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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

Letter XXIII.

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lines ^a are grammatically incorrect, and as they were not inserted in the first edition published at *London*, I cannot tell how they have crept into a poem, that is otherwise as exactly polished as any of SWIFT'S nicest compositions.

The remaining pieces in this volume are neither worthy of SWIFT'S pen, nor of your perusal. Many of them are spurious, and many more are trifling, and in every respect improper for the public view: so that what was once ludicrously said upon a different occasion, may be applied not only to the last volume, but indeed to some of the former, as "they put us in mind of the famous machine in WINSTANLEY'S water-works, where, out of the same vessel, the spectators were presented with tea, coffee, chocolate, champagne, and four small beer."

*I am, my dear Son,
Your truly affectionate Father,*

ORRERY.



LETTER XXIII.

WE have now gone through FAULKNER'S edition of SWIFT'S works; but there are still remaining three of

** That kingdom he hath left his debtor.
I wish it soon may have a better.*

his

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his pieces, *The Tale of a Tub*, *the Battle of the Books in St. James's Library*, and *The Fragment*, which, although not absolutely owned by the Dean, *aut Erasmi sunt aut Diaboli*.

The first of these, *The Tale of a Tub*, has made much noise in the world. It was one of SWIFT's earliest performances, and has never been excelled in wit and spirit by his own, or any other pen. The censures that are passed upon it, are various. The most material of which were such as reflected upon Dr. SWIFT, in the character of a clergyman, and a Christian. It has been one of the misfortunes attending Christianity, that many of her sons, from a mistaken filial piety, have indulged themselves in too restrained, and too melancholy a way of thinking. Can we wonder then, if a book, composed with all the force of wit and humour in derision of sacerdotal tyranny, in ridicule of grave hypocrisy, and in contempt of phlegmatic stiffness, should be wilfully misconstrued by some persons, and ignorantly mistaken by others, as a sarcasm and reflection upon the whole Christian Church? SWIFT's ungovernable spirit of irony has sometimes carried him into very unwarrantable flights of wit. I have remarked such passages with a most unwilling eye. But, let my affections of friendship have been ever so great, my paternal affection is still greater: and I will pursue candour, even with an aching heart, when the pursuit of it may tend to your advantage or instruction. In the style of truth therefore, I must still look upon *The Tale of a Tub*, as no intended insult against Christianity; but as a satyr against the wild errors of
the

the church of *Rome*, the slow and incomplete reformation of the Lutherans, and the absurd and affected zeal of the Presbyterians. In the character of PETER, we see the pope, seated on his pontifical throne, and adorned with his triple crown. In the picture of MARTIN, we view LUTHER, and the first reformers: and in the representation of JACK, we see JOHN CALVIN and his disciples. The author's arrows are chiefly directed against PETER and JACK. To MARTIN, he shews all the indulgence that the laws of allegory will permit.

The actions of PETER are the actions of a man intoxicated with pride, power, rage, tyranny, and self-conceit. These passions are placed in the most ridiculous light: and the effects of them produce to us the tenets and doctrines of papal *Rome*, such as purgatory, penance, images, indulgences, auricular confession, transubstantiation, and those dreadful monsters, the pontifical bulls, which, according to this ludicrous author, derived their origin from the famous bulls of COLCHOS, described by OVID.

*Terribiles vultus, præfixaque cornua ferro;
Pulveremque solum pede pulsavere bisulco;
Fumificisque locum mugitibus implevere*^a.

“ But LORD PETER'S BULLS, says *The Tale of a Tub*,
“ were extremely vitiated by time in the metal of their
“ feet, which, from BRASS, was now degenerated into
“ common LEAD. However, the terrible roaring peculiar

^a OVID *Metam.* Lib. VII. ver. 112.

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“ to their lineage was preserved, as likewise that faculty
 “ of BREATHING out fire at their nostrils.” These passages, and many others, no doubt, must be construed as antichristian by the church of *Rome*. When the chief minister, and his minions, are exposed, the keener the satyr, the more liable is it to be interpreted into high treason against the king.

In the character of JACK, a set of people were alarmed, who are easily offended, and who can scarce bear the cheerfulness of a smile. In their dictionry, wit is only another name for wickedness: and the purer or more excellent the wit, the greater and more impious the *abomination*. However wide therefore the difference of PETER and JACK might have been in fashioning their coats, the two brothers most sincerely agreed in their hatred of an adversary so powerful as this anonymous author. They spared no unmannerly reflections upon his character. They had recourse to every kind of abuse that could reach him. And sometimes it was the work of SWIFT, and his companions: sometimes not a syllable of it was his work; it was the work of one of his uncle's sons, a clergyman: and sometimes it was the work of a person, who was to be nameless. Each of these malicious conjectures reigned in its turn; and you will find, my HAMILTON, that bold assertions, however false, almost constantly meet with success; a kind of triumph, that would appear one of the severest institutes of fate, if time, and truth, did not soon obliterate all marks of the victory.

The

The criticisms of the Martinists (whom we may suppose the members of the church of *England*) were, it is to be hoped, more candid: for MARTIN, as I have just now hinted, is treated with a much less degree of sarcasm than the other two brothers. What relates to him is so short, that I will venture to transcribe it. “ They
 “ both [LUTHER and CALVIN] “ unanimously entered upon
 “ this great work [THE REFORMATION], looking some-
 “ times on their coats, and sometimes on the WILL. MAR-
 “ TIN laid the first hand; at one twitch brought off a
 “ large handful of POINTS; and, with a second pull,
 “ stript away ten dozen yards of FRINGE. But, when he
 “ had gone thus far, he demurred a while: he knew
 “ very well, there yet remained a great deal more to be
 “ done: however, the first heat being over, his violence
 “ began to cool, and he resolved to proceed more mode-
 “ rately in the rest of the work; having already very
 “ narrowly escaped a swinging rent in pulling off the
 “ POINTS, which, being TAGGED WITH SILVER (as
 “ we have observed before), the judicious workman had,
 “ with much sagacity, double-sown to preserve them from
 “ FALLING. Resolving therefore to rid his coat of a huge
 “ quantity of GOLD LACE, he picked up the stitches with
 “ much caution, and diligently gleaned out all the loose
 “ threads as he went; which proved to be a work of time.
 “ Then he fell about the embroidered INDIAN figures of
 “ men, women, and children; against which, as you have
 “ heard in its due place, their father’s testament was ex-
 “ tremely exact and severe. These, with much dexterity
 “ and application, were, after a while, quite eradicated,

“ or

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“ or utterly defaced. For the rest, where he observed the
 “ embroidery to be worked so close, as not to be got away
 “ without damaging the cloth, or where it served to hide
 “ or strengthen any flaw in the body of the coat, contracted
 “ by the perpetual tampering of workmen upon it; he con-
 “ cluded, the wisest course was to let it remain, resolving
 “ in no case whatsoever, that the substance of the stuff
 “ should suffer injury, which he thought the best method for
 “ serving the true intent and meaning of his father’s
 “ WILL. And this is the nearest account I have been able
 “ to collect of MARTIN’s proceedings upon this great revo-
 “ lution.”

The church of England can scarce be angry at such a favourable account of LUTHER: especially as we have since reformed from LUTHER himself, and, so far as our judgments can teach us, have restored our *habits* still nearer to the original fashion, which they bore at the perfection of the *Testament*. The best, and, what is more extraordinary, the most serious apology, that can be made for the author, was written by himself, and is dated June 3, 1709; from which time, it has been constantly printed in a prefatory manner to the work itself. In this apology, Dr. SWIFT candidly acknowledges, that
 “ There are several youthful sallies, which, from the grave
 “ and the wise, may deserve a rebuke.” And further adds, that “ He will forfeit his life, if any one opinion
 “ can fairly be deduced from the book, which is contrary
 “ to religion or morality.”

The dedication to *Prince Posterity* will please you; nor will you be less entertained by the several *digressions*

which are written in ridicule of bad critics, dull commentators, and the whole fraternity of Grub-street philosophers. *The Introduction* abounds with wit and humour: but the author never loses the least opportunity of venting his keenest satyr against Mr. DRYDEN, and consequently loads with insults the greatest, although the least prosperous, of our English poets. Yet who can avoid smiling, when he finds the *Hind and Panther* mentioned as *a complete abstract of sixteen thousand schoolmen*, and when TOMMY PORTS is supposed written by *the same hand*, as *a supplement to the former work*? I am willing to imagine, that DRYDEN, in some manner or other, had offended my friend Dr. SWIFT, who, otherwise, I hope, would have been more indulgent to the errors of a man oppressed by poverty, driven on by party, and bewildered by religion.

But although our satyrical author, now-and-then, may have indulged himself in some personal animosities, or may have taken freedoms not so perfectly consistent with that solemn decency, which is required from a clergyman; yet, throughout the whole piece, there is a vein of ridicule and good humour, that laughs pedantry and affectation into the lowest degree of contempt, and exposes the character of PETER and JACK in such a manner, as never will be forgiven, and never can be answered.

The *Battle of the Books* took its rise from the controversy between Sir WILLIAM TEMPLE and Mr. WOTTON: a controversy which made much noise, and employed many pens, towards the latter end of the last century.

This

This humorous treatise is drawn up in an heroic comic style, in which SWIFT, with great wit and spirit, gives the victory to the former. The general plan is excellent; but particular parts are defective. The frequent chasms puzzle and interrupt the narrative: they neither convey any latent ideas, nor point out any distant or occult sarcasms. Some characters are barely touched upon, which might have been extended; others are enlarged, which might have been contracted. The name of HORACE is scarce inserted, and VIRGIL is introduced only for an opportunity of comparing his translator DRYDEN, to *the Lady in a Lobster: to a Mouse under a Canopy of State: and to a scriwelled Beau within the Penthouse of a full-bottomed Perriwig*. These similies carry the true stamp of ridicule: but rancour must be very prevalent in the heart of an author, who could overlook the merits of DRYDEN; many of whose dedications and prefaces are as fine compositions, and as just pieces of criticism, as any in our language. The translation of VIRGIL was a work of haste and indigence: DRYDEN was equal to the undertaking, but unfortunate during the conduct of it.

And now, as I have mentioned VIRGIL, and as I indulge myself in an unlimited manner of expressing to you my thoughts, I must plead that kind of habit for inserting a conjecture, which, perhaps, is purely chimerical, but which, in the pursuit of it, has given me no small degree of pleasure, as the motive tends to vindicate one of your favourite poets from the censure of ingratitude.

The critics have been justly surpris'd, that VIRGIL seems entirely to have neglected HORACE, when it is

evident, that HORACE takes frequent occasions of expressing the greatest tenderness, esteem, and gratitude, for VIRGIL. They have endeavoured to account for this neglect, by supposing, that some of VIRGIL's poems have been lost; otherwise, who could imagine, that the author of the *Æneid* should have passed over in silence the name of so excellent, and so estimable a friend? In the Greek and Roman writers it is not to be doubted, that there are many expressions, which, at the time when written, were evident marks to distinguish particular characters. These, by the course of years, are now rendered doubtful and obscure. HORACE's *Glycon* was always taken for a gladiator, till at the bottom of the statue of the HERCULES FARNESE an old inscription was discovered, that shews it was so called from the name of the famous sculptor who made it. Many passages in Mr. POPE's poems, which are now easily explained, may, in a few centuries, become entirely unintelligible, and (excuse the improbability of the circumstance) when it is no longer remembered that he lived at *Twitnam*, he will no longer be known for *the Swan of Thames*.

VIRGIL, in his *Eclogues*, celebrates POLLIO, VARUS, and GALLUS, and he dedicates his *Georgics* to MECÆNAS: but in the *Æneid*, he could not introduce any of his cotemporaries, except by feigned names: and even then, the connexion of the fable must be preserved, and some poetical differences must be allowed. Such a conduct has induced some of the commentators to affix various names to particular characters in the *Æneid*. They have mentioned MARIUS, POMPEY, CURIO, and others; but

but their hints and sketches have been imperfect, and written at random.

Bishop ATTERBURY is more explicit. That learned prelate, in all the elegance and delicacy of criticism, illustrates the passage relating to IAPIS, and fixes to it the name and character of ANTONIUS MUSA, an eminent physician, and polite scholar, at Rome. The BARRY a of his day.

From these attempts, I have been encouraged to search for the character of HORACE; and instead of an imperfect picture, I hope, I shall be able to point out a very remarkable likeness in the following lines.

*Et amicum Cretea musis,
Cretea musarum comitem, cui carmina semper
Et citharæ cordi, numerosque intendere nervis;
Semper equos, atque arma virum, pugnasque canebat.*

An ode in HORACE, which appears, by the mention of TIRIDATES, to have been written at the same time with the seventh book of VIRGIL, bears a very striking resemblance to some part of this quotation. You remember

*Musis amicus tristitiam et metus
Tradam protervis in mare Creticum
Portare ventis.*

The *Musis amicus* was, in all probability, a synonymous name of HORACE, by which he was then distin-

guished, * Dr. EDWARD BARRY of Dublin.

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guished, and perfectly well known at *Rome*. Such an appellation might be given to him from this gay and spirited ode. He begins it, by delivering at once all his cares and fears to be buried in the Cretan sea. *TIBULLUS* and *ANACREON* have the same general sentiment; but *HORACE* chooses this particular part of the ocean for the eternal grave of all his cares. A circumstance which might occasion *VIRGIL* to give him the name of *CRETEAS*: and I dare say, *HAM*, you will agree with me in observing, that *VIRGIL* repeats that name with a certain tenderness and esteem, as if he was unwilling to quit the subject, and as if he could wish to dwell longer in the description of so excellent a genius, and so remarkable a poet.

But the line,

Et citharæ cordi, numerosque intendere nervis,

seems directly to point out *HORACE*, and to celebrate him for his lyric performances. *MONSIEUR DACIER*, in the preface to his *HORACE*, gives an history of the progress and decay of lyric poetry. He observes, that from the foundation of *Rome* to the reign of *AUGUSTUS CÆSAR* (a space of above seven hundred years) not one lyric poet had appeared. *HORACE* was the first Roman, who, with a surprising natural genius, having studied and acquired the beauty and strength of numbers, formed himself upon the Grecian plan, and became the best Latin lyric poet of the Augustan age. From whence, it almost

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almost evidently appears, that this passage can only be adapted to him.

Thus far, without straining the explanation of these lines, I would willingly hope, that the features of HORACE are discernible. The last verse indeed does not seem to answer so exactly his poetical character.

Semper equos, atque arma virum, pugnasque canebat.

Let us try, if we cannot banish the objection, and establish a perfect confirmation of the resemblance.

Several of the odes of HORACE are remarkably fine in the warlike strain, particularly the ode to AUGUSTUS after the battle of *Actium*, when the senate had agreed to address solemn hymns to the Emperor in the same manner as to the celestial deities. The ode beginning *Cælo tonantem*, and occasioned by the conquest over the Britons and Persians, is full of fire. But the address to ASINIUS POLLIO breathes war and slaughter still in a more exalted strain.

*Jam nunc minaci murmure cornuum
Perstringis aures : jam litui strepunt :
Jam fulgor armorum fugaces
Terret equos, equitumque vultus.*

MONSIEUR SANADON observes, that this stanza, and the four which follow it, are written with the greatest spirit of lyric poetry. His expression is *La force de Poésie lyrique ne va point au de là.*

It is very certain, that HORACE was a perfect master of the poetical array of battle, the din of war, and the sound
of

of clarions : or, in the words of VIRGIL, *equos, atque arma virum, pugnasque canebat*. But, notwithstanding his powers in that style, he seems constantly desirous of declining any long poem, or laboured performance, upon these subjects. In his ode beginning *Motum ex Metello*, he advises ASINIUS POLLIO to lay aside all intentions of writing tragedy, and he farther urges him to complete a poem upon the civil wars, between ANTONY and OCTAVIUS: but he damps this advice, by pointing out the danger of the theme. He tells POLLIO,

*Periculosæ plenum opus alexæ
Tractas ; et incedis per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso.*

Thus, while he expatiates upon the difficulty of the undertaking, he shews himself superior to the labours that deter him. As a Poet, we may be assured he was equal to the task : as a politician, we may presume, he avoided it. He was unwilling to remind his imperial master of a war, in which he had appeared in arms against his prince : and in which, the character of AUGUSTUS had not been distinguished with the most perfect degree of lustre. Yet, that such a kind of work was expected from him, may undoubtedly be deduced from what he says in one of his odes to MECÆNAS.

*Tuque pedestribus
Dices historiis prælia Cæsaris,
Mecænas, MELIUS.*

Here

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Here you see, HORACE assigns to his patron MECÆNAS all the laurels that might accrue from a complete poem upon the wars of AUGUSTUS: and in another place, the poet, with more modesty than justice, says,

*Cupidum, pater optime, vires
Deficiunt: neque enim quisvis horrentia pilis
Agmina, nec fracta pereuntes cuspide Gallos,
Aut labentis equo describat vulnera Parthi.*

These lines are in such a strain, as to demonstrate the powers of the muse much less deficient than the will. It is very probable therefore, that, during the time, while the public expectations were raised in hopes of seeing HORACE undertake some poem entirely formed upon the military plan, VIRGIL might have composed that part of the *Æneid* from whence I have drawn my quotation, and might very justly have given HORACE the character of CRETEAS, not only in consequence of the odes already written, but under a kind of certainty, of seeing future and more perfect poems in the same strain.

I submit to your judgment, whether these surmises are just. I really think they bear a great resemblance to truth. Positive assertions on such doubtful points, I leave to more established critics: and return from the civil wars in *Italy*, to the civil wars in St JAMES'S library.

The two chief heroes among the modern generals, are WOTTON and BENTLEY. Their figures are displayed in the most disadvantageous attitudes. The former is described,

described, *full of spleen, dulness, and ill manners.* The latter is represented, *tall, without shape or comeliness: large, without strength or proportion.* But, I will not anticipate your future pleasure in reading a performance that you will probably wish longer, and more complete.

The *Battle*, which is maintained by the antients with great superiority of strength, though not of numbers, ends with the demolition of BENTLEY and his friend WOTTON by the lance of your grandfather. And here, my son, it is not possible for me to avoid taking notice of one particular passage relating to my father. “BOYLE,
“ says the author, *clad in a suit of armour, WHICH HAD
“ BEEN GIVEN HIM BY ALL THE GODS, advanced to-
“ wards the trembling foe, who now fled before him.”*

I shall not dispute about the gift of the armour: but thus far I will venture to observe, that the gods never bestowed celestial armour, except upon heroes, whose courage, and superior strength, distinguished them from the rest of mankind; whose merits and abilities were already conspicuous; and who could wield, though young, the sword of MARS, and adorn it with all the virtues of MINERVA: and let me assure you, my dearest HAMILTON, that your grandfather sustained the character, which he had so early acquired, to the last moment of his life, and, on many occasions, exerted his abilities in such a manner, as evidently shewed, that he wanted neither armour, nor extraordinary assistance, to add to his first victory such superior ornaments, as will for ever be repositied among the brightest trophies, in the temple of fame.

But

But before I quit this subject, give me leave to own how sensibly I felt the force of an arrow directed from his hand. The wound, I believe, was not designed to be lasting. It was given in a passion, and upon an extraordinary occasion: but afterwards he was so desirous to heal it, by a return of the greatest degree of friendship and affection, that he had directed the remaining scar to be entirely erased, when his unexpected and too sudden death prevented the completion of his kind intentions, and the perfection of my cure. With difficulty I survived the shock. As it was not in my power to avoid the severe decree, I obeyed: and, by my obedience, have flattered myself, that I submitted to the will of heaven. However, I have since thought, that I could not offer a more grateful sacrifice to his manes, than by exerting those faculties, which he had, at first, cultivated with so much care; and had depressed, at last, perhaps only to raise them higher. Oh my son! how often have I reflected upon the happiness of *ÆNEAS*, in hearing the ghost of *ANCHISES* say,

*Sic equidem ducebam animo reba; que futurum,
Tempora dinumerans: nec me mea cura fefellit!*

The name of my honoured father has insensibly drawn me into this digression, which, to speak the truth, I look upon as due to his memory, to my own sentiments, and to your filial tenderness.

The Fragment, or a Discourse concerning the mechanical operation of the Spirit, is a satyr against enthusiasm, and those

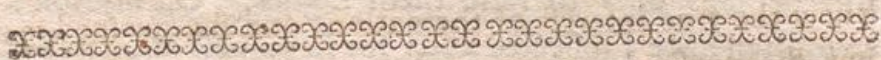
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those affected inspirations, which constantly begin in folly, and very often end in vice. In this treatise, the author has revelled in too licentious a vein of sarcasm: many of his ideas are nauseous, some are indecent, and others have an irreligious tendency: nor is the piece itself equal in wit and humour either to *The Tale of a Tub*, or *The Battle of the Books*. I should constantly choose rather to praise, than to arraign, any part of my friend SWIFT's writings: but in those tracts, where he tries to make us uneasy with ourselves, and unhappy in our present existence, *there*, I must yield him up entirely to censure.

I am, dear HAMILTON,

Your most affectionate Father,

ORRERY.



LETTER XXIV.

DR. SWIFT left behind him few manuscripts. Not one of any consequence, except an account of the peace of *Utrecht*, which he called *an History of the four lost Years of Queen ANNE*. The title of an history is too pompous for such a performance. In the historical style, it wants dignity, and candour: but as a pamphlet, it will appear the best defence of Lord OXFORD's administration,