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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

The amount of his fortune.

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happiness or pain: he had not even the power or expression of a child, appearing, for some years before his death, reserved only as an example to mortify human pride, and to reverse that fine description of human nature, which is given us by *Shakespeare* in an inimitable manner: "*What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god! the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals.*" Thus poets paint; but how vain and perishable is the picture? The smallest thunderbolt from heaven blasts it in a moment, and every tinct is so effectually obliterated, that scarce the outlines of the figure remain.

SWIFT, as I have hinted in a former letter ^a, certainly foresaw his fate. His frequent attacks of giddiness, and his manifest defect of memory, gave room for such apprehensions. I have often heard him lament the state of childhood, and idiotism, to which some of the greatest men of this nation were reduced before their death. He mentioned, as examples within his own time, the duke of MARLBOROUGH, and Lord SOMERS: and when he cited these melancholy instances, it was always with a heavy sigh, and with gestures that shewed great uneasiness, as if he felt an impulse of what was to happen to him before he died.

Unless I am misinformed, he died worth about twelve thousand pounds, inclusive of the specific legacies mentioned in his will, and which may be computed at the

^a See Letter VI.

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sum of twelve hundred pounds; so that the remainder, near eleven thousand pounds, is entirely applicable to the hospital for idiots and lunatics: a charitable foundation, particularly beneficial in these kingdoms, where the epidemic distemper of lunacy is so prevalent, that it will constantly furnish the largest building with a sufficient number of inhabitants.

Lunacy may in general be considered as arising from a depraved imagination; and must therefore be originally owing to a fault in the body, or the mind. We see instances every day, where, in fevers, all the powers of sense and reason are utterly overturned by a raging madness: this frenzy conquers, or is conquered, soon: but, from more slow and chronical causes, such obstructions may be formed, as gradually to produce various degrees of this disorder, and to remain invincible to the very last moments of life. Nothing more strongly disposes the mind to this depraved state, than too fixed an attention to any particular object. Mr. LOCKE, if my memory does not deceive me, defines madness as arising from some particular idea, or set of ideas, that make so strong an impression upon the mind, as to banish all others: and the persons affected are chearful or melancholy, well-tempered or fierce, according as the objects and ideas of their minds are different. From hence it is evident, that we ought to consider the strength of the mind even in the pursuit of knowledge, and often to vary our ideas by exercise and amusements; constantly fixing a strict guard against any passion, that may be prevalent in too high a degree, or may acquire an habitual strength
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