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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 XII.

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L E T T E R   X I I .

*My dear* HAMILTON,

**T**H E third part of GULLIVER'S travels is in general written against chymists, mathematicians, mechanics, and projectors of all kinds.

SWIFT was little acquainted with mathematical knowledge, and was prejudiced against it, by observing the strange effects it produced in those, who applied themselves entirely to that science. No part of human literature has given greater strength to the mind, or has produced greater benefits to mankind, than the several branches of learning that may pass under the general denomination of mathematics. But the abuses of this study, the idle, thin, immechanical refinements of it, are just subjects of satyr. The real use of knowledge is to invigorate, not to enervate the faculties of reason. Learning degenerates into a species of madness, when it is not superior to what it possesseth. The scientific powers are most evident, when, they are capable

pable of exerting themselves in the social duties of life: when, they wear no chains, but can freely disengage themselves, and like a sound constitution of body, rise chearful, and more vigorous by the food they have acquired, being neither oppressed, nor rendered stupid by the labours of digestion.

Lord BACON has justly exposed the vain pursuits of ostentatious pedants in the different parts of learning; and their unaccountable temerity in deducing general rules from arbitrary maxims, or few experiments: he has likewise fixed upon a sure and certain basis, the procedure and limits of the human understanding. SWIFT has pursued the same plan in a different manner, and has placed the imaginary schemes of all pretenders, in a more ludicrous, and therefore in a more proper light.

*Ridiculum acri*

*Fortius ac melius magnas plerumque secat res.*

He cannot be supposed to condemn useful experiments, or the right application of them: but he ridicules the vain attempts, and irregular productions of those rash men, who, like Ixion, embracing a cloud instead of a goddess, plagued the world with centaurs, whilst JUPITER, from the embraces of a JUNO, and an ALCMENA, blessed the earth with an HEBE, and an HERCULES.

However

AND WRITINGS OF DR. SWIFT. 97

However wild the description of the *flying island*, and the manners, and various projects of the philosophers of *Lagado* may appear, yet it is a real picture embellished with much latent wit and humour. It is a satyr upon those astronomers and mathematicians, who have so entirely dedicated their time to the planets, that they have been careless of their family and country, and have been chiefly anxious, about the œconomy and welfare of the upper worlds. But if we consider SWIFT's romance in a serious light, we shall find him of opinion, that those determinations in philosophy, which at present seem to the most knowing men to be perfectly well founded and understood, are in reality unsettled, or uncertain, and may perhaps some ages hence be as much decried, as the axioms of ARISTOTLE are at this day. SIR ISAAC NEWTON and his notions may hereafter be out of fashion. There is a kind of mode in philosophy, as well as in other things: and such modes often change more from the humour and caprice of men, than either from the unreasonable, or the ill-founded conclusions of the philosophy itself. The reasonings of some philosophers have undoubtedly better foundations than those of others: but I am of opinion (and SWIFT seems to be in the same way of thinking) that the most applauded philosophy hitherto extant has not fully, clearly, and certainly explained many difficulties in the phænomena of nature. I am induced to believe, that God may have absolutely denied us the perfect knowledge of many points in phi-

H losophy,

losophy, so that we shall never arrive at that perfection, however certain we may suppose ourselves of having attained to it already. Upon the whole, we may say with TULLY, *Omni bus ferè in rebus, et maximè in physicis quid non sit citius, quam quid sit, dixerim.*

The project for a more easy and expeditious method of writing a treatise in any science, by a wooden engine <sup>a</sup>, is entertainingly satyrical, and is aimed at those authors, who, instead of receiving materials from their own thoughts and observations, collect from dictionaries and common place-books, an irregular variety, without order, use, or design,

*Ut nec pes nec caput uni  
Reddatur formæ.*

The project of shortning a discourse, by cutting polysyllables into one, and leaving out verbs and participles <sup>b</sup>, is pointed at the pernicious custom of contracting the English language, the dialect of which is naturally harsh, and that harshness is still encreased by improper contractions. As SWIFT was scrupulously exact in the pronunciation of his own tongue, not the least improper expression ever escaped his censure: and I remember to have seen in manuscript a dictionary of hard words, composed by him for the use of his female senate.

<sup>a</sup> Page 218.

<sup>b</sup> Page 220.

AND WRITINGS OF DR. SWIFT. 99

The sixth chapter <sup>a</sup> is full of severity and fatyr. Sometimes it is exerted against the legislative power : sometimes against particular politicians : sometimes against women : and sometimes it degenerates into filth. True humour ought to be kept up with decency, and dignity, or it loses every tincture of entertainment. Descriptions that shock our delicacy cannot have the least good effect upon our minds. They offend us, and we fly precipitately from the sight. We cannot stay long enough to examine, whether wit, sense, or morality, may be couched under such odious appearances. I am sorry to say, that these sort of descriptions, which are too often interspersed throughout all SWIFT's works, are seldom written with any other view, or from any other motive, than a wild unbridled indulgence of his own humour and disposition.

He seems to have finished his voyage to LAPUTA in a careless hurrying manner, which makes me almost think, that sometimes he was tired with his work, and attempted to run through it as fast as he could ; otherwise why was the curtain dropped so soon ? or why were we deprived of so noble a scene as might have been discovered in the island of *Glubdubdrib* <sup>b</sup>, where the governor, by his skill in necromancy, had the power of calling whom he pleased from the dead ? I have not time by this post to write to you my thoughts upon a subject, which I confess awakened, but by no means satisfied my curiosity. I lamented to find so many il-

<sup>a</sup> Page 223.

<sup>b</sup> Chap. 7. Page 252.

lustrious ghosts vanish so quickly, and so abruptly from my sight, many of whom were of the brightest characters in history. In my next letter I shall endeavour to detain them a little longer in *Leicester-fields*, than SWIFT suffered them to stay in the island of Sorcerers.

*I am,*

*My dear HAMILTON,*

*Your affectionate Father,*

O R R E R Y.



## LETTER XIII.

*My dearest HAMILTON,*

I Believe it would be impossible to find out the design of Dr. SWIFT, in summoning up a parcel of apparitions, that from their behaviour, or from any thing they say, are almost of as little consequence, as the ghosts in GAY's farce of the *What d'ye call it*. Perhaps, SWIFT's general design might be, to arraign the conduct of eminent persons after their death, and to convey their names, and images to posterity, deprived of those false colours, in which they formerly appeared.