

# **THE EPISTLES OF NOAH**

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The Epistles of Noah by George UMBER

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**GEORGE UMBER**

**THE EPISTLES OF  
NOAH**



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T H E  
Epistles of Noah

EDITED BY  
GEORGE UMBER, A.R.A.

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"Sae I've begun to scrawl, but whether  
In rhyme, or prose, or baith thegither,  
Or some hotch-potch that's rightly neither,  
Let time mak' proof;  
But I shall scribble down some blether  
Just clean aff loof."

*Burns's Epistle to J. Lapraik.*

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Glasgow:  
ROBERT L. HOLMES  
3 AND 5 DUNLOP STREET.  
1888.

270. f. 370.

## INTRODUCTION :

### **Editorial Difficulties and their Solution.**

—30—

I DON'T know whether I was more astonished at being asked to edit the Epistles of Dr. Noah, or at the original character of the reason given for the selection of my humble self for the task.

I had to read the letter containing this request over two or three times before I could realize that it wasn't a mistake; and it was no joke, but solemn earnest, as the parcel of MSS. accompanying the letter abundantly testified.

To be sure, it was extremely gratifying to me, as an artist, to find that my work was so highly appreciated by my patrons. To admit, however, that the quality of that work afforded a guarantee for a similar excellence in the thorny walk of letters, was too much even for my faith, gently stimulated as it was at that moment with the pleasant wine of vanity.

Had I understood what was best for my own peace of mind, I should have returned the parcel of MSS. at once, declining the editorship of them—in the language of that privileged but polite editorial body—with thanks.

For some subtle reason or another (which, if I were sufficient analyst of human feeling I might discover, but I suppose it lay at the root of my vanity somewhere, or in the fact that I had not courage enough to forfeit the flattering opinion the doctor and his clever spouse had formed of my powers, which is, after all, the same thing), I was unable to take this course, and so had to endure the torture which is the invariable penalty us weak mortals have to pay for passing current as awfully nice fellows.

As I sat one day, on the wrack, in my studio, casting about in my mind for something suitable to put into this miraculous preface, and confounding the ill luck that had tricked me into such a fool's editorship, a light-hearted fellow-artist, who I had favoured a few days before with a reading of the doctor's epistles, dropped in upon me.

Seeing me in such dejection, he asked whatever could have happened; were my London pictures rejected, or —



I replied, before he could finish his sentence, that I was only bothered a bit about the preface I had undertaken to write for Dr. Noah's epistles.

"Preface!" said he; "they don't want any preface. Print the old chap's letter to yourself in front of them, which is the best preface they could have, and which you'll not improve, I'll bet you what you like, though you were to sit there cudgelling your dull ass till doomsday."

"But what about the grammar and spelling?" said I.

"As to that," returned he, "I confess I think the upstart, his son, not far off the mark in the strictures he passes upon his parent's scholarship, but I admire the rogue's judgment in leaving those comical specimens unlopped, which shows him, after all, to be a true chip off the old block. Unlike that blooming youth, however, I rather enjoy the old man's Scotch, which is full of healthy fun, here and there, and honest pathos; while his English—which he is a little shaky about in his own judgment—I think is just superb, albeit it must have got a polish from his amanuensis, or else he must have made considerable progress in his composition since he first took to literature. In fact, the whole thing is jolly fine, and the less you meddle with it the less you'll mar it; so take my

advice and preface no more about it, but send it off to the printer and get it into type."

"Not even to give a critical estimate of them?" asked I, relieved, and not relieved, at this wholesale disposal of my difficulties.

"Such as to examine the correctness of his scientific facts—a thing you know as much about, my dear Umber, as my big toe does about the colours on your palate there—to see if they warrant his conclusions; to point out that you have a shrewd guess that your old friend is a preacher in disguise, though he is everlastingly down on the cloth, like a hun'er o' bricks, whenever he gets the chance; that he is about as much a doctor and knows as much about diseases as my wife's mother does, and probably a great deal less, for she, at least, has been in continual practice on her relations and neighbours for the last forty years; that, in your humble opinion, his 'Ark o' Health' is pretty much of a hoax; that, if his epistles are rightly examined into, he will be found to be more of an artist than a physician and science lecturer, and exhibitor of the anatomy of man in wax; that, at all events, some of the touches in the more sober of his sketches show that he has an artist's eye in his head, and might paint with a brush and colour, as

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well as with a pen and ink, if he were versed in the technique of our art; that you should not be the least surprised if the old block himself prided his heart on being more of a humourist than either of the foregoing; and so on, and so on, *ad libitum*, as we used to say in our dog-Latin days. I suppose that's what you would like to do, old boy?"

"Well, some such critical estimate as that."

"Not even to do that, my déar old serious Umber. Let them that reads them critically estimate them; besides, it flatters a reader to discover things for himself. There's no excitement, man, in getting them hunted out for you."

"That may be true; but you will surely admit that I will have to give them some specific arrangement, seeing there are no dates on them to guide the reader as to the time or circumstances of their production."

"I will admit nothing of the kind. You toss them all together, as they do slips in a ballot-box; then shut your eyes and make your selection. It will turn out as fitting an arrangement as if you sat in judgment on them from now till Christmas."

"But some of the epistles are as serious—I don't mean in their matter so much as their manner—