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Remarks On The Life and Writings Of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin

Orrery, John Boyle of

London, 1752

Letter II.

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LETTER II.

I Am happy, my dear HAMILTON, to find that the task, which I have undertaken of placing together some memoirs of Dr. SWIFT's life, will be an acceptable present to you. In my last letter, you may remember, that I conducted Dr. SWIFT from his birth, in the year sixteen hundred and sixty seven, to his taking his degree of Master of Arts at *Oxford*, in the year sixteen hundred and ninety one. Curiosity may induce you to know, in what manner he could subsist, or by what channel the springs of his revenue were supplied, at a time when both kingdoms, but particularly *Ireland*, were in great confusion. You will almost tremble for him, when I tell you, that in the year of the Revolution, his uncle GODWIN SWIFT had fallen into a kind of lethargy, or dotage, which deprived him by degrees of his speech and memory; and rendered him totally incapable of being of the least service to his family and friends. But, in the midst of this distressful situation, as if it was ordained, that no incident should bereave mankind of such a genius, Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE (whose Lady was related to Dr. SWIFT's mother) most generously stept in to his assistance, and avowedly supported

supported

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supported his education at the University of *Oxford*. Acts of generosity seldom meet with their just applause: Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE's friendship was immediately construed to proceed from a consciousness, that he was the real father of Mr. SWIFT, otherwise it was thought impossible, that he could be so uncommonly munificent to a young man, no ways related to him, and but distantly related to his wife. I am not quite certain, that SWIFT himself did not acquiesce in the calumny. Perhaps, like ALEXANDER, he thought the natural son of JUPITER would appear greater than the legitimate son of PHILIP.

But I must not omit to tell you, that another of his father's brothers, WILLIAM SWIFT, assisted him when at *Oxford*, by repeated acts of friendship and affection. I have a letter now before me, which, tho' torn, and imperfect in several places, shews his gratitude and devotion to the uncle, whom I have just now mentioned, and whom he calls *the best of his relations*. I will transcribe this epistolary fragment, since at least it is so far curious, as it gives us a specimen of SWIFT's manner of writing and thinking, at that period of his life.

Moore

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Moore Park, Nov. 29, 1692.

S I R,

MY sister told me, you was pleased (when she was here) to wonder, I did so seldom write to you. I been so kind, to impute it neither to ill mann

respect. I always thought that sufficient from one, who has always been but too troublesome to you: besides I knew your aversion to impertinence, and God knows so very private a life as mine can furnish a letter with little else: for I often am two or three months without seeing any body besides the family; and now my sister is gone, I am likely to be more solitary than before. I am still to thank you for your care in my Testimonium, and it was to very good purpose, for I never was more satisfied than in the behaviour of the University of Oxford to me. I had all the civilities I could wish for, and so many

favours, that I am ashamed to have been more obliged in a few weeks to strangers, than ever I was in seven years to Dublin College. I am not to take orders till the King gives me a Prebendary: and Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE, tho' he promises me the certainty of it, yet is less forward than I could wish; because, I suppose, he believes I shall leave him, and upon some accounts, he thinks me a little necessary to him

If I were entertainment, or doing you any satisfaction by my letters, I should be very glad to perform it that way, as I am bound to do it by all others. I am sorry my fortune should

should

should fling me so far from the best of my relations, but hope that I shall have the happiness to see you some time or other. Pray my humble service to my good aunt, and the rest of my relations, if you please.

You do not see in these few lines, the least symptoms of that peculiar turn of phrase, which afterwards appeared in all his writings; even in his most trifling letters. Neither his learning, nor his genius were yet arrived to any degree of ripeness. Or perhaps the letter was rather the effect of duty than inclination, and in that case, the style of it must be illaborate, and void of all freedom and vivacity. It is dated from *Moore Park*, near *Farnham* in *Surry*, where *Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE* then resided.

SWIFT, as soon as he had quitted the University of *Oxford*, lived with *Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE* as his friend, and domestic companion. When he had been about two years at *Moore Park*, he contracted a very long and dangerous illness, by eating an immoderate quantity of fruit. To this surfeit I have often heard him ascribe that giddiness in his head, which with intermissions sometimes of a longer, and sometimes of a shorter continuance, pursued him till it seemed to compleat its conquest, by rendering him the exact image of one of his own *Struldbruggs*, a miserable spectacle, devoid of every appearance of human nature, except the outward form.

In compliance to the advice of his physicians, when he was sufficiently recovered to travel, he went into *Ireland*, to try the effects of his native air: and he

found so much benefit by the journey, that in compliance to his own inclinations, he soon returned into *England*, and was again most affectionately received by Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE, who had now left *Moore Park*, and was settled at *Sheene*, where he was often visited by King WILLIAM. Here SWIFT had frequent opportunities of conversing with that Prince; in some of which conversations, the King offered to make him a captain of horse: an offer, which, in splenetic dispositions, he always seemed sorry to have refused; but at that time, he had resolved, within his own mind, to take orders, and during his whole life, his resolutions, like the decrees of fate, were immoveable. Thus determined, he again went over into *Ireland*, and immediately enlisted himself under the banner of the Church. He was recommended by Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE to Lord CAPEL, then Lord Deputy, who gave him the first vacancy, a prebend, of which the income was about an hundred pounds a year. SWIFT soon grew weary of this preferment: it was not sufficiently considerable, and was at so great a distance from the metropolis, that it absolutely deprived him from that kind of conversation and society, in which he delighted. He had been used to very different scenes in *England*, and had naturally an aversion to solitude and retirement. He was glad therefore, to resign his prebend in favour of a friend, and to return to *Sheene*, where he lived domestically as usual, till the death of Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE, who, besides a legacy in money, left to him the care, and trust of publishing his posthumous works.

As

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As during my friend SWIFT's residence with Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE, he became intimately acquainted with a Lady, whom he has distinguished, and often celebrated in his works, under the name of STELLA; I cannot think, my HAM, that it will be improper, to give you at once her history, although, according to the rules of biography, I ought perhaps to have delayed the account, till we arrived at that period of his life, when he married her: but as I may have occasion to speak of her in various parts of SWIFT's works, and as his manner of living with her will shew you, how much he deviated from the common order of men, I shall fill up the rest of my letter with her extraordinary story.

STELLA's real name was JOHNSON. She was the daughter of Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE's steward, and the concealed, but undoubted wife of Dr. SWIFT. Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE bequeathed her in his will one thousand pounds, as an acknowledgment of her father's faithful services. I cannot tell, how long she remained in *England*, or whether she made more journeys than one to *Ireland* after Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE's death; but if my informations are right, she was married to Dr. SWIFT in the year seventeen hundred and sixteen, by Dr. ASHE then bishop of *Clogher*.

STELLA was a most amiable woman, in mind, and person. She had an elevated understanding, with all the delicacy and softness of her own sex. Her voice, however sweet in itself, was still rendered more harmonious by what she said. Her wit was poignant without severity.

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rity. Her manners were humane, polite, easy, and unreserved. Wherever she came she attracted attention and esteem. As virtue was her guide in morality, sincerity was her guide in religion. She was constant, but not ostentatious in her devotions. She was remarkably prudent in her conversation. She had great skill in music, and was perfectly well versed in all the lesser arts that employ a lady's leisure. Her wit allowed her a fund of perpetual cheerfulness: her prudence kept that cheerfulness within proper limits. She exactly answered the description of PENELOPE in HOMER,

*A woman loveliest of the lovely kind,
In body perfect, and compleat in mind.*

Such was STELLA: yet with all these accomplishments she never could prevail upon Dr. SWIFT to acknowledge her openly as his wife. A great genius must tread in unbeaten paths, and deviate from the common road of life: otherwise, surely a diamond of so much lustre might have been publicly produced, although it had been fixed within the collet of matrimony: but, the flaw, which in Dr. SWIFT'S eye reduced the value of such a jewel, was the servile state of her father, who, as has been said before, was a menial servant to Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE. Ambition and pride will, at any time, conquer reason and justice, and each larger degree of pride, like the larger fishes of prey, will devour all the less: thus the vanity of boasting such a
wife

wife was suppressed by the greater vanity of keeping free from a low alliance.

Dr. SWIFT and Mrs. JOHNSON continued the same œconomy of life after marriage, which they had pursued before it. They lived in separate houses; he remaining at the deanery, she, in lodgings at a distance from him, and on the other side of the river *Liffy*. Nothing appeared in their behaviour inconsistent with decorum, or beyond the limits of platonic love. They conversed like friends, but they industriously took care, to summon witnesses of their conversation: a rule to which they adhered so strictly, that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to prove they had ever been together without some third person.

A conduct so extraordinary in itself always gives room for various comments and reflections: but, however unaccountable this renunciation of marriage rites might appear to the world, it certainly arose not from any consciousness of too near a consanguinity between him and Mrs. JOHNSON, although the general voice of fame was willing to make them both, the natural children of Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE. I am persuaded, that Dr. SWIFT was not of that opinion; because, the same false pride that induced him to deny the legitimate daughter of an obscure servant, might have prompted him to own the natural daughter of so eminent a man as Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE. There are actions of which the true sources will never be discovered. This perhaps is one. I have told you the fact, in the manner I have received it from several of SWIFT's friends and relations,

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relations, and I must leave you to make your own observations upon it.

You may imagine, that a woman of STELLA's delicacy must repine at such an extraordinary situation. The outward honours, which she received, are as frequently bestowed upon a mistress, as a wife. She was absolutely virtuous, and yet was obliged to submit to all the appearances of vice, except in the presence of those few people, who were witnesses of the cautious manner in which she lived with her husband, who scorned, my HAMILTON, even to be married like any other man.

Inward anxiety affected by degrees the calmness of her mind, and the strength of her body. She began to decline in her health in the year seventeen hundred and twenty four, and from the first symptoms of decay, she rather hastened, than shrunk back in the descent: tacitly pleased, to find her footsteps tending to that place, where *they neither marry, nor are given in marriage*. She died towards the end of *January*, seventeen hundred and twenty seven, or eight, absolutely destroyed by the peculiarity of her fate: a fate, which perhaps she could not have incurred by an alliance with any other person in the world.

My paper, my time, and every circumstance, put me in mind of assuring you, my dear HAMILTON, that I am,

Your most affectionate Father,

O R R E R Y.

C

L E T.