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And Letters of Richard Hurd to Thomas Gray

With Introduction and Notes by the Late Ernest Harold Pearce

Excerpt

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I

HURD to Mason

Dear Sir

I am just return'd from a fortnight's ramble into Norfolk;¹ w^{ch} must be my Excuse for not acknowledging, so soon as I ought, your present of Musæus.² This Piece has now had it's fate; & tho' you must have known it long since from other hands, I must have leave to say that ev'ry body here reads & admires it, nothing ever pleas'd so generally. It has caught all sorts of Readers from Heads of Colleges down to little Coffee-House Critics. If there be here & there a little Envy, it dares not so much as shew itself in faint praises. Ev'ry one is asham'd not to appear struck, with what charms ev'ry body. Don't suspect me of flattery: I am only making a true & faithful Report, which I do with the greater pleasure as I hope this early tast of honest fame, a motive which a Poet may freely avow & the noblest indeed that can excite to any Undertaking, will engage you without further scruple to complete your other Imitations of Milton.³ The success of anything you do hereafter is certain; ev'n if one may suppose it to have much less merit than Musæus, which nothing I am sure of your's can ever

¹ On his ordination in 1742 (E. H. Pearce, *Hartlebury Castle*, p. 279) Hurd accepted a curacy at Reymerston, near Attleborough. His local friendships with Cox Macro, the antiquary, Robert Nash, Chancellor of Norwich diocese, and others, can be gathered from Kilvert, *Hurd*, pp. 10–15. At Reymerston he read *Pamela*.

² *Musæus: A Monody to the Memory of Mr Pope*, by Mr Mason, was published by Dodsley on 17 April 1747. It was written in 1744.

³ [*Il Bellicoso* and *Il Pacifico* were written in 1744 some time before *Musæus*. See Mason, *Works*, I, p. 158.]

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have.⁴ I know you are in pain, till I quit this Subject; but you must allow me to say, it gives me the greatest Joy to observe this public testimony to the merit of a Person, who has hitherto been so unjust to Himself, as by all means to conceal it. And I could not resist the pleasure of persecuting you with some part of the Applause, you fly from, ev'n tho' I follow'd you to that very Hawthorn-shade,⁵ which, you hop'd, might secure you from it.

Next to Musæus, the Thing, that occasions most noise here is a piece of D^r Middleton's,⁶ which undertakes to overthrow the Credit of the Fathers. You may not perhaps be much interested in Theological Disputes; but as a Composition only, it may chance to entertain you. A Postscript very well exposes an absurd whimsy of D^r Chapman.⁷ Since this Attack upon the

⁴ Nearly half a century later Hurd was still of the same opinion. In his *Discourse* on the life of Warburton (1794), pp. 41 f., he referred to Pope's death as having "brought on the dawn of M^r Mason's genius", and added that *Musæus* "gave so sure a presage of his future eminence in poetry, and so advantageous a picture of his mind, that M^r Warburton, on the sight of it

"With open arms received one poet more"

[Pope, *Prologue to the Satires*, l. 142]. It must be acknowledged that Mason was still alive when this was printed; indeed, it was shown to him before it was printed.

⁵ Mason, *Works* (1811), I, p. 15, the last canto of *Musæus*: "Unseen, unheard, beneath an hawthorn shade".

⁶ In the same month in which *Musæus* was published appeared Conyers Middleton's *Introductory Discourse to a larger Work, designed hereafter to be published, concerning the miraculous Powers, which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church from the earliest Ages, through several successive Centuries*. Its intention was "to fix the religion of Protestantism on its proper basis, that is, on the sacred Scriptures; not on the authority of weak & fallible man" (p. lxxvi).

⁷ Middleton included "a Postscript, containing some Remarks on an Archidiaconal Charge, delivered last Summer by the Revd.

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antient Fathers, another with equal Violence has been made upon a certain modern one. And to heighten the surprize Dux fœmina facti—that is to say, the old Lady of Yorkshire has fallen tooth & nail upon D^r Rutherford, set on too by M^r Warburton,⁸ who leads her to the Ring, & in a short Speech, after the old Homerial mode of Taunt & Defiance, commits Her to the Engagement. The Short of the story is, that the old Lady writes with a Spirit below her Years tho’ ’tis observ’d of Her, that She has reason in Her rage & upon the whole seems to have pretty well expos’d that very foolish Book, call’d an Efsay upon Virtue.⁹ This is all the literary News I know of worth sending. In return you must tell me what grove has shelter’d you & the Muse, & what new Designs She has put upon you in your Retirement. Genial Suns and blue Skies are strong Incitements; above all in this fav’rite month, w^{ch} no Son of the Muse ever let pass without some poetical tribute to it. S^t Edw^d

D^r Chapman” (on ‘Popery the true bane of Letters’). John Chapman was the Tory candidate for the Provostship of King’s at the contested election after Snape’s death (A. Austen Leigh, *King’s College*, p. 196). His “whimsy” was concerned with “certain Loyolites in France”, who were determined “by one desperate, furious push, to stab the Protestant cause to the heart” (Middleton, *op. cit.* p. lxxix). Middleton’s phrases for it were “solemn trifles” and “elaborate nonsense”; he urged that such a treatment of the matter “adds a real force and sting to the raileries of the Sceptics” (pp. lxxxv, xcvi).

⁸ [Hurd did not make Warburton’s acquaintance until he published Horace’s *Ars Poetica* in 1749.]

⁹ Catharine Cockburn, wife of Patrick Cockburn, drew up in 1747 an answer to the *Essay on the Nature and Obligations of Vertue*, 1744, by Thomas Rutherford, D.D., F.R.S., Archdeacon of Essex and (from 1756) Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge. The matter is referred to in Hurd’s *Discourse* on the life of Warburton (1794), p. 42, and Warburton’s clever letter to the lady is printed there as Appendix B, p. 147; 26 Jan. 1745.

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Littleton¹⁰ (who is just come in from his Journey out of Staffordshire & sends Services & thanks for your Poem) prevents my saying anything more at present but that I am always, with an entire respect,

Dear Sir,

Your most Faithfull Friend and Servant,

Camb.

R. HURD

7 May 1747¹¹

II

HURD to Mason

Dear Sir,

I expect with great pleasure your Epistle on Fashion¹, w^{ch} will be sure to find me in College & am glad to hear, y^t, notwithstanding the Muse has been bed-rid, She has been able to produce thus much. Tho' you Poets are perhaps not the more lazy for appearing to be so. Your trade may go on, seu *lectulus* aut vos porticus exceptit.²

¹⁰ Edward Littleton, fourth baronet (succeeded 1742), belonged to Hurd's Staffordshire interests and lived at Teddesley. He had been a pupil of Hurd's master, William Budworth, at Brewwood School. He entered at Emmanuel College as a nobleman in 1744, became Hurd's pupil and was by him introduced to the circle. In 1757 Hurd dedicated to Sir Edward his edition of the *Ars Poetica*. "I had the honour", he says, "to be intrusted with a part of your education, and it was my duty to contribute all I could to the success of it. But the task was easy and pleasant". Hurd, *Works* (1811), I, p. 10. Littleton was M.P. for Staffordshire from 1784 to 1807.

¹¹ This and the two following letters are addressed to 'M^r Mason at the Rev^d M^r Mason's in Hull, Yorkshire'.

¹ *The Birth of Fashion*, described as "An Epistolary Tale. Written in the year 1746, and sent to a Lady with Hollar's Habits of English Women, published in the former Century 1650". Mason, *Works*, I, p. 149.

² Horace, *Satires*, I, iv, 134.

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You are very Kind in not forgetting Pope's Head,³ which I want very much to preside over the little band of worthies, which I am collecting for the ornament of my Study. If you would but, at some leisure time, contrive to give me a Sketch of your own from Hayman's⁴ picture, it would complete the Obligation.

This Afternoon I have seen a small Poem of M^r Nevile's⁵ (for the fame of Musæus has kindled up a flame which I thought expiring) call'd an Efsay in the Art of writing Tragedy. The Efsay-way, you know, has been worn quite thread-bare. But there are some fine passages in it, &, with a little Alteration, would be worth your seeing.

As you promise to be a better Correspondent for the future, & here are no Compliments, I shall depend on the favour of a Letter very soon. The Swaggerer and S^r Edward send Services & I am,

Dear Sir,
Your most Affectionate Friend &
Hble Serv^t

Camb.

R. HURD

30 May 1747

³ See L. III, n. 1.

⁴ [Hurd alludes to the vignette on the title-page of Mason's *Musæus*. This represented Chaucer, Spenser and Milton with Pope, after a design by Francis Hayman.]

⁵ [Thomas Nevile, a friend of Hurd, Mason and Gray, matriculated from Jesus College in 1738; he migrated to Emmanuel in January 1745–6, and while there took his B.A. degree. He was elected a Fellow of Jesus in 1746. In 1758 he published, under his own name, *Imitations of Horace*, but he had previously issued imitations of single satires or epistles (see L. VII, n. 3). In 1767 his *Translation of the Georgics of Virgil* appeared, and in 1769 *Imitations of Juvenal and Persius*. William Cole, in a note written in 1776, described him as "of a good gentleman's family in Lincolnshire, tall and thin; he has an impediment in his speech, which may occasion much solitariness and is a layman".]

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to your own conscience, whether “a want of finishing” should be a pretence for denying me so much pleasure, as everything of your’s gives me.

Your new Canon of Criticism³ is very ingenious, &, to say the truth, shrewdly urg’d against the Authenticity of the Ode on Eaton.⁴ Yet ’tis confidently giv’n out here to be M^r Grey’s, & perhaps it may save the honour of your new-invented rule, if we suppose it printed, with the consent indeed of M^r G., but not under his direction. And this, it seems, was the case; for it was the force of friendly importunity, we are told, that drew it from him. And, to shew how little He interested Himself in it’s fame, He ev’n suffer’d it to pass with ill-plac’d Capitals & wooden Ornaments. I remember to have just seen it at the Coffee-House, &, if I might presume to criticise so delicate an Author, should pronounce it to be a common thought, indifferently executed. This is dogmatically said, but I am just come from the reading of the new Edition of Shakespeare by M^r Warburton,⁵ a Gentleman, you know, in whose company one does not usually pick up much civility. But what He wants in Compliment, He makes up in Sense & Ingenuity, two things, which, as

³ [Mason must have suggested that the Eton Ode was not by Gray. It is not clear what his “Canon of Criticism” was.]

⁴ The *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, “the first English production of M^r Gray which appeared in print”, as Mason described it, appeared anonymously on 30 May 1747. [By this time Mason had made the acquaintance of Gray, who was living as a fellow-commoner in Peterhouse. We do not know when Hurd’s acquaintance began. See L. XII, n. 1.]

⁵ Warburton’s edition of Shakespeare was also published in May 1747, and the eight volumes which Hurd bought are still in the Hartlebury library. Hurd was at present studying Warburton’s personality at a distance. They began to correspond two years later.

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they are very rare, cannot fail of pleasing, in a Critic. My main quarrel against Him is for his Abuse of our friend D^r Grey,⁶ whom, tho' his notes on *Hudibras* may deserve all, that can be said of them, yet, for his own good nature, one would wish not to see so publicly insulted.

Sir Edward & I stay here much longer, than we intended, w^{ch} is chiefly owing to the noise & fury of Elections. It is, I think, time enough for a young Gentleman to be initiated in the Mysteries of Party, which serves to no other end, that I know of, than to corrupt the heart & byas^s the Understanding. This conduct will, I know, be censur'd by some; but, for my own part, I had rather see any one, I am concern'd with, a candid, rational man, than the staunchest Wig, or honestest Tory in England. Sir Ed:^s compliments attend you, and I am,

Dear Sir

Your most oblig'd & Faithfull

Hble Serv^t

R. HURD

M^r Powell⁷ is not in College.

⁶ Zachary Grey, LL.D., Trinity Hall, whose "*Hudibras* . . . corrected" appeared in 1744. Warburton, in his *Shakespeare*, 1, pp. xxvi f., remarks in his preface upon the recent progress of the textual criticism of the great English poets and starts aside to attack Grey: "If the follies of particular men were sufficient to bring any Branch of Learning into disrepute, I don't know any that would stand in a worse situation than that for which I now apologize. For I hardly think there ever appeared, in any *learned* language, so execrable a heap of nonsense, under the name of Commentaries, as hath been lately given on a certain satiric Poet, of the last Age, by his Editor and Coadjutor". The attack was the cause of a wordy controversy.

⁷ See *Introduction*, p. xxii.

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IV

HURD to Mason

London

29 Oct. 1752

Dear M^r Mason

I am thus far on my way to Norfolk,¹ for w^{ch} I set out to-morrow, with hopes of coming to you² on Saturday next or very soon after.

You expect to be congratulated on the success of your Orator.³ Tho' I question if the disappointment, tho' it may chagrin for the present, will do the other⁴ any real hurt. On the contrary, I, who hold that all things work together for good, I mean for the advancement of such as diligently seek and perfectly deserve preferment, am of opinion that it may do him much present credit and recommend him to some future service. At least I seemed to collect this much this morning from a conversation with one who usually speaks the sense of the great world and was, I found, well informed in the circumstances of the case and the reasons of R[ofs]'s disappointment. But of this not a word, for I come from the schools of wise men, of whom I have learnt the golden rule of caution. To you perhaps I may hereafter explain myself more particularly. But for the present I say no more, and ev'n for this little exact silence.

¹ Not his first visit to the county that year, for he had preached the Assize Sermon in Norwich Cathedral on 29 July 1752.

² [Mason was then in Cambridge.]

³ The Rev. John Skynner, Fellow of St John's, elected Public Orator at Cambridge, 26 October 1752. He resigned in 1762.

⁴ The other candidate was John Ross, also Fellow of St John's, afterwards Bishop of Exeter. He was successful against Hurd for the Preachership of the Rolls.

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M^r W[arburton] and I laughed at your account of C.'s⁵ persecuting letters. They will certainly be printed and, it may be said, will do your fame at least as much service as the fond encomiums of F. For both these however I truly pity you. Was not Pope in the right when he preferred a fool's hate to his love?

As to the faithful Shepherdess,⁶ the event, as you say, turns out much to the credit of my divining faculty, the happiness of which arises not from my superior knowledge of the town and the world, as you jestingly put it, but from my acquaintance with Garrick's ill taste, and foible as an actor. He is entre nous nothing when he is not playing tricks & shewing attitudes, for which you and Fletcher left him little room. M^r W[arburton] abuses him for this folly. By the way you must send

⁵ [It may be inferred that "C.'s persecuting letters" and "the fond encomiums of F." were concerned with Mason's tragedy *Elfrida*, which had been published in March 1752. A note of Richard Hurd's identifies C. as Comber (probably William Comber, Fellow of Jesus). Nothing is known of the letters. Above "F." Fletcher is pencilled. This is an obvious mistake (see n. 6) and the identity of F. is revealed by a letter of Hurd's to Balguy, of 26 April 1762, in which he writes: "D^r Barnard, of Eton, sent me the other day a new book by that Foster, who wrote a simple thing on Elfrida (Kilvert, p. 85). John Foster, B.A. 1753, was a Fellow of King's. He became an assistant master at Eton, and in 1765 succeeded Barnard as Master of the Upper School.]

⁶ On 26 Sept. 1752 Hurd had written to Balguy from Cambridge: "You will find Mason here, who talks of fitting up his *Faithful Shepherdess*, as being in some apprehension that Boyce and Garrick will force it from him". [From the reference to Fletcher a few lines below it may be inferred that Mason had been adapting the *Faithful Shepherdess* of John Fletcher, with a view to its production by Garrick at Covent Garden. The mention of Boyce (who had written the music for Mason's *Installation Ode* in 1749) suggests that it was intended to be a masque with music. There is one other allusion to the work. Mason, writing to Lord Nuneham, on 10 Nov. 1758, says: "The 'Faithful Shepherdess' is still untranscrib'd, and I have no curate now to do such things for me" (*Harcourt Papers*, vii, p. 10). Nothing more is known of it.]