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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

Animadversions upon epistolary writings.

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

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dissolution, as could only be inspired by a clear conscience, and the calm retrospect of an uninterrupted series of virtue. The DEAN^a laments the loss of him with a pathetic sincerity, "*The death of Mr. GAY and the Doctor*^b (says he to Mr. POPE) *have been terrible wounds near my heart. Their living would have been a great comfort to me, although I should never have seen them; like a sum of money in a bank, from which I should receive at least annual interest, as I do from you, and have done from Lord BOLINGBROKE.*" I have chosen this last quotation, not more in honour of SWIFT's tenderness and affection to those whom he esteemed, than with a design of specifying to you as fine a group of friends^c, as have appeared since the Augustan age. As their letters were not intended for the public, perhaps I was unreasonable in looking for medals, and not being contented with the common current species. In our prejudices of favour or aversion we are apt to be deceived by names; nor can it be doubted, that such writers might have furnished us with familiar letters, very different from those, which have been collected in this seventh volume. They are filled indeed (especially in the correspondence between SWIFT and POPE) with the strongest expressions of mutual esteem; but those expressions are repeated too often. When friendship has subsisted so long, that time can-

^a SWIFT'S Works, Vol. VII, Letter LXX.

^b ARBUTHNOT.

^c Lord BOLINGBROKE, SWIFT, POPE, ARBUTHNOT, GAY.

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not encrease, nor words improve it, the commerce of affection between friends, ought to be carried on in a style that neither sinks below politeness, nor rises into forced compliments. I cannot avoid observing the epistolary conciseness that was in fashion among the antients, especially their conclusive sentences, [*vale*. Or again, *Si valeas, bene est, valeo*.:] which I own seems preferable to our method of loading every letter with compliments, not only to wives and children, but to uncles, aunts, and cousins: and of consequence, every relation, that is not particularly named, is particularly affronted. It will appear too minute a criticism to affirm, that the English language is not well adapted for epistolary writings: be that as it may, it is certainly inferior to the French, which engages, and perhaps improves us by a successive flow of phrases that are peculiar to that nation. MADAME DE SEVIGNE has filled four volumes of letters, all addressed to her daughter: they contain nothing, except different scenes of maternal fondness; yet, like a classic, the oftener they are read, the more they are relished. MONSIEUR DE PELISSON has published three volumes of letters, which he calls *Lettres Historiques*, and which are little else than materials for a gazette: they inform us at what time the *grand Monarque* arose; when he went to bed; at what hour he dined; and what he said while he was at supper: yet all these trifles are told in so agreeable a manner, and appear so natural and easy, that I can scarce think the skill of OVID greater, who, in his *Fasti*, has turned the Roman Calendar into elegant poetry, and has versified a set of old Almanacs. I need not men-

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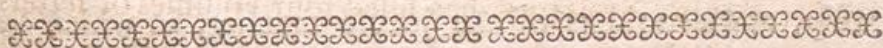
tion VOITURE OF BALZAC; and perhaps it was wrong to turn aside into the Roman and the French territories, when I ought to have confined myself to the British islands; but I love to wander about with you, and in writing, as in walking, to peep into every corner that may afford us matter of entertainment.

I am, my dear HAMILTON,

Your ever-affectionate Father,

O R R E R Y.

P. S. At the latter end of the seventh volume, is a pamphlet written in the year 1714. It is entitled, *Free Thoughts upon the present State of Affairs*. When you have read it, *digito compeſce labellum*.



LETTER XXI.

My dear HAMILTON,

IT is scarce possible to know in what manner to comment upon the last volume of the Dean's works. A general confusion and disorder runs throughout the whole; and one of the first pieces is, what ought to have been the last, Dr. SWIFT'S *Will*: which, like all his other writings, is drawn up in his own peculiar manner.

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