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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 Letter to the Earl of Oxford for correcting, improving, and ascertaining
the English Tongue.

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chusing to appear candidly serious, rather than to laugh silently under his usual mask of gravity. Read it, and tell me your opinion: for methinks, upon these occasions, I perceive him writing in shackles.

The critical essay on the faculties of the mind, will make you smile.

The letter to the Earl of OXFORD for correcting, improving, and ascertaining the English tongue might have been a very useful performance, if it had been longer, and less eclipsed by compliments to the noble person to whom it is addressed. It seems to have been intended as a preface to some more enlarged design: at the head of which such an introduction must have appeared with great propriety. A work of this kind is much wanted, as our language, instead of being improved, is every day growing worse, and more debased. We bewilder ourselves in various orthography; we speak, and we write at random; and if a man's common conversation were to be committed to paper, he would be startled for to find himself guilty in a few sentences, of so many solecisms and such false English. I believe we are the only people in the Christian world, who repeat the Lord's Prayer, in an ungrammatical manner: and I remember to have heard, that when a motion was made in the Convocation to alter the word [which] for the word [who] the proposition was rejected by the majority. This instance may shew you of what sort of men, the most learned, and even the most reverend assemblies, are sometimes composed. But let us consider the conduct of a neighbouring nation. How industrious have the

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the French been to improve their language? and to what a state of perfection have they brought it? *Rome*, by her conquests, made her dialect universal: *France*, by her policy, has done the same. By policy, I mean the encouragement of arts and sciences; which will often render a nation more powerful than arms. Nothing has contributed so much to the purity and excellence of the French tongue, as the noble academies established for that purpose: and, until some public work of the same kind is undertaken in *England*, we cannot flatter ourselves with any hopes of amending the errors, or ascertaining the limits of our style. I shall not presume even to whisper to you, that I think a design of this sort is sufficiently momentous to attract the consideration of our legislative powers. Their thoughts are otherways employed, and their faculties otherways applied. But I will venture to say, that if to our hospitals for lunatics, an hospital was added for the reception, and support of men of sense and learning, it would be of the highest honour to the present age, and of no less advantage to posterity. I call it an hospital, because I suppose it to be erected for the benefit of such persons, whose infirm fortunes, or diseased revenues, may have rendered the strength and abilities of their minds weak and useless to the public: for I entirely agree with ARISTOTLE, where he says, in the words of his scholiast. *Eum præclara et magna vix posse exequi et præstare, cui facultates desunt: quoniam per amicos et civilem potentiam veluti per instrumenta necesse est pleraque effici.* The reflexions, that arise from this theme, I find,

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find, are driving me beyond the bounds of a letter: therefore I shall only add, that I heartily wish you may think an attention to your native language as useful, and improving a study, as can be pursued, in whatever station of life Providence may allot you.

There are two other letters in this volume extremely worthy of your notice. The one is, *To a young gentleman lately entered into holy orders*. The other is, *To a young lady on her marriage*. The former, ought to be read by all the young clergymen in the three kingdoms, and the latter, by all the new married women. But, here again is the peculiar felicity of SWIFT's writings; the letters are addressed only to a young clergyman and a young lady, but they are adapted to every age and understanding. They contain observations that delight and improve every mind; and they will be read, with pleasure and advantage, by the oldest, and most exemplary divines, and by the most distinguished, and most accomplished ladies.

The rest of the volume is filled up with short tracts, and papers of various sorts: mostly humorous, and entertaining. You will laugh at the story in one of the *Intelligencers*, of *Whisk* and *Swobbers*: and you will wish *the Tatler* on those inferior duties of life, called *Les petites Morales*, hung up in every squire's hall in England. I am, my dearest HAMILTON,

Your most affectionate Father,

O R R E R Y.

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