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Remarks On The Life and Writings Of Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin

Orrery, John Boyle of

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Letter XVI.

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LETTER XVI.

WHAT is to be done, my HAMILTON, with the fourth volume of SWIFT'S works? How can I amuse you with any remarks from a collection of tracts, not only upon exceeding grave subjects, but entirely relative to the kingdom of *Ireland*? not only local, but temporary? In the beginning of the volume is a pamphlet entitled *A Letter from a Member of the House of Commons in Ireland, to a Member of the House of Commons in England, concerning the Sacramental Test, written in the year 1708*: and it is preceded by an explanatory advertisement, that was either dictated, or strictly revised by the Dean himself. He held the dissenters in the utmost degree of ridicule and detestation. He had an openness in his disposition, and a frankness in his conduct, that bore an abhorrence to all kind of reserve: even to discretion. Solemnities and outward forms were despised by him. His humorous disposition tempted him to actions inconsistent with the dignity of a clergyman: and such flights drew upon him the general character of an irreligious man. I remember to have heard a story of him that fully shews how little he regarded certain ceremonies, which ought always to be observed with respect. Soon after he had been
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made Dean of St. PATRICK'S, he was loitering one Sunday in the afternoon at the house of Dr. RAYMOND (with whom he had dined) at *Trim*, a little town near *Dublin*, of which the Doctor was vicar. The bell had rung: the parishioners were assembled, for evening prayers: and Dr. RAYMOND was preparing to go to the church, which was scarce two hundred yards from his house. "RAYMOND, said the Dean, "I'll lay you a crown I will begin prayers before you this afternoon." "I accept the wager," replied Dr. RAYMOND: and immediately they both ran as fast as they could towards the church. RAYMOND, who was much the nimbler man of the two, arrived first at the door: and when he entered the church, walked decently towards the reading desk. SWIFT never slackened his pace, but, running up the aisle, left Dr. RAYMOND behind him in the middle of it, and stepping into the reading desk, without putting on a surplice, or opening the prayer-book, began the liturgy in an audible voice, and continued to repeat the service sufficiently long to win his wager. To such a disposition it is impossible that the gravity of nonconformists could be agreeable. The dislike was mutual on both sides. Dr. SWIFT hated all fanatics: all fanatics hated Dr. SWIFT. The pamphlet, which now lies before me, is particularly written against *repealing the test act*: and whoever considers himself related to the kingdom of *Ireland*, will find in it some arguments of weight and consideration, in case any such repeal should ever be attempted there.

I cannot help pointing out to you, one particular piece of satyr, that is entirely in SWIFT's own style and manner. In the fourth page, he expresses himself thus. "One of these authors (the fellow that was pilloried, I have forgot his name) is indeed so grave, so sententious, dogmatical a rogue, that there is no enduring him." The fellow that was pilloried was DANIEL DEFOE, whose name SWIFT well knew and remembered, but the circumstance of the pillory was to be introduced; and the manner of introducing it, shews great art in the nicest touches of satyr, and carries all the marks of ridicule, indignation, and contempt. The scoffs and sarcasms of SWIFT, like the bite of the rattlesnake, distinguish themselves more venomously dangerous, than the wounds of a common serpent.

The next tract is, *A Proposal for the universal use of Irish Manufacture in clothes, and furniture of houses, &c.* utterly rejecting and renouncing every thing wearable that comes from *England*. Written in the year 1720. In a former letter^a, I believe I have told you, that, upon looking over the dates of Dr. SWIFT's works, he does not appear as a political writer from the year 1714 to the year 1720. You will probably be curious to know, in what manner he employed his time from the death of the Queen till the South-sea year. Not in poetry, for his poetical pieces, during that period, are in a manner domestic; being scarce any more than trifles to SHERIDAN, or *poematia* to STELLA. How then is

^a Letter VI.

the chasm to be filled up? I imagine, by GULLIVER'S travels. Such a work must, in all likelihood, have engrossed his leisure, during five or six years. When that was finished, he found an opening to indulge his love of politics, and to commence a patriot for *Ireland*: and he made use of the opportunity, by encreasing the natural jealousy which the lesser island constantly entertains of the greater. His *treatise*, or *proposal*, immediately raised a very violent flame. The printer was prosecuted: and the prosecution had the same effect, which generally attends those kind of measures: it added fuel to the flame. But his greatest enemies must confess, that the pamphlet is written in the style of a man, who had the good of his country nearest his heart, who saw her errors, and wished to correct them; who felt her oppressions, and wished to relieve them; and who had a desire to rouse, and awaken an indolent nation from a lethargic disposition, that might prove fatal to her constitution.

To the proposal, in favour of the Irish manufactures, succeed, *Some Arguments against enlarging the Power of Bishops in letting of Leases*. This is too serious a pamphlet for your perusal, nor shall I detain you with any farther account of it, than to say, that it is intermixt with those masterly strokes of irony, which so often appear in SWIFT'S works.

But the general subject of the pamphlet leads me to recollect a circumstance much to the Dean's honour. He could never be induced to take fines for any of the chapter lands. He always chose to raise the rents, as the method least oppressive to the present tenant, and

most advantageous to all future tenants and landlords. He constantly refused to give charity out of the chapter funds, which he alledged were scarce sufficient to maintain the necessary repairs of the cathedral. I have already told you ^a, that, among his prebendaries, the *vox Decani* was the *vox Dei*.

We are now come to THE DRAPIER'S *Letters*, those brazen monuments of his fame. They were written in the year 1724. I have said so much in one of my former letters ^b of the cause which gave rise to them, and of the effect which they had upon the nation, that I need say no more in this place, than to recommend them to your perusal, for the style and conduct of their manner: but, lest they may appear too grave to so young a man, and one who is so little interested in the present, and much less in the past affairs of *Ireland*, you will find a paper at the end of them that will excite your risibility, or I am mistaken. It is entitled, *A full and true account of the solemn procession to the Gallows at the execution of WILLIAM WOOD, Esq; and hard-ware-man*^c. The author makes the several artificers attend WILLIAM WOOD (represented by a log of timber) to the gallows, and each tradesman expresses his resentment in the terms of his proper calling. "The COOK will
" BASTE him. The BOOKSELLER will TURN OVER A
" NEW LEAF with him. The TAYLOR will fit IN HIS
" SKIRTS;" and so on, through a number of people

^a See Letter V.

^b Letter VI.

^c Page 233.

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of different conditions. Then follows the procession, most humourously described. The whole is a piece of ridicule too powerful for the strongest gravity to withstand.

The next tract is, *A short view of the state of Ireland, written in the year 1727*^a. Of this I need take little notice, since the present state of *Ireland* is, in general, as flourishing as possible. Agriculture is cultivated: arts and sciences are encouraged: and in the space of eighteen years, which is almost the full time that I have known it, no kingdom can be more improved. *Ireland*, in relation of *England*, may be compared to a younger sister lately come of age, after having suffered all the miseries of an injured minor; such as law suits, encroachments upon her property, violation of her rights, destruction of her tenants, and every evil that can be named. At length, time, and her own noble spirit of industry, have entirely relieved her, and, some little heart-burnings excepted, she enjoys the quiet possession of a very ample fortune, subject, by way of acknowledgement, to certain quit rents, payable to the elder branch of her house: and let me add by experience, that *take her all in all*, she cannot have a greater fortune than she deserves.

I shall not make any comments upon *An Answer to a Paper called A Memorial of the poor Inhabitants, Tradesmen, and Labourers of the Kingdom of Ireland, written in the year 1728*^b. The pamphlet which comes next in

^a Page 240.

^b Page 251.

order of succession, is written with SWIFT's usual peculiarity of humour. The title of it is, *A modest Proposal for preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland, from being a burden to their Parents or Country; and for making them beneficial to the Public, written in the year 1729^a*. The proposal is to fatten beggars children, and sell them for food to rich landlords, and persons of quality.

The vindication of his Excellency JOHN Lord CARTE-RET from the charge of favouring none but Tories, High-Churchmen, and Jacobites^b, is entirely humorous, and so I think are all the remaining pamphlets in this volume. But the last piece, entitled, *The Speech and dying Words of EBENEZOR ELLISTON, who was executed the second of May 1722, written and published at his desire for the common good, had a most excellent effect^c*. The thieves, vagabonds, and all the lower class of people thought it the real work of EBENEZOR ELLISTON, who had received the grounds of a good education; and the style of this paper, is so natural for a person in such circumstances, that it would almost deceive the nicest judgement.

I have now completed my animadversions upon the four first volumes of SWIFT's works; the last of which contains abundance of ironical wit, founded upon the basis of reason and good sense. But, I had almost forgot, that, at the latter end of the volume, there are

^a Page 262.

^b Page 275.

^c Page 363.

Written in the year 1730.

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three copies of verses, two of which are addressed to the Dean, and the third is his answer: the first being my property, may serve to conclude this letter. It was occasioned by an annual custom, which I found pursued among his friends, of making him a present on his birth-day. As he had admitted me of that number, I sent him a paper-book, finely bound, in the first leaf of which, I wrote the following lines.

Dublin, November 30, 1732.

TO thee, dear SWIFT, these spotless leaves I send;
 Small is the present, but sincere the friend,
 Think not so poor a book below thy care,
 Who knows the price that thou canst make it bear?
 Tho' tawdry now, and like TYRILLA'S face,
 The specious front shines out with borrow'd grace:
 Tho' paste-boards glittering like a tinsel'd coat,
 A *rasa tabula* within denote;
 Yet if a venal and corrupted age,
 And modern vices should provoke thy rage;
 If warn'd once more by their impending fate,
 A sinking country and an injur'd state,
 Thy great assistance should again demand,
 And call forth reason to defend the land;
 Then shall we view these sheets with glad surprize,
 Inspir'd with thought, and speaking to our eyes:
 Each vacant space shall then, enrich'd, dispense
 True force of eloquence, and nervous sense;
 Inform the judgement, animate the heart,
 And sacred rules of policy impart,

K

The

The spangled covering, bright with splendid ore,
Shall cheat the fight with empty shew no more;
But lead us inward to those golden mines,
Where all thy soul in native lustre shines.
So when the eye surveys some lovely fair,
With bloom of beauty, grac'd with shape and air,
How is the rapture heighten'd, when we find
Her form excell'd by her celestial mind.

O R R E R Y.

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