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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 on Dr. Swift's will.

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Even in so serious a composition he cannot help indulging himself, in leaving legacies that carry with them an air of raillery and jest. He disposes of his three hats (his best, his second best, and his third best beaver) with an ironical solemnity, that renders the bequests ridiculous. He bequeaths "*to Mr. JOHN GRATTAN a silver box, to keep in it the tobacco which the said JOHN usually chewed, called pigtail.*" But his legacy to Mr. ROBERT GRATTAN is still more extraordinary. "*Item, I bequeath to the Reverend Mr. ROBERT GRATTAN, Prebendary of St. Audeon's, my strong box, on condition of his giving the sole use of the said box to his brother, Dr. JAMES GRATTAN, during the life of the said Doctor, who hath more occasion for it.*" These are so many last impressions of his turn, and way of thinking: and, I dare say, the persons thus distinguished look upon these instances, as affectionate memorials of his friendship, and as tokens of the jocular manner, in which he had treated them during his life-time.

His monumental inscription, written by himself, and inserted at the beginning of his *Will*, may confirm to you the observation which I made in a former letter, that he was not an elegant writer of Latin. An harsher epitaph has seldom been composed. It is scarce intelligible; and if intelligible, is a proof how difficult a task it is, even for the greatest genius, to draw his own character, or to represent himself and his actions in a proper manner to posterity.

I am now drawing towards the last scene of his life. The total deprivation of his senses came upon him by degrees.

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degrees. In the year 1736. I remember him seized with a violent fit of giddiness. He was at that time writing a satirical poem, called *The Legion Club*; but he found the effects of his giddiness so dreadful, that he left the poem unfinished; and never afterwards attempted a composition of any length either in verse or prose. However, his conversation still remained the same; lively and severe; but his memory gradually grew worse and worse: and as that decreased, and was impaired, he appeared every day more fretful and impatient. From the year *thirty-nine* to the latter end of the year *forty-one*, his friends found his passions so violent and ungovernable, his memory so decayed, and his reason so depraved, that they took the utmost precautions to keep all strangers from approaching him: for, till then, he had not appeared totally incapable of conversation: but, early in the year *forty-two*, the small remains of his understanding became entirely confused, and the violence of his rage increased absolutely to a degree of madness. In this miserable state he seemed to be appointed as the first proper inhabitant for his own hospital: especially as from an outrageous lunatic, he sunk afterwards into a quiet, speechless idiot; and dragged out the remainder of his life in that helpless situation. He died towards the latter end of *October* 1745. The manner of his death was easy, without the least pang or convulsion. Even the rattling in his throat was scarce sufficient to give any alarm to his attendants, till within some very little time before he expired. A man in possession of his reason would have wished for such a kind of dissolution; but SWIFT was totally insensible of happiness