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The Works Of Mr. George Lillo; With Some Account Of His Life

Containing, *Silvia; or, The Country Burial. A Ballad Opera.* *George Barnwell, A Tragedy.* *The Life of Scanderbeg.* And *The Christian Hero, A Tragedy*

Lillo, George

London, 1775

To Sir John Eyles, Bart.

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TO
SIR JOHN EYLES, BART.
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR,
AND ALDERMAN OF,
THE CITY OF LONDON,
AND SUB-GOVERNOR OF
THE SOUTH-SEA COMPANY.

S I R,

IF Tragick Poetry be, as Mr. Dryden
has somewhere said, the most excellent
and most useful kind of writing, the more
extensively useful the moral of any tra-
gedy is, the more excellent that piece
must be of its kind.

Vol. I.

* H 3

I hope



D E D I C A T I O N .

I hope I shall not be thought to insinuate that this, to which I have presumed to prefix your name, is such; that depends on its fitness to answer the end of tragedy, the exciting of the passions, in order to the correcting such of them as are criminal, either in their nature, or through their excess. Whether the following scenes do this in any tolerable degree, is, with the deference that becomes one who would not be thought vain, submitted to your candid and impartial judgment.

What I would infer is this, I think, evident truth; that tragedy is so far from losing its dignity, by being accommodated to the circumstances of the generality of mankind, that it is more truly august in proportion to the extent of its influence, and the numbers that are properly affected by it: as it is more truly great to be the instrument of good to many, who stand in need of our assistance, than to a very small part of that number.

If



DEDICATION.

If princes, &c. were alone liable to misfortunes arising from vice, or weakness in themselves, or others, there would be good reason for confining the characters in tragedy to those of superior rank; but since the contrary is evident, nothing can be more reasonable than to proportion the remedy to the disease.

I am far from denying that tragedies founded on any instructive and extraordinary events in history, or well invented fables, where the persons introduced are of the highest rank, are without their use, even to the bulk of the audience. The strong contrast between a Tamerlane and a Bajazet may have its weight with an unsteady people, and contribute to the fixing of them in the interest of a prince of the character of the former, when, through their own levity, or the arts of designing men, they are rendered factious and uneasy, though they have the highest reason to be satisfied. The sentiments and example of a Cato may inspire his spectators



DEDICATION.

tors with a just sense of the value of liberty, when they see that honest patriot prefer death to an obligation from a tyrant, who would sacrifice the constitution of his country, and liberties of mankind, to his ambition or revenge. I have attempted, indeed, to enlarge the province of the graver kind of poetry, and should be glad to see it carried on by some abler hand. Plays, founded on moral tales in private life, may be of admirable use, by carrying conviction to the mind with such irresistible force as to engage all the faculties and powers of the soul in the cause of virtue, by stifling vice in its first principles. They who imagine this to be too much to be attributed to tragedy must be strangers to the energy of that noble species of poetry. Shakespeare, who has given such amazing proofs of his genius, in that as well as in comedy, in his Hamlet, has the following lines.

“ Had he the motive and the cause for passion
“ That I have, he would drown the stage with tears,
“ And



DEDICATION.

- “ And cleave the general ear with horrid speech
“ Make mad the guilty, and appall the free,
“ Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
“ The very faculty of eyes and ears.”

And farther in the same speech,

- “ I’ve heard, that guilty creatures at a play
“ Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
“ Been so struck to the soul, that presently
“ They have proclaim’d their malefactions.

Prodigious! yet strictly just. But I shall not take up your valuable time with my remarks: only give me leave just to observe, that he seems so firmly persuaded of the power of a well-written piece to produce the effect here ascribed to it, as to make Hamlet venture his soul on the event, and rather trust that than a messenger from the other world, though it assumed, as he expresses it, his “ noble father’s form,” and assured him, that it was his spirit. “ I’ll have,” says Hamlet, “ Grounds more relative.”

- “ The play’s the thing,
“ Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.

Such



DEDICATION.

Such plays are the best answers to them
who deny the lawfulness of the stage.

Considering the novelty of this attempt,
I thought it would be expected from me
to say something in its excuse; and I was
unwilling to lose the opportunity of say-
ing something of the usefulness of trage-
dy in general, and what may be reason-
ably expected from the farther improve-
ment of this excellent kind of poetry.

Sir, I hope you will not think I have said
too much of an art; a mean specimen of
which I am ambitious enough to recom-
mend to your favour and protection. A
mind conscious of superior worth, as
much despises flattery, as it is above it.
Had I found in myself an inclination to
so contemptible a vice, I should not have
chosen Sir John Eyles for my patron.
And indeed the best written panegyrick,
though strictly true, must place you in a
light much inferior to that in which you
have

DEDICATION.

have long been fixed, by the love and esteem of your fellow citizens; whose choice of you for one of their representatives in parliament has sufficiently declared their sense of your merit. Nor hath the knowledge of your worth been confined to the city. The proprietors in the South-Sea company, in which are included numbers of persons as considerable for their rank, fortune, and understanding, as any in the kingdom, gave the greatest proof of their confidence in your capacity and probity, by chusing you sub-governor of their company, at a time when their affairs were in the utmost confusion, and their properties in the greatest danger. Nor is the court insensible of your importance. I shall not therefore attempt your character, nor pretend to add any thing to a reputation so well established.

Whatever others may think of a dedication, wherein there is so much said of other



DEDICATION.

Other things, and so little of the person to whom it is addressed, I have reason to believe, that you will the more easily pardon it on that very account.

I am,

S I R,

Your most obedient

Humble servant,

GEORGE LILLO.

