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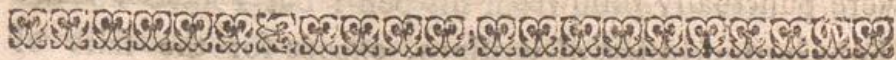
### **Remarks On The Life and Writings Of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin**

**Orrery, John Boyle of**

**London, 1752**

Letter VII.

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## LETTER VII.

*My dear* HAMILTON,

**Y**OU seem not only desirous, but impatient, that I should pass critically thorough all the works of my friend SWIFT. Your request is unreasonable if you imagine, that I must say something upon every individual performance. There are many pieces that I despise, others that I loath, and others that delight and improve me again. These last shall be discussed particularly. The former are not worthy of your notice. They are of no farther use than to shew us, in general, the errors of human nature; and to convince us, that neither the height of wit, nor genius, can bring a man to such a degree of perfection, as vanity would often prompt him to believe.

In a disquisition of the sort which you require, I shall avoid as much as possible any annotations upon that kind of satyr, in which the Dean indulged himself against particular persons: most of whom it is proba-

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ble provoked his rage by their own misconduct, and consequently owed to their own rashness the wounds which they received from his pen : but I have no delight in those kind of writings, except for the sake of the wit, which, either in general, or in particular satyr, is equally to be admired. The edge of wit will always remain keen, and its blade will be bright and shining, when the stone, upon which it has been whetted, is worn out, or thrown aside and forgotten. Personal satyr against evil magistrates, corrupt ministers, and those giants of power, who gorge themselves with the entrails of their country, is different from that personal satyr, which too often proceeds merely from self-love, or ill-nature : the one, is written in defence of the public, the other, in defence of ourselves. The one, is armed by the sword of justice, and encouraged not only by the voice of the people, but by the principles of morality : the other, is dictated by passion, supported by pride, and applauded by flattery. At the same time that I say this, I think every man of wit has a right to laugh at fools, who give offence, or at coxcombs, who are public nuisances. SWIFT indeed has left no weapon of sarcasm untried, no branch of satyr uncultivated : but while he has maintained a perpetual war against the mighty men in power, he has remained invulnerable, if not victorious.

Upon a review of the Dean's writings, it cannot be sufficiently lamented, that there is no just, or perfect edition of his works. FAULKNER's edition, at least the

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four first volumes of it (for there are now eight) were published, by the permission and connivance, if not by the particular appointment of the Dean himself. But the several pieces are thrown together without any order or regularity whatever: so that like the ancient chaos which contained an immense collection of various treasures, they remain in their state of confusion *rudis indigestaque moles*: and yet the incoherency of situation is perhaps one of the most excusable faults in the collection: for the materials are of so different, and so incongruous a nature, that it seems as if the author, (who was in reality the editor,) imagined the public under an absolute necessity of accepting the basest coin from the same hand, that had exhibited the purest. Surely the idle amusements of a man's private and domestic life, are not to be sent forth as sufficient entertainments for the witty or the learned. Posthumous works indeed are often worthless and improper, from the ill judged zeal of ignorant executors, or imprudent friends: but, a living author remains without excuse, who either wilfully, or wantonly imposes upon the world.

The English edition of SWIFT's works I have scarce seen; and I have had little inclination to examine it, because I was acquainted with the Dean, at the time when FAULKNER's edition came out, and therefore must always look upon that copy as most authentic; well knowing that Mr. FAULKNER had the advantage of printing his edition, by the consent and approbation

of the author himself. The four first volumes were published by subscription, and every sheet of them was brought to the Dean for his revifal and correction. The two next were published in the same manner. The feventh volume was printed from a number of surreptitious letters published in *England*: and the eighth volume did not come out till after the Dean's death. In the publication of the fix first volumes, the fituation and arrangement of each particular piece, in verfe and profe, was left entirely to the editor. In that point, the Dean either could not, or would not give him the leaft affiftance. The dates were often gueffed at, and every scrap was thruft into the parcel that might augment the collection. Such a conduct has been productive of a confufion that offends the eye, and mifleads the underftanding. We have lefs pleafure in looking at a palace built at different times, and put together by ignorant workmen, than in viewing a plain regular building compofed by a mafterly hand in all the beauty of fymmetry and order. The materials of the former may be more valuable, but the fimlicity of the latter is more acceptable. For health and exercife who would not chufe rather to walk upon a platform than in a labyrinth? or, who does not wifh to fee an edition of SWIFT's works becoming the genius, and dignity of the author? When fuch an edition is undertaken, I fhould hope that all the *minutiæ* of his idle hours might be entirely excluded: or at leaft placed, like out buildings, at a diftance from the chief edifices of ftate.

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SWIFT was naturally fond of seeing his works in print, and he was encouraged in this fondness by his friend Dr. SHERIDAN, who had the *cacoethes scribendi* to the greatest degree, and was continually letting off squibs, rockets, and all sorts of little fireworks from the press, by which means he offended many particular persons, who, although they stood in awe of SWIFT, held SHERIDAN at defiance. The truth is, the poor Doctor, by nature the most peaceable, inoffensive man alive, was in a continual state of warfare with the minor poets, and they revenged themselves, or, in the style of Mr. BAYS, often gave him *flash for flash*, and *singed his feathers*. The affection between THESEUS and PERITHOUS was not greater than the affection between SWIFT and SHERIDAN: but the friendship that cemented the two ancient heroes probably commenced upon motives very different from those which united the two modern divines. As in a former letter, I drew a picture of SWIFT's wife<sup>a</sup>, let me here give you some sketches of SWIFT's friend.

Dr. SHERIDAN was a schoolmaster, and, in many instances, perfectly well adapted for that station. He was deeply versed in the Greek and Roman languages; and in their customs and antiquities. He had that kind of good-nature, which absence of mind, indolence of body, and carelessness of fortune produce; and although

<sup>a</sup> Letter II. page 14.

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not over strict in his own conduct, yet he took care of the morality of his scholars, whom he sent to the University remarkably well founded in all classical learning, and not ill instructed in the social duties of life. He was slovenly, indigent, and chearful. He knew books much better than men : and he knew the value of money least of all. In this situation, and with this disposition, SWIFT fastened upon him, as upon a prey with which he intended to regale himself, whenever his appetite should prompt him. SHERIDAN therefore was kept constantly within his reach : and the only time he was permitted to go beyond the limits of his chain, was to take possession of a living in the county of *Corke*, which had been bestowed upon him by the then Lord Lieutenant of *Ireland*, the present Earl of *Granville*. SHERIDAN, in one fatal moment, or by one fatal text, effected his own ruin. You will find the story told by SWIFT himself, in the fourth volume of his works<sup>b</sup> : so that here I need only tell you, that this ill-starred, good-natured, improvident man returned to *Dublin*, unhinged from all favour at court, and even banished from the castle. But still he remained a punster, a quibbler, a fiddler, and a wit. Not a day passed without a rebus, an anagram, or a madrigal. His pen and his fiddle-stick were in continual motion ; and yet

<sup>b</sup> Page 289. In a pamphlet entitled, A Vindication of his Excellency JOHN Lord CARTERET from the charge of favouring none but Tories, High Churchmen, and Jacobites.

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to little or no purpose, if we may give credit to the following verses, which shall serve as the conclusion of his poetical character,

With music and poetry equally blest'd,  
 A bard thus APOLLO most humbly address'd,  
 Great author of poetry, music, and light,  
 Instructed by thee I both fiddle and write:  
 Yet unheeded I scrape, or I scribble all day,  
 My tunes are neglected, my verse flung away.  
 Thy substitute here VICE-APOLLO<sup>c</sup> disdains,  
 To vouch for my numbers, or list to my strains.  
 Thy manual sign he refuses to put  
 To the airs I produce from the pen, or the gut.  
 Be thou then propitious, great PHOEBUS, and grant  
 Relief; or reward to my merit, or want.  
 Tho' the DEAN and DELANY<sup>d</sup> transcendently shine,  
 O! brighten one solo, or sonnet of mine.  
 Make one work immortal; 'tis all I request;  
 APOLLO look'd pleas'd, and resolving to jest,  
 Replied, honest friend, I've consider'd your case,  
 Nor dislike your unmeaning and innocent face.  
 Your petition I grant, the boon is not great,  
 Your works shall continue, and here's the receipt,  
 On<sup>e</sup> *Roundos* hereafter your fiddle-strings spend,  
 Write verses in circles, they never shall end.

<sup>c</sup> Dr. SWIFT.

<sup>d</sup> Now Dean of *Downe*.

<sup>e</sup> A song, or peculiar kind of poetry, which returns to the beginning of the first verse, and so continues in a perpetual rotation.



In the course of my correspondence, my dear HAM, you may possibly observe some seeming contradictions, as I am pursuing the Dean through the mazy turnings of his character. But, they will easily be reconciled, when you consider, that, of all mankind, SWIFT perhaps had the greatest contrasts in his temper. He often put me in mind of that wild opinion, which PLUTARCH says was entertained by the sages of old, "That we  
 " are subject to the influence of two principles, or  
 " deities, who are in constant opposition to each other:  
 " the one directing us to the right hand, and through  
 " the right road, the other driving us astray, and op-  
 " posing us from pursuing the track pointed out by his  
 " adversary." The Manichean heresy, you know, has been built upon this hypothesis: and it is not impossible (as the doctrine itself was propagated before the time of MANES) that some antient speculative philosopher may have invented such a kind of mythology, merely to solve the various contradictions which he found fluctuating within his own breast.

You will possibly expect from me a collection of apophthegms, which the Dean may have uttered upon various occasions. But, the witty records of table-talk in my mind seem too minute and over curious; at least I must wish to treat with you upon subjects of more importance. I mean such subjects as will teach you to follow some moral virtue, or to shun some moral evil.

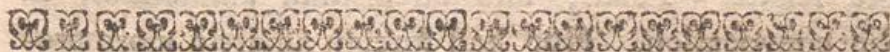
Forgive me too, if I am now and then guilty of repetitions. In reviewing the same person so often, the  
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same thoughts, if not the same expressions will inevitably occur. But, excuses for these kind of errors, are, I hope, unnecessary. Candour and truth are the chief points that I have had in view, knowing them to be coincident with your own manner of thinking.

You are now sufficiently prepared for that particular edition of SWIFT'S works, which I intend to pursue: and I shall undertake the performance with great pleasure and alacrity, because I flatter myself it may be acceptable to you, as it comes from

*your most affectionate Father,*

ORRERY.



## LETTER VIII.

**I** Was very glad to be interrupted, by your unexpected visit. The sight of you, and the happiness which I constantly receive in your company, are recollected by me in your absence, with such a kind of inexpressible pleasure, as the warmest affection and the truest tenderness inspire: and as I am always earnest to