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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

The history of Stella, the wife of Dr. Swift.

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14 REMARKS ON THE LIFE

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.