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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

Swift's sextumvirate.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109)

liable. Your grandfather, my honoured father, (who was excelled by few physicians in the theory of physic) has often told me, that those kind of convulsions were of such a nature as generally to come on after eating, and more violently if the stomach was overloaded. CÆSAR was so careful in observing a decent dignity in his behaviour, that he dreaded the shame of exposing publicly this weakness in his constitution, and therefore guarded against it in a prudent manner, which has since been construed into a reproach. This surmise, my HAM, rests upon the stronger foundation, as all authors agree, that he was most strictly, and remarkably abstemious.

In his public character, CÆSAR appears a strong example, how far the greatest natural, and acquired accomplishments may lose their lustre, when made subservient to false glory, and an immoderate thirst of power; as on the other hand, the history of BRUTUS may instruct us, what unhappy effects the rigid exercise of superiour virtue, when misapplied and carried too far, may produce in the most stedfast mind, or the soundest judgement.

GULLIVER has given to BRUTUS five companions, JUN. BRUTUS, SOCRATES, EPAMINONDAS, CATO the censor, and Sir THOMAS MOORE. Such a sextumvirate is not easily to be increased: yet, let me hope, that the reflexion is too severely critical, when he adds, "*that all the ages of the world cannot furnish out a seventh.*" Every age has produced men of virtue, and abilities in
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the highest degree. The race of mankind, since their first creation, have been always the same. The greatest characters have been blended with the greatest faults. Poets and historians have singled out particular persons for fame and immortality: they have adorned them with accomplishments, which perhaps they never possessed, while other men equally meritorious, have been silently buried in oblivion, with only the self-consciousness of deserving a rank among the companions of BRUTUS in the Elyfian fields.

In this illustrious sextumvirate, SOCRATES and Sir THOMAS MOORE undoubtedly deserve the pre-eminence. The extravagant virtue of JUNIUS BRUTUS is shocking to every parent, and every good-natured mind. The important services of the father, might justly have claimed from the public, the pardon of his sons: and when his paternal piety had saved their lives, his precepts and example might so effectually have reclaimed their errors, as to have made them become useful members of the commonwealth. I am fully persuaded, that if Dr. SWIFT had been a father, we should not have found the name of JUNIUS BRUTUS where it is now placed.

In EPAMINONDAS the Theban glory first appeared: and died. His own merit, in overcoming the greatest difficulties, entirely fixed his reputation. A happy concurrence of circumstances has often given fame to others; but EPAMINONDAS was indebted for his superior character, only to himself.

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I am in some doubt, whether CATO the *Censor* can fairly claim a rank among so choice a groope of ghosts. He justly indeed condemned the luxury of the Romans, and he punished their vices with an impartial severity: but herein he seems to have indulged his own natural temper rather than to have acted absolutely from a love of virtue: he was a declared enemy to poetry, painting, and all the politer arts: he was proud, vain, and morose: but above all, he was so extremely avaritious, that RHADAMANTHUS in the Archbishop of CAMBRAY'S dialogues of the dead, after expressing some regard to his merits, tells him, as he was an usurer he could not be admitted into the Elysian fields: and therefore orders him to keep the gate as porter: in which situation, he might gratify the censoriousness of his disposition, by examining every ghost that attempted to come into *Elysium*, and by shutting the door against all those, who were not qualified for admittance. RHADAMANTHUS then gives him money to pay CHARON for such passengers, who were not able to pay for themselves, and at the same time declares, that he will punish him as a robber, if he offers to lend out that money upon usury. How very different, you will say, are the sentiments of Archbishop FENELON, and of Dr. SWIFT in their judgement of CATO. The one, thinks him unworthy of a place among millions in *Elysium*, while the other, distinguishes him among the greatest men of antiquity. From this dissention of opinions may be traced, perhaps, the particular temper both of the Archbishop and of the

Dean,