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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

Remarks upon a pamphlet entitled, The public Spirit of the Whigs.

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138 REMARKS ON THE LIFE

The *Publick Spirit of the Whigs* is a pamphlet in answer to the *Crisis* written by Sir RICHARD STEELE, but it contains such acute satyr against the nobility of Scotland, that in an advertisement printed before it, we are told, "All the Scotch lords then in London went in a body to complain against the author, and the consequence of that complaint was a proclamation offering a reward of three hundred pounds to discover him." It was written in the year 1712, by the consent, if not the encouragement of the ministers of that æra. In the style and conduct, it is one of the boldest, as well as one of the most masterly tracts that SWIFT everwrote. And I cannot help again observing, that on whatever topic he employs his pen, the subject which he treats of, is always so excellently managed, as to seem to have been the whole study, and application of his life: so that he appears, the greatest master through a greater variety of materials, than perhaps have been discussed by any other author.

The *Bishop of Salisbury* [Dr. BURNET] is the next antagonist whom SWIFT attacks in single combat. I can give you no better idea of this work, than by a quotation from the tract itself, which is called, *A Preface to the Bishop of Salisbury's introduction to the third volume of the History of the Reformation of the Church of England*. Towards the latter end of the Pamphlet * SWIFT says,

"However he [THE BISHOP] thanks GOD, there are many among us who stand in the breach: I believe there

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" andy

" may : it is a BREACH of their own making, and they
 " design to come forward, and storm and plunder, if
 " they are not driven back. THEY MAKE THEM-
 " SELVES A WALL FOR THEIR CHURCH AND
 " COUNTRY. A SOUTH wall, I suppose, for all the
 " best fruit of the church and country to be nailed on.
 " Let us examine this metaphor. THE WALL OF OUR
 " CHURCH AND COUNTRY is built of those who love
 " the constitution in both. Our domestic enemies under-
 " mine some parts of the WALL, and place themselves in
 " the BREACH; and then they cry, WE ARE THE WALL.
 " We do not like such patch-work; they build with un-
 " tempered mortar; nor can they ever cement with us,
 " till they get better materials; and better workmen:
 " GOD keep us from having our BREACHES made up
 " with such rubbish: THEY STAND UPON THE
 " WATCHTOWER! They are indeed pragmatical enough
 " to do so; but who assigned them that post, to give us
 " false intelligence, to alarm us with false dangers, and
 " send us to defend one gate, while their accomplices are
 " breaking in at another? THEY CRY TO GOD DAY
 " AND NIGHT TO AVERT THE JUDGEMENT OF
 " POPERY, WHICH SEEMS TO HASTEN TOWARDS
 " US. Then I affirm, they are hypocrites by day, and
 " filthy dreamers by night. When they cry unto Him,
 " He will not hear them: for they cry out against the
 " plainest dictates of their own conscience, reason and be-
 " lief.

" But

“ But lastly, THEY LIE IN THE DUST, MOURN-
 “ ING BEFORE HIM. Hang me if I believe that, unless
 “ it be figuratively spoken. But, suppose it to be true, why
 “ do THEY LIE IN THE DUST? because they love to
 “ raise it; for what do they mourn? why for power,
 “ wealth, and places. There let the enemies of the Queen,
 “ Monarchy, and the Church lie, and mourn, and lick the
 “ DUST like SERPENTS, till they are truly sensible of
 “ their ingratitude, falsehood, disobedience, slander, blas-
 “ phemy, sedition, and every evil work.”

I must follow the same method in forming your idea of the next pamphlet, by a quotation out of it, which happens to be the first paragraph. The title is, *The Presbyterians Plea of Merit in order to take off the Test, impartially examined*: and the author begins in the true vein of wit and spirit, by saying, “ We have been told in
 “ the common news papers, that all attempts are to be made
 “ this session by the presbyterians and their abettors, for
 “ taking off the test; as a kind of preparatory step to make
 “ it go down smoother in England. For, if once THEIR
 “ LIGHT WOULD SO SHINE, the papists, delighted with
 “ the blaze, would all come in, and dance about it. This I
 “ take to be a prudent method, like that of a discreet phy-
 “ sician, who first gives a new medicine to a dog, before he
 “ prescribes it to a HUMAN CREATURE.” I have quoted this short passage for the style, as well as the matter; and I dare say, even from hence, you will be confirmed in one general observation, that SWIFT maintains and conducts his metaphors and allusions, with a justness particularly delicate and exact, and without the least stiffness,

stiffness, or affectation. In some of my former letters, I have mentioned in what degree of contempt and hatred he held the dissenters, especially the presbyterians: and I need only add, that as this pamphlet was written for the meridian of *Ireland*, it ought to have been placed with the other tracts on the same subject.

The subsequent pamphlet is, *Advice offered to the Members of the October Club*. It was written in the year 1711, and is so applicable to that particular time, that I shall not make any animadversions upon it. From political tracts, the true history of *England* is to be deduced: and if foreigners were to enter into that branch of reading, they might frame a more distinct notion of our legislature, and of our manners, than from more laboured, and connected accounts of our constitution. In such a view, I am apt to think, that, at first sight, they must behold us a disunited, discontented, and seemingly an unsteady people: but I am certain, that, upon a more minute disquisition, they must find in us a fixed, and, I may say, an innate love of liberty, variegated, and perhaps sometimes erroneous in its progress, but constant, and unwearied in the pursuit of that glorious end. What people upon earth can desire a more exalted, or a more distinguished character? To speak in the dialect of the heathen world, our errors are the errors of men, our principles are the principles of gods.

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The other pieces in this volume, except *The Remarks on the Barrier Treaty*, are not, in my mind, sufficiently striking to deserve much notice. Some of them are the *minutissimæ* of SWIFT's writings, which, I believe, he would scarce have published, fond as he was of seeing his works in print, if he had been in the full vigour of his understanding, or had considered, that those kind of trifles, which are weak as feathers, in supporting a reputation, are heavy as lead, in depressing it.

I am, my dearest HAM,

Your most affectionate Father,

O R R E R Y.

L E T.