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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

Their friendship mutual and lasting.

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of the two English poets appears throughout their works: and therefore in this place, I cannot avoid taking notice of a report very industriously spread, and not without some degree of success, "That the friendship between POPE and SWIFT was not so firm and perfect at the latter end as at the beginning of their lives." On Dr. SWIFT's side, I am certain, it ever remained unalterable: nor did it appear less fervent on the side of Mr. POPE. Their letters are the best evidence to determine the doubt. In one of SWIFT's latest letters to me, not long before he was lost to all human comforts, he says, "*When you see my dear friend POPE, tell him I will answer his letter soon; I love him above all the rest of mankind.*" In my long correspondence wirth Mr. POPE, I scarce received the least billet from him, without the kindest mention of Dr. SWIFT: and the tenderest anxiety for his state of health. Judge by the following paragraphs. The first, dated July the 12th, 1737.

My Lord, The pleasure you gave me, in acquainting me of the Dean's better health, is one so truly great, as might content even your own humanity: and whatever my sincere opinion and respect of your Lordship prompts me to wish from your hands for myself, your love for him makes me as happy. Would to GOD my weight, added to your's, could turn his inclinations to this side, that I might live to enjoy him here thro' your means, and flatter myself 'twas partly thro' my own! But this, I fear, will never be the case; and I think it more probable, his attraction will

draw me on the other side, which, I protest, nothing less than a probability of dying at sea, considering the weak frame of my breast, would have hindered me from, two years past. In short, whenever I think of him, 'tis with the vexation of all impotent passions that carry us out of ourselves only to spoil our quiet, and make us return to a resignation, which is the most melancholy of all virtues. And in another letter, dated April 2, 1738, he says, I write by the same post that I received your very obliging and humane letter. The consideration you shew towards me, in the just apprehension that any news of the Dean's condition might alarm me, is most kind and generous. The very last post I writ to him a long letter, little suspecting him in that dangerous circumstance. I was so far from fearing his health, that I was proposing schemes, and hoping possibilities for our meeting once more in this world. I am weary of it; and shall have one reason more, and one of the strongest that nature can give me (even when she is shaking my weak frame to pieces) to be willing to leave this world, when our dear friend is on the edge of the other. Yet I hope, I would fain hope, he may yet hover a while on the brink of it, to preserve to this wretched age a relique and example of the last. One more quotation, and I have done. TWITNAM, November 7. When you get to Dublin (whither I direct this, supposing you will see our dear friend as soon as possible) pray put the Dean in mind of me, and tell him I hope he received my last. Tell him how dearly I love, and how greatly I honour him: how greatly I reflect on every testimony of his friendship; how much I resolve to give
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the best I can of my esteem for him to posterity; and assure him the world has nothing in it I admire so much, nothing, the loss of which I should regret so much, as his genius and his virtues.

My excuse, for I stand in need of one, by having inserted these scraps of letters, is my real desire of convincing you, that the affection of SWIFT and POPE subsisted as entire and uninterrupted as their friends could wish, or their enemies regret. It must be owned, that we as seldom see a mutual attachment between poets, as between statesmen. "True friendship, as TULLY observes, proceeds from a reciprocal esteem, and a virtuous resemblance of manners." When such is the basis, the variety in certain tenets and opinions is of no ill consequence to the union: and will scarce ever unloose the social ties of love, veneration, and esteem. Thus the friendship between ATTICUS and HORTENSIVS, although they were of different sects, one a Stoic, and the other an Epicurean, subsisted like Mr. POPE's and Dr. SWIFT's, firm and constant to the last, when that of ANTHONY, LEPIDUS, and AUGUSTUS, continued no longer than while it was subservient to their views of interest. CATILINE says, *Idem velle, ac idem nolle, ea demum amicitia est.* This often attends a vitious conspiracy; and perhaps an agreement so perfectly mutual, is scarce to be met with in any other instance. Emulation generally breaks the chain of friendship between poets. They are running with the utmost eagerness to the same goal; no

wonder, if, in the race, they endeavour to trip up each others heels.

As I have often reverted in my mind certain particulars relating to my two poetical friends, I have always thought, that the circumstance of their pursuing different roads in poetry, and living in different kingdoms, was probably one of the happiest incidents in their lives. Such a separation prevented all personal dissentions, and fixt them in a correspondence, that constantly tended to establish their endearments; when, perhaps, a residence near each other, might have had a very contrary effect. It is much easier to rectify any mistake, or to cool any animosity that may have arisen, in a letter, than to recal a passionate verbal answer, especially if uttered with all the actions, and vehemence of anger. The impression of such a scene remains long upon the mind of the person offended, and the old adage is transposed, *Vox audita manet, litera scripta perit*. Few men can submit to contradiction. SWIFT was certainly not of the number, and therefore I am persuaded, that his distance from his English friends, proved a strong incitement to their mutual affection. But, I must again repeat, that throughout the long series of letters which have been published, not the least altercations appear to have happened between SWIFT and POPE.

In all SWIFT's writings, you will find his own peculiar vein of humour. The same liberty of expression would have been improper and absurd in any other writer, but it produced the consequences which he desired.

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His seeming arrogance gained him more favour, than the humility and affected benevolence of others. His railery and freedom of censure, are conveyed in a manner more prevalent, and perhaps often more agreeable than flattery. He seldom praised, but where merit was conspicuous. A single stroke of his pen pleased more, and gave more honour, than a long flattering dedication from any other author. His style was masterly, correct, and strong: never diffusive, yet always clear; and, if we consider it in comparison with his predecessors, he has outdone them all, and is one, perhaps the chief, of those few select English writers, who have excelled in elegance and propriety of language.

Lord BACON is the first author, who has attempted any style that can be relishable to the present age, for I must own to you, that I think SWIFT, and his contemporaries, have brought our language to the utmost degree of perfection, without the help of a LONGINUS, a QUINTILIAN, or even of a dictionary, or a grammar. Lord BACON has written with an infinite fund of knowledge: every science that he treats upon, is discussed by him with the greatest learning and dignity, and he shews himself at once a philosopher, an historian, a politician, and a divine: but his dialect (for, that demands our present attention) is quibbling and pedantic; and never more so than when he condescends to flatter his royal master, and the minions of that court.

Consider the prosaical works of MILTON, you will find them more nervous than elegant; more distinguished by the strength of reason, than by the rules of rhetoric;