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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 character of Alexander the Great.

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ed. If these were his intentions, he has missed his aim; or at least, has been so far carried away by his disposition to raillery, that the moral, which ought to arise from such a fable, is buried in obscurity.

The first airy substance introduced is ALEXANDER the Great^a. After a hint from GULLIVER, that we have lost the true Greek idiom, the conqueror of the universe is made to declare upon his honour, “*That he died by excessive drinking, not by poison.*” A trifling and an improper observation, because the apparition is called up as he appeared at the head of his army, just after the battle of *Arbella*. I own my expectations were great, when I found his appearance was to be at such a remarkable juncture: and I particularly wished to see him properly introduced after that battle, as the compassion and generosity which he shewed, to the family of DARIUS, was highly worthy of imitation. There are other circumstances in the historical records of him, that redound to his honour. His tender regard to PINDAR, by sparing the house of that poet (when he rased the city of *Thebes*) seems to demand perpetual gratitude from all succeeding bards. The manner in which he visited the tomb of ACHILLES: the affection and respect paid to him by ARISTOTLE; the undaunted confidence placed in his physician PHILIP, are instances sufficient to shew, that ALEXANDER did not want some virtues of humanity: and when we consider several of his rash actions of inebriety, they convince us, how far the native excellencies of the mind

^a Chap. 7. Page 234.

may be debas'd and changed by passions which too often attend success and luxury,

*Utique defecere mores
Dedecorant bene nata culpa.*

It is evident, my HAM, that SWIFT had conceived an absolute disgust to ALEXANDER, whose character he aims to destroy, by touching it in so slight a manner, that he puts me in mind of the visit paid by AUGUSTUS CÆSAR, to ALEXANDER's sepulchre at *Alexandria*. Upon the Emperor's arrival, the body of the Macedonian hero was found in its full dimensions, but so tender, notwithstanding all the former embalming, that CÆSAR, by touching only the nose of it, defaced the whole figure immediately.

HANNIBAL^a seems to have been summoned with no other view than to censure LIVY the historian. It is not only improbable, but impossible, that HANNIBAL should have carried a sufficient quantity of vinegar for the purpose related by LIVY: but as vinegar will certainly soften, and dissolve stones, the experiment might have been improved; or so contrived by HANNIBAL, as to appear to make an easy, and expeditious opening through some particular passage, already fitted for the purpose. Such a trial, practis'd in that age of darkness, and properly managed, might have been universally received as a kind of miracle: so that LIVY could scarce have avoided inserting the report as an acknowledged truth: especially when the fact itself seems to

infer

^a Page 235.