The Rape of the Lock, and Other Poems

by Alexander Pope

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Pope's The Rape of the Lock

and other poems

edited with introduction and notes by Thomas Marc Parrott this edition 1906 Portrait of Pope

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Preface

It has been the aim of the editor in preparing this little book to get together sufficient material to afford a student in one of our high schools or colleges adequate and typical specimens of the vigorous and versatile genius of Alexander Pope. With this purpose he has included in addition to

The Rape of the Lock

, the

Essay on Criticism

as furnishing the standard by which Pope himself expected his work to be judged, the

First Epistle

of the

Essay on Man

as a characteristic example of his didactic poetry, and the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

, both for its exhibition of Pope's genius as a satirist and for the picture it gives of the poet himself. To these are added the famous close of the

Dunciad

, the

Ode to Solitude

, a specimen of Pope's infrequent lyric note, and the

Epitaph on Gay

.

The first edition of

The Rape of the Lock

has been given as an appendix in order that the student may have the opportunity of comparing the two forms of this poem, and of realizing the admirable art with which Pope blended old and new in the version that is now the only one known to the average reader. The text throughout is that of the Globe Edition prepared by Professor A. W. Ward.

The editor can lay no claim to originality in the notes with which he has attempted to explain and illustrate these poems. He is indebted at every step to the labors of earlier editors, particularly to Elwin, Courthope, Pattison, and Hales. If he has added anything of his own, it has been in the way of defining certain words whose meaning or connotation has changed since the time of Pope, and in paraphrasing certain passages to bring out a meaning which has been partially obscured by the poet's effort after brevity and concision.

In the general introduction the editor has aimed not so much to recite the facts of

Pope's life as to draw the portrait of a man whom he believes to have been too often misunderstood and misrepresented. The special introductions to the various poems are intended to acquaint the student with the circumstances under which they were composed, to trace their literary genesis and relationships, and, whenever necessary, to give an outline of the train of thought which they embody. In conclusion the editor would express the hope that his labors in the preparation of this book may help, if only in some slight degree, to stimulate the study of the work of a poet who, with all his limitations, remains one of the abiding glories of English literature, and may contribute not less to a proper appreciation of a man who with all his faults was, on the evidence of those who knew him best, not only a great poet, but a very human and lovable personality.

T. M. P.

Princeton University

,

June

4, 1906.

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Introduction

Perhaps no other great poet in English Literature has been so differently judged at different times as Alexander Pope. Accepted almost on his first appearance as one of the leading poets of the day, he rapidly became recognized as the foremost man of letters of his age. He held this position throughout his life, and for over half a century after his death his works were considered not only as masterpieces, but as the finest models of poetry. With the change of poetic temper that occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century Pope's fame was overshadowed. The romantic

poets and critics even raised the question whether Pope was a poet at all. And as his poetical fame diminished, the harsh judgments of his personal character increased. It is almost incredible with what exulting bitterness critics and editors of Pope have tracked out and exposed his petty intrigues, exaggerated his delinquencies, misrepresented his actions, attempted in short to blast his character as a man.

Both as a man and as a poet Pope is sadly in need of a defender to-day. And a defense is by no means impossible. The depreciation of Pope's poetry springs, in the main, from an attempt to measure it by other standards than those which he and his age recognized. The attacks upon his character are due, in large measure, to a misunderstanding of the spirit of the times in which he lived and to a forgetfulness of the special circumstances of his own life. Tried in a fair court by impartial judges Pope as a poet would be awarded a place, if not among the noblest singers, at least high among poets of the second order. And the flaws of character which even his warmest apologist must admit would on the one hand be explained, if not excused, by circumstances, and on the other more than counterbalanced by the existence of noble qualities to which his assailants seem to have been quite blind.

Alexander Pope was born in London on May 21, 1688. His father was a Roman Catholic linen draper, who had married a second time. Pope was the only child of this marriage, and seems to have been a delicate, sweet-tempered, precocious, and, perhaps, a rather spoiled child.

Pope's religion and his chronic ill-health are two facts of the highest importance to be taken into consideration in any study of his life or judgment of his character. The high hopes of the Catholics for a restoration of their religion had been totally destroyed by the Revolution of 1688. During all Pope's lifetime they were a sect at once feared, hated, and oppressed by the severest laws. They were excluded from the schools and universities, they were burdened with double taxes, and forbidden to acquire real estate. All public careers were closed to them, and their property and

even their persons were in times of excitement at the mercy of informers. In the last year of Pope's life a proclamation was issued forbidding Catholics to come within ten miles of London, and Pope himself, in spite of his influential friends, thought it wise to comply with this edict. A fierce outburst of persecution often evokes in the persecuted some of the noblest qualities of human nature; but a long-continued and crushing tyranny that extends to all the details of daily life is only too likely to have the most unfortunate results on those who are subjected to it. And as a matter of fact we find that the well-to-do Catholics of Pope's day lived in an atmosphere of disaffection, political intrigue, and evasion of the law, most unfavorable for the development of that frank, courageous, and patriotic spirit for the lack of which Pope himself has so often been made the object of reproach.

In a well-known passage of the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

, Pope has spoken of his life as one long disease. He was in fact a humpbacked dwarf, not over four feet six inches in height, with long, spider-like legs and arms. He was subject to violent headaches, and his face was lined and contracted with the marks of suffering. In youth he so completely ruined his health by perpetual studies that his life was despaired of, and only the most careful treatment saved him from an early death. Toward the close of his life he became so weak that he could neither dress nor undress without assistance. He had to be laced up in stiff stays in order to sit erect, and wore a fur doublet and three pairs of stockings to protect himself against the cold. With these physical defects he had the extreme sensitiveness of mind that usually accompanies chronic ill health, and this sensitiveness was outraged incessantly by the brutal customs of the age. Pope's enemies made as free with his person as with his poetry, and there is little doubt that he felt the former attacks the more bitterly of the two. Dennis, his first critic, called him "a short squab gentleman, the very bow of the God of love; his outward form is downright

monkey." A rival poet whom he had offended hung up a rod in a coffee house where men of letters resorted, and threatened to whip Pope like a naughty child if he showed his face there. It is said, though perhaps not on the best authority, that when Pope once forgot himself so far as to make love to Lady Mary Wortley Montague, the lady's answer was "a fit of immoderate laughter." In an appendix to the

Dunciad

Pope collected some of the epithets with which his enemies had pelted him, "an ape," "an ass," "a frog," "a coward," "a fool," "a little abject thing." He affected, indeed, to despise his assailants, but there is only too good evidence that their poisoned arrows rankled in his heart. Richardson, the painter, found him one day reading the latest abusive pamphlet. "These things are my diversion," said the poet, striving to put the best face on it; but as he read, his friends saw his features "writhen with anguish," and prayed to be delivered from all such "diversions" as these. Pope's enemies and their savage abuse are mostly forgotten to-day. Pope's furious retorts have been secured to immortality by his genius. It would have been nobler, no doubt, to have answered by silence only; but before one condemns Pope it is only fair to realize the causes of his bitterness.

Pope's education was short and irregular. He was taught the rudiments of Latin and Greek by his family priest, attended for a brief period a school in the country and another in London, and at the early age of twelve left school altogether, and settling down at his father's house in the country began to read to his heart's delight. He roamed through the classic poets, translating passages that pleased him, went up for a time to London to get lessons in French and Italian, and above all read with eagerness and attention the works of older English poets, — Spenser, Waller, and Dryden. He had already, it would seem, determined to become a poet, and his father, delighted with the clever boy's talent, used to set him topics, force him to correct his verses over and over, and finally, when satisfied, dismiss him with the praise,

"These are good rhymes." He wrote a comedy, a tragedy, an epic poem, all of which he afterward destroyed and, as he laughingly confessed in later years, he thought himself "the greatest genius that ever was."

Pope was not alone, however, in holding a high opinion of his talents. While still a boy in his teens he was taken up and patronized by a number of gentlemen, Trumbull, Walsh, and Cromwell, all dabblers in poetry and criticism. He was introduced to the dramatist Wycherly, nearly fifty years his senior, and helped to polish some of the old man's verses. His own works were passed about in manuscript from hand to hand till one of them came to the eyes of Dryden's old publisher, Tonson. Tonson wrote Pope a respectful letter asking for the honor of being allowed to publish them. One may fancy the delight with which the sixteen-year-old boy received this offer. It is a proof of Pope's patience as well as his precocity that he delayed three years before accepting it. It was not till 1709 that his first published verses, the

Pastorals

, a fragment translated from Homer, and a modernized version of one of the

Canterbury Tales

, appeared in Tonson's

Miscellany

.

With the publication of the

Pastorals

, Pope embarked upon his life as a man of letters. They seem to have brought him a certain recognition, but hardly fame. That he obtained by his next poem, the

Essay on Criticism

, which appeared in 1711. It was applauded in the

Spectator

, and Pope seems about this time to have made the acquaintance of Addison and the little senate which met in Button's coffee house. His poem the

Messiah

appeared in the

Spectator

in May 1712; the first draft of

The Rape of the Lock

in a poetical miscellany in the same year, and Addison's request, in 1713, that he compose a prologue for the tragedy of

Cato

set the final stamp upon his rank as a poet.

Pope's friendly relations with Addison and his circle were not, however, long continued. In the year 1713 he gradually drew away from them and came under the influence of Swift, then at the height of his power in political and social life. Swift introduced him to the brilliant Tories, politicians and lovers of letters, Harley, Bolingbroke, and Atterbury, who were then at the head of affairs. Pope's new friends seem to have treated him with a deference which he had never experienced before, and which bound him to them in unbroken affection. Harley used to regret that Pope's religion rendered him legally incapable of holding a sinecure office in the government, such as was frequently bestowed in those days upon men of letters, and Swift jestingly offered the young poet twenty guineas to become a Protestant. But now, as later, Pope was firmly resolved not to abandon the faith of his parents for the sake of worldly advantage. And in order to secure the independence he valued so highly he resolved to embark upon the great work of his life, the translation of Homer.

"What led me into that," he told a friend long after, "was purely the want of money. I had then none; not even to buy books."

It seems that about this time, 1713, Pope's father had experienced some heavy financial losses, and the poet, whose receipts in money had so far been by no means in proportion to the reputation his works had brought him, now resolved to use that reputation as a means of securing from the public a sum which would at least keep him for life from poverty or the necessity of begging for patronage. It is worth noting that Pope was the first Englishman of letters who threw himself thus boldly upon the public and earned his living by his pen.

The arrangements for the publication and sale of Pope's translation of Homer were made with care and pushed on with enthusiasm. He issued in 1713 his proposals for an edition to be published by subscription, and his friends at once became enthusiastic canvassers. We have a characteristic picture of Swift at this time, bustling about a crowded ante-chamber, and informing the company that the best poet in England was Mr. Pope (a Papist) who had begun a translation of Homer for which they must all subscribe, "for," says he, "the author shall not begin to print till I have a thousand guineas for him." The work was to be in six volumes, each costing a guinea. Pope obtained 575 subscribers, many of whom took more than one set. Lintot, the publisher, gave Pope £1200 for the work and agreed to supply the subscription copies free of charge. As a result Pope made something between £5000 and £6000, a sum absolutely unprecedented in the history of English literature, and amply sufficient to make him independent for life.

But the sum was honestly earned by hard and wearisome work. Pope was no Greek scholar; it is said, indeed, that he was just able to make out the sense of the original with a translation. And in addition to the fifteen thousand lines of the

Iliad

, he had engaged to furnish an introduction and notes. At first the magnitude of the

undertaking frightened him.

"What terrible moments," he said to Spence, "does one feel after one has engaged for a large work. In the beginning of my translating the Iliad, I wished anybody would hang me a hundred times. It sat so heavily on my mind at first that I often used to dream of it and do sometimes still."

In spite of his discouragement, however, and of the ill health which so constantly beset him, Pope fell gallantly upon his task, and as time went on came almost to enjoy it. He used to translate thirty or forty verses in the morning before rising and, in his own characteristic phrase, "piddled over them for the rest of the day." He used every assistance possible, drew freely upon the scholarship of friends, corrected and recorrected with a view to obtaining clearness and point, and finally succeeded in producing a version which not only satisfied his own critical judgment, but was at once accepted by the English-speaking world as the standard translation of Homer.

The first volume came out in June, 1715, and to Pope's dismay and wrath a rival translation appeared almost simultaneously. Tickell, one of Addison's "little senate," had also begun a translation of the

Iliad

, and although he announced in the preface that he intended to withdraw in favor of Pope and take up a translation of the

Odyssey

, the poet's suspicions were at once aroused. And they were quickly fanned into a flame by the gossip of the town which reported that Addison, the recognized authority in literary criticism, pronounced Tickell's version "the best that ever was in any language." Rumor went so far, in fact, as to hint pretty broadly that Addison himself was the author, in part, at least, of Tickell's book; and Pope, who had been encouraged by Addison to begin his long task, felt at once that he had been betrayed. His resentment was all the more bitter since he fancied that Addison, now at the

height of his power and prosperity in the world of letters and of politics, had attempted to ruin an enterprise on which the younger man had set all his hopes of success and independence, for no better reason than literary jealousy and political estrangement. We know now that Pope was mistaken, but there was beyond question some reason at the time for his thinking as he did, and it is to the bitterness which this incident caused in his mind that we owe the famous satiric portrait of Addison as Atticus.

The last volume of the

Iliad

appeared in the spring of 1720, and in it Pope gave a renewed proof of his independence by dedicating the whole work, not to some lord who would have rewarded him with a handsome present, but to his old acquaintance, Congreve, the last survivor of the brilliant comic dramatists of Dryden's day. And now resting for a time from his long labors, Pope turned to the adornment and cultivation of the little house and garden that he had leased at Twickenham.

Pope's father had died in 1717, and the poet, rejecting politely but firmly the suggestion of his friend, Atterbury, that he might now turn Protestant, devoted himself with double tenderness to the care of his aged and infirm mother. He brought her with him to Twickenham, where she lived till 1733, dying in that year at the great age of ninety-one. It may have been partly on her account that Pope pitched upon Twickenham as his abiding place. Beautifully situated on the banks of the Thames, it was at once a quiet country place and yet of easy access to London, to Hampton Court, or to Kew. The five acres of land that lay about the house furnished Pope with inexhaustible entertainment for the rest of his life. He "twisted and twirled and harmonized" his bit of ground "till it appeared two or three sweet little lawns opening and opening beyond one another, the whole surrounded by impenetrable woods." Following the taste of his times in landscape gardening, he adorned his

lawns with artificial mounds, a shell temple, an obelisk, and a colonnade. But the crowning glory was the grotto, a tunnel decorated fantastically with shells and bits of looking-glass, which Pope dug under a road that ran through his grounds. Here Pope received in state, and his house and garden was for years the center of the most brilliant society in England. Here Swift came on his rare visits from Ireland, and Bolingbroke on his return from exile. Arbuthnot, Pope's beloved physician, was a frequent visitor, and Peterborough, one of the most distinguished of English soldiers, condescended to help lay out the garden. Congreve came too, at times, and Gay, the laziest and most good-natured of poets. Nor was the society of women lacking at these gatherings. Lady Mary Wortley Montague, the wittiest woman in England, was often there, until her bitter quarrel with the poet; the grim old Duchess of Marlborough appeared once or twice in Pope's last years; and the Princess of Wales came with her husband to inspire the leaders of the opposition to the hated Walpole and the miserly king. And from first to last, the good angel of the place was the blue-eyed, sweet-tempered Patty Blount, Pope's best and dearest friend. Not long after the completion of the

Iliad

, Pope undertook to edit Shakespeare, and completed the work in 1724. The edition is, of course, quite superseded now, but it has its place in the history of Shakespearean studies as the first that made an effort, though irregular and incomplete, to restore the true text by collation and conjecture. It has its place, too, in the story of Pope's life, since the bitter criticism which it received, all the more unpleasant to the poet since it was in the main true, was one of the principal causes of his writing the

Dunciad

. Between the publication of his edition of Shakespeare, however, and the appearance of the

Dunciad

, Pope resolved to complete his translation of Homer, and with the assistance of a pair of friends, got out a version of the Odyssey in 1725. Like the

Iliad

, this was published by subscription, and as in the former case the greatest men in England were eager to show their appreciation of the poet by filling up his lists. Sir Robert Walpole, the great Whig statesman, took ten copies, and Harley, the fallen Tory leader, put himself, his wife, and his daughter down for sixteen. Pope made, it is said, about £3700 by this work.

In 1726, Swift visited Pope and encouraged him to complete a satire which he seems already to have begun on the dull critics and hack writers of the day. For one cause or another its publication was deferred until 1728, when it appeared under the title of the

Dunciad

. Here Pope declared open war upon his enemies. All those who had attacked his works, abused his character, or scoffed at his personal deformities, were caricatured as ridiculous and sometimes disgusting figures in a mock epic poem celebrating the accession of a new monarch to the throne of Dullness. The

Dunciad

is little read to-day except by professed students of English letters, but it made, naturally enough, a great stir at the time and vastly provoked the wrath of all the dunces whose names it dragged to light. Pope has often been blamed for stooping to such ignoble combat, and in particular for the coarseness of his abuse, and for his bitter jests upon the poverty of his opponents. But it must be remembered that no living writer had been so scandalously abused as Pope, and no writer that ever lived was by nature so quick to feel and to resent insult. The undoubted coarseness of the work is in part due to the gross license of the times in speech and writing, and more

particularly to the influence of Swift, at this time predominant over Pope. And in regard to Pope's trick of taunting his enemies with poverty, it must frankly be confessed that he seized upon this charge as a ready and telling weapon. Pope was at heart one of the most charitable of men. In the days of his prosperity he is said to have given away one eighth of his income. And he was always quick to succor merit in distress; he pensioned the poet Savage and he tried to secure patronage for Johnson. But for the wretched hack writers of the common press who had barked against him he had no mercy, and he struck them with the first rod that lay ready to his hands.

During his work on the

Dunciad

, Pope came into intimate relations with Bolingbroke, who in 1725 had returned from his long exile in France and had settled at Dawley within easy reach of Pope's villa at Twickenham. Bolingbroke was beyond doubt one of the most brilliant and stimulating minds of his age. Without depth of intellect or solidity of character, he was at once a philosopher, a statesman, a scholar, and a fascinating talker. Pope, who had already made his acquaintance, was delighted to renew and improve their intimacy, and soon came wholly under the influence of his splendid friend. It is hardly too much to say that all the rest of Pope's work is directly traceable to Bolingbroke. The

Essay on Man

was built up on the precepts of Bolingbroke's philosophy; the

Imitations of Horace

were undertaken at Bolingbroke's suggestion; and the whole tone of Pope's political and social satire during the years from 1731 to 1738 reflects the spirit of that opposition to the administration of Walpole and to the growing influence of the commercial class, which was at once inspired and directed by Bolingbroke. And yet

it is exactly in the work of this period that we find the best and with perhaps one exception, the

Essay on Man

, the most original, work of Pope. He has obtained an absolute command over his instrument of expression. In his hands the heroic couplet sings, and laughs, and chats, and thunders. He has turned from the ignoble warfare with the dunces to satirize courtly frivolity and wickedness in high places. And most important of all to the student of Pope, it is in these last works that his personality is most clearly revealed. It has been well said that the best introduction to the study of Pope, the man, is to get the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

by heart.

Pope gradually persuaded himself that all the works of these years, the

Essay on Man

, the

Satires, Epistles

, and

Moral Essays

, were but parts of one stupendous whole. He told Spence in the last years of his life:

"I had once thought of completing my ethic work in four books. — The first, you know, is on the Nature of Man [the Essay on Man]; the second would have been on knowledge and its limits — here would have come in an Essay on Education, part of which I have inserted in the Dunciad [i.e. in the Fourth Book, published in 1742]. The third was to have treated of Government, both ecclesiastical and civil — and this was what chiefly stopped my going on. I could not have said what I would have said without provoking every church on the face of the earth; and I did not care for

living always in boiling water. — This part would have come into my Brutus [an epic poem which Pope never completed], which is planned already. The fourth would have been on Morality; in eight or nine of the most concerning branches of it."

It is difficult, if not impossible, to believe that Pope with his irregular methods of work and illogical habit of thought had planned so vast and elaborate a system before he began its execution. It is far more likely that he followed his old method of composing on the inspiration of the moment, and produced the works in question with little thought of their relation or interdependence. But in the last years of his life, when he had made the acquaintance of Warburton, and was engaged in reviewing and perfecting the works of this period, he noticed their general similarity in form and spirit, and, possibly under Warburton's influence, conceived the notion of combining and supplementing them to form that "Greater Essay on Man" of which he spoke to Spence, and of which Warburton himself has given us a detailed account.

Warburton, a wide-read, pompous, and polemical clergyman, had introduced himself to the notice of Pope by a defense of the philosophical and religious principles of the

Essay on Man

. In spite of the influence of the free-thinking Bolingbroke, Pope still remained a member of the Catholic church and sincerely believed himself to be an orthodox, though liberal, Christian, and he had, in consequence, been greatly disconcerted by a criticism of his poem published in Switzerland and lately translated into English. Its author, Pierre de Crousaz, maintained, and with a considerable degree of truth, that the principles of Pope's poem if pushed to their logical conclusion were destructive to religion and would rank their author rather among atheists than defenders of the faith. The very word "atheist" was at that day sufficient to put the man to whom it

was applied beyond the pale of polite society, and Pope, who quite lacked the ability to refute in logical argument the attack of de Crousaz, was proportionately delighted when Warburton came forward in his defense, and in a series of letters asserted that Pope's whole intention was to vindicate the ways of God to man, and that de Crousaz had mistaken his purpose and misunderstood his language. Pope's gratitude to his defender knew no bounds; he declared that Warburton understood the

Essay

better than he did himself; he pronounced him the greatest critic he ever knew, secured an introduction to him, introduced him to his own rich and influential friends, in short made the man's fortune for him outright. When the University of Oxford hesitated to give Warburton, who had never attended a university, the degree of D.D., Pope declined to accept the degree of D.C.L. which had been offered him at the same time, and wrote the Fourth Book of the

Dunciad

to satirize the stupidity of the university authorities. In conjunction with Warburton he proceeded further to revise the whole poem, for which his new friend wrote notes and a ponderous introduction, and made the capital mistake of substituting the frivolous, but clever, Colley Gibber, with whom he had recently become embroiled, for his old enemy, Theobald, as the hero. And the last year of his life was spent in getting out new editions of his poems accompanied by elaborate commentaries from the pen of Warburton.

In the spring of 1744, it was evident that Pope was failing fast. In addition to his other ailments he was now attacked by an asthmatical dropsy, which no efforts of his physicians could remove. Yet he continued to work almost to the last, and distributed copies of his

Ethic Epistles

to his friends about three weeks before his death, with the smiling remark that like

the dying Socrates he was dispensing his morality among his friends. His mind began to wander; he complained that he saw all things as through a curtain, and told Spence once "with a smile of great pleasure and with the greatest softness" that he had seen a vision. His friends were devoted in their attendance. Bolingbroke sat weeping by his chair, and on Spence's remarking how Pope with every rally was always saying something kindly of his friends, replied:

"I never in my life knew a man that had so tender a heart for his particular friends, or a more general friendship for mankind. I have known him these thirty years; and value myself more for that man's love than"

— here his head dropped and his voice broke in tears. It was noticed that whenever Patty Blount came into the room, the dying flame of life flashed up in a momentary glow. At the very end a friend reminded Pope that as a professed Catholic he ought to send for a priest. The dying man replied that he did not believe it essential, but thanked him for the suggestion. When the priest appeared, Pope attempted to rise from his bed that he might receive the sacrament kneeling, and the priest came out from the sick room "penetrated to the last degree with the state of mind in which he found his penitent, resigned and wrapt up in the love of God and man." The hope that sustained Pope to the end was that of immortality.

"I am so certain of the soul's being immortal," he whispered, almost with his last breath, "that I seem to feel it within me, as it were by intuition."

He died on the evening of May 30, so quietly that his friends hardly knew that the end had come. He was buried in Twickenham Church, near the monument he had erected to his parents, and his coffin was carried to the grave by six of the poorest men of the parish.

It is plain even from so slight a sketch as this that the common conception of Pope as "the wicked wasp of Twickenham," a bitter, jealous, and malignant spirit, is utterly out of accord with the facts of his life. Pope's faults of character lie on the

surface, and the most perceptible is that which has done him most harm in the eyes of English-speaking men. He was by nature, perhaps by training also, untruthful. If he seldom stooped to an outright lie, he never hesitated to equivocate; and students of his life have found that it is seldom possible to take his word on any point where his own works or interests were concerned. I have already attempted to point out the probable cause of this defect; and it is, moreover, worth while to remark that Pope's manifold intrigues and evasions were mainly of the defensive order. He plotted and quibbled not so much to injure others as to protect himself. To charge Pope with treachery to his friends, as has sometimes been done, is wholly to misunderstand his character.

Another flaw, one can hardly call it a vice, in Pope's character was his constant practice of considering everything that came in his way as copy. It was this which led him to reclaim his early letters from his friends, to alter, rewrite, and redate them, utterly unconscious of the trouble which he was preparing for his future biographers. The letters, he thought, were good reading but not so good as he could make them, and he set to work to improve them with all an artist's zeal, and without a trace of a historian's care for facts. It was this which led him to embody in his description of a rich fool's splendid house and park certain unmistakable traces of a living nobleman's estate and to start in genuine amazement and regret when the world insisted on identifying the nobleman and the fool. And when Pope had once done a good piece of work, he had all an artist's reluctance to destroy it. He kept bits of verse by him for years and inserted them into appropriate places in his poems. This habit it was that brought about perhaps the gravest charge that has ever been made against Pope, that of accepting £1000 to suppress a satiric portrait of the old Duchess of Marlborough, and yet of publishing it in a revision of a poem that he was engaged on just before his death. The truth seems to be that Pope had drawn this portrait in days when he was at bitter enmity with the Duchess, and after the reconcilement that took place, unwilling to suppress it entirely, had worked it over,

and added passages out of keeping with the first design, but pointing to another lady with whom he was now at odds. Pope's behavior, we must admit, was not altogether creditable, but it was that of an artist reluctant to throw away good work, not that of a ruffian who stabs a woman he has taken money to spare.

Finally Pope was throughout his life, and notably in his later years, the victim of an irritable temper and a quick, abusive tongue. His irritability sprang in part, we may believe, from his physical sufferings, even more, however, from the exquisitely sensitive heart which made him feel a coarse insult as others would a blow. And of the coarseness of the insults that were heaped upon Pope no one except the careful student of his life can have any conception. His genius, his morals, his person, his parents, and his religion were overwhelmed in one indiscriminate flood of abuse. Too high spirited to submit tamely to these attacks, too irritable to laugh at them, he struck back, and his weapon was personal satire which cut like a whip and left a brand like a hot iron. And if at times, as in the case of Addison, Pope was mistaken in his object and assaulted one who was in no sense his enemy, the fault lies not so much in his alleged malice as in the unhappy state of warfare in which he lived.

Over against the faults of Pope we may set more than one noble characteristic. The sensitive heart and impulsive temper that led him so often into bitter warfare, made him also most susceptible to kindness and quick to pity suffering. He was essentially of a tender and loving nature, a devoted son, and a loyal friend, unwearied in acts of kindness and generosity. His ruling passion, to use his own phrase, was a devotion to letters, and he determined as early and worked as diligently to make himself a poet as ever Milton did. His wretched body was dominated by a high and eager mind, and he combined in an unparalleled degree the fiery energy of the born poet with the tireless patience of the trained artist.

But perhaps the most remarkable characteristic of Pope is his manly independence. In an age when almost without exception his fellow-writers stooped to accept a great

man's patronage or sold their talents into the slavery of politics, Pope stood aloof from patron and from party. He repeatedly declined offers of money that were made him, even when no condition was attached. He refused to change his religion, though he was far from being a devout Catholic, in order to secure a comfortable place. He relied upon his genius alone for his support, and his genius gave him all that he asked, a modest competency. His relations with his rich and powerful friends were marked by the same independent spirit. He never cringed or flattered, but met them on even terms, and raised himself by merit alone from his position as the unknown son of an humble shopkeeper to be the friend and associate of the greatest fortunes and most powerful minds in England. It is not too much to say that the career of a man of letters as we know it to-day, a career at once honorable and independent, takes its rise from the life and work of Alexander Pope.

The long controversies that have raged about Pope's rank as a poet seem at last to be drawing to a close; and it has become possible to strike a balance between the exaggerated praise of his contemporaries and the reckless depreciation of romantic critics. That he is not a poet of the first order is plain, if for no other reason than that he never produced a work in any of the greatest forms of poetry. The drama, the epic, the lyric, were all outside his range. On the other hand, unless a definition of poetry be framed — and Dr. Johnson has well remarked that "to circumscribe poetry by a definition will only show the narrowness of the definer" — which shall exclude all gnomic and satiric verse, and so debar the claims of Hesiod, Juvenal, and Boileau, it is impossible to deny that Pope is a true poet. Certain qualities of the highest poet Pope no doubt lacked, lofty imagination, intense passion, wide human sympathy. But within the narrow field which he marked out for his own he approaches perfection as nearly as any English poet, and Pope's merit consists not merely in the smoothness of his verse or the polish of separate epigrams, as is so often stated, but quite as much in the vigor of his conceptions and the unity and careful proportion of each poem as a whole. It is not too much to say that

The Rape of the Lock

is one of the best-planned poems in any language. It is as symmetrical and exquisitely finished as a Grecian temple.

Historically Pope represents the fullest embodiment of that spirit which began to appear in English literature about the middle of the seventeenth century, and which we are accustomed to call the "classical" spirit. In essence this movement was a protest against the irregularity and individual license of earlier poets. Instead of far-fetched wit and fanciful diction, the classical school erected the standards of common sense in conception and directness in expression. And in so doing they restored poetry which had become the diversion of the few to the possession of the many. Pope, for example, is preeminently the poet of his time. He dealt with topics that were of general interest to the society in which he lived; he pictured life as he saw it about him. And this accounts for his prompt and general acceptance by the world of his day.

For the student of English literature Pope's work has a threefold value. It represents the highest achievement of one of the great movements in the developments of English verse. It reflects with unerring accuracy the life and thought of his time — not merely the outward life of beau and belle in the days of Queen Anne, but the ideals of the age in art, philosophy, and politics. And finally it teaches as hardly any other body of English verse can be said to do, the perennial value of conscious and controlling art. Pope's work lives and will live while English poetry is read, not because of its inspiration, imagination, or depth of thought, but by its unity of design, vigor of expression, and perfection of finish — by those qualities, in short, which show the poet as an artist in verse.

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The Rape of the Lock

An heroi-comical poem

Nolueram, Belinda, tuos violare capillos; Sed juvat, hoc precibus me tribuisse tuis. Mart, [Epigr, XII. 84.]

To Mrs. Arabella Fermor

Madam,

It will be in vain to deny that I have some regard for this piece, since I dedicate it to You. Yet you may bear me witness, it was intended only to divert a few young Ladies, who have good sense and good humour enough to laugh not only at their sex's little unguarded follies, but at their own. But as it was communicated with the air of a Secret, it soon found its way into the world. An imperfect copy having been offer'd to a Bookseller, you had the good-nature for my sake to consent to the publication of one more correct: This I was forc'd to, before I had executed half my

design, for the Machinery was entirely wanting to compleat it.

The Machinery, Madam, is a term invented by the Critics, to signify that part which the Deities, Angels, or Dæmons are made to act in a Poem: For the ancient Poets are in one respect like many modern Ladies: let an action be never so trivial in itself, they always make it appear of the utmost importance. These Machines I determined to raise on a very new and odd foundation, the Rosicrucian doctrine of Spirits.

I know how disagreeable it is to make use of hard words before a Lady; but't is so much the concern of a Poet to have his works understood, and particularly by your Sex, that you must give me leave to explain two or three difficult terms.

The Rosicrucians are a people I must bring you acquainted with. The best account I know of them is in a French book call'd

Le Comte de Gabalis

, which both in its title and size is so like a Novel, that many of the Fair Sex have read it for one by mistake. According to these Gentlemen, the four Elements are inhabited by Spirits, which they call Sylphs, Gnomes, Nymphs, and Salamanders. The Gnomes or Dæmons of Earth delight in mischief; but the Sylphs whose habitation is in the Air, are the best-condition'd creatures imaginable. For they say, any mortals may enjoy the most intimate familiarities with these gentle Spirits, upon a condition very easy to all true Adepts, an inviolate preservation of Chastity.

As to the following Canto's, all the passages of them are as fabulous, as the Vision at the beginning, or the Transformation at the end; (except the loss of your Hair, which I always mention with reverence). The Human persons are as fictitious as the airy ones; and the character of Belinda, as it is now manag'd, resembles you in nothing but in Beauty.

If this Poem had as many Graces as there are in your Person, or in your Mind, yet I could never hope it should pass thro' the world half so Uncensur'd as You have done. But let its fortune be what it will, mine is happy enough, to have given me this

occasion of assuring you that I am, with the truest esteem, Madam,

Your most obedient, Humble Servant,

A. Pope

Canto I

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, What mighty contests rise from trivial things, I sing — This verse to Caryl, Muse! is due: This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view: Slight is the subject, but not so the praise, If She inspire, and He approve my lays. Say what strange motive, Goddess! could compel A well-bred Lord t' assault a gentle Belle? O say what stranger cause, yet unexplor'd, Could make a gentle Belle reject a Lord? In tasks so bold, can little men engage, And in soft bosoms dwells such mighty Rage? Sol thro' white curtains shot a tim'rous ray, And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day: Now lap-dogs give themselves the rousing shake, And sleepless lovers, just at twelve, awake: Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knock'd the ground, And the press'd watch return'd a silver sound. Belinda still her downy pillow prest, Her guardian Sylph prolong'd the balmy rest: 'Twas He had summon'd to her silent bed The morning-dream that hover'd o'er her head; A Youth more glitt'ring than a Birth-night Beau, (That ev'n in slumber caus'd her cheek to glow) Seem'd to her ear his winning lips to lay, And thus in whispers said, or seem'd to say. Fairest of mortals, thou distinguish'd care Of thousand bright Inhabitants of Air! If e'er one vision touch.'d thy infant thought, Of all the Nurse and all the Priest have taught; Of airy Elves by moonlight shadows seen, The silver token, and the circled green, Or virgins visited by Angel-pow'rs, With golden crowns and wreaths of heav'nly flow'rs; Hear and believe! thy own importance know, Nor bound thy narrow views to things below. Some secret truths, from learned pride conceal'd, To Maids alone and Children are reveal'd: What tho' no credit doubting Wits may give? The Fair and Innocent shall still believe. Know, then, unnumber'd Spirits round thee fly, The light Militia of the lower sky: These,

tho' unseen, are ever on the wing, Hang o'er the Box, and hover round the Ring. Think what an equipage thou hast in Air, And view with scorn two Pages and a Chair. As now your own, our beings were of old, And once inclos'd in Woman's beauteous mould; Thence, by a soft transition, we repair From earthly Vehicles to these of air. Think not, when Woman's transient breath is fled That all her vanities at once are dead; Succeeding vanities she still regards, And tho' she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards. Her joy in gilded Chariots, when alive, And love of Ombre, after death survive. For when the Fair in all their pride expire, To their first Elements their Souls retire: The Sprites of fiery Termagants in Flame Mount up, and take a Salamander's name. Soft yielding minds to Water glide away, And sip, with Nymphs, their elemental Tea. The graver Prude sinks downward to a Gnome, In search of mischief still on Earth to roam. The light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair, And sport and flutter in the fields of Air. "Know further yet; whoever fair and chaste Rejects mankind, is by some Sylph embrac'd: For Spirits, freed from mortal laws, with ease Assume what sexes and what shapes they please. What guards the purity of melting Maids, In courtly balls, and midnight masquerades, Safe from the treach'rous friend, the daring spark, The glance by day, the whisper in the dark, When kind occasion prompts their warm desires, When music softens, and when dancing fires? 'Tis but their Sylph, the wise Celestials know, Tho' Honour is the word with Men below. Some nymphs there are, too conscious of their face, For life predestin'd to the Gnomes' embrace. These swell their prospects and exalt their pride, When offers are disdain'd, and love deny'd: Then gay Ideas crowd the vacant brain, While Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train, And Garters, Stars, and Coronets appear, And in soft sounds, Your Grace salutes their ear. 'T is these that early taint the female soul, Instruct the eyes of young Coquettes to roll, Teach Infant-cheeks a bidden blush to know, And little hearts to flutter at a Beau. Oft, when the world imagine women stray, The Sylphs thro' mystic mazes guide their way, Thro' all the giddy circle they pursue, And old impertinence expel by new.

What tender maid but must a victim fall To one man's treat, but for another's ball? When Florio speaks what virgin could withstand, If gentle Damon did not squeeze her hand? With varying vanities, from ev'ry part, They shift the moving Toyshop of their heart; Where wigs with wigs, with sword-knots sword-knots strive, Beaux banish beaux, and coaches coaches drive. This erring mortals Levity may call; Oh blind to truth! the Sylphs contrive it all. Of these am I, who thy protection claim, A watchful sprite, and Ariel is my name. Late, as I rang'd the crystal wilds of air, In the clear Mirror of thy ruling Star I saw, alas! some dread event impend, Ere to the main this morning sun descend, But heav'n reveals not what, or how, or where: Warn'd by the Sylph, oh pious maid, beware! This to disclose is all thy guardian can: Beware of all, but most beware of Man!" He said; when Shock, who thought she slept too long, Leap'd up, and wak'd his mistress with his tongue. 'T was then, Belinda, if report say true, Thy eyes first open'd on a Billet-doux; Wounds, Charms, and Ardors were no sooner read, But all the Vision vanish'd from thy head. And now, unveil'd, the Toilet stands display'd, Each silver Vase in mystic order laid. First, rob'd in white, the Nymph intent adores, With head uncover'd, the Cosmetic pow'rs. A heav'nly image in the glass appears, To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears; Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side, Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride. Unnumber'd treasures ope at once, and here The various off'rings of the world appear; From each she nicely culls with curious toil, And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil. This casket India's glowing gems unlocks, And all Arabia breathes from yonder box. The Tortoise here and Elephant unite, Transformed to combs, the speckled, and the white. Here files of pins extend their shining rows, Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux. Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms; The fair each moment rises in her charms, Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace, And calls forth all the wonders of her face; Sees by degrees a purer blush arise, And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes. The busy Sylphs surround their darling care, These set the head, and those divide the hair, Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown: And Betty's

prais'd for labours not her own. 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100 105 110 115 120 125 130 135 140 145

Canto II

Canto III

Close by those meads, for ever crown'd with flow'rs, Where Thames with pride surveys his rising tow'rs, There stands a structure of majestic frame, Which from the neighb'ring Hampton takes its name. Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom Of foreign Tyrants and of Nymphs at home; Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey. Dost sometimes counsel take — and sometimes Tea. Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort, To taste awhile the pleasures of a Court; In various talk th' instructive hours they past, Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last; One speaks the glory of the British Queen, And one describes a charming Indian screen; A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes; At ev'ry word a reputation dies. Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat, With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that. Mean while, declining from the noon of day, The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray; The hungry Judges soon the sentence sign, And wretches hang that jury-men may dine; The merchant from th' Exchange returns in peace, And the long labours of the Toilet cease. Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites, Burns to encounter two advent'rous Knights, At Ombre singly to decide their doom; And swells her breast with conquests yet to come. Straight the three bands prepare in arms to join, Each band the number of the sacred nine. Soon as she spreads her hand, th' aërial guard Descend, and sit on each important card: First Ariel perch'd upon a Matadore, Then each, according to the rank they bore; For Sylphs, yet mindful of their ancient race, Are, as when women, wondrous fond of place. Behold, four Kings in majesty rever'd, With hoary whiskers and a forky beard; And four fair Queens whose hands sustain a flow'r, Th' expressive emblem of their softer pow'r; Four Knaves in garbs

succinct, a trusty band, Caps on their heads, and halberts in their hand; And particolour'd troops, a shining train, Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain. The skilful Nymph reviews her force with care: Let Spades be trumps! she said, and trumps they were. Now move to war her sable Matadores, In show like leaders of the swarthy Moors. Spadillio first, unconquerable Lord! Led off two captive trumps, and swept the board. As many more Manillio forc'd to yield, And march'd a victor from the verdant field. Him Basto follow'd, but his fate more hard Gain'd but one trump and one Plebeian card. With his broad sabre next, a chief in years, The hoary Majesty of Spades appears, Puts forth one manly leg, to sight reveal'd, The rest, his many-colour'd robe conceal'd. The rebel Knave, who dares his prince engage, Proves the just victim of his royal rage. Ev'n mighty Pam, that Kings and Queens o'erthrew And mow'd down armies in the fights of Lu, Sad chance of war! now destitute of aid, Falls undistinguish'd by the victor spade! Thus far both armies to Belinda yield; Now to the Baron fate inclines the field. His warlike Amazon her host invades, Th' imperial consort of the crown of Spades. The Club's black Tyrant first her victim dy'd, Spite of his haughty mien, and barb'rous pride: What boots the regal circle on his head, His giant limbs, in state unwieldy spread; That long behind he trails his pompous robe, And, of all monarchs, only grasps the globe? The Baron now his Diamonds pours apace; Th' embroider'd King who shows but half his face, And his refulgent Queen, with pow'rs combin'd Of broken troops an easy conquest find. Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, in wild disorder seen, With throngs promiscuous strow the level green. Thus when dispers'd a routed army runs, Of Asia's troops, and Afric's sable sons, With like confusion different nations fly, Of various habit, and of various dye, The pierc'd battalions dis-united fall, In heaps on heaps; one fate o'erwhelms them all. The Knave of Diamonds tries his wily arts, And wins (oh shameful chance!) the Queen of Hearts. At this, the blood the virgin's cheek forsook, A livid paleness spreads o'er all her look; She sees, and trembles at th' approaching ill, Just in the jaws of ruin, and Codille. And now (as oft in some distemper'd State)

On one nice Trick depends the gen'ral fate. An Ace of Hearts steps forth: The King unseen Lurk'd in her hand, and mourn'd his captive Queen: He springs to Vengeance with an eager pace, And falls like thunder on the prostrate Ace. The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky; The walls, the woods, and long canals reply. Oh thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate, Too soon dejected, and too soon elate. Sudden, these honours shall be snatch'd away, And curs'd for ever this victorious day. For lo! the board with cups and spoons is crown'd, The berries crackle, and the mill turns round; On shining Altars of Japan they raise The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze: From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide, While China's earth receives the smoking tide: At once they gratify their scent and taste, And frequent cups prolong the rich repast. Straight hover round the Fair her airy band; Some, as she sipp'd, the fuming liquor fann'd, Some o'er her lap their careful plumes display'd, Trembling, and conscious of the rich brocade. Coffee, (which makes the politician wise, And see thro' all things with his half-shut eyes) Sent up in vapours to the Baron's brain New Stratagems, the radiant Lock to gain. Ah cease, rash youth! desist ere't is too late, Fear the just Gods, and think of Scylla's Fate! Chang'd to a bird, and sent to flit in air, She dearly pays for Nisus' injur'd hair! But when to mischief mortals bend their will, How soon they find fit instruments of ill! Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace A two-edg'd weapon from her shining case: So Ladies in Romance assist their Knight, Present the spear, and arm him for the fight. He takes the gift with rev'rence, and extends The little engine on his fingers' ends; This just behind Belinda's neck he spread, As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head. Swift to the Lock a thousand Sprites repair, A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair; And thrice they twitch'd the diamond in her ear; Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the foe drew near. Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought The close recesses of the Virgin's thought; As on the nosegay in her breast reclin'd, He watch'd th' Ideas rising in her mind, Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her art, An earthly Lover lurking at her heart. Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd, Resign'd to fate, and with

a sigh retir'd. The Peer now spreads the glitt'ring Forfex wide, T' inclose the Lock; now joins it, to divide. Ev'n then, before the fatal engine clos'd, A wretched Sylph too fondly interpos'd; Fate urg'd the shears, and cut the Sylph in twain, (But airy substance soon unites again) The meeting points the sacred hair dissever From the fair head, for ever, and for ever! Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes, And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies. Not louder shrieks to pitying heav'n are cast, When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last; Or when rich China vessels fall'n from high, In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie! Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine (The victor cry'd) the glorious Prize is mine! While fish in streams, or birds delight in air, Or in a coach and six the British Fair, As long as Atalantis shall be read, Or the small pillow grace a Lady's bed, While visits shall be paid on solemn days, When num'rous wax-lights in bright order blaze, While nymphs take treats, or assignations give, So long my honour, name, and praise shall live! What Time would spare, from Steel receives its date, And monuments, like men, submit to fate! Steel could the labour of the Gods destroy, And strike to dust th' imperial tow'rs of Troy; Steel could the works of mortal pride confound, And hew triumphal arches to the ground. What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel, The conqu'ring force of unresisted steel? 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100 105 110 115 120 125 130 135 140 145 150 155 160 165 170 175

Canto IV

But anxious cares the pensive nymph oppress'd, And secret passions labour'd in her breast. Not youthful kings in battle seiz'd alive, Not scornful virgins who their charms survive, Not ardent lovers robb'd of all their bliss, Not ancient ladies when refus'd a kiss, Not tyrants fierce that unrepenting die, Not Cynthia when her manteau's pinn'd awry, E'er felt such rage, resentment, and despair, As thou, sad Virgin! for thy ravish'd Hair. For, that sad moment, when the Sylphs withdrew And

Ariel weeping from Belinda flew, Umbriel, a dusky, melancholy sprite, As ever sully'd the fair face of light, Down to the central earth, his proper scene, Repair'd to search the gloomy Cave of Spleen. Swift on his sooty pinions flits the Gnome, And in a vapour reach'd the dismal dome. No cheerful breeze this sullen region knows, The dreaded East is all the wind that blows. Here in a grotto, shelter'd close from air, And screen'd in shades from day's detested glare, She sighs for ever on her pensive bed, Pain at her side, and Megrim at her head. Two handmaids wait the throne: alike in place, But diff'ring far in figure and in face. Here stood Ill-nature like an ancient maid, Her wrinkled form in black and white array'd; With store of pray'rs, for mornings, nights, and noons, Her hand is fill'd; her bosom with lampoons. There Affectation, with a sickly mien, Shows in her cheek the roses of eighteen, Practis'd to lisp, and hang the head aside. Faints into airs, and languishes with pride, On the rich quilt sinks with becoming woe, Wrapt in a gown, for sickness, and for show. The fair ones feel such maladies as these, When each new night-dress gives a new disease. A constant Vapour o'er the palace flies; Strange phantoms rising as the mists arise; Dreadful, as hermit's dreams in haunted shades, Or bright, as visions of expiring maids. Now glaring fiends, and snakes on rolling spires, Pale spectres, gaping tombs, and purple fires: Now lakes of liquid gold, Elysian scenes, And crystal domes, and angels in machines. Unnumber'd throngs on every side are seen, Of bodies chang'd to various forms by Spleen. Here living Tea-pots stand, one arm held out, One bent; the handle this, and that the spout: A Pipkin there, like Homer's Tripod walks; Here sighs a Jar, and there a Goose-pie talks; Men prove with child, as pow'rful fancy works, And maids turn'd bottles, call aloud for corks. Safe past the Gnome thro' this fantastic band, A branch of healing Spleenwort in his hand. Then thus address'd the pow'r: "Hail, wayward Queen! Who rule the sex to fifty from fifteen: Parent of vapours and of female wit, Who give th' hysteric, or poetic fit, On various tempers act by various ways, Make some take physic, others scribble plays; Who cause the proud their visits to delay, And send the godly in a pet to pray. A

nymph there is, that all thy pow'r disdains, And thousands more in equal mirth maintains. But oh! if e'er thy Gnome could spoil a grace, Or raise a pimple on a beauteous face, Like Citron-waters matrons cheeks inflame, Or change complexions at a losing game; If e'er with airy horns I planted heads, Or rumpled petticoats, or tumbled beds, Or caus'd suspicion when no soul was rude, Or discompos'd the head-dress of a Prude, Or e'er to costive lap-dog gave disease, Which not the tears of brightest eyes could ease: Hear me, and touch Belinda with chagrin, That single act gives half the world the spleen." The Goddess with a discontented air Seems to reject him, tho' she grants his pray'r. A wond'rous Bag with both her hands she binds, Like that where once Ulysses held the winds; There she collects the force of female lungs, Sighs, sobs, and passions, and the war of tongues. A Vial next she fills with fainting fears, Soft sorrows, melting griefs, and flowing tears. The Gnome rejoicing bears her gifts away, Spreads his black wings, and slowly mounts to day. Sunk in Thalestris' arms the nymph he found, Her eyes dejected and her hair unbound. Full o'er their heads the swelling bag he rent, And all the Furies issu'd at the vent. Belinda burns with more than mortal ire, And fierce Thalestris fans the rising fire. "O wretched maid!" she spread her hands, and cry'd, (While Hampton's echoes, "Wretched maid!" reply'd) "Was it for this you took such constant care The bodkin, comb, and essence to prepare? For this your locks in paper durance bound, For this with tort'ring irons wreath'd around? For this with fillets strain'd your tender head, And bravely bore the double loads of lead? Gods! shall the ravisher display your hair, While the Fops envy, and the Ladies stare! Honour forbid! at whose unrivall'd shrine Ease, pleasure, virtue, all our sex resign. Methinks already I your tears survey, Already hear the horrid things they say, Already see you a degraded toast, And all your honour in a whisper lost! How shall I, then, your helpless fame defend? 'T will then be infamy to seem your friend! And shall this prize, th' inestimable prize, Expos'd thro' crystal to the gazing eyes, And heighten'd by the diamond's circling rays, On that rapacious hand for ever blaze? Sooner shall grass in

Hyde-park Circus grow, And wits take lodgings in the sound of Bow; Sooner let earth, air, sea, to Chaos fall, Men, monkeys, lap-dogs, parrots, perish all!" She said; then raging to Sir Plume repairs, And bids her Beau demand the precious hairs; (Sir Plume of amber snuff-box justly vain, And the nice conduct of a clouded cane) With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face, He first the snuff-box open'd, then the case, And thus broke out — "My Lord, why, what the devil? "Z — ds! damn the lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil! Plague on't!'t is past a jest — nay prithee, pox! Give her the hair" — he spoke, and rapp'd his box. "It grieves me much" (reply'd the Peer again) "Who speaks so well should ever speak in vain. But by this Lock, this sacred Lock I swear, (Which never more shall join its parted hair; Which never more its honours shall renew, Clipp'd from the lovely head where late it grew) That while my nostrils draw the vital air, This hand, which won it, shall for ever wear." He spoke, and speaking, in proud triumph spread The long-contended honours of her head. But Umbriel, hateful Gnome! forbears not so; He breaks the Vial whence the sorrows flow. Then see! the nymph in beauteous grief appears, Her eyes half-languishing, half-drown'd in tears; On her heav'd bosom hung her drooping head, Which, with a sigh, she rais'd; and thus she said. "For ever curs'd be this detested day, Which snatch'd my best, my fav'rite curl away! Happy! ah ten times happy had I been, If Hampton-Court these eyes had never seen! Yet am not I the first mistaken maid, By love of Courts to num'rous ills betray'd. Oh had I rather un-admir'd remain'd In some lone isle, or distant Northern land; Where the gilt Chariot never marks the way, Where none learn Ombre, none e'er taste Bohea! There kept my charms conceal'd from mortal eye, Like roses, that in deserts bloom and die. What mov'd my mind with youthful Lords to roam? Oh had I stay'd, and said my pray'rs at home! 'T was this, the morning omens seem'd to tell, Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell; The tott'ring China shook without a wind. Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind! A Sylph too warn'd me of the threats of fate, In mystic visions, now believ'd too late! See the poor remnants of these slighted hairs! My

hands shall rend what ev'n thy rapine spares: These in two sable ringlets taught to break, Once gave new beauties to the snowy neck; The sister-lock now sits uncouth, alone, And in its fellow's fate foresees its own; Uncurl'd it hangs, the fatal shears demands, And tempts once more thy sacrilegious hands. Oh hadst thou, cruel! been content to seize Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these!" 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100 105 110 115 120 125 130 135 140 145 150 155 160 165 170 175

Canto V

She said: the pitying audience melt in tears. But Fate and Jove had stopp'd the Baron's ears. In vain Thalestris with reproach assails, For who can move when fair Belinda fails? Not half so fix'd the Trojan could remain, While Anna begg'd and Dido rag'd in vain. Then grave Clarissa graceful wav'd her fan; Silence ensu'd, and thus the nymph began. "Say why are Beauties prais'd and honour'd most, The wise man's passion, and the vain man's toast? Why deck'd with all that land and sea afford, Why Angels call'd, and Angel-like ador'd? Why round our coaches crowd the white-glov'd Beaux, Why bows the side-box from its inmost rows; How vain are all these glories, all our pains, Unless good sense preserve what beauty gains: That men may say, when we the front-box grace: 'Behold the first in virtue as in face!' Oh! if to dance all night, and dress all day, Charm'd the small-pox, or chas'd old-age away; Who would not scorn what housewife's cares produce, Or who would learn one earthly thing of use? To patch, nay ogle, might become a Saint, Nor could it sure be such a sin to paint. But since, alas! frail beauty must decay, Curl'd or uncurl'd, since Locks will turn to grey; Since painted, or not painted, all shall fade, And she who scorns a man, must die a maid; What then remains but well our pow'r to use, And keep good-humour still whate'er we lose? And trust me, dear! good-humour can prevail, When airs, and flights, and screams, and scolding fail. Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll; Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul." So spoke the

Dame, but no applause ensu'd; Belinda frown'd, Thalestris call'd her Prude. "To arms, to arms!" the fierce Virago cries, And swift as lightning to the combat flies. All side in parties, and begin th' attack; Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack; Heroes' and Heroines' shouts confus'dly rise, And bass, and treble voices strike the skies. No common weapons in their hands are found, Like Gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound. So when bold Homer makes the Gods engage, And heav'nly breasts with human passions rage; 'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms; And all Olympus rings with loud alarms: Jove's thunder roars, heav'n trembles all around, Blue Neptune storms, the bellowing deeps resound: Earth shakes her nodding tow'rs, the ground gives way. And the pale ghosts start at the flash of day! Triumphant Umbriel on a sconce's height Clapp'd his glad wings, and sate to view the fight: Propp'd on the bodkin spears, the Sprites survey The growing combat, or assist the fray. While thro' the press enrag'd Thalestris flies, And scatters death around from both her eyes, A Beau and Witling perish'd in the throng, One died in metaphor, and one in song. "O cruel nymph! a living death I bear," Cry'd Dapperwit, and sunk beside his chair. A mournful glance Sir Fopling upwards cast, "Those eyes are made so killing" — was his last. Thus on Mæander's flow'ry margin lies Th' expiring Swan, and as he sings he dies. When bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down, Chloe stepp'd in, and kill'd him with a frown; She smil'd to see the doughty hero slain, But, at her smile, the Beau reviv'd again. Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air, Weighs the Men's wits against the Lady's hair; The doubtful beam long nods from side to side; At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside. See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies, With more than usual lightning in her eyes: Nor fear'd the Chief th' unequal fight to try, Who sought no more than on his foe to die. But this bold Lord with manly strength endu'd, She with one finger and a thumb subdu'd: Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew, A charge of Snuff the wily virgin threw; The Gnomes direct, to ev'ry atom just, The pungent grains of titillating dust. Sudden, with starting tears each eye o'erflows, And the high dome re-echoes to his

nose. Now meet thy fate, incens'd Belinda cry'd, And drew a deadly bodkin from her side. (The same, his ancient personage to deck, Her great great grandsire wore about his neck, In three seal-rings; which after, melted down, Form'd a vast buckle for his widow's gown: Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew, The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew; Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs, Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.) "Boast not my fall" (he cry'd) "insulting foe! Thou by some other shalt be laid as low, Nor think, to die dejects my lofty mind: All that I dread is leaving you behind! Rather than so, ah let me still survive, And burn in Cupid's flames — but burn alive." "Restore the Lock!" she cries; and all around "Restore the Lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound. Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain Roar'd for the handkerchief that caus'd his pain. But see how oft ambitious aims are cross'd, And chiefs contend 'till all the prize is lost! The Lock, obtain'd with guilt, and kept with pain, In ev'ry place is sought, but sought in vain: With such a prize no mortal must be blest, So heav'n decrees! with heav'n who can contest? Some thought it mounted to the Lunar sphere, Since all things lost on earth are treasur'd there. There Hero's wits are kept in pond'rous vases, And beau's in snuff-boxes and tweezer-cases. There broken vows and death-bed alms are found, And lovers' hearts with ends of riband bound, The courtier's promises, and sick man's pray'rs, The smiles of harlots, and the tears of heirs, Cages for gnats, and chains to yoke a flea, Dry'd butterflies, and tomes of casuistry. But trust the Muse — she saw it upward rise, Tho' mark'd by none but quick, poetic eyes: (So Rome's great founder to the heav'ns withdrew, To Proculus alone confess'd in view) A sudden Star, it shot thro' liquid air, And drew behind a radiant trail of hair. Not Berenice's Locks first rose so bright, The heav'ns bespangling with dishevell'd light. The Sylphs behold it kindling as it flies, And pleas'd pursue its progress thro' the skies. This the Beau monde shall from the Mall survey, And hail with music its propitious ray. This the blest Lover shall for Venus take, And send up vows from Rosamonda's lake. This Partridge soon shall view in cloudless skies, When next he looks thro' Galileo's eyes; And hence th'

egregious wizard shall foredoom The fate of Louis, and the fall of Rome. Then cease, bright Nymph! to mourn thy ravish'd hair, Which adds new glory to the shining sphere! Not all the tresses that fair head can boast, Shall draw such envy as the Lock you lost. For, after all the murders of your eye, When, after millions slain, yourself shall die: When those fair suns shall set, as set they must, And all those tresses shall be laid in dust, This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame, And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name. 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100 105 110 115 120 125 130 135 140 145 150

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An Essay on Criticism

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An Essay on Criticism

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An Essay on Man, Epistle I

To H. St. John Lord Bolingbroke

The Design

Having proposed to write some pieces on Human Life and Manners, such as (to use my Lord Bacon's expression)

come home to Men's Business and Bosoms

, I thought it more satisfactory to begin with considering

Man

in the abstract, his

Nature

and his

State

; since, to prove any moral duty, to enforce any moral precept, or to examine the perfection or imperfection of any creature whatsoever, it is necessary first to know what

condition

and

relation

it is placed in, and what is the proper end and purpose of its

being

.

The science of Human Nature is, like all other sciences, reduced to a

few clear points

: There are not

many certain truths

in this world. It is therefore in the Anatomy of the mind as in that of the Body; more good will accrue to mankind by attending to the large, open, and perceptible parts, than by studying too much such finer nerves and vessels, the conformations and uses of which will for ever escape our observation. The

disputes

are all upon these last, and, I will venture to say, they have less sharpened the

wits

than the

hearts

of men against each other, and have diminished the practice, more than advanced the theory of Morality. If I could flatter myself that this Essay has any merit, it is in steering betwixt the extremes of doctrines seemingly opposite, in passing over terms

utterly unintelligible, and in forming a

temperate

yet not

inconsistent

, and a

short

yet not

imperfect

system of Ethics.

This I might have done in prose, but I chose verse, and even rhyme, for two reasons. The one will appear obvious; that principles, maxims, or precepts so written, both strike the reader more strongly at first, and are more easily retained by him afterwards: The other may seem odd, but is true, I found I could express them more

shortly

this way than in prose itself; and nothing is more certain, than that much of the

force

as well as

grace

of arguments or instructions, depends on their

conciseness

. I was unable to treat this part of my subject more in

detail

, without becoming dry and tedious; or more

poetically

, without sacrificing perspicuity to ornament, without wandring from the precision, or breaking the chain of reasoning: If any man can unite all these without diminution of any of them, I freely confess he will compass a thing above my capacity.

What is now published, is only to be considered as a

general Map

of

Man

, marking out no more than the

greater parts

, their

extent

, their

limits

, and their

connection

, and leaving the particular to be more fully delineated in the charts which are to follow. Consequently, these Epistles in their progress (if I have health and leisure to make any progress) will be less dry, and more susceptible of poetical ornament. I am here only opening the

fountains

, and clearing the passage. To deduce the

rivers

, to follow them in their course, and to observe their effects, may be a task more agreeable.

P.

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Universe

.

Of

Man

in the abstract

.

sectionlinestopic I17 &c.That we can judge only with regard to our own system, being ignorant of the relations of systems and things. II35 &c.That Man is not to be deemed imperfect, but a Being suited to his place and rank in the creation, agreeable to the general Order of things, and conformable to Ends and Relations to him unknown. III77 &c.That it is partly upon his ignorance of future events, and partly upon the hope of a future state, that all his happiness in the present depends. IV109 &c.The pride of aiming at more knowledge, and pretending to more Perfections, the cause of Man's error and misery. The impiety of putting himself in the place of God, and judging of the fitness or unfitness, perfection or imperfection, justice or injustice of his dispensations. V131 &c.The absurdity of conceiting himself the final cause of the creation, or expecting that perfection in the moral world, which is not in the natural. VI173 &c.The unreasonableness of his complaints against Providence, while on the one hand he demands the Perfections of the Angels, and on the other the bodily qualifications of the Brutes; though, to possess any of the sensitive faculties in a higher degree, would render him miserable. VII207That throughout the whole visible world, an universal order and gradation in the sensual and mental faculties is observed, which causes a subordination of creature to creature, and of all

creatures to Man. The gradations of sense, instinct, thought, reflection, reason; that Reason alone countervails fill the other faculties. VIII233How much further this order and subordination of living creatures may extend, above and below us; were any part of which broken, not that part only, but the whole connected creation must be destroyed. IX250The extravagance, madness, and pride of such a desire. X281→endThe consequence of all, the absolute submission due to Providence, both as to our present and future state.

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Epistle I

Awake, my St. John! leave all meaner things To low ambition, and the pride of Kings. Let us (since Life can little more supply Than just to look about us and to die) Expatiate free o'er all this scene of Man; A mighty maze! but not without a plan; A Wild, where weeds and flow'rs promiscuous shoot; Or Garden, tempting with forbidden fruit. Together let us beat this ample field, Try what the open, what the covert yield; The latent tracts, the giddy heights, explore Of all who blindly creep, or sightless soar; Eye Nature's walks, shoot Folly as it flies, And catch the Manners living as they rise; Laugh where we must, be candid where we can; But vindicate the ways of God to Man. 5 10 15 I Say first, of God above, or Man below, What can we reason, but from what we know? Of Man, what see we but his station here, From which to reason, or to which refer? Thro' worlds unnumber'd tho' the God be known, 'Tis ours to trace him only in our own. He, who thro' vast immensity can pierce, See worlds on worlds compose one universe, Observe how system into system runs, What other planets circle other suns, What vary'd Being peoples ev'ry star, May tell why Heav'n has made us as we are. But of this frame the bearings, and the ties, The strong connexions, nice dependencies, Gradations just, has thy pervading soul Look'd thro'? or can a part contain the whole? Is the great chain, that draws all to agree, And drawn supports, upheld by God, or thee? 20 25 30 II Presumptuous Man!

the reason wouldst thou find, Why form'd so weak, so little, and so blind? First, if thou canst, the harder reason guess, Why form'd no weaker, blinder, and no less? Ask of thy mother earth, why oaks are made Taller or stronger than the weeds they shade? Or ask of yonder argent fields above, Why Jove's satellites are less than Jove? Of Systems possible, if 'tis confest That Wisdom infinite must form the best, Where all must full or not coherent be, And all that rises, rise in due degree; Then, in the scale of reas'ning life, 'tis plain, There must be, somewhere, such a rank as Man: And all the question (wrangle e'er so long) Is only this, if God has plac'd him wrong? Respecting Man, whatever wrong we call, May, must be right, as relative to all. In human works, tho' labour'd on with pain, A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain; In God's, one single can its end produce; Yet serves to second too some other use. So Man, who here seems principal alone, Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown, Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal; 'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole. When the proud steed shall know why Man restrains His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains: When the dull Ox, why now he breaks the clod, Is now a victim, and now Ægypt's God: Then shall Man's pride and dulness comprehend His actions', passions', being's, use and end; Why doing, suff'ring, check'd, impell'd; and why This hour a slave, the next a deity. Then say not Man's imperfect, Heav'n in fault; Say rather, Man's as perfect as he ought: His knowledge measur'd to his state and place; His time a moment, and a point his space. If to be perfect in a certain sphere, What matter, soon or late, or here or there? The blest to day is as completely so,, As who began a thousand years ago. 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 III Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of Fate, All but the page prescrib'd, their present state: From brutes what men, from men what spirits know: Or who could suffer Being here below? The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day, Had he thy Reason, would he skip and play? Pleas'd to the last, he crops the flow'ry food, And licks the hand just rais'd to shed his blood. Oh blindness to the future! kindly giv'n, That each may fill the circle mark'd by Heav'n: Who sees with equal

eye, as God of all, A hero perish, or a sparrow fall, Atoms or systems into ruin hurl'd, And now a bubble burst, and now a world. Hope humbly then: with trembling pinions soar; Wait the great teacher Death; and God adore. What future bliss, he gives not thee to know, But gives that Hope to be thy blessing now. Hope springs eternal in the human breast: Man never Is, but always To be blest: The soul, uneasy and confin'd from home, Rests and expatiates in a life to come. Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutor'd mind Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind: His soul, proud Science never taught to stray Far as the solar walk, or milky way; Yet simple Nature to his hope has giv'n, Behind the cloud-topt hill, an humbler heav'n; Some safer world in depth of woods embrac'd, Some happier island in the watry waste, Where slaves once more their native land behold, No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold. To Be, contents his natural desire, He asks no Angel's wing, no Seraph's fire; But thinks, admitted to that equal sky, His faithful dog shall bear him company. 80 85 90 95 100 105 110 IV Go, wiser thou! and, in thy scale of sense, Weight thy Opinion against Providence; Call imperfection what thou fancy'st such, Say, here he gives too little, there too much: Destroy all Creatures for thy sport or gust, Yet cry, If Man's unhappy, God's unjust; If Man alone engross not Heav'n's high care, Alone made perfect here, immortal there: Snatch from his hand the balance and the rod, Re-judge his justice, be the God of God. In Pride, in reas'ning Pride, our error lies; All quit their sphere, and rush into the skies. Pride still is aiming at the blest abodes, Men would be Angels, Angels would be Gods. Aspiring to be Gods, if Angels fell, Aspiring to be Angels, Men rebel: And who but wishes to invert the laws Of Order, sins against th' Eternal Cause. 115 120 125 130 V Ask for what end the heav'nly bodies shine, Earth for whose use? Pride answers, "'Tis for mine: For me kind Nature wakes her genial Pow'r, Suckles each herb, and spreads out ev'ry flow'r; Annual for me, the grape, the rose renew The juice nectareous, and the balmy dew; For me, the mine a thousand treasures brings; For me, health gushes from a thousand springs; Seas roll to waft me, suns to light me rise; My foot-stool earth, my canopy

the skies." But errs not Nature from his gracious end, From burning suns when livid deaths descend, When earthquakes swallow, or when tempests sweep Towns to one grave, whole nations to the deep? "No, ('tis reply'd) the first Almighty Cause Acts not by partial, but by gen'ral laws; Th' exceptions few; some change since all began: And what created perfect?" — Why then Man? If the great end be human Happiness, Then Nature deviates; and can Man do less? As much that end a constant course requires Of show'rs and sun-shine, as of Man's desires; As much eternal springs and cloudless skies, As Men for ever temp'rate, calm, and wise. If plagues or earthquakes break not Heav'n's design, Why then a Borgia, or a Catiline? Who knows but he, whose hand the lightning forms, Who heaves old Ocean, and who wings the storms; Pours fierce Ambition in a Caesar's mind, Or turns young Ammon loose to scourge mankind? From pride, from pride, our very reas'ning springs; Account for moral, as for nat'ral things: Why charge we Heav'n in those, in these acquit? In both, to reason right is to submit. Better for Us, perhaps, it might appear, Were there all harmony, all virtue here; That never air or ocean felt the wind; That never passion discompos'd the mind. But All subsists by elemental strife; And Passions are the elements of Life. The gen'ral Order, since the whole began, Is kept in Nature, and is kept in Man. 135 140 145 150 155 160 165 170 VI What would this Man? Now upward will he soar, And little less than Angel, would be more; Now looking downwards, just as griev'd appears To want the strength of bulls, the fur of bears. Made for his use all creatures if he call, Say what their use, had he the pow'rs of all? Nature to these, without profusion, kind, The proper organs, proper pow'rs assign'd; Each seeming want compensated of course, Here with degrees of swiftness, there of force; All in exact proportion to the state; Nothing to add, and nothing to abate. Each beast, each insect, happy in its own: Is Heav'n unkind to Man, and Man alone? Shall he alone, whom rational we call, Be pleas'd with nothing, if not bless'd with all? The bliss of Man (could Pride that blessing find) Is not to act or think beyond mankind; No pow'rs of body or of soul to share, But what his nature

and his state can bear. Why has not Man a microscopic eye? For this plain reason, Man is not a Fly. Say what the use, were finer optics giv'n, T' inspect a mite, not comprehend the heav'n? Or touch, if tremblingly alive all o'er, To smart and agonize at every pore? Or quick effluvia darting thro' the brain, Die of a rose in aromatic pain? If Nature thunder'd in his op'ning ears, And stunn'd him with the music of the spheres, How would he wish that Heav'n had left him still The whisp'ring Zephyr, and the purling rill? Who finds not Providence all good and wise, Alike in what it gives, and what denies? 175 180 185 190 195 200 205 VII Far as Creation's ample range extends, The scale of sensual, mental pow'rs ascends: Mark how it mounts, to Man's imperial race, From the green myriads in the peopled grass: What modes of sight betwixt each wide extreme, The mole's dim curtain, and the lynx's beam: Of smell, the headlong lioness between, And hound sagacious on the tainted green: Of hearing, from the life that fills the Flood, To that which warbles thro' the vernal wood: The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine! Feels at each thread, and lives along the line: In the nice bee, what sense so subtly true From pois'nous herbs extracts the healing dew? How Instinct varies in the grov'lling swine, Compar'd, half-reas'ning elephant, with thine! 'Twixt that, and Reason, what a nice barrier, For ever sep'rate, yet for ever near! Remembrance and Reflection how ally'd; What thin partitions Sense from Thought divide: And Middle natures, how they long to join, Yet never pass th' insuperable line! Without this just gradation, could they be Subjected, these to those, or all to thee? The pow'rs of all subdu'd by thee alone, Is not thy Reason all these pow'rs in one? 210 215 220 225 230 VIII See, thro' this air, this ocean, and this earth, All matter quick, and bursting into birth. Above, how high, progressive life may go! Around, how wide! how deep extend below! Vast chain of Being! which from God began, Natures ethereal, human, angel, man, Beast, bird, fish, insect, what no eye can see, No glass can reach; from Infinite to thee, From thee to Nothing. — On superior pow'rs Were we to press, inferior might on ours: Or in the full creation leave a void, Where, one step broken, the great scale's destroy'd: From Nature's

chain whatever link you strike, Tenth or ten thousandth, breaks the chain alike. And, if each system in gradation roll Alike essential to th' amazing Whole, The least confusion but in one, not all That system only, but the Whole must fall. Let Earth unbalanc'd from her orbit fly, Planets and Suns run lawless thro' the sky; Let ruling Angels from their spheres be hurl'd, Being on Being wreck'd, and world on world; Heav'n's whole foundations to their centre nod, And Nature tremble to the throne of God. All this dread Order break — for whom? for thee? Vile worm! — Oh Madness! Pride! Impiety! 235 240 245 250 255 IX What if the foot, ordain'd the dust to tread, Or hand, to toil, aspir'd to be the head? What if the head, the eye, or ear repin'd To serve mere engines to the ruling Mind? Just as absurd for any part to claim To be another, in this gen'ral frame: Just as absurd, to mourn the tasks or pains, The great directing Mind of All ordains. All are but parts of one stupendous whole, Whose body Nature is, and God the soul; That, chang'd thro' all, and yet in all the same; Great in the earth, as in th' ethereal frame; Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze, Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees, Lives thro' all life, extends thro' all extent, Spreads undivided, operates unspent; Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part, As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart: As full, as perfect, in vile Man that mourns, As the rapt Seraph that adores and burns: To him no high, no low, no great, no small; He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all. 260 265 270 275 280 X Cease then, nor Order Imperfection name: Our proper bliss depends on what we blame. Know thy own point: This kind, this due degree Of blindness, weakness, Heav'n bestows on thee. Submit. — In this, or any other sphere, Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear: Safe in the hand of one disposing Pow'r, Or in the natal, or the mortal hour. All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee; All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see; All Discord, Harmony not understood; All partial Evil, universal Good: And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite, One truth is clear, Whatever Is, Is Right. 285 290

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Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot

Advertisement to the first publication of this Epistle

This paper is a sort of bill of complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches, as the several occasions offered. I had no thoughts of publishing it, till it pleased some Persons of Rank and Fortune (the Authors of

Verses to the Imitator of Horace

, and of an

Epistle to a Doctor of Divinity from a Nobleman at Hampton Court

) to attack, in a very extraordinary manner, not only my Writings (of which, being public, the Public is judge), but my P

erson, Morals

, and

Family

, whereof, to those who know me not, a truer information may be requisite. Being divided between the necessity to say something of

myself

, and my own laziness to undertake so awkward a task, I thought it the shortest way to put the last hand to this Epistle. If it have any thing pleasing, it will be that by which I am most desirous to please, the

Truth

and the

Sentiment

; and if any thing offensive, it will be only to those I am least sorry to offend,

the vicious

or

the ungenerous

.

Many will know their own pictures in it, there being not a circumstance but what is true; but I have, for the most part, spared their

Names

, and they may escape being laughed at, if they please.

I would have some of them know, it was owing to the request of the learned and candid Friend to whom it is inscribed, that I make not as free use of theirs as they have done of mine. However, I shall have this advantage, and honour, on my side, that whereas, by their proceeding, any abuse may be directed at any man, no injury can possibly be done by mine, since a nameless character can never be found out, but by its

truth

and

likeness

.

P.

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Epistle to Dr Arnuthnot

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Ode on Solitude

Happy the man whose wish and care A few paternal acres bound, Content to breathe his native air, In his own ground. Whose herds with milk, whose fields with bread,

Whose flocks supply him with attire, Whose trees in summer yield him shade, In winter fire. Blest, who can unconcern'dly find Hours, days, and years slide soft away, In health of body, peace of mind, Quiet by day, Sound sleep by night; study and ease, Together mixt; sweet recreation; And Innocence, which most does please With meditation. Thus let me live, unseen, unknown, Thus unlamented let me die, Steal from the world, and not a stone Tell where I lie. 5 10 15 20

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The Descent of Dullness

from The Dunciad, Book IV.

In vain, in vain — the all-composing Hour Resistless falls: the Muse obeys the Pow'r. She comes! she comes! the sable Throne behold Of Night primæval and of Chaos old! Before her, Fancy's gilded clouds decay, And all its varying Rain-bows die away. Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires, The meteor drops, and in a flash expires. As one by one, at dread Medea's strain, The sick'ning stars fade off th' ethereal plain; As Argus' eyes by Hermes' wand opprest, Clos'd one by one to everlasting rest; Thus at her felt approach, and secret might, Art after Art goes out, and all is Night. See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled, Mountains of Casuistry heap'd o'er her head! Philosophy, that lean'd on Heav'n before, Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more. Physic of Metaphysic begs defence, And Metaphysic calls for aid on Sense! See Mystery to Mathematics fly! In vain! they gaze, turn giddy, rave, and die. Religion blushing veils her sacred fires, And unawares Morality expires. For public Flame, nor private, dares to shine; Nor human Spark is left, nor Glimpse divine! Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos! is restor'd; Light dies before thy uncreating word; Thy hand, great Anarch! lets the curtain fall, And universal Darkness buries All. 5 10 15 20 25 30

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Epitaph on Gay

In Westminster Abbey, 1732

Of Manners gentle, of Affections mild; In Wit, a Man; Simplicity, a Child: With native Humour temp'ring virtuous Rage, Form'd to delight at once and lash the age: Above Temptation, in a low Estate, And uncorrupted, ev'n among the Great: A safe Companion, and an easy Friend, Unblam'd thro' Life, lamented in thy End. These are Thy Honours! not that here thy Bust Is mix'd with Heroes, or with Kings thy dust; But that the Worthy and the Good shall say, Striking their pensive bosoms — Here lies Gay. 5 10

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Notes on The Rape of the Lock

Introduction

In 1711 Pope, who had just published his

Essay on Criticism

, was looking about for new worlds to conquer. A fortunate chance threw in his way a subject exactly suited to his tastes and powers. He seized upon it, dashed off his first sketch in less than a fortnight, and published it anonymously in a

Miscellany

issued by Lintot in 1712. But the theme had taken firm root in his mind. Dissatisfied with his first treatment of it, he determined, against the advice of the best critic of the day, to recast the work, and lift it from a mere society

jeu d'esprit

into an elaborate mock-heroic poem. He did so and won a complete success. Even yet, however, he was not completely satisfied and from time to time he added a touch to his work until he finally produced the finished picture which we know as

The Rape of the Lock

. As it stands, it is an almost flawless masterpiece, a brilliant picture and light-hearted mockery of the gay society of Queen Anne's day, on the whole the most satisfactory creation of Pope's genius, and, perhaps, the best example of the mock-heroic in any literature.

The occasion which gave rise to

The Rape of the Lock

has been so often related that it requires only a brief restatement. Among the Catholic families of Queen Anne's day, who formed a little society of their own, Miss Arabella Fermor was a reigning belle. In a youthful frolic which overstepped the bounds of propriety Lord Petre, a young nobleman of her acquaintance, cut off a lock of her hair. The lady was offended, the two families took up the quarrel, a lasting estrangement, possibly even a duel, was threatened. At this juncture a common friend of the two families, a Mr. Caryll, nephew of a well-known Jacobite exile for whom he is sometimes mistaken, suggested to Pope "to write a poem to make a jest of it," and so kill the quarrel with laughter. Pope consented, wrote his first draft of

The Rape of the Lock

, and passed it about in manuscript. Pope says himself that it had its effect in the two families; certainly nothing more is heard of the feud. How Miss Fermor received the poem is a little uncertain. Pope complains in a letter written some months after the poem had appeared in print that "the celebrated lady is offended." According to Johnson she liked the verses well enough to show them to her friends, and a niece of hers said years afterward that Mr. Pope's praise had made her aunt "very

troublesome and conceited." It is not improbable that Belinda was both flattered and offended. Delighted with the praise of her beauty she may none the less have felt called upon to play the part of the offended lady when the poem got about and the ribald wits of the day began to read into it double meanings which reflected upon her reputation. To soothe her ruffled feelings Pope dedicated the second edition of the poem to her in a delightful letter in which he thanked her for having permitted the publication of the first edition to forestall an imperfect copy offered to a bookseller, declared that the character of Belinda resembled her in nothing but in beauty, and affirmed that he could never hope that his poem should pass through the world half so uncensured as she had done. It would seem that the modern critics who have undertaken to champion Miss Fermor against what they are pleased to term the revolting behavior of the poet are fighting a needless battle. A pretty girl who would long since have been forgotten sat as an unconscious model to a great poet; he made her the central figure in a brilliant picture and rendered her name immortal. That is the whole story, and when carping critics begin to search the poem for the improprieties of conduct to which they say Pope alluded, one has but to answer in Pope's own words.

If to her share some female errors fall, Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

Pope's statement in the dedication that he had been forced into publishing the first draft of the poem before his design of enlarging it was half executed is probably to be taken, like many of his statements, with a sufficient grain of salt. Pope had a curious habit of protesting that he was forced into publishing his letters, poems, and other trifles, merely to forestall the appearance of unauthorized editions. It is more likely that it was the undoubted success of

The Rape of the Lock

in its first form which gave him the idea of working up the sketch into a complete mock-heroic poem.

Examples of such a poem were familiar enough to Pope. Not to go back to the pseudo-Homeric mock epic which relates the battle of the frogs and mice, Vida in Italy and Boileau in France, with both of whom Pope, as the

Essay on Criticism

shows, was well acquainted, had done work of this kind. Vida's description of the game of chess in his

Scacchia Ludus

certainly gave him the model for the game of ombre in the third canto of

The Rape of the Lock

; Boileau's

Lutrin

probably suggested to him the idea of using the mock-heroic for the purposes of satire.

Now it was a dogma of the critical creed of the day, which Pope devoutly accepted, that every epic must have a well-recognized "machinery." Machinery, as he kindly explained to Miss Fermor, was a "term invented by the critics to signify that part which the deities, angels, or demons are made to act in a poem," in short for the whole supernatural element. Such machinery was quite wanting in the first draft of the Rape; it must be supplied if the poem was to be a true epic, even of the comic kind. And the machinery must be of a nature which would lend itself to the light satiric tone of the poem. What was it to be? The employment of what we may call Christian machinery, the angels and devils of Tasso and Milton, was, of course, out of the question. The employment of the classic machinery was almost as impossible. It would have been hard for such an admirer of the classics as Pope to have taken the deities of Olympus otherwise than seriously. And even if he had been able to treat them humorously, the humor would have been a form of burlesque quite at variance

with what he had set out to accomplish. For Pope's purpose, springing naturally from the occasion which set him to writing the

Rape

, was not to burlesque what was naturally lofty by exhibiting it in a degraded light, but to show the true littleness of the trivial by treating it in a grandiose and mock-heroic fashion, to make the quarrel over the stolen lock ridiculous by raising it to the plane of the epic contest before the walls of Troy.

In his perplexity a happy thought, little less in fact than an inspiration of genius, came to Pope. He had been reading a book by a clever French abbé treating in a satiric fashion of the doctrines of the so-called Rosicrucians, in particular of their ideas of elemental spirits and the influence of these spirits upon human affairs. Here was the machinery he was looking for made to his hand. There would be no burlesque in introducing the Rosicrucian sylphs and gnomes into a mock-heroic poem, for few people, certainly not the author of the

Comte de Gabalis

, took them seriously. Yet the widespread popularity of this book, to say nothing of the existence of certain Rosicrucian societies, had rendered their names familiar to the society for which Pope wrote. He had but to weave them into the action of his poem, and the brilliant little sketch of society was transformed into a true mock-epic.

The manner in which this interweaving was accomplished is one of the most satisfactory evidences of Pope's artistic genius. He was proud of it himself. "The making the machinery, and what was published before, hit so well together, is," he told Spencer, "I think, one of the greatest proofs of judgment of anything I ever did." And he might well be proud. Macaulay, in a well-known passage, has pointed out how seldom in the history of literature such a recasting of a poem has been successfully accomplished. But Pope's revision of

The Rape of the Lock

was so successful that the original form was practically done away with. No one reads it now but professed students of the literature of Queen Anne's time. And so artfully has the new matter been woven into the old that if the recasting of

The Rape of the Lock

were not a commonplace even in school histories of English literature, not one reader in a hundred would suspect that the original sketch had been revised and enlarged to more than twice its length. It would be an interesting task for the student to compare the two forms printed in this edition, to note exactly what has been added, and the reasons for its addition, and to mark how Pope has smoothed the junctures and blended the old and the new. Nothing that he could do would admit him more intimately to the secrets of Pope's mastery of his art.

A word must be said in closing as to the merits of

The Rape of the Lock

and its position in English literature. In the first place it is an inimitable picture of one phase, at least, of the life of the time, of the gay, witty, heartless society of Queen Anne's day. Slowly recovering from the licentious excesses of the Restoration, society at this time was perhaps unmoral rather than immoral. It was quite without ideals, unless indeed the conventions of "good form" may be dignified by that name. It lacked the brilliant enthusiasm of Elizabethan times as well as the religious earnestness of the Puritans and the devotion to patriotic and social ideals which marked a later age. Nothing, perhaps, is more characteristic of the age than its attitude toward women. It affected indeed a tone of high-flown adoration which thinly veiled a cynical contempt. It styled woman a goddess and really regarded her as little better than a doll. The passion of love had fallen from the high estate it once possessed and become the mere relaxation of the idle moments of a man of fashion.

In the comedies of Congreve, for example, a lover even if honestly in love thinks it

as incumbent upon him to make light of his passion before his friends as to exaggerate it in all the forms of affected compliment before his mistress.

In

The Rape of the Lock

Pope has caught and fixed forever the atmosphere of this age. It is not the mere outward form and circumstance, the manners and customs, the patching, powdering, ogling, gambling, of the day that he has reproduced, though his account of these would alone suffice to secure the poem immortality as a contribution to the history of society. The essential spirit of the age breathes from every line. No great English poem is at once so brilliant and so empty, so artistic, and yet so devoid of the ideals on which all high art rests. It is incorrect, I think, to consider Pope in

The Rape of the Lock

as the satirist of his age. He was indeed clever enough to perceive its follies, and witty enough to make sport of them, but it is much to be doubted whether he was wise enough at this time to raise his eyes to anything better. In the social satires of Pope's great admirer, Byron, we are at no loss to perceive the ideal of personal liberty which the poet opposes to the conventions he tears to shreds. Is it possible to discover in

The Rape of the Lock

any substitute for Belinda's fancies and the Baron's freaks? The speech of Clarissa which Pope inserted as an afterthought to point the moral of the poem recommends Belinda to trust to merit rather than to charms. But "merit" is explicitly identified with good humor, a very amiable quality, but hardly of the highest rank among the moral virtues. And the avowed end and purpose of "merit" is merely to preserve what beauty gains, the flattering attentions of the other sex, — surely the lowest ideal ever set before womankind. The truth is, I think, that

The Rape of the Lock

represents Pope's attitude toward the social life of his time in the period of his brilliant youth. He was at once dazzled, amused, and delighted by the gay world in which he found himself. The apples of pleasure had not yet turned to ashes on his lips, and it is the poet's sympathy with the world he paints which gives to the poem the air, most characteristic of the age itself, of easy, idle, unthinking gayety. We would not have it otherwise. There are sermons and satires in abundance in English literature, but there is only one

Rape of the Lock

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The form of the poem is in perfect correspondence with its spirit. There is an immense advance over the

Essay on Criticism

in ease, polish, and balance of matter and manner. And it is not merely in matters of detail that the supremacy of the latter poem is apparent.

The Rape of the Lock

is remarkable among all Pope's longer poems as the one complete and perfect whole. It is no mosaic of brilliant epigrams, but an organic creation. It is impossible to detach any one of its witty paragraphs and read it with the same pleasure it arouses when read in its proper connection. Thalestris' call to arms and Clarissa's moral reproof are integral parts of the poem. And as a result, perhaps, of its essential unity

The Rape of the Lock

bears witness to the presence of a power in Pope that we should hardly have suspected from his other works, the power of dramatic characterization. Elsewhere he has shown himself a master of brilliant portraiture, but Belinda, the Baron, and Thalestris are something more than portraits. They are living people, acting and speaking with admirable consistency. Even the little sketch of Sir Plume is instinct

with life.

Finally

The Rape of the Lock

, in its limitations and defects, no less than in its excellencies, represents a whole period of English poetry, the period which reaches with but few exceptions from Dryden to Wordsworth. The creed which dominated poetic composition during this period is discussed in the

introduction

to the

Essay on Criticism

, and is admirably illustrated in that poem itself. Its repression of individuality, its insistence upon the necessity of following in the footsteps of the classic poets, and of checking the outbursts of imagination by the rules of common sense, simply incapacitated the poets of the period from producing works of the highest order. And its insistence upon man as he appeared in the conventional, urban society of the day as the one true theme of poetry, its belief that the end of poetry was to instruct and improve either by positive teaching or by negative satire, still further limited its field. One must remember in attempting an estimate of

The Rape of the Lock

that it was composed with an undoubting acceptance of this creed and within all these narrowing limitations. And when this is borne in mind, it is hardly too much to say that the poem attains the highest point possible. In its treatment of the supernatural it is as original as a poem could be at that day. The brilliancy of its picture of contemporary society could not be heightened by a single stroke. Its satire is swift and keen, but never ill natured. And the personality of Pope himself shines through every line. Johnson advised authors who wished to attain a perfect style to

give their days and nights to a study of Addison. With equal justice one might advise students who wish to catch the spirit of our so-called Augustan age, and to realize at once the limitations and possibilities of its poetry, to devote themselves to the study of

The Rape of the Lock

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linereferencemeaning

Dedication

Mrs. Arabellathe title of Mrs. was still given in Pope's time to unmarried ladies as soon as they were old enough to enter society. the Rosicrucian doctrinethe first mention of the Rosicrucians is in a book published in Germany in 1614, inviting all scholars to join the ranks of a secret society said to have been founded two centuries before by a certain Christian Rosenkreuz who had mastered the hidden wisdom of the East. It seems probable that this book was an elaborate hoax, but it was taken seriously at the time, and the seventeenth century saw the formation of numerous groups of "Brothers of the Rosy Cross." They dabbled in alchemy, spiritualism, and magic, and mingled modern science with superstitions handed down from ancient times. Pope probably knew nothing more of them than what he had read in Le Comte de Gabalis. This was the work of a French abbé, de Montfaucon Villars (1635-1673), who was well known in his day both as a preacher and a man of letters. It is really a satire upon the fashionable mystical studies, but treats in a tone of pretended seriousness of secret sciences, of elemental spirits, and of their intercourse with men. It was translated into English in 1680 and again in 1714.

Canto I

1-2Pope opens his mock-epic with the usual epic formula, the statement of the subject. Compare the first lines of the Iliad, the Æneid, and Paradise Lost. In l. 7 he goes on to call upon the "goddess," i.e. the muse, to relate the cause of the rape.

This, too, is an epic formula. Compare Æneid, I, 8, and Paradise Lost, I, 27-33. 3Carylsee Introduction. In accordance with his wish his name was not printed in the editions of the poem that came out in Pope's lifetime, appearing there only as C — — or C — — l. 4Belindaa name used by Pope to denote Miss Fermor, the heroine of The Rape of the Lock 12 This line is almost a translation of a line in the Æneid (I, 11), where Virgil asks if it be possible that such fierce passions (as Juno's) should exist in the minds of gods. 13Sola good instance of the fondness which Pope shared with most poets of his time for giving classical names to objects of nature. This trick was supposed to adorn and elevate poetic diction. Try to find other instances of this in The Rape of the Lock. Why is the sun's ray called "tim'rous"? 16 It was an old convention that lovers were so troubled by their passion that they could not sleep. In the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales (ll. 97-98), Chaucer says of the young squire:

So hote he lovede, that by nightertale He sleep namore than dooth a nightingale.

Pope, of course, is laughing at the easy-going lovers of his day who in spite of their troubles sleep very comfortably till noon. 17 The lady on awaking rang a little hand-bell that stood on a table by her bed to call her maid. Then as the maid did not appear at once she tapped impatiently on the floor with the heel of her slipper. The watch in the next line was a repeater. 19All the rest of this canto was added in the second edition of the poem. See pp. 84-86. Pope did not notice that he describes Belinda as waking in I. 14 and still asleep and dreaming in II. 19-116. 20 guardian Sylphcompare ll. 67-78 23a Birth-night Beaua fine gentleman in his best clothes, such as he would wear at a ball on the occasion of a royal birthday. 30The nurse would have told Belinda the old tales of fairies who danced by moonlight on rings in the greensward, and dropped silver coins into the shoes of tidy little maids. The priest, on the other hand, would have repeated to her the legend of St. Cecilia and her guardian angel who once appeared in bodily form to her husband holding two rose garlands gathered in Paradise, or of St. Dorothea, who sent an angel messenger with a basket of heavenly fruits and flowers to convert the pagan Theophilus.

42militiaused here in the general sense of "soldiery." 44the box in the theater. the ringthe drive in Hyde Park, where the ladies of society took the air. 46a chaira sedan chair in which ladies used to be carried about. Why is Belinda told to scorn it? 50What is the meaning of "vehicles" in this line? 56Ombrethe fashionable game of cards in Pope's day. See his account of a game in Canto III and the notes on that passage. 57-67 See Introduction 69-70Compare Paradise Lost, I, 423-431. 79conscious of their face: proud of their beauty. 81Thesethe gnomes who urge the vain beauties to disdain all offers of love and play the part of prudes. 85garters, stars, and coronetsthe garter is the badge of the Knights of the Garter, an order founded by Edward III, to which only noble princes and noblemen of the highest rank were admitted. "Stars" are the jeweled decorations worn by members of other noble orders. "Coronets" are the inferior crowns worn by princes and nobles, not by sovereigns. 86"Your Grace" the title bestowed in England on a duchess — The idea in this passage, ll. 83-86, is that the gnomes fill the girls' minds with hopes of a splendid marriage and so induce them to "deny love." 94impertinence purposeless flirtation. 97-98Florio ... Damon poetic names for fine gentlemen; no special individuals are meant. 100Why is a woman's heart called a "toy-shop"? 101Sword-knots tassels worn at the hilts of swords. In Pope's day every gentleman carried a sword, and these sword-knots were often very gay. 105who thy protection claimwhat is the exact meaning of his phrase? 108thy ruling Star the star that controls thy destinies, a reference to the old belief in astrology. 115ShockBelinda's pet dog. His name would seem to show that he was a rough-haired terrier. 118Does this line mean that Belinda had never seen a billet-doux before? 119Wounds, Charms, and Ardorsthe usual language of a love-letter at this time. 124the Cosmetic pow'rsthe deities that preside over a lady's toilet. Note the playful satire with which Pope describes Belinda's toilet as if it were a religious ceremony. Who is "th' inferior priestess" in l. 127? 131nicelycarefully. 134Arabia famous for its perfumes. 145set the headarrange the head-dress. 147BettyBelinda's maid.

Canto II

4Launch'dembarked 25springessnares 26the finny preya characteristic instance of Pope's preference or circumlocution to a direct phrase. 35-36A regular formula in classical epics. In Virgil (XI, 794-795) Phœbus grants part of the prayer of Arruns; the other part he scatters to the light winds. 38vast French Romancesthese romances were the customary reading of society in Pope's day when there were as yet no English novels. Some of them were of enormous length. Addison found several of them in a typical lady's library, great folio volumes, finely bound in gilt (Spectator, 37). 58 All but the Sylph so in Homer (1-25), while all the rest of the army is sleeping Agamemnon is disturbed by fear of the doom impending over the Greeks at the hands of Hector. 60Waftwave, or flutter. 70Superior by the headso in Homer (Iliad, III, 225-227) Ajax is described as towering over the other Greeks by head and shoulders. 73sylphidsa feminine form of "sylphs." 74 This formal opening of Ariel's address to his followers is a parody of a passage in Paradise Lost, V, 600-601. 75sphereseither "worlds" or in a more general sense "regions." 79What are the "wandering orbs," and how do they differ from planets in l. 80? 97a washa lotion for the complexion. 105Diana, the virgin huntress, was in a peculiar sense the goddess of chastity. 106China jarthe taste for collecting old china was comparatively new in England at this time. It had been introduced from Holland by Queen Anne's sister, Queen Mary, and was eagerly caught up by fashionable society. 113The drops the diamond earrings. 118the Petticoatthe huge hoop skirt which had recently become fashionable. Addison, in a humorous paper in the Tatler (No. 116), describes one as about twenty-four yards in circumference. 128bodkina large needle. 133rivel'dan obsolete raiment of "obrivelled." 133Ixion according to classical mythology Ixion was punished for his sins by being bound forever upon a whirling wheel. 134Mill the mill in which cakes of chocolate were ground up preparatory to making the beverage. 138orb in orbin concentric circles. 139thrida variant form of "thread."

Canto III

3a structureHampton Court, a palace on the Thames, a few miles above London. It was begun by Wolsey, and much enlarged by William III. Queen Anne visited it occasionally, and cabinet meetings were sometimes held there. Pope insinuates (l. 6) that the statesmen who met in these councils were as interested in the conquest of English ladies as of foreign enemies. 8 Tea was still in Queen Anne's day a luxury confined to the rich. It cost, in 1710, from twelve to twenty-eight shillings per pound. 9The heroes and the nymphs the boating party which started for Hampton Court in Canto II. 17Snuff-taking had just become fashionable at this time. The practice is said to date from 1702, when an English admiral brought back fifty tons of snuff found on board some Spanish ships which he had captured in Vigo Bay. In the Spectator for August 8, 1711, a mock advertisement is inserted professing to teach "the exercise of the snuff-box according to the most fashionable airs and motions," and in the number for April 4, 1712, Steele protests against "an impertinent custom the fine women have lately fallen into of taking snuff." 22dinethe usual dinner hour in Queen Anne's reign was about 3 P.M. Fashionable people dined at 4, or later. This allowed the fashionable lady who rose at noon time to do a little shopping and perform "the long labours of the toilet." 26two ... Knightsone of these was the baron, see l. 66. 27Ombrea game of cards invented in Spain. It takes its name from the Spanish phrase originally used by the player who declared trumps: "Yo soy l'hombre," i. e. I am the man. It could be played by three, five, or nine players, but the usual number was three as here. Each of these received nine cards, and one of them named the trump and thus became the "ombre," who played against the two others. If either of the ombre's opponents took more tricks than the ombre, it was "codille" (l. 92). This meant that the opponent took the stake and the ombre had to replace it for the next hand. A peculiar feature of ombre is the rank, or value, of the cards. The three best cards were called "matadores," a Spanish word meaning "killers." The first of these matadores was "Spadillio," the ace of spades; the third was "Basto," the ace of clubs. The second, "Manillio," varied

according to the suit. If a black suit were declared, Maniilio was the two of trumps; if a red suit, Manillio was the seven of trumps. It is worth noting also that the red aces were inferior to the face cards of their suits except when a red suit was trump. A brief analysis of the game played on this occasion will clear up the passage and leave the reader free to admire the ingenuity with which Pope has described the contest in terms of epic poetry. Belinda declares spades trumps and so becomes the "ombre." She leads one after the other the three matadores; and takes three tricks. She then leads the next highest card, the king of spades, and wins a fourth trick. Being out of trumps she now leads the king of clubs; but the baron, who has actually held more spades than Belinda, trumps it with the queen of spades. All the trumps are now exhausted and the baron's long suit of diamonds is established. He takes the sixth, seventh, and eighth tricks with the king, queen, and knave of diamonds, respectively. Everything now depends on the last trick, since Belinda and the baron each have taken four. The baron leads the ace of hearts and Belinda takes it with the king, thus escaping "codille" and winning the stake. 30the sacred ninethe nine Muses. 41succinttucked up. 54one Plebeian cardone of Belinda's opponents is now out of trumps and discards a low card on her lead. 61Pama term applied to the knave of clubs which was always the highest card in Lu, another popular game of that day. 74the globethe jeweled ball which forms one of the regalia of a monarch. The aspect of playing cards has changed not a little since Pope's day, but the globe is still to be seen on the king of clubs. 79Clubs, Diamonds, Heartsthese are the losing cards played by Belinda and the third player on the baron's winning diamonds. 99 Pope's old enemy, Dennis, objected to the impropriety of Belinda's filling the sky with exulting shouts, and some modern critics have been foolish enough to echo his objection. The whole scene is a masterpiece of the mock-heroic. The game is a battle, the cards are warriors, and Belinda's exclamations of pleasure at winning are in the same fashion magnified into the cheers of a victorious army. 100long canalsthe canals which run through the splendid gardens of Hampton Court, laid out

by William III in the Dutch fashion. 106The berries crackle it would seem from this phrase that coffee was at that time roasted as well as ground in the drawing-room. In a letter written shortly after the date of this poem Pope describes Swift as roasting coffee "with his own hands in an engine made for that purpose." Coffee had been introduced into England about the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1657 a barber who had opened one of the first coffeehouses in London was indicted for "making and selling a sort of liquor called coffee, as a great nuisance and prejudice of the neighborhood." In Pope's time there were nearly three thousand coffee-houses in London. The mill the coffee-mill. 107Altars of Japanjapanned stands for the lamps. 117-118The parenthesis in these lines contains a hit at the would-be omniscient politicians who haunted the coffee-houses of Queen Anne's day, and who professed their ability to see through all problems of state with their eyes half-shut. Pope jestingly attributes their wisdom to the inspiring power of coffee. 122Scylla the daughter of King Nisus in Grecian legends. Nisus had a purple hair and so long as it was untouched he was unconquerable. Scylla fell in love with one of his enemies and pulled out the hair while Nisus slept. For this crime she was turned into a bird. The story is told in full in Ovid's Metamorphoses, Bk. VIII. 127Clarissa it does not appear that Pope had any individual lady in mind. We do not know, at least, that any lady instigated or aided Lord Petre to cut off the lock. 144An earthly Loverwe know nothing of any love affair of Miss Fermor's. Pope mentions the "earthly lover" here to account for Ariel's desertion of Belinda, for he could only protect her so long as she "rejected mankind"; compare Canto I, ll. 67-68. 147Forfexa Latin word meaning scissors. 152 Pope borrowed this idea from Milton, who represents the wound inflicted on Satan, by the Archangel Michael as healing immediately:

Th' ethereal substance closed Not long divisible.

Paradise Lost, VI, 330-331. 165AtalantisThe New Atalantis, a four-volume "cornucopia of scandal" involving almost every public character of the day, was

published by a Mrs. Manley in 1709. It was very widely read. The Spectator found it, along with a key which revealed the identities of its characters, in the lady's library already mentioned (Spectator, No. 37). 166the small pillowa richly decorated pillow which fashionable ladies used to prop them up in bed when they received morning visits from gentlemen. Addison gives an account of such a visit in the Spectator, No. 45. 167solemn daysdays of marriage or mourning, on which at this time formal calls were paid. 173the labour of the gods the walls of Troy built by Apollo and Neptune for King Laomedon. 178unresistedirresistible.

Canto IV

8Cynthiaa fanciful name for any fashionable lady. No individual is meant. manteau a loose upper garment for women. 16Spleenthe word is used here as a personification of melancholy, or low spirits. It was not an uncommon affectation in England at this time. A letter to the Spectator, No. 53, calls it "the distemper of the great and the polite." 17the Gnome Umbriel, who in accordance with his nature now proceeds to stir up trouble. Compare Canto I, ll. 63-64. 20The bitter east wind which put every one into a bad humor was supposed to be one of the main causes of the spleen. 23She the goddess of the spleen. Compare l. 79. 84Megrim headache. 29storea large supply. 38night-dressthe modern dressing-gown. The line means that whenever a fashionable beauty bought a new dressing-gown she pretended to be ill in order to show her new possession to sympathetic friends who called on her. 40phantomsthese are the visions, dreadful or delightful, of the disordered imagination produced by spleen. 43snakes on rolling spires like the serpent which Milton describes in Paradise Lost, IX, 501-502, "erect amidst his circling spires." 46angels in machines angels coming to help their votaries. The word "machine" here has an old-fashioned technical sense. It was first used to describe the apparatus by which a god was let down upon the stage of the Greek theater. Since a god was only introduced at a critical moment to help the distressed hero, the phrase, "deus ex machina," came to mean a god who rendered aid. Pope transfers it here to angels.

47throngs Pope now describes the mad fancies of people so affected by spleen as to imagine themselves transformed to inanimate objects. 51pipkina little jar. Homer (Iliad, XVIII, 373-377) tells how Vulcan had made twenty wonderful tripods on living wheels that moved from place to place of their own accord. 52Pope in a note to this poem says that a lady of his time actually imagined herself to be a goose-pie. 56A branchso Æneas bore a magic branch to protect him when he descended to the infernal regions (Æneid, VI, 136-143). Spleenworta sort of fern which was once supposed to be a remedy against the spleen. 58the sexwomen. 59vapoursa form of spleen to which women were supposed to be peculiarly liable, something like our modern hysteria. It seems to have taken its name from the fogs of England which were thought to cause it. 65a nymphBelinda, who had always been so light-hearted that she had never been a victim of the spleen. 89Citron-watersa liqueur made by distilling brandy with the rind of citrons. It was a fashionable drink for ladies at this time. 71Made men suspicious of their wives. 82UlyssesHomer (Odyssey, X, 1-25) tells how Æolus, the god of the winds, gave Ulysses a wallet of oxhide in which all the winds that might oppose his journey homeward were closely bound up. 89Thalestris the name of a warlike queen of the Amazons. Pope uses it here for a friend of Belinda's, who excites her to revenge herself for the rape of her lock. It is said that this friend was a certain Mrs. Morley. 102loads of leadcurl papers used to be fastened with strips of lead. 105Honourfemale reputation. 109toasta slang term in Pope's day for a reigning beauty whose health was regularly drunk by her admirers. Steele (Tatler, No. 24) says that the term had its rise from an accident that happened at Bath in the reign of Charles II. A famous beauty was bathing there in public, and one of her admirers filled a glass with the water in which she stood and drank her health.

"There was in the place," says Steele "a gay fellow, half-fuddled, who offered to jump in, and swore though he liked not the liquor, he would have the Toast. He was opposed in his resolution; yet this whim gave foundation to the present honor which

is done to the lady we mention in our liquors, who has ever since been called a Toast."

To understand the point of the story one must know that it was an old custom to put a bit of toast in hot drinks. In this line in the poem Thalestris insinuates that if Belinda submits tamely to the rape of the lock, her position as a toast will be forfeited. 113-116 Thalestris supposes that the baron will have the lock set in a ring under a bit of crystal. Old-fashioned hair-rings of this kind are still to be seen. 117Hyde-park Circus the Ring of Canto I, l. 44. Grass was not likely to grow there so long as it remained the fashionable place to drive. 118in the sound of Bowwithin hearing of the bells of the church of St. Mary le Bow in Cheapside. So far back as Ben Jonson's time (Eastward Ho, I, ii, 36) it was the mark of the unfashionable middle-class citizen to live in this quarter. A "wit" in Queen Anne's day would have scorned to lodge there. 121Sir Plume this was Sir George Brown, brother of Mrs. Morley (Thalestris). He was not unnaturally offended at the picture drawn of him in this poem. Pope told a friend many years later that

"nobody was angry but Sir George Brown, and he was a good deal so, and for a long time. He could not bear that Sir Plume should talk nothing but nonsense."

124a clouded cane a cane of polished wood with cloudlike markings. In the Tatler, Mr. Bickerstaff sits in judgment on canes, and takes away a cane, "curiously clouded, with a transparent amber head, and a blue ribband to hang upon his wrist," from a young gentleman as a piece of idle foppery. There are some amusing remarks on the "conduct" of canes in the same essay. 133 The baron's oath is a parody of the oath of Achilles (Iliad, I, 234). 142 The breaking of the bottle of sorrows, etc., is the cause of Belinda's change of mood from wrath as in l. 93 to tears, 143-144. 155the gilt Chariot the painted and gilded coach in which ladies took the air in London. 156Bohea tea, the name comes from a range of hills in China where a certain kind of tea was grown. 162the patch-box the box which held the little bits of black

sticking-plaster with which ladies used to adorn their faces. According to Addison (Spectator, No. 81), ladies even went so far in this fad as to patch on one side of the face or the other, according to their politics.

Canto V

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Notes on An Essay on Criticism

Introduction

The

Essay on Criticism

was the first really important work that Pope gave to the world. He had been composing verses from early boyhood, and had actually published a set of

Pastorals

which had attracted some attention. He was already known to the literary set of London coffeehouses as a young man of keen wit and high promise, but to the reading public at large he was as yet an unknown quantity. With the appearance of the

Essay

, Pope not only sprang at once into the full light of publicity, but seized almost undisputed that position as the first of living English poets which he was to retain unchallenged till his death. Even after his death down to the Romantic revival, in fact, Pope's supremacy was an article of critical faith, and this supremacy was in no small measure founded upon the acknowledged merits of the

Essay on Criticism.

Johnson, the last great representative of Pope's own school of thought in matters

literary, held that the poet had never excelled this early work and gave it as his deliberate opinion that if Pope had written nothing else, the

Essay

would have placed him among the first poets and the first critics. The

Essay on Criticism

is hardly an epoch-making poem, but it certainly "made" Alexander Pope.

The poem was published anonymously in the spring of 1711, when Pope was twenty-three years old. There has been considerable dispute as to the date of its composition; but the facts seem to be that it was begun in 1707 and finished in 1709 when Pope had it printed, not for publication, but for purposes of further correction. As it stands, therefore, it represents a work planned at the close of Pope's precocious youth, and executed and polished in the first flush of his manhood. And it is quite fair to say that considering the age of its author the

Essay on Criticism

is one of the most remarkable works in English.

Not that there is anything particularly original about the

Essay.

On the contrary, it is one of the most conventional of all Pope's works. It has nothing of the lively fancy of

The Rape of the Lock

, little or nothing of the personal note which stamps the later satires and epistles as so peculiarly Pope's own. Apart from its brilliant epigrammatic expression the

Essay on Criticism

might have been written by almost any man of letters in Queen Anne's day who took the trouble to think a little about the laws of literature, and who thought about those laws strictly in accordance with the accepted conventions of his time. Pope is not in

the least to be blamed for this lack of originality. Profound original criticism is perhaps the very last thing to be expected of a brilliant boy, and Pope was little more when he planned this work. But boy as he was, he had already accomplished an immense amount of desultory reading, not only in literature proper, but in literary criticism as well. He told Spence in later years that in his youth he had gone through all the best critics, naming especially Quintilian, Rapin, and Bossu. A mere cursory reading of the Essay shows that he had also studied Horace, Vida, and Boileau. Before he began to write he had, so he told Spence, "digested all the matter of the poem into prose." In other words, then, the

Essay on Criticism

is at once the result of Pope's early studies, the embodiment of the received literary doctrines of his age, and, as a consecutive study of his poems shows, the programme in accordance with which, making due allowance for certain exceptions and inconsistencies, he evolved the main body of his work.

It would, however, be a mistake to treat, as did Pope's first editor, the

Essay on Criticism

as a methodical, elaborate, and systematic treatise. Pope, indeed, was flattered to have a scholar of such recognized authority as Warburton to interpret his works, and permitted him to print a commentary upon the

Essay

, which is quite as long and infinitely duller than the original. But the true nature of the poem is indicated by its title. It is not an

Art of Poetry

such as Boileau composed, but an

Essay

. And by the word "essay," Pope meant exactly what Bacon did, — a tentative

sketch, a series of detached thoughts upon a subject, not a complete study or a methodical treatise. All that we know of Pope's method of study, habit of thought, and practice of composition goes to support this opinion. He read widely but desultorily; thought swiftly and brilliantly, but illogically and inconsistently; and composed in minute sections, on the backs of letters and scraps of waste paper, fragments which he afterward united, rather than blended, to make a complete poem, a mosaic, rather than a picture.

Yet the

Essay

is by no means the "collection of independent maxims tied together by the printer, but having no natural order," which De Quincey pronounced it to be. It falls naturally into three parts. The first deals with the rules derived by classic critics from the practice of great poets, and ever since of binding force both in the composition and in the criticism of poetry. The second analyzes with admirable sagacity the causes of faulty criticism as pride, imperfect learning, prejudice, and so on. The third part discusses the qualities which a true critic should possess, good taste, learning, modesty, frankness, and tact, and concludes with a brief sketch of the history of criticism from Aristotle to Walsh. This is the general outline of the poem, sufficient, I think, to show that it is not a mere bundle of poetic formulæ. But within these broad limits the thought of the poem wanders freely, and is quite rambling, inconsistent, and illogical enough to show that Pope is not formulating an exact and definitely determined system of thought.

Such indeed was, I fancy, hardly his purpose. It was rather to give clear, vivid, and convincing expression to certain ideas which were at that time generally accepted as orthodox in the realm of literary criticism. No better expression of these ideas can be found anywhere than in the

Essay

itself, but a brief statement in simple prose of some of the most important may serve as a guide to the young student of the essay.

In the first place, the ultimate source alike of poetry and criticism is a certain intuitive faculty, common to all men, though more highly developed in some than others, called Reason, or, sometimes, Good Sense. The first rule for the budding poet or critic is "Follow Nature." This, by the way, sounds rather modern, and might be accepted by any romantic poet. But by "Nature" was meant not at all the natural impulses of the individual, but those rules founded upon the natural and common reason of mankind which the ancient critics had extracted and codified from the practice of the ancient poets. Pope says explicitly "to follow nature is to follow them;" and he praises Virgil for turning aside from his own original conceptions to imitate Homer, for:

Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.

Certain exceptions to these rules were, indeed, allowable, — severer critics than Pope, by the way, absolutely denied this, — but only to the ancient poets. The moderns must not dare to make use of them, or at the very best moderns must only venture upon such exceptions to the rules as classic precedents would justify. Inasmuch as all these rules were discovered and illustrated in ancient times, it followed logically that the great breach with antiquity, which is called the Middle Ages, was a period of hopeless and unredeemed barbarism, incapable of bringing forth any good thing. The light of literature began to dawn again with the revival of learning at the Renaissance, but the great poets of the Renaissance, Spenser and Shakespeare, for example, were "irregular," that is, they trusted too much to their individual powers and did not accept with sufficient humility the orthodox rules of poetry. This dogma, by the way, is hardly touched upon in the

Essay

, but is elaborated with great emphasis in Pope's later utterance on the principles of

literature, the well-known

Epistle to Augustus

. Finally with the establishment of the reign of Reason in France under Louis XIV, and in England a little later, the full day had come, and literary sins of omission and commission that might be winked at in such an untutored genius as Shakespeare were now unpardonable. This last dogma explains the fact that in the brief sketch of the history of criticism which concludes the

Essay

, Pope does not condescend to name an English poet or critic prior to the reign of Charles II.

It would be beside the purpose to discuss these ideas to-day or to attempt an elaborate refutation of their claims to acceptance. Time has done its work upon them, and the literary creed of the wits of Queen Anne's day is as antiquated as their periwigs and knee-breeches. Except for purposes of historical investigation it is quite absurd to take the

Essay on Criticism

seriously.

And yet it has even for us of to-day a real value. Our age absolutely lacks a standard of literary criticism; and of all standards the one least likely to be accepted is that of Pope and his fellow-believers. Individual taste reigns supreme in this democratic age, and one man's judgment is as good as, perhaps a little better than, another's. But even this democratic and individual age may profit by turning back for a time to consider some of the general truths, as valid to-day as ever, to which Pope gave such inimitable expression, or to study the outlines of that noble picture of the true critic which St. Beuve declared every professed critic should frame and hang up in his study. An age which seems at times upon the point of throwing classical studies overboard as useless lumber might do far worse than listen to the eloquent tribute

which the poet pays to the great writers of antiquity. And finally nothing could be more salutary for an age in which literature itself has caught something of the taint of the prevailing commercialism than to bathe itself again in that spirit of sincere and disinterested love of letters which breathes throughout the

Essay

and which, in spite of all his errors, and jealousies, and petty vices, was the master-passion of Alexander Pope.

linereferencemeaning 6censurethe word has here its original meaning of "judge," not its modern "judge severely" or "blame." 8Because each foolish poem provokes a host of foolish commentators and critics. 15-16This assertion that only a good writer can be a fair critic is not to be accepted without reservation. 17witThe word "wit" has a number of different meanings in this poem, and the student should be careful to discriminate between them. It means mind, intellect, l. 61; learning, culture, l 727; imagination, genius, l. 82; the power to discover amusing analogies, or the apt expression of such an analogy, ll. 449, 297; a man possessed of wit in its various significations, l. 45; this last form usually occurs in the plural, ll. 104, 539. 26the maze of schoolsthe labyrinth of conflicting systems of thought, especially of criticism. 21coxcombs ... foolswhat is the difference in meaning between these words in this passage? 30-31In this couplet Pope hits off the spiteful envy of conceited critics toward successful writers. If the critic can write himself, he hates the author as a rival; if he cannot, he entertains against him the deep grudge an incapable man so often cherishes toward an effective worker. 34Mæviusa poetaster whose name has been handed down by Virgil and Horace. His name, like that of his associate, Bavius, has become a by-word for a wretched scribbler. Apollohere thought of as the god of poetry. The true poet was inspired by Apollo; but a poetaster like Mævius wrote without inspiration, as it were, in spite of the god. 40-43Pope here compares "half-learned" critics to the animals which old writers

reported were bred from the Nile mud. In Antony and Cleopatra, for example, Lepidus says, "Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun; so is your crocodile." Pope thinks of these animals as in the unformed stage, part "kindled into life, part a lump of mud." So these critics are unfinished things for which no proper name can be found. "Equivocal generation" is the old term used to denote spontaneous generation of this sort. Pope applies it here to critics without proper training who spring spontaneously from the mire of ignorance. 44tellcount 45The idea is that a vain wit's tongue could out-talk a hundred ordinary men's. 53pretending witpresuming, or ambitious mind. 56-58memory ... understanding imaginationThis is the old threefold division of the human mind. Pope means that where one of these faculties is above the average in any individual, another of them is sure to fall below. Is this always the case? 63peculiar artsspecial branches of knowledge. 73In what sense can nature be called the source, the end, and the test of art? 76th' informing soulexplanation 80-81What two meanings are attached to "wit" in this couplet? 84'Tis moreit is more important. the Muse's steedPegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology, was supposed to be the horse of the Muses and came to be considered a symbol of poetic genius. 86gen'roushigh-bred. 88What is the difference between "discovered" and "devised"? 94Parnassus' topthe Muses were supposed to dwell on the top of Parnassus, a mountain in Greece. Great poets are here thought of as having climbed the mountain to dwell with the Muses. 96What is (cf. text) "the immortal prize"? 99Shei. e. learned Greece, especially Greek criticism, which obtained the rules of poetry from the practice of great poets, and, as it were, systematized their inspiration. 104following witslater scholars. 105What is meant by "the mistress" and "the maid" in this line? 109Doctor's billsprescriptions. 112These are the prosy commentators on great poets, whose dreary notes often disgust readers with the original. 120fablea plot. 123What is the difference between "cavil" and "criticise"? 129the Mantuan Musethe poetry of Virgil, which Pope thinks the best commentary on Homer. In

what sense is this to be understood? 130MaroVirgil, whose full name was Publius Vergilius Maro, Pope here praises Virgil's well-known imitation of Homer. Since "nature and Homer were the same," a young poet like Virgil could do nothing better than copy Homer. 138the StagiriteAristotle, a native of Stagyra, was the first and one of the greatest of literary critics. His "rules" were drawn from the practice of great poets, and so, according to Pope, to imitate Homer was to obey the "ancient rules." 141There are some beauties in poetry which cannot be explained by criticism. 142happinessused here to express the peculiar charm of spontaneous poetic expression as contrasted with "care," 'i.e.' the art of revising and improving, which can be taught. 152vulgar boundsthe limitations imposed upon ordinary writers. 157out of ... risesurpass the ordinary scenes of nature. 159Great witspoets of real genius. 160faultshere used in the sense of irregularities, exceptions to the rules of poetry. When these are justified by the poet's genius, true critics do not presume to correct them. In many editions this couplet comes after l. 151. This was Pope's first arrangement, but he later shifted it to its present position. 162As Kingsthe Stuart kings claimed the right to "dispense with laws," that is, to set them aside in special instances. In 1686 eleven out of twelve English judges decided in a test case that "it is a privilege inseparably connected with the sovereignty of the king to dispense with penal laws, and that according to his own judgment." The English people very naturally felt that such a privilege opened the door to absolute monarchy, and after the fall of James II, Parliament declared in 1689 that "the pretended power of suspending of laws ... without the consent of Parliament, is illegal." 164its Endthe purpose of every law of poetry, namely, to please the reader. This purpose must not be "transgressed," 'i.e.' forgotten by those who wish to make exceptions to these laws. 166their precedentthe example of classic poets. 179stratagems ... errorthings in the classic poets which to carping critics seem faults are often clever devices to make a deeper impression on the reader. 180Homer nodsHorace in his Art of Poetry used this figure to imply that even the greatest poet

sometimes made mistakes. Pope very neatly suggests that it may be the critic rather than the poet who is asleep. 181each ancient Altarused here to denote the works of the great classic writers. The whole passage down to l. 200 is a noble outburst of enthusiasm for the poets whom Pope had read so eagerly in early youth. 186consenting Pæansunanimous hymns of praise. 194must ... foundare not destined to be discovered till some future time. 196Who is "the last, the meanest of your sons"? 203biasmental bent, or inclination. 208This line is based upon physiological theories which are now obsolete. According to these wind or air supplied the lack of blood or of animal spirits in imperfectly constituted bodies. To such bodies Pope compares those ill-regulated minds where a deficiency of learning and natural ability is supplied by self-conceit. 216The Pierian springthe spring of the Muses, who were called Pierides in Greek mythology. It is used here as a symbol for learning, particularly for the study of literature. 222the lengths behindthe great spaces of learning that lie behind the first objects of our study. 225-232This fine simile is one of the best expressions in English verse of the modesty of the true scholar, due to his realization of the boundless extent of knowledge. It was such a feeling that led Sir Isaac Newton to say after all his wonderful discoveries,

"I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary whilst the great ocean of truth lay all the time undiscovered before me."

Contents

Notes on An Essay on Man, Epistle I

Introduction

The

Essay on Man

is the longest and in some ways the most important work of the third period of Pope's career. It corresponds closely to his early work, the

Essay on Criticism

. Like the earlier work, the

Essay on Man

is a didactic poem, written primarily to diffuse and popularize certain ideas of the poet. As in the earlier work these ideas are by no means original with Pope, but were the common property of a school of thinkers in his day. As in the

Essay on Criticism

, Pope here attempts to show that these ideas have their origin in nature and are consistent with the common sense of man. And finally the merit of the later work, even more than of the earlier, is due to the force and brilliancy of detached passages rather than to any coherent, consistent, and well-balanced system which it presents.

The close of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth was marked by a change of ground in the sphere of religious controversy. The old debates between the Catholic and Protestant churches gradually died out as these two branches of Western Christianity settled down in quiet possession of the territory they still occupy. In their place arose a vigorous controversy on the first principles of religion in general, on the nature of God, the origin of evil, the place of man in the universe, and the respective merits of optimism and pessimism as philosophic theories. The controversialists as a rule either rejected or neglected the dogmas of revealed religion and based their arguments upon real or supposed facts of history, physical nature, and the mental processes and moral characteristics of man. In this controversy the two parties at times were curiously mingled. Orthodox clergymen used arguments which justified a strong suspicion of their orthodoxy; and avowed freethinkers bitterly disclaimed the imputation of atheism and wrote in terms that

might be easily adopted by a devout believer.

Into this controversy Pope was led by his deepening intimacy with Bolingbroke, who had returned from France in 1725 and settled at his country place within a few miles of Twickenham. During his long exile Bolingbroke had amused himself with the study of moral philosophy and natural religion, and in his frequent intercourse with Pope he poured out his new-found opinions with all the fluency, vigor, and polish which made him so famous among the orators and talkers of the day. Bolingbroke's views were for that time distinctly heterodox, and, if logically developed, led to complete agnosticism. But he seems to have avoided a complete statement of his ideas to Pope, possibly for fear of shocking or frightening the sensitive little poet who still remained a professed Catholic. Pope, however, was very far from being a strict Catholic, and indeed prided himself on the breadth and liberality of his opinions. He was, therefore, at once fascinated and stimulated by the eloquent conversation of Bolingbroke, and resolved to write a philosophical poem in which to embody the ideas they held in common. Bolingbroke approved of the idea, and went so far as to furnish the poet with seven or eight sheets of notes "to direct the plan in general and to supply matter for particular epistles." Lord Bathurst, who knew both Pope and Bolingbroke, went so far as to say in later years that the

Essay

was originally composed by Bolingbroke in prose and that Pope only put it into verse. But this is undoubtedly an exaggeration of what Pope himself frankly acknowledged, that the poem was composed under the influence of Bolingbroke, that in the main it reflected his opinions, and that Bolingbroke had assisted him in the general plan and in numerous details. Very properly, therefore, the poem is addressed to Bolingbroke and begins and closes with a direct address to the poet's "guide, philosopher, and friend."

In substance the

Essay on Man

is a discussion of the moral order of the world. Its purpose is "to vindicate the ways of God to man," and it may therefore be regarded as an attempt to confute the skeptics who argued from the existence of evil in the world and the wretchedness of man's existence to the impossibility of belief in an all-good and all-wise God. It attempts to do this, not by an appeal to revelation or the doctrines of Christianity, but simply on the basis of a common-sense interpretation of the facts of existence.

A brief outline of the poem will show the general tenor of Pope's argument.

The first epistle deals with the nature and state of man with respect to the universe. It insists on the limitations of man's knowledge, and the consequent absurdity of his presuming to murmur against God. It teaches that the universe was not made for man, but that man with all his apparent imperfections is exactly fitted to the place which he occupies in the universe. In the physical universe all things work together for good, although certain aspects of nature seem evil to man, and likewise in the moral universe all things, even man's passions and crimes conduce to the general good of the whole. Finally it urges calm submission and acquiescence in what is hard to understand, since "one truth is clear, — whatever is, is right."

The second epistle deals with the nature of man as an individual. It begins by urging men to abandon vain questionings of God's providence and to take up the consideration of their own natures, for "the proper study of mankind is man." Pope points out that the two cardinal principles of man's nature are self-love and reason, the first an impelling, the second a regulating power. The aim of both these principles is pleasure, by which Pope means happiness, which he takes for the highest good. Each man is dominated by a master passion, and it is the proper function of reason to control this passion for good and to make it bear fruit in virtue. No man is wholly virtuous or vicious, and Heaven uses the mingled qualities of men to bind them together in mutual interdependence, and makes the various passions

and imperfections of mankind serve the general good. And the final conclusion is that "though man's a fool, yet God is wise."

The third epistle treats of the nature of man with respect to society. All creatures, Pope asserts, are bound together and live not for themselves alone, but man is preeminently a social being. The first state of man was the state of nature when he lived in innocent ignorance with his fellow-creatures. Obeying the voice of nature, man learned to copy and improve upon the instincts of the animals, to build, to plow, to spin, to unite in societies like those of ants and bees. The first form of government was patriarchal; then monarchies arose in which virtue, "in arms or arts," made one man ruler over many. In either case the origin of true government as of true religion was love. Gradually force crept in and uniting with superstition gave rise to tyranny and false religions. Poets and patriots, however, restored the ancient faith and taught power's due use by showing the necessity of harmony in the state. Pope concludes by asserting the folly of contention for forms of government or modes of faith. The common end of government as of religion is the general good. It may be noticed in passing that Pope's account of the evolution of society bears even less relation to historical facts than does his account of the development of literature in the

Essay on Criticism.

The last epistle discusses the nature of happiness, "our being's end and aim." Happiness is attainable by all men who think right and mean well. It consists not in individual, but in mutual pleasure. It does not consist in external things, mere gifts of fortune, but in health, peace, and competence. Virtuous men are, indeed, subject to calamities of nature; but God cannot be expected to suspend the operation of general laws to spare the virtuous. Objectors who would construct a system in which all virtuous men are blest, are challenged to define the virtuous and to specify what is meant by blessings. Honors, nobility, fame, superior talents, often merely serve to make their possessors unhappy. Virtue alone is happiness, and virtue consists in a

recognition of the laws of Providence, and in love for one's fellow-man.

Even this brief outline will show, I think, some of the inconsistencies and omissions of Pope's train of thought. A careful examination of his arguments in detail would be wholly out of place here. The reader who wishes to pursue the subject further may consult Warburton's elaborate vindication of Pope's argument, and Elwin's equally prosy refutation, or better still the admirable summary by Leslie Stephen in the chapter on this poem in his life of Pope (

English Men of Letters

). No one is now likely to turn to the writer of the early eighteenth century for a system of the universe, least of all to a writer so incapable of exact or systematic thinking as Alexander Pope. If the

Essay on Man

has any claim to be read to-day, it must be as a piece of literature pure and simple. For philosophy and poetry combined, Browning and Tennyson lie nearer to our age and mode of thought than Pope.

Even regarded as a piece of literature the

Essay on Man

cannot, I think, claim the highest place among Pope's works. It obtained, indeed, a success at home and abroad such as was achieved by no other English poem until the appearance of

Childe Harold

. It was translated into French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Polish, and Latin. It was imitated by Wieland, praised by Voltaire, and quoted by Kant. But this success was due in part to the accuracy with which it reflected ideas which were the common property of its age, in part to the extraordinary vigor and finish of its epigrams, which made it one of the most quotable of English poems. But as a whole the Essay

is not a great poem. The poet is evidently struggling with a subject that is too weighty for him, and at times he staggers and sinks beneath his burden. The second and third books in particular are, it must be confessed, with the exception of one or two fine outbursts, little better than dull, and dullness is not a quality one is accustomed to associate with Pope. The

Essay on Man

lacks the bright humor and imaginative artistry of

The Rape of the Lock,

and the lively portraiture, vigorous satire, and strong personal note of the

Moral Epistles

and

Imitations of Horace

. Pope is at his best when he is dealing with a concrete world of men and women as they lived and moved in the London of his day; he is at his worst when he is attempting to seize and render abstract ideas.

Yet the

Essay on Man

is a very remarkable work. In the first place, it shows Pope's wonderful power of expression. No one can read the poem for the first time without meeting on page after page phrases and epigrams which have become part of the common currency of our language. Pope's "precision and firmness of touch," to quote the apt statement of Leslie Stephen, "enables him to get the greatest possible meaning into a narrow compass. He uses only one epithet, but it is the right one." Even when the thought is commonplace enough, the felicity of the expression gives it a new and effective force. And there are whole passages where Pope rises high above the mere coining of epigrams. As I have tried to show in my notes he composed by separate

paragraphs, and when he chances upon a topic that appeals to his imagination or touches his heart, we get an outburst of poetry that shines in splendid contrast to the prosaic plainness of its surroundings. Such, for example, are the noble verses that tell of the immanence of God in his creation at the close of the first epistle, or the magnificent invective against tyranny and superstition in the third (ll. 241-268).

Finally the

Essay on Man

is of interest in what it tells us of Pope himself. Mr. Elwin's idea that in the

Essay on Man

Pope, "partly the dupe, partly the accomplice of Bolingbroke," was attempting craftily to undermine the foundations of religion, is a notion curiously compounded of critical blindness and theological rancor. In spite of all its incoherencies and futilities the

Essay

is an honest attempt to express Pope's opinions, borrowed in part, of course, from his admired friend, but in part the current notions of his age, on some of the greatest questions that have perplexed the mind of man. And Pope's attitude toward the questions is that of the best minds of his day, at once religious, independent, and sincere. He acknowledges the omnipotence and benevolence of God, confesses the limitations and imperfections of human knowledge, teaches humility in the presence of unanswerable problems, urges submission to Divine Providence, extols virtue as the true source of happiness, and love of man as an essential of virtue. If we study the

Essay on Man

as the reasoned argument of a philosopher, we shall turn from it with something like contempt; if we read it as the expression of a poet's sentiments, we shall, I think,

leave it with an admiration warmer than before for a character that has been so much abused and so little understood as that of Pope.

linereferencemeaning

The Design

2Bacon's expressionin the dedication of his Essays (1625) to Buckingham, Bacon speaks of them as the most popular of his writings, "for that, as it seems, they come home to men's business and bosoms." 11anatomydissection

Epistle I

1St. JohnHenry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, Pope's "guide, philosopher, and friend," under whose influence the Essay on Man was composed. 5expatiaterange, wander. 6Pope says that this line alludes to the subject of this first Epistle, "the state of man here and hereafter, disposed by Providence, though to him unknown." The next two lines allude to the main topics of the three remaining epistles, "the constitution of the human mind ... the temptations of misapplied self-love, and the wrong pursuits of power, pleasure, and false happiness." 9beat ... fieldthe metaphor is drawn from hunting. Note how it is elaborated in the following lines. 12blindly creep ... sightless soarthe first are the ignorant and indifferent; those who "sightless soar" are the presumptuous who reason blindly about things too high for human knowledge. 15candidlenient, free from harsh judgments. 16An adaptation of a well-known line of Milton's Paradise Lost, l, 26. 17-23Pope lays down as the basis of his system that all argument about man or God must be based upon what we know of man's present life, and of God's workings in this world of ours. 29this framethe universe. Compare Hamlet, II, ii, 310, "this goodly frame, the earth." 30nice dependenciessubtle inter-relations. 31Gradations justexact shades of difference. 32a partthe mind of man, which is but a part of the whole universe. 33the great chainaccording to Homer, Jove, the supreme God, sustained the whole creation by a golden chain. Milton also makes use of this idea of the visible universe as linked to heaven in a

golden chain, Paradise Lost, II, 1004-1006, and 1051-1052. 41yonder argent fieldsthe sky spangled with silvery stars. The phrase is borrowed from Milton, Paradise Lost, III, 460. 42Jovethe planet Jupiter. satellitesPope preserves here the Latin pronunciation, four syllables, with the accent on the antepenult. 43-40Pope here takes it for granted that our universe, inasmuch as it is the work of God's infinite wisdom, must be the best system possible. If this be granted, he says, it is plain that man must have a place somewhere in this system, and the only question is whether "God has placed him wrong." 45Every grade in creation must be complete, so as to join with that which is beneath and with that which is above it or there would be a lack of coherency, a break, somewhere in the system. 47reas'ning lifeconscious mental life. 51-60Pope argues here that since man is a part of the best possible system, whatever seems wrong in him must be right when considered in relation to the whole order of the universe. It is only our ignorance of this order which keeps us from realizing this fact. 55one singlethe word "movement" is understood after "single." 61-8Pope here illustrates his preceding argument by analogy. We can know no more of God's purpose in the ordering of our lives than the animals can know of our ordering of theirs. 64Ægypt's GodOne of the gods of the Egyptians was the sacred bull, Apis. 68a deityworshiped as a god, like the Egyptian kings and Roman emperors. 69-76Pope now goes on to argue that on the basis of what has been proved we ought not to regard man as an imperfect being, but rather as one who is perfectly adapted to his place in the universe. His knowledge, for example, is measured by the brief time he has to live and the brief space he can survey. 69faultpronounced in Pope's day as rhyming with "ought." 73-6These lines are really out of place. They first appeared after l. 98; then Pope struck them out altogether. Just before his death he put them into their present place on the advice of Warburton, who probably approved of them because of their reference to a future state of bliss. It is plain that they interfere with the regular argument of the poem. 79This line is grammatically dependent upon "hides," l. 77. 81riotused here in the

sense of "luxurious life." The lamb is slain to provide for some feast. 86Heav'ni. e. God. Hence the relative "who" in the next line. 92-8Pope urges man to comfort himself with hope, seeing that he cannot know the future. 93What future blissthe words "shall be" are to be understood after this phrase. 96Point out the exact meaning of this familiar line. 97from homeaway from its true home, the life to come. This line represents one of the alterations which Warburton induced Pope to make. The poet first wrote "confined at home," thus representing this life as the home of the soul. His friend led him to make the change in order to express more clearly his belief in the soul's immortality. 89Show how "rests" and "expatiates" in this line contrast with "uneasy" and "confined" in l. 97. 99-112In this famous passage Pope shows how the belief in immortality is found even among the most ignorant tribes. This is to Pope an argument that the soul must be immortal, since only Nature, or God working through Nature, could have implanted this conception in the Indian's mind. 102the solar walkthe sun's path in the heavens. the milky waysome old philosophers held that the souls of good men went thither after death. ...Pope means that the ignorant Indian had no conception of a heaven reserved for the just such as Greek sages and Christian believers have. All he believes in is "an humbler heaven," where he shall be free from the evils of this life. Line 108 has special reference to the tortures inflicted upon the natives of Mexico and Peru by the avaricious Spanish conquerors. 109-10He is contented with a future existence, without asking for the glories of the Christian's heaven. 111equal skyimpartial heaven, for the heaven of the Indians was open to all men, good or bad. 113-30In this passage Pope blames those civilized men who, though they should be wiser than the Indian, murmur against the decrees of God. The imperative verbs "weigh," "call," "say," etc., are used satirically. 113scale of sensethe scale, or means of judgment, which our senses give us. 117gustthe pleasure of taste. 120The murmurers are dissatisfied that man is not at once perfect in his present state and destined to immortality, although such gifts have been given to no other creature.

123reas'ning pridethe pride of the intellect which assumes to condemn God's providence. 131-172In this passage Pope imagines a dialogue between one of the proud murmurers he has described and himself. His opponent insists that the world was made primarily for man's enjoyment (ll. 132-140). Pope asks whether nature does not seem to swerve from this end of promoting human happiness in times of pestilence, earthquake, and tempest (ll. 141-144). The other answers that these are only rare exceptions to the general laws, due perhaps to some change in nature since the world began (ll. 145-148). Pope replies by asking why there should not be exceptions in the moral as well as in the physical world; may not great villains be compared to terrible catastrophes in nature (ll. 148-156)? He goes on to say that no one but God can answer this question, that our human reasoning springs from pride, and that the true course of reasoning is simply to submit (ll. 156-164). He then suggests that "passions," by which he means vices, are as necessary a part of the moral order as storms of the physical world (ll. 165-172). 142livid deathspestilence 143-4Pope was perhaps thinking of a terrible earthquake and flood that had caused great loss of life in Chili the year before this poem appeared. 150then Nature deviatesNature departs from her regular order on such occasions as these catastrophes. 151that endhuman happiness, as in l. 149. 156Cæsar Borgia, the wicked son of Pope Alexander VI, and Catiline are mentioned here as portents in the moral world parallel to plagues and earthquakes in the physical. 160young AmmonAlexander the Great. See note on Essay on Criticism, l. 376. 163Why do we accuse God for permitting wickedness when we do not blame Him for permitting evil in the natural world? 166therein nature herein man 173-206In this section Pope reproves those who are dissatisfied with man's faculties. He points out that all animals, man included, have powers suited to their position in the world (ll. 179-188), and asserts that if man had keener senses than he now has, he would be exposed to evils from which he now is free (ll. 193-203). 176to wantto lack 177Paraphrase this line in prose. 181compensatedaccented on the antepenult. 183the

statethe place which the creature occupies in the natural world. 195finer opticskeener power of sight. 197toucha noun, subject of "were given," understood from l. 195. 199quick effluviapungent odors. The construction is very condensed here; "effluvia" may be regarded like "touch" as a subject of "were given" (l. 195); but one would expect rather a phrase to denote a keener sense of smell than man now possesses. 202music of the spheresit was an old belief that the stars and planets uttered musical notes as they moved along their courses. These notes made up the "harmony of the spheres." Shakespeare ('Merchant of Venice', V, 64-5) says that our senses are too dull to hear it. Pope, following a passage in Cicero's Somnium Scipionis, suggests that this music is too loud for human senses. 207-232Pope now goes on to show how in the animal world there is an exact gradation of the faculties of sense and of the powers of instinct. Man alone is endowed with reason which is more than equivalent to all these powers and makes him lord over all animals. 212The mole is almost blind; the lynx was supposed to be the most keen-sighted of animals. 213-4The lion was supposed by Pope to hunt by sight alone as the dog by scent. What does he mean by "the tainted green"? 215-6Fishes are almost deaf, while birds are very quick of hearing. 219nicekeenly discriminating. healing dewhealthful honey. 221-222The power of instinct which is barely perceptible in the pig amounts almost to the power of reason in the elephant. 223barrierpronounced like the French 'barrière', as a word of two syllables with the accent on the last. 226Sense ... Thoughtsensation and reason. 227middle naturesintermediate natures, which long to unite with those above or below them. The exact sense is not very clear. 233-58In this passage Pope insists that the chain of being stretches unbroken from God through man to the lowest created forms. If any link in this chain were broken, as would happen if men possessed higher faculties than are now assigned them, the whole universe would be thrown into confusion. This is another answer to those who complain of the imperfections of man's nature. 234quickliving. Pope does not discriminate between organic and inorganic matter. 240glassmicroscope

242-44Inferior beings might then press upon us. If they did not, a fatal gap would be left by our ascent in the scale. 247each systemPope imagines the universe to be composed of an infinite number of systems like ours. Since each of these is essential to the orderly arrangement of the universe, any disorder such as he has imagined would have infinitely destructive consequences. These are described in ll. 251-257. 267-80In these lines Pope speaks of God as the soul of the world in an outburst of really exalted enthusiasm that is rare enough in his work. 269thata relative pronoun referring to "soul," l. 268. 270th' ethereal framethe heavens 276as perfect in a hair as heartthis has been called "a vile antithesis," on the ground that there is no reason why hair and heart should be contrasted. But Pope may have had in mind the saying of Christ. "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." The hairs are spoken of here as the least important part of the body; the heart, on the other hand, has always been thought of as the most important organ. There is, therefore, a real antithesis between the two. 278Seraph ... burnsthe seraphim according to old commentators are on fire with the love of God. 280equals allmakes all things equal. This does not seem consistent with the idea of the gradations of existence which Pope has been preaching throughout this Epistle. Possibly it means that all things high and low are filled alike with the divine spirit and in this sense all things are equal. But one must not expect to find exact and consistent philosophy in the Essay on Man. 281-94Here Pope sums up the argument of this Epistle, urging man to recognize his ignorance, to be content with his seeming imperfections, and to realize that "whatever is, is right." 282our proper blissour happiness as men. 283pointappointed place in the universe. 286Securesure. 289Hobbes, an English philosopher with whose work Pope was, no doubt, acquainted, says, "Nature is the art whereby God governs the world."

Contents

An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot

Introduction

Next to

The Rape of the Lock

, I think, the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

is the most interesting and the most important of Pope's poems — the most important since it shows the master poet of the age employing his ripened powers in the field most suitable for their display, that of personal satire, the most interesting, because, unlike his former satiric poem the

Dunciad

, it is not mere invective, but gives us, as no other poem of Pope's can be said to do, a portrait of the poet himself.

Like most of Pope's poems, the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

owes its existence to an objective cause. This was the poet's wish to justify himself against a series of savage attacks, which had recently been directed against him. If Pope had expected by the publication of the

Dunciad

to crush the herd of scribblers who had been for years abusing him, he must have been woefully disappointed. On the contrary, the roar of insult and calumny rose louder than ever, and new voices were added to the chorus. In the year 1733 two enemies entered the field against Pope such as he had never yet had to encounter — enemies of high social position, of acknowledged wit, and of a certain, though as the sequel proved quite inadequate, talent for satire. These were Lady Mary Wortley Montague and Lord John Hervey.

Lady Mary had been for years acknowledged as one of the wittiest, most learned,

and most beautiful women of her day. Pope seems to have met her in 1715 and at once joined the train of her admirers. When she accompanied her husband on his embassy to Constantinople in the following year, the poet entered into a long correspondence with her, protesting in the most elaborate fashion his undying devotion. On her return he induced her to settle with her husband at Twickenham. Here he continued his attentions, half real, half in the affected gallantry of the day, until, to quote the lady's own words to her daughter many years after,

"at some ill-chosen time when she least expected what romancers call a declaration, he made such passionate love to her, as, in spite of her utmost endeavours to be angry and look grave, provoked an immoderate fit of laughter,"

and, she added, from that moment Pope became her implacable enemy. Certainly by the time Pope began to write the

Dunciad

he was so far estranged from his old friend that he permitted himself in that poem a scoffing allusion to a scandal in which she had recently become involved. The lady answered, or the poet thought that she did, with an anonymous pamphlet,

A Pop upon Pope

, describing a castigation, wholly imaginary, said to have been inflicted upon the poet as a proper reward for his satire. After this, of course, all hope of a reconciliation was at an end, and in his satires and epistles Pope repeatedly introduced Lady Mary under various titles in the most offensive fashion. In his first

Imitation of Horace

, published in February, 1733, he referred in the most unpardonable manner to a certain Sappho, and the dangers attendant upon any acquaintance with her. Lady Mary was foolish enough to apply the lines to herself and to send a common friend to remonstrate with Pope. He coolly replied that he was surprised that Lady Mary should feel hurt, since the lines could only apply to certain women, naming four

notorious scribblers, whose lives were as immoral as their works. Such an answer was by no means calculated to turn away the lady's wrath, and for an ally in the campaign of anonymous abuse that she now planned she sought out her friend Lord Hervey. John Hervey, called by courtesy Lord Hervey, the second son of the Earl of Bristol, was one of the most prominent figures at the court of George II. He had been made vice-chamberlain of the royal household in 1730, and was the intimate friend and confidential adviser of Queen Caroline. Clever, affable, unprincipled, and cynical, he was a perfect type of the Georgian courtier to whom loyalty, patriotism, honesty, and honor were so many synonyms for folly. He was effeminate in habits and appearance, but notoriously licentious; he affected to scoff at learning but made some pretense to literature, and had written

Four Epistles after the Manner of Ovid

, and numerous political pamphlets. Pope, who had some slight personal acquaintance with him, disliked his political connections and probably despised his verses, and in the

Imitation

already mentioned had alluded to him under the title of Lord Fanny as capable of turning out a thousand lines of verse a day. This was sufficient cause, if cause were needed, to induce Hervey to join Lady Mary in her warfare against Pope.

The first blow was struck in an anonymous poem, probably the combined work of the two allies, called

Verses addressed to the Imitator of Horace

, which appeared in March, 1733, and it was followed up in August by an

Epistle from a Nobleman to a Doctor of Divinity

, which also appeared anonymously, but was well known to be the work of Lord Hervey. In these poems Pope was abused in the most unmeasured terms. His work

was styled a mere collection of libels; he had no invention except in defamation; he was a mere pretender to genius. His morals were not left unimpeached; he was charged with selling other men's work printed in his name, — a gross distortion of his employing assistants in the translation of the

Odyssey

, — he was ungrateful, unjust, a foe to human kind, an enemy like the devil to all that have being. The noble authors, probably well aware how they could give the most pain, proceeded to attack his family and his distorted person. His parents were obscure and vulgar people; and he himself a wretched outcast:

with the emblem of [his] crooked mind Marked on [his] back like Cain by God's own hand.

And to cap the climax, as soon as these shameful libels were in print, Lord Hervey bustled off to show them to the Queen and to laugh with her over the fine way in which he had put down the bitter little poet.

In order to understand and appreciate Pope's reception of these attacks, we must recall to ourselves the position in which he lived. He was a Catholic, and I have already (

Introduction

) called attention to the precarious, tenure by which the Catholics of his time held their goods, their persons, their very lives, in security. He was the intimate of Bolingbroke, of all men living the most detested by the court, and his noble friends were almost without exception the avowed enemies of the court party. Pope had good reason to fear that the malice of his enemies might not be content to stop with abusive doggerel. But he was not in the least intimidated. On the contrary, he broke out in a fine flame of wrath against Lord Hervey, whom he evidently considered the chief offender, challenged his enemy to disavow the

Epistle

, and on his declining to do so, proceeded to make what he called "a proper reply" in a prose

Letter to a Noble Lord

. This masterly piece of satire was passed about from hand to hand, but never printed. We are told that Sir Robert Walpole, who found Hervey a convenient tool in court intrigues, bribed Pope not to print it by securing a good position in France for one of the priests who had watched over the poet's youth. If this story be true, and we have Horace Walpole's authority for it, we may well imagine that the entry of the bribe, like that of Uncle Toby's oath, was blotted out by a tear from the books of the Recording Angel.

But Pope was by no means disposed to let the attacks go without an answer of some kind, and the particular form which his answer took seems to have been suggested by a letter from Arbuthnot.

"I make it my last request," wrote his beloved physician, now sinking fast under the diseases that brought him to the grave, "that you continue that noble disdain and abhorrence of vice, which you seem so naturally endued with, but still with a due regard to your own safety; and study more to reform than to chastise, though the one often cannot be effected without the other."

"I took very kindly your advice," Pope replied, "... and it has worked so much upon me considering the time and state you gave it in, that I determined to address to you one of my epistles written by piecemeal many years, and which I have now made haste to put together; wherein the question is stated, what were, and are my motives of writing, the objections to them, and my answers."

In other words, the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

which we see that Pope was working over at the date of this letter, August 25, 1734, was, in the old-fashioned phrase, his

Apologia

, his defense of his life and work.

As usual, Pope's account of his work cannot be taken literally. A comparison of dates shows that the

Epistle

instead of having been "written by piecemeal many years" is essentially the work of one impulse, the desire to vindicate his character, his parents, and his work from the aspersions cast upon them by Lord Hervey and Lady Mary. The exceptions to this statement are two, or possibly three, passages which we know to have been written earlier and worked into the poem with infinite art.

The first of these is the famous portrait of Addison as Atticus. I have already spoken of the reasons that led to Pope's breach with Addison (Introduction); and there is good reason to believe that this portrait sprang directly from Pope's bitter feeling toward the elder writer for his preference of Tickell's translation. The lines were certainly written in Addison's lifetime, though we may be permitted to doubt whether Pope really did send them to him, as he once asserted. They did not appear in print, however, till four years after Addison's death, when they were printed apparently without Pope's consent in a volume of miscellanies. It is interesting to note that in this form the full name "Addison" appeared in the last line. Some time later Pope acknowledged the verses and printed them with a few changes in his

Miscellany

of 1727, substituting the more decorous "A — -n" for the "Addison" of the first text. Finally he worked over the passage again and inserted it, for a purpose that will be shown later, in the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

.

It is not worth while to discuss here the justice or injustice of this famous portrait. In fact, the question hardly deserves to be raised. The passage is admittedly a satire, and a satire makes no claim to be a just and final sentence. Admitting, as we must, that Pope was in the wrong in his quarrel with Addison, we may well admit that he has not done him full justice. But we must equally admit that the picture is drawn with wonderful skill, that praise and blame are deftly mingled, and that the satire is all the more severe because of its frank admission of the great man's merits. And it must also be said that Pope has hit off some of the faults of Addison's character, — his coldness, his self-complacency, his quiet sneer, his indulgence of flattering fools — in a way that none of his biographers have done. That Pope was not blind to Addison's chief merit as an author is fully shown by a passage in a later poem, less well known than the portrait of Atticus, but well worth quotation. After speaking of the licentiousness of literature in Restoration days, he goes on to say:

In our own (excuse some courtly stains) No whiter page than Addison's remains, He from the taste obscene reclaims our youth, And sets the passions on the side of truth, Forms the soft bosom with the gentlest art, And pours each human virtue in the heart. Epistle to Augustus, II. 215-220.

If Pope was unjust to Addison the man, he at least made amends to Addison the moralist.

The second passage that may have had an independent existence before the

Epistle

was conceived is the portrait of Bufo, ll. 229-247. There is reason to believe that this attack was first aimed at Bubb Doddington, a courtier of Hervey's class, though hardly of so finished a type, to whom Pope alludes as Bubo in l. 278. When Pope was working on the

Epistle

, however, he saw an opportunity to vindicate his own independence of patronage by

a satiric portrait of the great Mæcenas of his younger days, Lord Halifax, who had ventured some foolish criticisms on Pope's translation of the

Iliad

, and seems to have expected that the poet should dedicate the great work to him in return for an offer of a pension which he made and Pope declined. There is no reason to believe that Pope cherished any very bitter resentment toward Halifax. On the contrary, in a poem published some years after the

Epistle

he boasted of his friendship with Halifax, naming him outright, and adding in a note that the noble lord was no less distinguished by his love of letters than his abilities in Parliament.

The third passage, a tender reference to his mother's age and weakness, was written at least as early as 1731, — Mrs. Pope died in 1733, — and was incorporated in the

Epistle

to round it off with a picture of the poet absorbed in his filial duties at the very time that Hervey and Lady Mary were heaping abuse upon him, as a monster devoid of all good qualities. And now having discussed the various insertions in the

Epistle

, let us look for a moment at the poem as a whole, and see what is the nature of Pope's defense of himself and of his reply to his enemies.

It is cast in the form of a dialogue between the poet himself and Arbuthnot. Pope begins by complaining of the misfortunes which his reputation as a successful man of letters has brought upon him. He is a mark for all the starving scribblers of the town who besiege him for advice, recommendations, and hard cash. Is it not enough to make a man write

Dunciads

? Arbuthnot warns him against the danger of making foes (ll. 101- 104), but Pope replies that his flatterers are even more intolerable than his open enemies. And with a little outburst of impatience, such as we may well imagine him to have indulged in during his later years, he cries:

Why did I write? What sin to me unknown Dipt me in ink, my parents' or my own?

and begins with l. 125 his poetical autobiography. He tells of his first childish efforts, of poetry taken up "to help me thro' this long disease my life," and then goes on to speak of the noble and famous friends who had praised his early work and urged him to try his fortune in the open field of letters. He speaks of his first poems, the

Pastorals

and

Windsor Forest

, harmless as Hervey's own verses, and tells how even then critics like Dennis fell foul of him. Rival authors hated him, too, especially such pilfering bards as Philips. This he could endure, but the coldness and even jealousy of such a man as Addison — and here appears the famous portrait of Atticus — was another matter, serious enough to draw tears from all lovers of mankind.

Passing on (l. 213) to the days of his great success when his

Homer

was the talk of the town, he asserts his ignorance of all the arts of puffery and his independence of mutual admiration societies. He left those who wished a patron to the tender mercies of Halifax, who fed fat on flattery and repaid his flatterers merely with a good word or a seat at his table. After all, the poet could afford to lose the society of Bufo's toadies while such a friend as Gay was left him (l. 254).

After an eloquent expression of his wish for independence (ll. 261-270), he goes on

to speak of the babbling friends who insist that he is always meditating some new satire, and persist in recognizing some wretched poetaster's lampoon as his. And so by a natural transition Pope comes to speak of his own satiric poems and their aims. He says, and rightly, that he has never attacked virtue or innocence. He reserves his lash for those who trample on their neighbors and insult "fallen worth," for cold or treacherous friends, liars, and babbling blockheads. Let Sporus (Hervey) tremble (l. 303). Arbuthnot interposes herewith an ejaculation of contemptuous pity; is it really worth the poet's while to castigate such a slight thing as Hervey, that "mere white curd"? But Pope has suffered too much from Hervey's insolence to stay his hand, and he now proceeds to lay on the lash with equal fury and precision, drawing blood at every stroke, until we seem to see the wretched fop writhing and shrieking beneath the whip. And then with a magnificent transition he goes on (ll. 332-337) to draw a portrait of himself. Here, he says in effect, is the real man that Sporus has so maligned. The portrait is idealized, of course; one could hardly expect a poet speaking in his own defense in reply to venomous attacks to dissect his own character with the stern impartiality of the critics of the succeeding century, but it is in all essentials a portrait at once impressive and true.

Arbuthnot again interrupts (l. 358) to ask why he spares neither the poor nor the great in his satire, and Pope replies that he hates knaves in every rank of life. Yet by nature, he insists, he is of an easy temper, more readily deceived than angered, and in a long catalogue of instances he illustrates his own patience and good nature (ll. 366-385). It must be frankly confessed that these lines do not ring true. Pope might in the heat of argument convince himself that he was humble and slow to wrath, but he has never succeeded in convincing his readers.

With l. 382 Pope turns to the defense of his family, which, as we have seen, his enemies had abused as base and obscure. He draws a noble picture of his dead father, "by nature honest, by experience wise" simple, modest, and temperate, and passes to the description of himself watching over the last years of his old mother,

his sole care to

Explore the thought, explain the asking eye And keep a while one parent from the sky.

If the length of days which Heaven has promised those who honor father and mother fall to his lot, may Heaven preserve him such a friend as Arbuthnot to bless those days. And Arbuthnot closes the dialogue with a word which is meant, I think, to sum up the whole discussion and to pronounce the verdict that Pope's life had been good and honorable.

Whether that blessing1 be deny'd or giv'n, Thus far was right, the rest belongs to Heav'n.

It seems hardly necessary to point out the merits of so patent a masterpiece as the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

. In order to enjoy it to the full, indeed, one must know something of the life of the author, of the circumstances under which it was written, and, in general, of the social and political life of the time. But even without this special knowledge no reader can fail to appreciate the marvelous ease, fluency, and poignancy of this admirable satire. There is nothing like it in our language except Pope's other satires, and of all his satires it is, by common consent, easily the first. It surpasses the satiric poetry of Dryden in pungency and depth of feeling as easily as it does that of Byron in polish and artistic restraint. Its range of tone is remarkable. At times it reads like glorified conversation, as in the opening lines; at times it flames and quivers with emotion, as in the assault on Hervey, or in the defense of his parents. Even in the limited field of satiric portraiture there is a wide difference between the manner in which Pope has drawn the portrait of Atticus and that of Sporus. The latter is a masterpiece of pure invective; no allowances are made, no lights relieve the darkness of the shadows, the portrait is frankly inhuman. It is the product of an unrestrained outburst of bitter passion. The portrait of Atticus, on the other hand, was, as we know, the work of

years. It is the product not of an outburst of fury, but of a slowly growing and intense dislike, which, while recognizing the merits of its object, fastened with peculiar power upon his faults and weaknesses. The studious restraint which controls the satirist's hand makes it only the more effective. We know well enough that the portrait is not a fair one, but we are forced to remind ourselves of this at every step to avoid the spell which Pope's apparent impartiality casts over our judgments. The whole passage reads not so much like the heated plea of an advocate as the measured summing-up of a judge, and the last couplet falls on our ears with the inevitability of a final sentence. But the peculiar merit of the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

consists neither in the ease and polish of its style, nor in the vigor and effectiveness of its satire, but in the insight it gives us into the heart and mind of the poet himself. It presents an ideal picture of Pope, the man and the author, of his life, his friendships, his love of his parents, his literary relationships and aims. And it is quite futile to object, as some critics have done, that this picture is not exactly in accordance with the known facts of Pope's life. No great man can be tried and judged on the mere record of his acts. We must know the circumstances that shaped these, and the motives that inspired them. A man's ideals, if genuinely held and honestly followed, are perhaps even more valuable contributions to our final estimate of the man himself than all he did or left undone.

All I could never be, All, men ignored in me, This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

And in the

Epistle to Arbuthnot

we recognize in Pope ideals of independence, of devotion to his art, of simple living, of loyal friendship, and of filial piety which shine in splendid contrast with the gross, servile, and cynically immoral tone of the age and society in which he lived.

Footnote 1:

i. e.

the blessing of Arbuthnot's future companionship, for which Pope (l. 413) had just prayed.

return to footnote mark

linereferencemeaning

Advertisement

Dr. John Arbuthnot, one of Pope's most intimate friends, had been physician to Queen Anne, and was a man of letters as well as a doctor. Arbuthnot, Pope, and Swift had combined to get out a volume of Miscellanies in 1737. His health was failing rapidly at this time, and he died a month or so after the appearance of this Epistle.

Epistle

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Notes on An Ode on Solitude

Pope says that this delightful little poem was written at the early age of twelve. It first appeared in a letter to his friend, Henry Cromwell, dated July 17, 1709. There are several variations between this first form and that in which it was finally published, and it is probable that Pope thought enough of his boyish production to subject it to repeated revision. Its spirit is characteristic of a side of Pope's nature that is often forgotten. He was, indeed, the poet of the society of his day, urban, cultured, and pleasure-loving; but to the end of his days he retained a love for the quiet charm of country life which he had come to feel in his boyhood at Binfield, and for which he early withdrew from the whirl and dissipations of London to the groves and the grotto of his villa at Twickenham.

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Notes on The Descent of Dullness

In the fourth book of the

Dunciad

, Pope abandons the satire on the pretenders to literary fame which had run through the earlier books, and flies at higher game. He represents the Goddess Dullness as "coming in her majesty to destroy Order and Science, and to substitute the Kingdom of the Dull upon earth." He attacks the pedantry and formalism of university education in his day, the dissipation and false taste of the traveled gentry, the foolish pretensions to learning of collectors and virtuosi, and the daringly irreverent speculations of freethinkers and infidels. At the close of the book he represents the Goddess as dismissing her worshipers with a speech which she concludes with "a yawn of extraordinary virtue." Under its influence "all nature nods," and pulpits, colleges, and Parliament succumb. The poem closes with the magnificent description of the descent of Dullness and her final conquest of art, philosophy, and religion. It is said that Pope himself admired these lines so much that he could not repeat them without his voice faltering with emotion. "And well it might, sir," said Dr. Johnson when this anecdote was repeated to him, "for they are noble lines." And Thackeray in his lecture on Pope in

The English Humorists

says:

"In these astonishing lines Pope reaches, I think, to the very greatest height which his sublime art has attained, and shows himself the equal of all poets of all times. It is the brightest ardor, the loftiest assertion of truth, the most generous wisdom, illustrated by the noblest poetic figure, and spoken in words the aptest, grandest, and most harmonious."

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Notes on The Epitaph on Gay

John Gay, the idlest, best-natured, and best-loved man of letters of his day, was the special friend of Pope. His early work,

The Shepherd's Week

, was planned as a parody on the

Pastorals

of Pope's rival, Ambrose Philips, and Pope assisted him in the composition of his luckless farce,

Three Hours after Marriage

. When Gay's opera

Polly

was forbidden by the licenser, and Gay's patrons, the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry, were driven from court for soliciting subscriptions for him, Pope warmly espoused his cause. Gay died in 1732 and was buried in Westminster Abbey. Pope's epitaph for his tomb was first published in the quarto edition of Pope's works in 1735 — Johnson, in his discussion of Pope's epitaphs (

Lives of the Poets

), devotes a couple of pages of somewhat captious criticism to these lines; but they have at least the virtue of simplicity and sincerity, and are at once an admirable portrait of the man and a lasting tribute to the poet Gay.

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Appendix

The Rape of the Lock: First Edition

Nolueram, Belinda, tuos violare capillos Sed juvat, hoc precibus me tribuisse tuis. Mart.

Canto I

What dire offence from am'rous causes springs, What mighty quarrels rise from trivial things, I sing — This verse to C — l, Muse! is due: This, ev'n Belinda may vouchsafe to view: Slight is the subject, but not so the praise, If she inspire, and he approve my lays. Say what strange motive, goddess! could compel A well-bred lord t' assault a gentle belle? O say what stranger cause, yet unexplored, Could make a gentle belle reject a lord? And dwells such rage in softest bosoms then, And lodge such daring souls in little men? Sol through white curtains did his beams display, And ope'd those eyes which brighter shine than they, Shock just had giv'n himself the rousing shake, And nymphs prepared their chocolate to take; Thrice the wrought slipper knocked against the ground, And striking watches the tenth hour resound. Belinda rose, and midst attending dames, Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames: A train of well-dressed youths around her shone, And ev'ry eye was fixed on her alone: On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore. Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose, Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those: Favours to none, to all she smiles extends; Oft she rejects, but never once offends. Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike, And, like the sun, they shine on all alike. Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride, Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide: If to her share some female errors fall, Look on her face, and you'll forgive 'em all. This nymph, to the destruction of mankind, Nourished two locks, which graceful hung behind In equal curls, and well conspired to deck With shining ringlets her smooth iv'ry neck. Love in these labyrinths his slaves detains, And mighty hearts are held in slender chains. With hairy springes we the birds betray, Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey, Fair tresses man's

imperial race insnare, And beauty draws us with a single hair. Th' adventurous baron the bright locks admired; He saw, he wished, and to the prize aspired. Resolved to win, he meditates the way, By force to ravish, or by fraud betray; For when success a lover's toil attends, Few ask if fraud or force attained his ends. For this, ere Phoebus rose, he had implored Propitious heav'n, and every pow'r adored, But chiefly Love — to Love an altar built, Of twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt. There lay the sword-knot Sylvia's hands had sewn With Flavia's busk that oft had wrapped his own: A fan, a garter, half a pair of gloves, And all the trophies of his former loves. With tender billets-doux he lights the pire, And breathes three am'rous sighs to raise the fire. Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize: The pow'rs gave ear, and granted half his pray'r, The rest the winds dispersed in empty air. Close by those meads, for ever crowned with flow'rs, Where Thames with pride surveys his rising tow'rs, There stands a structure of majestic frame, Which from the neighb'ring Hampton takes its name. Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom Of foreign tyrants, and of nymphs at home; Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey, Dost sometimes counsel take — and sometimes tea. Hither our nymphs and heroes did resort, To taste awhile the pleasures of a court; In various talk the cheerful hours they passed, Of who was bit, or who capotted last; This speaks the glory of the British queen, And that describes a charming Indian screen; A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes; At ev'ry word a reputation dies. Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat, With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that. Now when, declining from the noon of day, The sun obliquely shoots his burning ray; When hungry judges soon the sentence sign, And wretches hang that jurymen may dine; When merchants from th' Exchange return in peace, And the long labours of the toilet cease, The board's with cups and spoons, alternate, crowned, The berries crackle, and the mill turns round; On shining altars of Japan they raise The silver lamp, and fiery spirits blaze: From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide, While China's earth receives the smoking tide. At once they gratify

their smell and taste, While frequent cups prolong the rich repast. Coffee (which makes the politician wise, And see through all things with his half-shut eyes) Sent up in vapours to the baron's brain New stratagems, the radiant lock to gain. Ah cease, rash youth! desist ere't is too late, Fear the just gods, and think of Scylla's fate! Changed to a bird, and sent to flit in air, She dearly pays for Nisus' injured hair! But when to mischief mortals bend their mind, How soon fit instruments of ill they find! Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace A two-edged weapon from her shining case: So ladies, in romance, assist their knight, Present the spear, and arm him for the fight; He takes the gift with rev'rence, and extends The little engine on his fingers' ends; This just behind Belinda's neck he spread, As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head. He first expands the glitt'ring forfex wide T' enclose the lock; then joins it, to divide; One fatal stroke the sacred hair does sever From the fair head, for ever, and for ever! The living fires come flashing from her eyes, And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies. Not louder shrieks by dames to heav'n are cast, When husbands die, or lapdogs breathe their last; Or when rich china vessels, fall'n from high, In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie! "Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine," The victor cried, "the glorious prize is mine! While fish in streams, or birds delight in air, Or in a coach and six the British fair, As long as Atalantis shall be read, Or the small pillow grace a lady's bed, While visits shall be paid on solemn days, When num'rous wax-lights in bright order blaze, While nymphs take treats, or assignations give, So long my honour, name, and praise shall live!" What time would spare, from steel receives its date, And monuments, like men, submit to fate! Steel did the labour of the gods destroy, And strike to dust th' aspiring tow'rs of Troy; Steel could the works of mortal pride confound, And hew triumphal arches to the ground. What wonder then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel The conqu'ring force of unresisted steel? 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100 105 110 115 120 125 130 135 140

Canto II

But anxious cares the pensive nymph oppressed, And secret passions laboured in her breast. Not youthful kings in battle seized alive, Not scornful virgins who their charms survive, Not ardent lover robbed of all his bliss, Not ancient lady when refused a kiss, Not tyrants fierce that unrepenting die, Not Cynthia when her manteau's pinned awry, E'er felt such rage, resentment, and despair, As thou, sad virgin! for thy ravished hair. While her racked soul repose and peace requires, The fierce Thalestris fans the rising fires. "O wretched maid!" she spread her hands, and cried, (And Hampton's echoes, "Wretched maid!" replied) "Was it for this you took such constant care Combs, bodkins, leads, pomatums to prepare? For this your locks in paper durance bound? For this with tort'ring irons wreathed around? Oh had the youth been but content to seize Hairs less in sight, or any hairs but these! Gods! shall the ravisher display this hair, While the fops envy, and the ladies stare! Honour forbid! at whose unrivalled shrine Ease, pleasure, virtue, all, our sex resign. Methinks already I your tears survey, Already hear the horrid things they say, Already see you a degraded toast, And all your honour in a whisper lost! How shall I, then, your helpless fame defend? 'T will then be infamy to seem your friend! And shall this prize, th' inestimable prize, Exposed through crystal to the gazing eyes, And heightened by the diamond's circling rays, On that rapacious hand for ever blaze? Sooner shall grass in Hyde Park Circus grow, And wits take lodgings in the sound of Bow; Sooner let earth, air, sea, to chaos fall, Men, monkeys, lapdogs, parrots, perish all!" She said; then raging to Sir Plume repairs, And bids her beau demand the precious hairs: Sir Plume, of amber snuff-box justly vain, And the nice conduct of a clouded cane, With earnest eyes, and round unthinking face, He first the snuff-box opened, then the case, And thus broke out — "My lord, why, what the devil! Zounds! damn the lock! 'fore Gad, you must be civil! Plague on't! 't is past a jest — nay, prithee, pox! Give her the hair." — He spoke, and rapped his box. "It grieves me much," replied the peer again, "Who speaks so well should ever speak in

vain: But by this lock, this sacred lock, I swear, (Which never more shall join its parted hair; Which never more its honours shall renew, Clipped from the lovely head where once it grew) That, while my nostrils draw the vital air, This hand, which won it, shall for ever wear." He spoke, and speaking, in proud triumph spread The long-contended honours of her head. But see! the nymph in sorrow's pomp appears, Her eyes half-languishing, half drowned in tears; Now livid pale her cheeks, now glowing red On her heaved bosom hung her drooping head, Which with a sigh she raised, and thus she said: "For ever cursed be this detested day, Which snatched my best, my fav'rite curl away; Happy! ah ten times happy had I been, If Hampton Court these eyes had never seen! Yet am not I the first mistaken maid, By love of courts to num'rous ills betrayed. O had I rather unadmired remained In some lone isle, or distant northern land, Where the gilt chariot never marked the way, Where none learn ombre, none e'er taste bohea! There kept my charms concealed from mortal eye, Like roses, that in deserts bloom and die. What moved my mind with youthful lords to roam? O had I stayed, and said my pray'rs at home! 'Twas this the morning omens did foretell, Thrice from my trembling hand the patchbox fell; The tott'ring china shook without a wind, Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind! See the poor remnants of this slighted hair! My hands shall rend what ev'n thy own did spare: This in two sable ringlets taught to break, Once gave new beauties to the snowy neck; The sister-lock now sits uncouth, alone, And in its fellow's fate foresees its own; Uncurled it hangs, the fatal shears demands, And tempts once more thy sacrilegious hands." She said: the pitying audience melt in tears; But fate and Jove had stopped the baron's ears. In vain Thalestris with reproach assails, For who can move when fair Belinda fails? Not half so fixed the Trojan could remain, While Anna begged and Dido raged in vain. "To arms, to arms!" the bold Thalestris cries, And swift as lightning to the combat flies. All side in parties, and begin th' attack; Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones crack; Heroes' and heroines' shouts confus'dly rise, And bass and treble voices strike the skies; No common weapons in

their hands are found, Like gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound. So when bold Homer makes the gods engage, And heav'nly breasts with human passions rage, 'Gainst Pallas, Mars; Latona, Hermes arms, And all Olympus rings with loud alarms; Jove's thunder roars, heav'n trembles all around, Blue Neptune storms, the bellowing deeps resound: Earth shakes her nodding tow'rs, the ground gives way, And the pale ghosts start at the flash of day! While through the press enraged Thalestris flies, And scatters death around from both her eyes, A beau and witling perished in the throng, One died in metaphor, and one in song. "O cruel nymph; a living death I bear," Cried Dapperwit, and sunk beside his chair. A mournful glance Sir Fopling upwards cast, "Those eyes are made so killing" — was his last. Thus on Mæander's flow'ry margin lies Th' expiring swan, and as he sings he dies. As bold Sir Plume had drawn Clarissa down, Chloe stepped in, and killed him with a frown; She smiled to see the doughty hero slain, But at her smile the beau revived again. Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air, Weighs the men's wits against the lady's hair; The doubtful beam long nods from side to side; At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside. See fierce Belinda on the baron flies, With more than usual lightning in her eyes: Nor feared the chief th' unequal fight to try, Who sought no more than on his foe to die. But this bold lord, with manly strength endued, She with one finger and a thumb subdued: Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew, A charge of snuff the wily virgin threw; Sudden, with starting tears each eye o'erflows, And the high dome re-echoes to his nose. "Now meet thy fate," th' incensed virago cried, And drew a deadly bodkin from her side. "Boast not my fall," he said, "insulting foe! Thou by some other shalt be laid as low; Nor think to die dejects my lofty mind; All that I dread is leaving you behind! Rather than so, ah let me still survive, And still burn on, in Cupid's flames, alive." "Restore the lock!" she cries; and all around "Restore the lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound. Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain Roared for the handkerchief that caused his pain. But see how oft ambitious aims are crossed, And chiefs contend till all the prize is lost! The lock, obtained with guilt,

and kept with pain, In ev'ry place is sought, but sought in vain: With such a prize no mortal must be blessed, So heav'n decrees! with heav'n who can contest? Some thought it mounted to the lunar sphere, Since all that man e'er lost is treasured there. There heroes' wits are kept in pond'rous vases, And beaux' in snuff-boxes and tweezer-cases. There broken vows, and death-bed alms are found, And lovers' hearts with ends of ribbon bound, The courtier's promises, and sick man's pray'rs, The smiles of harlots, and the tears of heirs, Cages for gnats, and chains to yoke a flea, Dried butterflies, and tomes of casuistry. But trust the muse — she saw it upward rise, Though marked by none but quick poetic eyes: (Thus Rome's great founder to the heav'ns withdrew, To Proculus alone confessed in view) A sudden star, it shot through liquid air, And drew behind a radiant trail of hair. Not Berenice's locks first rose so bright, The skies bespangling with dishevelled light. (This the beau monde shall from the Mall survey, (As through the moonlight shade they nightly stray, (And hail with music its propitious ray; This Partridge soon shall view in cloudless skies, When next he looks through Galileo's eyes; And hence th' egregious wizard shall foredoom The fate of Louis, and the fall of Rome. Then cease, bright nymph! to mourn thy ravished hair, Which adds new glory to the shining sphere! Not all the tresses that fair head can boast, Shall draw such envy as the lock you lost. For after all the murders of your eye, When, after millions slain, yourself shall die; When those fair suns shall set, as set they must, And all those tresses shall be laid in dust, This lock the muse shall consecrate to fame, And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name. 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50 55 60 65 70 75 80 85 90 95 100 105 110 115 120 125 130 135 140 145 150 155 160 165 170 175 180 185 190

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