

EPISTLE I. TO SIR RICHARD TEMPLE, LORD VISCOUNT COBHAM

Alexander Pope

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Yes, you despise the Man to books confin'd,
Who from his Study rails at human kind;
Tho' what he learns he speaks, and may advance
Some gen'ral maxims, or be right by chance.
The coxcomb bird, so talkative and grave,
That from his cage cries cuckold, whore, and knave,
Tho' many a passenger he rightly call,
You hold him no Philosopher at all.
And yet the fate of all Extremes is such,
Men may be read, as well as books, too much,
To observations which ourselves we make,
We grow more partial for th'Observer's sake;
To written wisdom, as another's, less:
Maxims are drawn from Notions, these from Guess.
There's some Peculiar in each Leaf and Grain;
Some unmark'd fibre, or some varying vein:
Shall only Man be taken in the gross?
Grant but as many sorts of mind, as Moss.
That each from other differs, first confess;
Next, that he varies from himself no less:
Add Nature's, Custom's, Reason's, Passion's strife,
And all Opinion's colours cast on Life.
Yet more; the difference is as great between
The Optics seeing, as the objects seen.
All Manners take a tincture from our own,
Or come discolour'd thro' our Passions shown,
Or Fancy's beam enlarges, multiplies,
Contracts, inverts, and gives ten thousand dyes.
Our Depths who fathoms, or our Shallows finds?
Quick Whirls, and shifting Eddies, of our minds?
Life's stream for observation will not stay,
It hurries all too fast to mark their way:
In vain sedate reflections we would make,
When half our knowledge we must snatch, not take.
On human actions reason tho' you can,
It may be Reason, but it is not Man;

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His Principle of action once explore,
That instant, 'tis his principle no more;
Like following life thro' Creatures you dissect,
You lose it, in the moment you detect.
Oft, in the Passions wild rotation tost,
Our Spring of action to ourselves is lost:
Tir'd, not determin'd, to the last we yield,
And what comes then is master of the field.
As the last Image of that troubled heap
When sense subsides, and Fancy sports in sleep,
(Tho' past the recollection of the thought)
Becomes the stuff of which our Dream is wrought;
Something, as dim to our internal view,
Is thus perhaps the cause of all we do.
In vain the grave, with retrospective eye,
Would from th'apparent what conclude the why,
Infer the Motive from the Deed, and show
That what we chanc'd, was what we meant to do.
Behold! if Fortune, or a Mistress frowns,
Some plunge in bus'ness, others shave their crowns:
To ease the soul of one oppressive weight,
This quits an Empire, that embroils a State:
The same adust complexion has impell'd
Charles to the Convent, Philip to the Field .
Not always Actions shew the Man: we find,
Who does a kindness is not therefore kind;
Perhaps Prosperity becalm'd his breast;
Perhaps the Wind just shifted from the east.
Not therefore humble he who seeks retreat,
Pride guides his steps, and bids him shun the Great.
Who combats bravely, is not therefore brave;
He dreads a death-bed like the meanest slave.
Who reasons wisely, is not therefore wise;
His pride in reas'ning, not in acting lies.
But grant that Actions best discover man;
Take the most strong, and sort them as you can:
The few that glare, each Character must mark,
You balance not the many in the dark.
What will you do with such as disagree?
Suppress them, or miscall them Policy?
Must then at once (the character to save)
A plain, rough Hero turn a crafty knave?
Alas! in truth the man but chang'd his mind,
Perhaps was sick, in love, or had not din'd.
Ask why from Britain, Caesar made retreat?
Caesar perhaps had told you, he was beat.
The mighty Czar what mov'd to wed a punk?
Caesar perhaps might answer, he was drunk.
But sage Historians! 'tis your task to prove
One action Conduct, one Heroic love.
'Tis from high Life high Characters are drawn;

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A Saint in crape, is twice a Saint in lawn;
A Judge is just, a Chanc'lor juster still;
A Gownman learn'd; a Bishop, what you will;
Wise, if a Minister; but if a King,
More wise, more learn'd, more just, more ev'ry thing.
Court-virtues bear, like gems, the highest rate,
Born where heav'n's influence scarce can penetrate.
In life's low vale, (the soil the Virtues like)
They please as beauties, here as wonders strike.
Tho' the same Sun with all diffusive rays
Blush in the rose, and in the diamond blaze,
We prize the stronger effort of his pow'r,
And always set the gem above the flow'r.
Tis Education forms the vulgar mind:
Just as the Twig is bent, the Tree's inclin'd.
Boastful and rough, your first son is a Squire;
The next a Tradesman, meek, and much a liar:
Tom struts a Soldier, open, bold, and brave;
Will sneaks a Scriv'ner, an exceeding knave:
Is he a Churchman? then he's fond of pow'r;
A Quaker? sly; a Presbyterian? sour;
A smart Free thinker? all things in an hour.
True, some are open and to all Men known;
Others so very close, they're hid from none;
(So darkness fills the Eye no less than Light)
Thus gracious Chandos is belov'd at sight:
And ev'ry child hates Shylock, tho' his Soul
Still sits at squat, and peeps not from its hole.
At half mankind when gen'rous Manly raves,
All know 'tis Virtue, for he thinks them knaves.
When universal homage Umbra pays,
All see 'tis Vice, and itch of vulgar praise.
When flatt'ry glares, all hate it in a Queen,
While One there is, who charms us with his Spleen.
But these plain Characters we rarely find,
Tho' strong the bent, yet quick the turns of mind:
Or puzzling Contraries confound the whole,
Or Affectations quite reverse the Soul:
The dull, flat Falsehood serves for policy,
And in the cunning, Truth itself's a lye:
Unthought of Frailties cheat us in the Wise;
The Fool lies hid in Inconsistencies.

See the same man, in vigour, in the gout;
Alone, in company; in place, or out;
Early at bus'ness, and at Hazard late;
Mad at a fox-chase, wise at a debate;
Drunk at a borough, civil at a ball;
Friendly at Hackney, faithless at Whitehall.

Catius is ever moral, ever grave,

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Thinks who endures a knave, is next a knave;
Save just at Dinner then prefers no doubt,
A rogue with Ven'son to a saint without.

Who would not praise Patritio's high desert?
His hand unstain'd, his uncorrupted heart,
His comprehensive head; all Int'rests weigh'd,
All Europe sav'd, yet Britain not betray'd.
He thanks you not; his pride was in Piquette,
Newmarket-fame, and judgment at a bett.
What made (say Montagne, or more sage Charron!)
Otho a Warrior, Cromwell a Buffoon?
A perjur'd Prince a leaden Saint revere?
A god-less Regent tremble at a Star?
The throne a Bigot keep, a Genius quit,
Faithless thro' Piety, and dup'd thro' Wit?
Europe, a Woman, child, or dotard rule;
And just her ablest Monarch made a fool?

Know, God and Nature only are the same:
In Man, the judgment shoots at flying game;
A bird of passage! lost, as soon as found;
Now in the Moon perhaps, now under ground!

Ask men's Opinions: Scoto now shall tell
How trade increases, and the world goes well;
Strike off his pension by the setting sun,
And Britain, if not Europe, is undone.
That gay Free-thinker, a fine talker once,
What turns him now a stupid, silent dunce?
Spome God, or Spirit he has lately found,
Or chanc'd to meet a Minister that frown'd.

Manners with Fortunes, Humours change with Climes,
Tenets with Books, and Principles with Times.

Judge we by Nature? Habit can efface,
Int'rest o'ercome, or Policy take place:
By Actions? those Uncertainty divides:
By Passions? these Dissimulation hides:
Affections? they still take a wider range:
Find, if you can, in what you cannot change?
Search then the ruling Passion: there alone,
The wild are constant, and the cunning known,
The fool consistent, and the false sincere;
Priests, Princes, Women, no dissemblers here.
This clue once found, unravels all the rest;
The prospect clears, and Wharton stands confest.
Clodio, the Scorn and Wonder of our days,
Whose ruling passion was the Lust of Praise;
Born with whate'er could win it from the wise,

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Women and fools must like him, or he dies.
Tho' wond'ring Senates hung on all he spoke,
The Club must hail him Master of the Joke.
Shall parts so various aim at nothing new?
He'll shine a Tully, and a Wilmot too:
Then turns repentant, and his God adores
With the same spirit that he drinks and whores:
Enough, if all around him but admire,
And now the Punk applaud, and now the Fry'r.
Thus, with each gift of Nature and of Art,
And wanting nothing but an honest heart;
Grown all to all, from no one vice exempt,
And most contemptible to shun contempt;
His Passion still to covet gen'ral praise;
His Life, to forfeit it a thousand ways;
A constant Bounty, which no friend has made;
An Angel Tongue which no man can persuade;
A Fool, with more of Wit than half mankind;
Too rash for Thought, for Action too refin'd;
A Tyrant to the Wife his heart approves;
A Rebel to the very King he loves;
He dies, sad out-cast of each Church and State!
And (harder still) flagitious, yet not great.
Ask you why Wharton broke thro' every rule?
'Twas all for fear, the Knaves should call him fool.

Nature well known, no Miracles remain,
Comets are regular, and Wharton plain.
Yet in the search, the wisest may mistake,
If second Qualities for first they take.
When Catiline by rapine swell'd his store,
When Caesar made a noble dame a whore,
In this the Lust, in that the Avarice
Were means, not ends; Ambition was the vice.
That very Caesar, born in Scipio's days,
Had aim'd, like him, by Chastity at praise:
Lucullus, when Frugality could charm,
Had roasted turnips in the Sabin farm.

In this one Passion man can strength enjoy,
As Fits give vigour, just when they destroy.
Time, that on all things lays his lenient hand,
Yet tames not this: it sticks to our last sand.
Consistent in our follies, and our sins,
Here honest Nature ends as she begins.

Behold a rev'rend Sire, whom want of grace
Has made the father of a nameless race,
Crawl thro' the street, shov'd on, or rudely press'd
By his own sons that pass him by unblest'd!
Still to his Wench he creeps on knocking knees,

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And envies ev'ry Sparrow that he sees.
A Salmon's belly, Helluo, was thy fate:
The Doctor call'd declares all help too late.
Mercy! cries Helluo, mercy on my soul!
Is there no hope? alas! then bring the Jowl.
'Odious! in Woollen! 'twou'd a Saint provoke,
(Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke)
No, let a charming Chintz, and Brussels lace
Wrap my cold limbs, and shade my lifeless face:
One would not, sure, be frightful when one's dead
And, Betty! gives this cheek a little red.'

Old Politicians chew on Wisdom past,
And blunder on in bus'ness to the last;
As weak as earnest; and as gravely out,
As sober Lanesb'row, dancing in the Gout.

The Courtier smooth, who forty years had shin'd
An humble servant to all human kind,
Just brought out this, when scarce his tongue could stir,
'If where I'm going I could serve you, Sir?'
'I give and I devise (old Euclio said,
And sigh'd) my Lands and Tenements to Ned.
Your Money, sir? 'My Money, sir! what all?
Why if I must (then wept) I give it Paul.
The Mannor, Sir? 'The Mannor! hold,' he cry'd,
'Not that I cannot part with that' and dy'd.

And you! brave Cobham, to the latest breath,
Shall feel your ruling Passion strong in death:
Such in those moments, as in all the past,
'Oh save my Country, Heav'n!' shall be your last.