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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 XVII.

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## LETTER XVII.

I Have already told you, my dear HAM, that the four first volumes of SWIFT's works were published together, and passed immediately under his own inspection. Not long afterwards came out two additional volumes, both which were supervised and corrected by the author.

*The Conduct of the Allies* begins the fifth volume. I imagine that *the Publisher's Preface* was composed by the Dean himself, but affectedly written in a bad style. The last paragraph makes me suspect his hand. "It is plainly seen, says the Publisher, that a spirit of liberty is diffused through all these writings, and that the author is an enemy to tyranny and oppression in any shape whatever." This is the character at which SWIFT aimed, and this is the character which indeed he deserved.

Throughout the course of these letters, I have freely pointed out to you all his faults, but I beg you to remember, that with all those faults, he was above corruption. A virtue in itself sufficient to cover a multitude of human failings, since from that virtue alone can flow prosperity to the commonwealth.

*The conduct of the Allies* was written in the year 1712, and it is preparatory to the peace, which the ministers

were then concerting, and which was afterwards perfected at *Utrecht*. It begins by reflexions on war in general, and then particularly mentions the several civil wars in our kingdom. When I am reading treatises of this sort, I cannot help pitying my unhappy country, torn to pieces by her own sons. A wretched mother of vultures, for whom, like *TITUS*, she produces new entrails only to be devoured.

The papers called *the Examiners*, at least those of which *Dr. SWIFT* is the author, fill up the rest of the volume. They begin in *November 1710*, and they are carried down to the end of *July 1711*. They are written in defence of the new administration, and the particular revolutions at court which had introduced the *Earl of OXFORD*, and had displaced the *earl of GODOLPHIN* and his friends.

Many of *SWIFT*'s *Examiners* are personally aimed at the *General*\*. In a free country, the power of a general is always to be feared. The greater his military capacity, or the more successful his arms, in the greater danger are the liberties of the people. On this maxim *SWIFT* proceeded; and while he was writing in defence of the commonwealth, he had an opportunity of giving a loose to his own severity, of which *the house of Pride*, and several other allegorical essays are very spirited examples.

But I am fettered in my animadversions on these papers. The present times, and the honour which I bear

\* The Duke of *MARLBOROUGH*.

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to many noble families, descended from persons mentioned in *the Examiners*, make me willing to take as slight notice as possible even of the wittiest passages in those papers, because many of those passages arise from personal reflections, or party sarcasms. In general, the several points relating to the national debt (alas! how increased since the year seventeen hundred and ten) the too long continuance of the war, and other public topics of complaint are melancholy truths, justly becoming the pen of a man who loves his country.

Within these last forty years, the political treatises have been so numerous, so various, so local, and so temporary, that each new pamphlet has succeeded its predecessor, like a youthful son to an antient father amidst a multiplicity of followers, admirers, and dependants, whilst the antiquated Sire having *strutted and foamed his hour upon the stage, is heard no more*, but lies silent, and almost entirely forgotten, except by a few friends and cotemporaries, who accidentally remember some of his just observations, or prophetic aphorisms, which they have lived to see accomplished. Thus has it fared even in my time, with the EXAMINERS, the FREEHOLDERS, and the CRAFTSMAN: and the same fate will attend most writings of that sort, which being framed to serve particular views, fulfill the purport of their creation, and then perish: while works of a more liberal and diffusive kind are acceptable to all persons, and all times; and may assume to themselves, a certain prospect of surviving to the latest posterity.

But my dearest HAMILTON, when you enter into the commerce of life, you will be obliged, in your own defence, to look into every thing that has been written upon political subjects. In *England*, a man cannot keep up a conversation without being well versed in politics. In whatever other point of learning he may be deficient, he certainly must not appear superficial in state affairs. He must chuse his party; and he must stick to the choice. *Non revocare gradum* must be his motto; and Heaven forgive you, my dear son, if the *gradus* now and then enforces you to act against self conviction.

If party, and the consequences of it had arisen to that height among the Romans and Grecians, as it has arisen of late years among the English, their poets would probably have added *her* to the three furies, and would have placed her in hell, as a fit companion for TYSIPHONE, MEGARA, and ALECTO, from whence, according to their description, she might have made excursions upon earth, only with an intention to destroy, confound, mislead, and disunite mankind.

It is true, that all countries have their parties and their factions. But there is a certain contagious distemper of this sort, so peculiar to the British islands, that, I believe, it is unknown to every other part of the world. It increases our natural gloom, and it makes us so averse to each other, that it keeps men of the best morals, and most social inclinations, in one continued state of warfare and opposition. Must not the source of this malady arise rather from the heart, than from

the head? from the different operations of our passions,  
than of our reason?

*Furoræ cæcus, an rapit vis acrior,*  
*An culpa?*

SWIFT, a man of violent passions, was, in consequence of those passions, violent in his party: but as his capacity and genius were so extraordinary and extensive, even his party writings carry with them dignity and instruction: and in that light I wish you to read *the Examiners*, where you will find a nervous style, a clear diction, and great knowledge of the true landed interest of *England*.

*I am,*

*My dear HAMILTON,*

*Your ever affectionate Father,*

O R R E R Y.

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