



UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
PADERBORN

Universitätsbibliothek Paderborn

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

Orrery, John Boyle of

London, 1752

Gay's letters.

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-49109)

that opinion; we may compound therefore to lose satyr and raillery, when we gain humanity and tenderness in their stead: yet, even in some of his highest scenes of benevolence, his expressions are delivered in such a manner, as to seem rather the effects of haughtiness than of good-nature: but you must never look upon him as a traveller in the common road. He must be viewed by a *camera obscura* that turns all objects the contrary way. When he appears most angry, he is most pleased ^b; when most humble, he is most assuming ^c. Such was the man, and in such variegated colours must he be painted.

The letters from Lord BOLINGBROKE, which are inserted in this collection, are written with an elegance and politeness that distinguish them from all the rest. We see they were not intended for the press; but how valuable are the most careless strokes of such a pen?

GAY's letters have nothing in them striking or commendatory. His sentiments are those of an honest, indolent, good-natured man. He loved SWIFT to a degree of veneration: and the friendship was returned with great sincerity. SWIFT writes to him in the same strain as he would have written to a son; and seems to distinguish him as the correspondent to whom he has not the least grain of reserve. In the several accounts which he gives of his situation at *Dublin*, and the idle manner of

^b See his letters to GAY, and to the Duchess of *Queensborough*, in Vol. VII.

^c See his letter to Lord PALMERSTON, Vol. VIII. page 373.

AND WRITINGS OF DR. SWIFT. 163

his passing his time there, he writes sometimes in an ironical, and sometimes in a contrary style. But, in one of his letters, dated *August 28, 1731*^a, he tells GAY, "that the most arrant trifles of his former writings are "serious philosophical lucubrations, in comparison to "what he now busies himself about;" and his conclusive words are, "*As the world may one day see.*" By this desire of *letting the world see* what other men of less wit, and more discretion, would carefully have concealed, he has placed himself open to the censure of his enemies, and beyond the reach of any defence from his friends. He has not only committed to the press a most despicable heap of writings, but has publicly recorded the lowest amusements of his private scenes of life, without having once suspected, that persons, whose stations, or abilities, have fixed them in a conspicuous attitude, are looked upon by the rest of mankind with a very critical, and a very envious eye. AUGUSTUS, as I remember, was a little ashamed to be discovered at a game of cobnuts; and even DOMITIAN was cunning enough to withdraw into his closet to catch flies. Great minds, you will say, require to be often unbent. I allow it; but those relaxations might be chosen, so as to make idleness appear in a beautiful light: and SWIFT would have forfeited a less degree of fame by playing many years at push-pin (the records of which he could not have printed), than by composing various kinds of *nonsense*, which, by his own option, have been honoured with a place in his works.

^a Vol. VII. Letter LIII. page 185.

M 2

I should

164 REMARKS ON THE LIFE

I should have been much pleased, in finding some of Dr. ARBUTHNOT's letters among this collection. Although he was justly celebrated for wit and learning, there was an excellence in his character more amiable than all his other qualifications: I mean the excellence of his heart. He has shewed himself equal to any of his cotemporaries in humour and vivacity: and he was superior to most men in acts of humanity and benevolence: his very sarcasms are the satirical strokes of good-nature; they are like slaps on the face given in jest, the effects of which may raise blushes, but no blackness will appear after the blows. He laughs as jovially as an attendant upon BACCHUS, but continues as sober and considerate as a disciple of SOCRATES. He is seldom serious, except in his attacks upon vice; and then his spirit rises with a manly strength, and a noble indignation. His epitaph upon CHARTRES ^a (allowing one small alteration, the word *permitted*, instead of *connived at*) is a complete, and a masterly composition in its kind. No man exceeded him in the moral duties of life: a merit still more to his honour, as the ambitious powers of wit and genius are seldom submissive enough to confine themselves within the limitations of morality. In his letter to Mr. POPE ^b, written, as it were, upon his death-bed, he discovers such a noble fortitude of mind at the approach of his

^a See POPE's Works, by WARBURTON, Vol. III, page 219.

^b See again POPE by WARBURTON, Vol. VIII. Letter XLVII.