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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

Of Aristotle.

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AND WRITINGS OF DR. SWIFT. III

that infect and perhaps corrupt the air, in which he shines with so much lustre. But, when an original admired author, as ARISTOTLE, is really erroneous, and deceives with false specious principles, what a train of errors must arise from commentators on such subjects, who, while they endeavour to pursue and extend a pleasing enchanted prospect, that has no real foundation, deviate into a dark, disagreeable road of briers and thorns?

It is on this account that the Dean has introduced ARISTOTLE in company with HOMER. The description of that philosopher is fine, and in a few words represents the true nature of his works. "*He stooped much, and made use of a staff. His visage was meagre, his hair lank and thin, and his voice hollow.*" By not having the immortal spirit of HOMER, he was unable to keep his body erect: and the staff which weakly supported him, like his commentators, made this defect more conspicuous. He wanted not some useful qualities, but these real ornaments, like his hair, were thin and ungraceful. His style was harsh, and, like his voice, had neither force nor harmony. He was without doubt a man of great genius and penetration, but he did infinitely more prejudice than service to real literature. He studied words more than facts, and delivered his philosophy perplexed with such intricate logical terms, as have laid a foundation for the endless scholastic disputations, which have corrupted and retarded the progress of learning. He waged war with all his predecessors. He never quotes an author, except
with

with a view to refute his opinion. Like the Ottoman Emperor, he could not reign in safety, till he had first destroyed his brethren. He was as ambitious in science, as his pupil ALEXANDER was in arms. He aimed to be a despotic original: and not only to be the Prince, but the Tyrant of philosophy. What then can be expected from the commentators of his works, who were devoid of his ingenuity, and possessed of all his intricate follies? RAMUS with his covert ignorance, and SCOTUS and AQUINAS with their subdivisions, and imaginary nothings, must make a contemptible figure in the Elysian fields, which are the supposed mansions of cheerfulness, truth, and candour, and consequently must be a very improper situation for that tribe of philosophers.

*“ I then desired, says GULLIVER, that DESCARTES
 “ and GASSENDI might be called up: with whom I
 “ prevailed to explain their systems to ARISTOTLE. This
 “ great philosopher freely acknowledged his own mistakes
 “ in natural philosophy, because he proceeded in many things
 “ upon conjecture, as all men must do; and he found that
 “ GASSENDI, who had made the doctrine of EPICURUS
 “ as palatable as he could, and the vortices of DESCAR-
 “ TES, were equally to be exploded.”* I believe you will find, my dear HAMILTON, that ARISTOTLE is still to be preferred to EPICURUS. The former made some useful experiments and discoveries, and was engaged in a real pursuit of knowledge, although his manner is much perplexed. The latter was full of vanity and ambition. He was an impostor, and only aimed at de-