I R,

I AM one, whose ambition it hath been, ever since I came into the world to distinguish myself as a writer; in which, I fairly confess, I had not only the view of raising my reputation, but that of establishing my fortune. A prospect, which seemed very reasonable in a time of general peace and universal affluence; in an age so particularly polite, that it is even the fashion to appear knowing in all the elegant arts and sciences; and that to whatever branch of them a genius shall think fit to turn himself, he is sure it will be to one that is in vogue.

THE first essays of my pen made a good deal of noise in the world: they filled foreign journals, and were translated into several languages. The Sorbonne, and both our mother Universities, returned me thanks for having reconciled several

disputes, and solved several difficulties in chronology and history, which had perplexed the learned world, from the impartial EUSEBIUS, down to the circumstantial PRIDEAUX; my philosophical Poems were received with the greatest applause; and it is well known, that if the gay part of the world read my ANTI-LUCRETIUS for amusement, the gravest divines have not disdained to borrow arguments from it in their disputes with the materialists.

ANIMATED by such success, in one part of my aim, I proceeded with indefatigable labor, till continual disappointments, in the other, rendered me at length more indifferent to that imaginary good, applause, and less patient of that real evil, want. I began then to compare my condition with that of several great authors both antient and modern; and finding upon the comparison that they had not been better treated than myself, I was soon led by my reflections to discover the true reason of our ill fortune in the world; I was soon convinced that they and I had been on a wrong pursuit; that ministers of state pay no respect to the brightest talents, when they are misapplied, and esteem all talents to be so, which are not wholly employed about the present time, and principally dedicated to the service of their administration; neither can I say this proceeding is unjust, how much soever I suffer by it.

If we write for posterity, we must not complain that the care of rewarding our merit is left to posterity; and if we neglect to serve the state, those, who are appointed to preside over it, break no rule of equity when they neglect us. SPENCER has been amply recompensed by posterity for his Fairy Queen; but the wise treasurer BURLEIGH declined the payment of an hundred pounds, which QUEEN ELIZABETH ordered

dered him, and left this admirable poet to starve. Had SPENCER applied himself to more serious studies, had he excelled in physics, in metaphysics, or even in the first philosophy, or in theology, instead of excelling in wit and poetry, the "amabiles insaniae" of Horace, his usage would have been the same no doubt. Even the greatest productions of these studies are but trifles in the account of a consummate statesman, and may properly enough be distinguished from the others in his sense, by the title of "insaniae severiores."

OUR English ministers, to their honor be it spoken, have at all times proceeded upon this admirable principle; the most excellent sermons, the most elaborate treatises, have not been sufficient to procure the advancement of some divines, whilst a sorry pamphlet or a spiritual libel has raised others to the highest dignities of the church. As it has fared with mere divinity, so has it fared with mere eloquence: as one never caused the divine, so the other never caused the lawyer to be distinguished. But we know that if either of them be employed in a court-cause, he never fails of making his fortune. The same fate has attended writers of another kind; the celebrated Tatlers, and Spectators, had no reward except from booksellers and fame. But when those authors made the discovery I have made, and applied their talents better, in writing the Englishman and the Freeholder, one was soon created a knight, and the other became secretary of state. In short, without enumerating any more instances, I may confidently affirm, that this has been the case from the days of BURLEIGH to this time; how much sooner it began to be so, I hope, sir, you will not give me the leisure to enquire.

FROM the moment I resolved to become a state-writer, I mentally devoted myself to your service: and I do it now in
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this public and most solemn manner. Employ me, sir, as you please; I abandon myself intirely to you; my pen is at your disposition, and my conscience in your keeping. Like a lawyer, I am ready to support the cause, in which, give me leave to suppose that, I shall be soon retained, with ardor; and, if occasion be, with subtilty and acrimony. Like a Swiss, I will behave myself with equal boldness and fidelity; my pen is my fortune, and I think it as honorable to offer it, as offer my sword, without enquiring in a general battle, or in private skirmishes, at what relation or friend I strike. I cancel at once all former obligations and friendship, and will most implicitly follow your instructions in panegyric on yourself and friends, in satyr on your adversaries, in writing for or against any subject; nay, in writing for or against the same subject, just as your interest, or even your passions, may render it expedient.

I AM not ignorant that when CARNEADES offered to argue for virtue, and then against it, CATO proposed to drive that great philosopher and orator out of Rome. But CATO was a man of narrow principles and of too confined an understanding. He considered virtue abstractedly, without any regard to time, to place, and to that vast variety of conjunctures, which happens in the course of human affairs. In common life, morality is no doubt necessary, and therefore Legislators have been careful to enforce the practice of it; but whenever morality clashes with the interest of the state, it must be, and it always has been, laid aside. These are my opinions: and it is a great comfort to my conscience to find them confirmed by the practice of some reverend persons, whose examples ought to be of greater weight with me, than that of a wretched pagan. I shall therefore shew my self neither squeamish nor whimsical in pursuing the enterprize to which I offer my services, but shall remain firmly persuaded, that all the moral vices,

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vices, I may be occasionally guilty of in so good a course, will be exalted into political virtues.

AFTER this plain and honest account, which I have given of myself, it may be allowed me to say, that you cannot find a person better qualified for your service, or more worthy to be lifted, among those who draw their pens in your cause, and of whom I am willing to hope that you have a greater and an abler body in reserve, than you have hitherto judged proper to bring into the field.

It is evident, that a minister, in every circumstance of life, stands in as much need of us public writers as we of him. In his prosperity he can no more subsist without daily praise, than we without daily bread, and the farther he extends his views the more necessary are we to his support. Let him speak as contemptuously of us as he pleases, for that is frequently the manner of those who employ us most, and pay us best; yet will it fare with his ambition as with a lofty tree, which cannot shoot its branches into the clouds, unless its root work into the dirt, from which it rose, on which it stands, and by which it is nourished.

If a minister falls into adversity, shall he take up the pen in his own defence? would not the case be as deplorable for him to be left to write, as for a prince to be left to fight in his own quarrel? Believe me, sir, whenever fortune abandons you, and who knows how soon that may happen, you will find yourself in a very forlorn state. At the name of your successor, those crowds, that attend your levee, will vanish like spirits at the dawn of day. None will remain about you, but such as no other administration will condescend to employ: and we may therefore very probably behold you, which would
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be a pitiful fight indeed, endeavouring to secure a safe retreat with H***** on one side of you, and L***** on the other, two grotesque personages, exactly paired and nearly allyed, but surely as little fit to support a minister in his decline, as to adorn his triumph. In such a turn as this, you may depend on my utmost efforts to keep up a spirit for you; and I can make no doubt of being seconded by several of my fellow-writers, since I am certain you will not scruple to share some part of that fortune, which your industry and parsimony have raised, with those who unite to save the whole; and since we shall be reasonable enough not to expect above sixpence in the pound out of it, which cannot well amount to more than fifteen or twenty thousand pounds. A trifling sum for so great a service and so weighty a purse!

You may perhaps, after all I have said, be still apt to think that these are wild discourses, which have no other foundation but my desire to render myself necessary. You may refine too much in your reflections on my conduct, and too little in those you make on your present situation; or if you judge rightly of this, it is not impossible but you may depend too much on your own vigilance and dexterity. Should any of those flatterers, who often betray their patrons into a fatal security, speak to you much in the same manner, as sleep addresses himself to Palinurus in the fifth book of the *Aeneis*.

-----Palinure, ferunt ipsa aequora classẽm,
Aequatae spirant aerae, datur hora quieti;
Pone caput, fessosque oculos furare labori.

You would answer, I am persuaded, as this Pilot did.

Mene falis placidi vultum, fluctusque quietos
Ignorare jubes? mene huic confidere monstro? But

But PALINURUS slept, and you know the consequence.

BE not therefore displeas'd if a sincere and zealous servant rouses you, admonishes you not to trust too much to appearances, and shews you danger when perhaps you least expect it. You have sail'd long in a smooth sea with gentle and favorable gales. We believe your courage and your abilities extremely great, but we believe it implicitly; for you have not had foul weather enough to give any considerable proofs of either. These circumstances, which might be abus'd to inspire security, I urge as reasons why you should be alarmed; for the element you have to deal with is by the laws of nature inconstant: and therefore the longer you have been without a storm the more reason you have to expect one. There is no surer presage of an hurricane than just such a dead calm as I have observed for some time.

To speak without a figure: I would not have you flatter yourself, that the undisturbed quiet you have so long enjoyed is merely owing to your own integrity and political merit, or to the uncommon prosecution of hawkers and pamphleteers, which has been carried on by the direction of one of your principal instruments, and indeed a most vigorous statesman. This quiet, sir, is owing to deep and inveterate designs, which it becomes me to lay before you, without any regard to the censure I may incur, of revealing private conversation, and of breach of trust. Know then, that from the time you came into a fulness of power, many were shocked at the manner in which you seized it, and at the use you made of it. They said that both were hurtful, indecent, and even shameless. They went still farther, and affirmed, that your conduct was foolish with regard to your own interest, since it was foolish for a man to trust to

one single expedient of government, who had several in his power; and especially to such an expedient as that of money, which would equally serve to support him or to hang him. These persons however, notwithstanding their discontent, resolved to lie quiet, till your mal-administration should become so glaring as to justify their opposition, even in his majesty's sight: they said they would not follow your example; and upon that occasion they remembered with some sharpness how you did your utmost to distress the king's affairs, upon the first disgust you received; nay they were malicious enough to call to mind some personal reflections*, which the heat of your imagination, and your familiarity with majesty, betrayed you into, and for which they faucily wished what I dare not name. These seditious spirits flattered themselves that you would do your own business when you had the full swing of your power. They were acquainted, they said, with the presumption and distrust, with the boldness and pusillanimity, with the indiscretion and cunning, and with fifty other contradictions, which made up your character: and upon these they depended for putting a speedy end to your administration. This end they imagine to be now at hand; for thus they reason. A minister, who is attacked on his management of the public revenue, and has all the advantages of money and authority on his side, may escape tho he is guilty; but if he is innocent, the proceedings against him in such a case must necessarily confirm his power, and establish his reputation: nothing more desirable than such an attack can happen to him. But our present minister, say these malignants, directly stops all enquiry: in public he evades giving such accounts as the representatives of the people have a right to demand; in pri-

* See a pamphlet called An Answer to an infamous Libel, intituled, Sedition and Defamation displayed. Printed for R. Francklin.

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vate he is modest and discreet enough to laugh at those who think him such a fool as to furnish proofs against himself. Can a minister keep his ground long, who has no other defence than an implied confession of his guilt? will such a behaviour be endured in a nation hitherto free, and where there remain at least some sparks of honor and of love of the country?

THESE and many other reflections, which for brevity sake I omit, upon your particular conduct, and upon our domestic affairs, are frequently thrown out. But, sir, I confess to you, that I tremble when I hear the same persons discourse concerning the state of the nation with regard to her foreign interests. They affirm and they offer to demonstrate, that the affairs of Europe never were in greater confusion, and that the part we take upon ourselves is such an one, as no nation ever acted which was not betrayed, or whose ministers were not infatuated. That you are so, they say, is past dispute, whether you have conducted these affairs yourself, or have left them to those men of eminent talents, who are concerned in this part of your administration: they insist that nothing could have happened to us, if you had intirely neglected our foreign interests, worse than what you have brought upon us, by running into the other extreme. For they ask, what is the fruit of your continual negotiations, supported by a vast expence, and carried on as busily as if the welfare of Great Britain had been at stake in every dispute which has happened on the continent? They answer for you, and they defy you to contradict them, that we have made the quarrels of other people our own; and that we find ourselves engaged as principals, in some cases where we have but a very remote concern, and in others where we have no concern at all. That our commerce suffers and runs the risque of being lost, not for a time, but for ever, in several branches, much more beneficial to us than the

Offend trade; and that our right to keep those important possessions, which were yielded to us in the most solemn and authentic manner, is come, by dint of negotiation, from being indisputable, to be called in question. In a word, that to restore the public tranquility, and to settle our own interests, we must engage in a new war and conclude a new peace: that you have contrived to make it impossible for us to do one, without fighting against the very principle for which we have fought ever since the revolution, or to attempt the other without lying under the particular circumstance, that our principal allies will be as much in earnest as our enemies to wrest out of our hands the chief advantages which we obtained by the treaty of Utrecht. At the time when these treaties were made, continue they, your great minister cried aloud and spared not. He complained, as much as any man, that the exorbitant power of France was not sufficiently reduced; and that the barriers of our allies, on the Rhine and in the Netherlands, were left too weak: and is it under his administration that we are to see a pretence given to the French, and an opportunity thrown into their hands, of strengthening their power, and of extending their barriers? When I tell these objectors that your brother answers for the court of France, they laugh in my face, and reply, "Well he may, and so might any of those, who were in the French interest, have done at the time when the triple alliance was broken, and France was encouraged by England to fall upon the Dutch." The ministers, who are answered for, would be as weak as he, who answers for them, if they did not see the advantage in the present juncture, and did not take a secret malicious pleasure in making us, who contributed so much to reduce their power, become the instruments of raising it again. In the case of a war then, we have, according to this reasoning, which really, sir, has an air of truth, nothing so much to fear as the assistance of our chief ally; and
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in the case of a treaty, not only France, but Holland likewise, must be against us in that important article of Gibraltar and Port-Mahon, and in all particular advantages of commerce, which we have enjoyed, and may find it reasonable to pretend to. The late duke of Orleans, as dear a friend as he was to us, insisted strenuously, that we should give up the places before-mentioned; pretended a promise to this effect, and himself obliged in honor to see this promise kept. Every one, who knows any thing of the transactions of those times, knows with how envious an eye the Dutch beheld the separate privileges in trade, and the sole possession of Gibraltar, and of the island of Minorca, which we obtained at the last peace; and what lengths they would have gone to facilitate the negotiations, which at that time they opposed, if they might have been admitted to a share in these advantages.

THE danger of an immediate invasion, and the engagements entered into by the emperor and the king of Spain to insult us with their fleets, and to conquer Great Britain and Ireland for the pretender, have been very industriously propagated by those, who are already in your pay, and by me, who stand a candidate for this honor, but am hitherto a volunteer in your service. I am sorry to tell you, sir, but Heaven forbid that I should conceal so material a circumstance from your knowledge, we do not succeed. We raise a spirit, but this spirit turns against you. There are more people than ever against the pretender; and zeal for supporting the present establishment never ran higher. But this zeal is not any longer without knowledge: it is directed to its proper object, and there is no possibility of leading it hoodwinked to serve any other purposes. Some incredulous wretches there are, who smile when we talk to them of invasions and the pretender, and who content themselves to reply, that the machine is very seasonably introduced,
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and according to the rules of art. The greater number take fire, and lay this new distress, which we threaten them with, at your door; for, they say, that we disobliged Spain some years ago, to tie the emperor the more firmly to us, and that we have since that time disobliged the emperor, by affecting a closer correspondence, and greater union of councils with France than ever was known between the two nations. They send us to that excellent treatise, "The barrier treaty vindicated," to learn our true and lasting interest in foreign alliances, and there they pretend that we shall find the condemnation of all your measures: they lament the miserable scene, which they apprehend may soon be opened, his majesty's foreign dominions exposed to all the calamities of war, and perhaps in danger of being lost; we ourselves struggling against domestic enemies, and defending our coasts against invasions: these mischiefs brought upon us by a conjunction of the emperor, our old ally, with the king of Spain his rival; a conjunction so unnatural, that nothing but the highest resentment at our behavior to them both could have brought it about: in short, to finish up the picture, Great Britain reduced in this distress to lean solely upon France, and the faith of that court to become our chief security.

UPON the whole matter, your enemies, sir, the substance of whose private conversation I have now honestly reported to you, conclude very insolently that you have filled up the measure of your iniquity and your folly, and that you must sink, or the nation must sink under the weight of that calamity which you have brought and suffered to be brought upon her.

As shocking as this account must be to your ears, I promise myself that the sincerity and plainness with which I have given it, will be agreeable to you; and that you will receive
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into your bosom a man whose affection for your person and zeal for your service, must be above all suspicion, after giving you intelligence of so high a nature, without any stipulation for the discovery.

I EXPECT to hear from you in eight days from the date hereof; if I do not, you shall hear again from him, who is,

Most noble SIR,

Your honor's

most devoted servant,

From my Garret,
Jan. 1726-7.

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