

**POPE, HIS DESCENT AND
FAMILY
CONNECTIONS: FACTS
AND CONJECTURES**

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JOSEPH HUNTER

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P O P E:

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FACTS AND CONJECTURES.

BY JOSEPH HUNTER.

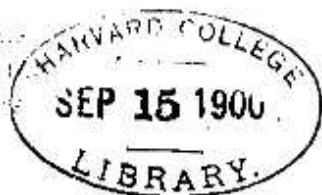
ANCHERY, whose grace
Chalks successors their way,
SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
JOHN RUSSELL SMITH,
36, SOHO SQUARE.

M.DCCC.LVII.

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THE following Tract is an enlargement of the principal portion of an account which I propose to give of POPE, in *Poets and Verse Writers, from Chaucer to Pope: new Facts in their History*—should the public curiosity respecting them call for the publication of what I have collected and written.

OCTOBER 26, 1857.

POPE:

HIS DESCENT AND FAMILY CONNECTIONS.

Two persons of noble birth, who thought themselves insulted in the "Imitation of the First of the Second Book of the Satires of Horace," retorted upon the Poet with a severity not wholly undeserved. Unlike Pope, who had dismissed them both in a line or two, they composed their attacks very elaborately, seeking out everything that could offend him,—defects for which he must be held responsible, and those for which no man can justly be so held.

One of these latter points was, want of *birth*. The lines,

Whilst none thy crabbed numbers can endure,
Hard as thy heart, and as thy birth obscure,

are attributed to the Lady Mary Wortley Montague; but Johnson assigns them to Lord Hervey,¹ who attacked Pope in another poem, in which he makes it a charge that he was

¹ Johnson is probably in the wrong. They are printed as Lady Mary's in the collection entitled *The Poetical Works of the Right Honourable Lady M—y W—y M—s.* Dublin: 12mo, 1768, p. 28.

It is rather remarkable that we should find in private documents two ladies whom Pope had made the subject of his severest satire, both manifesting curiosity about the contents of his will. Lady Hervey (Mary Lepell) writes on the 20th July, 1744, respecting one clause in it; but she writes darkly, and the editor of her *Letters* has not cleared away the obscurity. Lady Mary's curiosity is ex-

a hatter's son, and insults him on the score of the meanness of his family.

These allusions to his origin seem to have galled the Poet more than anything else that was said of him. He was then living in what is called high society, and it was of some importance to him not to be thought meanly bred. Three courses were open to him. He might have assumed to pass over the charge as unworthy his notice: he might have claimed it as a merit to have surpassed his ancestors, and risen to distinction by his own genius, "out of himself drawing his web;" or he might deny the charge altogether. He adopted the last of these courses, and in this he acted wisely and honestly.

pressed in letters perhaps not so well known; at least I copy from the originals. They are addressed to her intimate friend the Countess of Oxford.—"*Avignon*, Aug. 10, 1744.—I hear that Pope is dead, but suppose it is a mistake, since your Ladyship has never mentioned it. If it is so, I have some small curiosity for the disposition of his affairs, and to whom he has left the enjoyment of his pretty house at Twict'narn, which was in his power to dispose of for only one year after his decease." Again:—"*Avignon*, Oct. 15.—I am surprised Lord Burlington is unmentioned in Pope's will. On the whole, it appears to me more reasonable and less vain than I expected from him." It was from Lady Oxford that she had received a copy of the will. In another letter (not of this series) Lady Mary speaks of having converted an old ruined windmill on the heights of Avignon into a belvedere, from which she says there was commanded the finest land prospect she had ever seen; then recollecting what were perhaps the happiest months of her life (for her happiness is to be counted by months, not years), she adds, "except Wharncliffe." This "belvedere" must have been on the hill on which still stand the cathedral and the Pope's palace, now barracks. The prospect, though magnificent, does not naturally recal the forests and moors of Wharncliffe. No traces of the "belvedere" are discoverable.

When a defence against such a charge is undertaken, there is an advantage in the difficulty of defining that really undefinable quality called *birth*. There is an *absolute*, and a *relative*, want of it. A rich mercantile family may be a good family when compared with persons of the same class who have been less successful than they; a family owning a good estate in the country is a good family amongst the neighbours; a race of persons eminent in any of the professions may be called a good family. But place these by the side of the ancient aristocracy of the country, who have maintained this position for centuries, and what are they? and let persons even of acknowledged antiquity and elevation be brought into the company of kings and emperors, or even of the great families of the Continent, and they lose something of their lustre:—

A deputy shines bright as doth a king
Until a king be by.

Undoubtedly, Pope could not in this respect compare himself with the Pierrepoints and the Herveys; and to *them* his birth would necessarily appear obscure, if they thought at all about it, and chose to take the unkind view. But Pope knew that what was *relatively* true might be *absolutely* untrue. He therefore took the first opportunity of claiming publicly what in his opinion belonged to him.

In the *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, which was written early in 1733, he speaks of his birth thus:—

Of gentle blood (part shed in honour's cause,
While yet in Britain honour had applause)
Each parent sprung—

Then follows his touching notice of his father, and of his mother (who was then living, in her ninety-third year), not

the less genuine for being written in imitation of Horace.
They are handed down for ever as people of

Unspotted names, and venerable long,
If there be force in virtue or in song.

To these lines this note is appended:—"Mr. Pope's father was of a gentleman's family in Oxfordshire, the head of which was the Earl of Downe, whose sole heiress married the Earl of Lindsey. His mother was the daughter of William Turner, Esq., of York: she had three brothers, one of whom was killed, another died, in the service of King Charles; the eldest following his fortunes, and becoming a general officer in Spain, left her what estate remained after the sequestrations and forfeitures of her family."

In his more formal reply to his noble assailant, he says that his father was a younger brother,—“that he was no mechanic (neither a hatter, nor, which might please your Lordship yet better, a cobbler), but in truth of a very honourable family, and my mother of an ancient one.”

It happened that while this subject was fresh in the public mind, and within a very few weeks after he had finished his *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, the death of his mother occurred. This gave him a fair occasion of publicly asserting his claim to a good position in respect of birth. Accordingly, the following notice, which appeared in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for June 1733, we cannot doubt came from himself:—"June 8. Died Mrs. Editha Pope, aged 93, the last survivor of the children of William Turner, of York, Esq., who, by Thomasine Newton, his wife, had fourteen daughters and three sons, two of which died in the King's service in the Civil Wars, and the eldest retired into Spain, where he died a general officer."