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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

A letter from Mr. Pope to Dr. Swift.

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During the time of these ceremonies, he kept a constant correspondence with his friends in *England*: all of whom were eminent, either in birth, station, or abilities. Among these, let me begin with the name of Mr. POPE. The world has already seen a long series of their correspondence: but a remarkable letter of Mr. POPE's having been lately communicated to me, and bearing date at the latter end of the year 1713, as I cannot part with the original, I will send you a very faithful copy of it. I should first say, that it is in answer to one from SWIFT, wherein he had jocosely made an offer to his friend of a sum of money, *ex causâ religionis*, or, in plain english, to induce Mr. POPE to change his religion. The wit of the letter itself will excuse all farther commentaries.

Binfield, December 8, 1713.

S I R,

NO T to trouble you at present with a recital of all my obligations to you, I shall only mention two things, which I take particularly kind of you: your desire that I should write to you, and your proposal of giving me twenty guineas to change my religion, which last you must give me leave to make the subject of this letter.

Sure no clergyman ever offered so much out of his own purse for the sake of any religion. 'Tis almost as many pieces of gold, as an Apostle could get of silver from the priests of old, on a much more valuable consideration. I believe it will be better worth my while to propose a

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change of my faith by subscription, than a translation of HOMER. And to convince you, how well disposed I am to the reformation, I shall be content, if you can prevail with my Lord Treasurer, and the ministry, to rise to the same sum, each of them, on this pious account, as my Lord HALLIFAX has done on the prophane one. I am afraid there's no being at once a poet and a good Christian, and I am very much straitned between two, while the Whigs seem willing to contribute as much, to continue me the one, as you would, to make me the other. But, if you can move every man in the government, who has above ten thousand pounds a year, to subscribe as much as yourself, I shall become a convert, as most men do, when the LORD turns it to my interest. I know they have the truth of religion so much at heart, that they'd certainly give more to have one good subject translated from popery to the church of England, than twenty heathenish authors out of any unknown tongue into ours. I therefore commission you, Mr. DEAN, with full authority, to transact this affair in my name, and to propose as follows. First, that as to the head of our church, the Pope, I may engage to renounce his power, whensoever I shall receive any particular indulgences from the head of your church, the Queen.

As to communion in one kind, I shall also promise to change it for communion in both, as soon as the ministry will allow me.

For invocations to saints, mine shall be turned to dedications to sinners, when I shall find the great ones of this world as willing to do me any good, as I believe those of the other are.

You see I shall not be obstinate in the main points; but there is one article I must reserve, and which you seemed

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not unwilling to allow me, prayer for the dead. There are people to whose souls I wish as well, as to my own; and I must crave leave, humbly to lay before them, that though the subscriptions abovementioned will suffice for myself, there are necessary perquisites and additions, which I must demand on the score of this charitable article. It is also to be considered, that the greater part of those, whose souls I am most concerned for, were unfortunately heretics, schismaticks, poets, painters, or persons of such lives and manners, as few or no churches are willing to save. The expence will therefore be the greater, to make an effectual provision for the said souls.

Old DRYDEN, though a Roman Catholic, was a poet, and 'tis revealed in the visions of some ancient saints, that no poet was ever saved under some hundred of masses. I cannot set his delivery from purgatory at less than fifty pounds sterling.

WALSH was not only a Socinian, but (what you'll own is harder to be saved) a Whig. He cannot modestly be rated at less than an hundred.

L'ESTRANGE, being a Tory, we compute him but at twenty pounds, which I hope no friend of the party can deny to give, to keep him from damning in the next life, considering they never gave him sixpence to keep him from starving in this.

All this together amounts to one hundred and seventy pounds.

In the next place, I must desire you to represent, that there are several of my friends yet living, whom I design, God willing, to outlive, in consideration of legacies; out of which it is a doctrine in the reformed church, that not

a farthing shall be allowed to save their souls who gave them.

There is one * * * * who will dye within these few months, with * * * * * one Mr. JERVAS, who hath grievously offended in making the likeness of almost all things in heaven above and earth below. And one Mr. GAY, an unhappy youth, who writes pastorals during the time of divine service, whose case is the more deplorable, as he hath miserably lavished away all that silver he should have reserved for his soul's health, in buttons and loops for his coat.

I can't pretend to have these people honestly saved under some hundred pounds, whether you consider the difficulty of such a work, or the extreme love and tenderness I bear them, which will infallibly make me push this charity as far as I am able. There is but one more whose salvation I insist upon, and then I have done: but indeed it may prove of so much greater charge than all the rest, that I will only lay the case before you and the ministry, and leave to their prudence and generosity, what sum they shall think fit to bestow upon it.

The person I mean, is Dr. SWIFT; a dignified clergyman, but one, who, by his own confession, has composed more libels than sermons. If it be true, what I have heard often affirmed by innocent people, That too much wit is dangerous to salvation, this unfortunate gentleman must certainly be damned to all eternity. But, I hope his long experience in the world, and frequent conversation with great men, will cause him (as it has some others) to have less and less wit every day. Be it as it will, I should not think

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think my own soul deserved to be saved, if I did not endeavour to save his ; for I have all the obligations in nature to him. He has brought me into better company than I cared for, made me merrier when I was sick than I had a mind to be, and put me upon making poems on purpose, that he might alter them &c.

I once thought I could never have discharged my debt to his kindness, but have lately been informed, to my unspeakable comfort, that I have more than paid it all. For, MONSIEUR DE MONTAGNE has assured me, " that the person who receives a benefit obliges the giver : " for since the chief endeavour of one friend is to do good to the other, he who administers both the matter and occasion, is the man who is liberal. At this rate it is impossible Dr. SWIFT should be ever out of my debt, as matters stand already : and, for the future, he may expect daily more obligations from

his most faithful, affectionate

humble servant

A. POPE.

I have finished the Rape of the Lock, but I believe I may stay here till Christmas, without hindrance of business.

In the beginning of the year 1714, SWIFT returned to England. He found his great friends, who sat in the seat of power, much disunited among themselves. He saw the Queen declining in her health, and distressed

treffed in her situation : while faction was exerting itself, and gathering new strength every day. The part which he had to act upon this occasion, was not so difficult, as it was disagreeable. He exerted the utmost of his skill to reunite the ministers, and to cement the apertures of the state. I could descend into very minute particulars, were I to tell you what I have heard him say upon this occasion : but, my dearest HAM, let me speak to you with my usual sincerity. We are at present too near that æra, and have had too many unexpected consequences from it, either to judge impartially, or to write undauntedly, of those tempestuous times. Be contented if I tell you, that as soon as SWIFT found his pains fruitless, his arguments unavailing, and his endeavours, like the stone of SISYPHUS, rolling back upon himself, he retired to a friend's house in *Berkshire*, where he remained till the Queen died. So fatal a catastrophe put a final period to all his views in *England*, and made him return, as fast as possible, to his deanery in *Ireland*, loaded with those agonizing passions, grief and discontent. I am sorry to leave him in so uneasy a situation, but I must hasten to subscribe myself,

Your affectionate Father,

O R R E R Y.

L E T.