

KLASSIK STIFTUNG WEIMAR

Brief(e) von Anderson, James an Schiller, Friedrich (von)

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Schiller

Eingegangener Brief von
Anderson, James

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Sir

Edinburgh. N. Britain
6th May 1790

Tho' I am altogether unknown to you, I am induced, from the idea I have formed of your character, from some of your dramatic performances that have fallen in my way, not only to wish that the literary undertaking in which I am about to engage should be known to you, but also to hope you will pardon me for taking this uncommon way of conveying a copy of the prospectus of it to you - If the plan of this work meets with your approbation I will be glad to send a copy of it to you regularly as it is published, if you will do me the favour to accept of it, as a small mark of esteem for distinguished merit - And should its execution be equal to my wishes, or the importance of the objects aimed at, it may possibly happen, at some future time, that you may feel an inclination to enrich it with a few observations. When that proceeds from inclination only, and serves as a recreation from more important studies, I shall be rendered very happy by it - But I should feel a very disagreeable sensation if I believed that you could imagine I should ever think of any such thing in any other way.

You know with what ardour of enthusiasm the writings of Shakespeare are revered by the people of Britain. Strangers, who are incapable of relishing these beauties, on account of their imperfect knowledge of his language (which not a few of the natives ^{of Britain} do not, nor ever can, fully understand) but who are very capable of judging

of the many striking absurdities that abound in his works, are very apt to think this enthusiasm nothing better than a blind national prejudice. They are however, here in the wrong. Shakespeare is, and ever will be admired, as long as the English language is known, because he has discovered a more intimate knowledge of the human heart, and a finer discrimination of character, than any other dramatic poet perhaps that has appeared before our day. — To avoid faults, in dramatic composition, is an easy task — to write smooth and flowing verses, is a thing that many are able to attain — but to enter into the human heart, and to depict all its feelings in their truest shades, with the most perfect accuracy, force, and precision, without deviating on these great occasions from nature in the smallest degree, was what no poet before Shakespeare, had been able to do — and what few after him will ever attain. Is it a wonder then, that those who are capable of perceiving these beauties should be enthusiastic in their admiration of them!

Without a compliment, Sir, (And if you know me you would not expect any compliments from this quarter) if I may judge from the specimens of your dramatic performances I have seen, they are more nearly allied to the productions of Shakespeare, than any others I have ^{met with} ~~seen~~. And I have received a pleasure from their perusal greater than I can express. I have wished to have them translated into English, that a greater number of my countrymen might be delighted with them

them than now can enjoy it. — But translations of works of taste, or poetry, I consider as a kind of literary murder, and translations of sublime dramatic compositions, as barbarous butchery in which a mangled carcass is only exhibited instead of the energetic living animal in all the glow of health and vigour. I would even say this of the best translations of works of this nature. — But what can be said of those bald and poor translations that are made by men without talents, who labour for bread alone! yet the best poets have been so translated — and their writings still prove interesting. I have commended for all your dramatic performances — And if I can find any person who is able to give the English readers but a faint idea of them (for I myself cannot attempt it) I shall be happy to make them more generally known. I would rather wish however that could be done, under your own inspection — But this is probably as little in your power, as mine. I will do what I can not to allow the original to be horribly disfigured, and I should gladly pay any person for the translation of dramatic performances of excellence, so rare, that I cannot help expressing a wish that you should not endeavour to repress your genius in that line. — But above all to entreat that you would not injure the bold touches of nature by polishing them with the sacrilegious refinements that a tame criticism may suggest. Shakespeare threw away his writings the moment they came from his pen, nor ever touched them more. — So that circumstance we are indebted, no doubt, for many of his faults — but to that circumstance also, I am much inclined to believe, we are solely indebted for those sublime beauties which others

may admire but seldom can hope to imitate — Beware then of polishing — Like the pebbles on the shore, the asperities will thus be lost — but it is in the lofty rugged fragments of the rocks that raise their towering heads above the reach of the smoothing wave, that we perceive the genuine and interesting touches of nature, that all mankind unite in one voice to admire — One of these scenes is worth a hundred thousands of those in which a faultless mediocrity prevails.

I hope you will forgive this involuntary and impetuous effusion which has accidentally arisen from the impulse of the moment — from one who is capable of relishing the beauties of elegant composition — tho' he is himself so utterly devoid of talents of that kind as never to have been able to write a single line himself. Indeed he has been endowed with grace enough never to attempt it. Should you feel any inclination to begin a correspondence with a man who can plead no other merit but candour and honesty of intention I shall be happy at it — Letters by post, will come to me safe, if addressed to Dr James Anderson, at the Navy pay office London — Bulky parcels can be easily sent to or from this through Hamburg.

Without farther apology I conclude by assuring you with great truth — that I am, with cordial esteem and great regard
Yr. your most obedient and most devoted
W^m Schiller, Jena J^m Anderson