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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° 3.

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T H E
OCCASIONAL WRITER.

N U M B E R III.

To the same.

--- Quis te, juvenum confidentissime, nostras
Jussit adire domos? Quidve hinc petis? inquit. At ille,
Scis Proteu, scis ipse; neque est te fallere cuiquam.

VIRG.

Most Noble S I R,

WHEN I write the postscript to my last letter, I believed firmly that the answer to the Occasional Writer was neither writ by you, nor published by your order. Many considerations determined me to this opinion. For instance: I could not think, that in order to vent yourself in a fit of railing, you would draw a picture out of your own imagination, which cannot pass for that of the person who writ to you, even in the low and vile character he assumed, and which you will hardly venture to own that you meant to be the resemblance of any man in Britain. I could not persuade myself that you would give occasion, as I apprehend very much that you may have done, to the drawing of another picture after the life, which no one will mistake, and which you will not be curious to place in your collection of paintings. I have, with the rest of mankind, a great re-
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gard for some of your friends; but I have, with the rest of mankind likewise, a great regard for your particular enemies, among whom it seemed impossible to me that you, who know them so well, should presume to find either slaves or criminals, or insolvent debtors. I dare affirm, that there is not one of them, who ever "mortgaged his estate for more than it's value, or reduced himself near the necessity of living by contribution."

THESE are some of the motives which induced me to acquit you of the scandal, as I then thought it, of writing this paper. But, upon better information, and farther reflection, I have changed my opinion; and I see nothing inconsistent with my respect for you, in believing that you did write it.

As great an advantage as it is in all the affairs of life for a man to keep his temper, it is often excusable, and perhaps sometimes even praise-worthy, to lose it. When a minister is contradicted in matters relating to his administration, and when busy people shall presume to ask his reasons, instead of submitting to his authority, can we wonder if his passion transports him into rhodomontades, and if he behaves himself a little wildly? But when the virtue of a minister like you, whose whole life has been one bright example of public and private virtue, shall be suspected, so far as to be tempted to passion; who can refuse him even applause, if his generous soul, transported with a just indignation, breathes forth such expressions, as might, upon a less occasion, pass for indecent ribaldry?

THIS was your case, most noble sir, in the trial which I presumed lately to make, with too much boldness perhaps, but surely with a very good design. A man writes to you from

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his

his garret; describes himself as a prostitute scribbler, and offers you the service of his pen: this, and this alone, appears to you; upon which a noble indignation seizes you, and you strike boldly, tho' you strike in the dark. There is really somewhat fine in this sally of resentment, and it confirms, in the highest degree, the sentiments I have long entertained of your integrity, of your ability, and of a certain grace which accompanies and gives a lustre to every part of your conduct.

THE share I have had in this adventure, affords me great satisfaction. Your anger fell on a feigned character, and hurts me not; but the honor of having drawn an answer from a first minister, and an answer in print, accrues to me, and is such a one, as the greatest of our weekly authors could never boast.

GIVE me leave therefore to be transported in my turn, but to be transported with joy, and to insert an abstract of your answer in this paper, as BALZAC placed at the head of his works a letter from the cardinal de RICHLIEU. I consult my own honor, it must be confessed, in doing this; but I consider still more that just applause and admiration which I, with the rest of the world, am obliged on this occasion to give you.

To those parts of the Occasional Writer's letter, which shew that you are at this juncture in want of such services as the scoundrel he personated might be fit to do, you make no reply. The want you seem to admit, but the offer of service you reject: let the public hear in what manner.

ABSTRACT of the M-----r's ANSWER to
the Occasional Writer.

Pag. 1. " **T**HO you have not signed your name, I know
" you. Because a man who is without all
" principles of honesty, who in no one thing can be relied
" upon, a betrayer of his friend, a traitor to his prince, an
" enemy to his country, a perjured, ungrateful, unfaithful
" rascal, must be you; one who is a composition of all these,
" can be only you.

Pag. 2. " You are an infamous fellow, who make a repu-
" tation of doing mischief; and HEROSTRATUS and NERO
" were not greater villains than you.

" You are of so profligate a character, that in your prof-
" perity no body envied you, and in your disgrace no body
" pities you.

" You were in the interest of France, and of the pope, as
" hath appeared by your writings, and you went out of the
" way to save yourself from the gallows.

Pag. 3. " You are a fellow who have no conscience at all,
" or a damnable complying one: and if you would lend it to
" me, it would be of no use to me.

" You have no abilities; you are an emancipated slave, a
" proscribed criminal, and an insolvent debtor: and I am
" not in such a desperate forlorn condition, to employ a fellow
" who hath no talents.

Pag.

Pag. 4. " You have been a traitor, and should be used like
 " one. And I love my master so well, that I will never ad-
 " vise him to use you, lest you should jostle me out of my
 " employment.

" The majority are of my opinion. One side rails at you,
 " the other dislikes you ; and that PALINURUS would deserve
 " to be drowned indeed, who let you have the rudder, if he
 " could help it.

Pag. 5. " I do not value what you or your company say of
 " me ; neither am I to be frightened with a parliamentary scru-
 " tiny. You rail at me, because you envy me ; and I despise
 " all that a man in the impotence of disgrace can do against
 " me, who could never terrify me in the zenith of his
 " power."

Then follow these admirable arguments.

Pag. 6, 7, 8. " I. You may talk what you will of France,
 " Spain, and the emperor, power is fluctuating, and perhaps I
 " know who is Britain's enemy as well as another. II. Tho'
 " we did lend the emperor a helping hand, we are not to let
 " him do what he pleases ; and when we set him up, it was
 " good politics, and now it is equally good to take him down.
 " III. I do not question but we shall humble him. IV. I must
 " tell you plainly, you and I, as to foreign affairs, differ widely
 " in opinion. V. When our neighbours grow saucy and en-
 " croaching, it is high time to look about us, and not to be
 " taken napping. VI. I know you are like the emperor, be-
 " cause he is like yourself in ingratitude ; and you hate our
 " friend France, because you were well received there.

" IF

“ IF any body says any thing of me, pray, tell them ALL
“ THESE THINGS. But for all that, I will not give you
“ an employment.

“ I know you to be so hot-headed, that when you have
“ read this, you will vent all your malice against me. But I
“ do not value it; for I would rather have you my enemy
“ than my friend.

“ CHANGE your names, and be as abusive and scurrilous as
“ you please, I shall find you out. I am ARISTABUS; you
“ are PROTEUS. You may change to a flame, a lion, a bull,
“ or a bear, I shall know you, baffle you, conquer you, and
“ contemn you. All your opposition will redound to my
“ honor and glory. And so, fir, I scorn your proffered ser-
“ vices. Sir,

“ Your most, &c.”

How great! how free! how bold! how generous! Well may those who have the honor of a near approach to you, extol the noble openness of your nature, which displays itself in this uncommon manner; and think that temper in a statesman, truly admirable, which loses itself so gloriously. Did ever minister speak so plainly, or lay himself so open to any man, and especially to such a man as you supposed yourself writing to at that time? Far from discovering hatred and contempt of such wretches, persons in your situation have generally encouraged, and even feared them. Nay, they have sometimes aspired to be themselves of that class; and SENECA'S Apocolocyntosis upon CLAUDIUS, is not the sole instance of ministers, who have dipped their pens in satyr, to rail at the memory of a dead prince.

But

BUT now, after this honorable declaration which you have made, after this great example which you have given, let every mercenary scribbler, every tool of secret service, tremble and despair. Long may you live, most noble sir, the just model of a minister, who scorns the assistance of flattery, falsehood, artifice, or corruption.

I HAVE devoted myself to your service, and shall certainly attend you through every stage of your fortune: as long as we both draw vital air, you shall feel the effects of my zeal in your cause, and I promise you very solemnly, that from henceforward I will live for no other purpose; so that I am persuaded you will hear with pleasure the three engagements which I think it proper to take with the public and with you.

THE first is, that my pen shall constantly preserve decency and good manners, and shall never be stained with any abuse of particular persons. I will chastise vice, I will expose folly, and I will combat error, wherever I find them. But I will never touch upon any unalterable defects in figure, in family, in birth, in any kind whatsoever; much less will I allow myself to hint at any particular scandal, or even to mention any real misfortune, which may equally befall the best and the worst of men; unless I am forced by my subject to it, and unless I can soften the evil by the very manner of recalling it to memory. To attack a vice, a folly or an error, is correction. To attack the person is defamation. He who writes an invective, does a silly thing, because he loses his end; and the wisest of men has said, "he that uttereth slander is a fool." Even truth loses it's force in an invective, as it does in a panegyric; in one, it is thrown into the lump with malice, in the other, with flattery; and he who is guilty of the first, that is, he who writes against the man, not against his crimes,
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his follies, or his errors, seldom proves any thing more than his own envy, and the other's superiority. To conclude this head, he, who writes an invective, does a base and wicked thing; because his design is to disturb the quiet, and destroy the peace of another man, but not to reform him, or to serve the public. The pen of such a writer, like one of those scourges, of which the profound MEIBOMIUS has writ so learnedly, while it chastises the person, serves only to provoke the vice.

THE second obligation, which I lay myself under, and which equally becomes a man who writes in the cause of truth, is that of intire disinterestedness.

I KNOW the generosity of your nature, I know what places and pensions have been the rewards of some very mean performances in verse and prose; and that R. R. state-writer, of whom we are obliged to ask blessing, is most certainly not at the head of our profession. These examples, and a due consideration of the importance of my services, teach me sufficiently what expectations I might entertain, without any risque of a disappointment. But I have neither ambition of this kind, nor avarice. My fortune is above wanting the necessaries, and my philosophy above wanting the superfluities of life. I therefore discharge you from all obligation of rewarding my services; and I wish, for the sake of your ease, your honor, and your safety, my example was likely to be followed.

WHEN we behold a great man among a croud of disinterested friends, we know that they follow his virtues, and his merit; when we hear an orator bring over the majority of an unprejudiced audience to his opinion, we must impute it to the force of his eloquence. But surely it is as rare for a minister to have disinterested friends, as an unprejudiced audience; so

that a number of followers can be no proof of his personal virtues, or a majority of his eloquence.

THE antients placed great happiness in their *inemptae dapes*; I would rather you should place yours in the *inempti amici*. But alas! sir, as amiable as you are, this happiness will hardly fall to your lot, in our degenerate age; and I know not whether to maintain your power, you may not be forced to tarnish the lustre of your glorious administration. The king has indeed the hearts of the people; his service will always be supported by a national concurrence, because his views are always directed to the national good. This part is easy and secure, but when once men come to distinguish between the king's service and yours, there will arise another part not so easy nor secure. You have blended them pretty artfully together hitherto, but I doubt the discrimination is at hand. When that comes, you will be reduced to a melancholy alternative; which I beg you to think of, and to prepare for. To quit your power and your pretensions, and to quit them before you have established in your room that dear brother of yours, who does you so much service at home, by tiring the ****, and the nation so much honor abroad by diverting the C*** of F***, would indeed be hard. But on the other hand, be pleased to consider that this nation has gone very far into corruption already; that there is a point of corruption, to which no nation can arrive and recover their liberties, if they are lost; or even preserve them, if they are not lost, according to MACHIAVEL's observation; and that whoever is the instrument of plunging his country irretrievably into this abyss, I use a word you seem fond of, will fall into a terrible abyss himself, and have no superiority any where, but where the briber stands before the bribed, as the devil stands before the sinner.

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You see, sir, how my zeal transports me, and carries me upon the least hint, which may be improved to your honor or service, even out of my subject. I return to it, and the third engagement which I take, is to observe a strict impartiality.

To do otherwise, would be to act contrary to my nature, and to the dictates of my reason. I have a natural abhorrence of injustice; and I considered, when I first drew my pen, in how particular a manner it behoves us political writers to be on our guard, against falling into any partiality. The judge is circumscribed by forms, to the observance of which he is bound; he has the law open before him; the parties, on whom he sits in judgment are generally indifferent to him, and far from having any of his passions awakened, the whole man is sometimes prone to sleep. When there is room to suspect a judge of partiality in a particular case, it is agreeable to the practice of some countries that he should decline presiding at the trial, or be obliged to withdraw at the requisition of the party. With all these, and many other precautions which wise constitutions have established, it is neither easy nor safe for the venerable sages of the law to exercise partiality. But we political writers are not under the same restraints, and are exposed to strong temptations. No forms are prescribed to regulate our proceedings; no particular laws adapted to the particular cases which may occur, lie open before us. The general law of reason is the only rule we have to follow; the application of this rule requires the most nice exactness, and we are obliged to make this application often, in pronouncing judgment on men and things, when we are the most warmly engaged in those civil contests, which the duty of our profession exposes us to, and even when our tempers are ruffled by opposition. From which consideration, the difficulty of preserving a strict impartiality may
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evidently appear: give me leave, however, to illustrate this matter a little farther.

IN the Athenian commonwealth, the citizen who took no side was deemed indifferent to the public good, and was branded for his infamous neutrality. Now, if such an obligation as this lay upon every private citizen in that democratical government, it is certain, that we public persons, at least, ought to think ourselves under the same obligation, even in this limited monarchy of ours. Indifference must be a crime in us, to be ranked but one degree below treachery; for deserting the commonwealth is next to betraying it. Our duty must oblige us in all public disputes to take the best side, and to espouse it with warmth: this warmth will beget warmth; for you know, sir, that the worst side is not always the worst defended. Provocations will multiply daily, and we may be attacked in the most sensible parts. You, sir, yourself, may for aught I know be insulted, and your spotless character may be defiled by some saucy scribbler: in this licentious age, nothing is held sacred; under the specious pretence of free-thinking, the providence, and the very being of God, have been openly called in question, and reflections on your administration may possibly steal into the world.

SUPPOSE, for a moment, that any thing so monstrous as this should happen, that you should be directly inveighed against, or which perhaps is more poignant, ironically commended; and then consider how difficult it would be for a professed admirer of you, heated in the contest, to keep his temper, and to preserve his impartiality: you must agree with me, the task would be extremely difficult.

But

BUT I am sure you will agree likewise, that as difficult as it would be, a conscientious man ought to impose it upon himself.

THE ill effects of partiality in us political writers, when it carries us to give unjust and false representations of men and things will not be thought of little moment by you, who labor for fame, and expect a great part of your reward from posterity, as posterity is to receive a great part of the advantages which your wise and virtuous administration procures, in “reviving, supporting, and extending credit, in opening so comfortable a prospect of the payment of our debts, in strengthening us abroad by so many beneficial alliances, and above all in amending our morals, by the total discouragement of every kind of artifice and corruption.”

THE civil magistrate may give away a man's estate, or take away his life; but we can do, and often have done more; we set the general characters and particular actions of men in what light we please, and deliver them down, sometimes very unjustly, under the most amiable or the most hateful colors to future ages: for the rash sentence we pronounce is eagerly received, and as eagerly transmitted by those who are animated with the same passion.

IN this manner are unjust, and even false representations established. They become the general opinion of mankind, and then, altho our works should grow out of date as fast as a Gazette, which it must be confessed happens very frequently; yet still the mischief is done, the historian perpetuates the slander which the politician broached, and triumphs in the cotemporary authority, upon which he writes to serve the present turn, or to satisfy resentment of party; such persons as have no other crime but that of differing in opinion from us,
and

and such events as have no other demerit but our dislike of the persons who bring them about, are loaded with infamy. Posterity is imposed upon as well as the present age, and the children continue the fathers vengeance, without having the fathers provocation.

THIS faint sketch of some consequences that follow the partiality of political writers, and of the danger wherein we all stand of being transported by our own passions, or hurried by those of other people, so far to be answerable for such consequences, may suffice to shew how much reason there is for a man who undertakes the career I am entering upon, to be watchful over himself, and to lay himself under as strong a restraint as I do by this solemn engagement.

INDEED, as the world goes, it is only by running into extremes that a state-writer can effectually please his party, or serve himself; the eye of party sees nothing but quite white, or quite black, observes no degrees between them, and can distinguish no middle color that partakes of both. The greatest genius in writing may be exposed to share the fate of the greatest genie in painting. ANNIBAL CARACHE, who followed nature and truth with the utmost exactness, found his noblest works discountenanced and neglected. He thereupon advised GUIDO and CARAVAGGIO, his two favorite scholars, to take quite another manner, to trace nothing faithfully, but to outrage all they represented, the one by painting in the darkest, and the other in the lightest manner. By these means both of them were sure of admirers, and both of them grew rich.

To imitate these painters, is all our party-writers aim at; whether their manner be black or white satyr, or panegyric, no matter. Their principle is to lay their colors on thick, and
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to be equally in an extreme. But I hope, for my own part, to prove that I am not of this number. On the contrary, I will endeavor to excel in a much more difficult way, in softnings and middle teints; and yet by these to form a manner so strong, as shall be sufficient for my own reputation, and for your service. To you, who have so fine a taste in painting, this attempt will, I flatter myself, be agreeable, and will secure the continuance of your favor to,

Most noble Sir,

Your honor's

most devoted servant,

February 13,
1726-7.

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