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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 XXIV.

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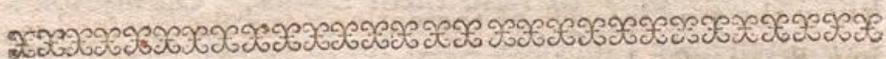
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those affected inspirations, which constantly begin in folly, and very often end in vice. In this treatise, the author has revelled in too licentious a vein of sarcasm: many of his ideas are nauseous, some are indecent, and others have an irreligious 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,

stration, and the clearest account of the treaty of *Utrecht*, that has hitherto been written.

In some of his leisure hours, he had begun an history of *England*, and had pursued it through two or three reigns, from *WILLIAM* the Conqueror. The contempt which he conceived of our antient monarchs, made him soon lay the design aside. His aversion to kings was invincible. You will say perhaps, this aversion was rooted in pride: possibly it might: but, in your course of reading, you will find so very few princes whose merits and abilities entitle them even to a crown of rushes, that you will probably think no small degree of prudence necessary to reconcile us to a monarchical state. What has not this nation suffered from our former princes? Even from the best of them? If we speak candidly of our boasted *QUEEN ELIZABETH*, she was, in many instances, a tyrant: but she was a tyrant with sense and dignity. She knew the true interest of the nation, and she pursued it, but she pursued it in an arbitrary manner. She was fortunate in the time of reigning: for her character has been exalted by the want of merit in her successor, from whose misconduct gushed forth that torrent of misery, which not only bore down his son, but overwhelmed the three kingdoms. If you ask what were the precious fruits of the restoration? the answer will be, An exchange only from one confusion to another: from jealousies between general *MONK* and *LAMBERT*, to jealousies between the dukes of *York* and *Monmouth*: a perpetual rotation of false politics: a king with the best-natured disposition imaginable, suffering innocent blood

to be shed without remorse. Or, if you enquire, what was the effect of a lawful sovereign? A shameful submission to a neighbouring kingdom, which, not long before, had trembled at the frowns of an usurper. Such was the fate of poor *England!* To these wretched times, succeeded the religious fooleries, and the weak attempts, of JAMES the second. Then followed the revolution. But, I must descend no lower. Let us therefore turn our eyes from home, and take a momentary view of other nations. If we look towards antient *Rome*, and consider her first seven monarchs, how wicked, or how insignificant, were their characters? And, when the name of *Monarch* was changed into that of *Emperor*, what a tyrannical pack of CÆSARS pass before our eyes? Many of them, the greatest monsters that human nature ever produced: yet these were lords, emperors, and kings of the world. If you read the Old Testament, and consult the Chronicles of the kings of *Judah*, you will find them a set of the proudest, and the most obstinate princes upon earth. Tell me then, my HAMILTON, is not such a retrospect enough to disgust us against kings? Bad as it is, it must not disgust an Englishman. We ought ever to regard, honour, and preserve, our original constitution, which of all regal states is the best framed in the universe. The balance of our government is hung indeed in the nicest manner imaginable: a single hair will turn it; but when it is held exactly even, there cannot be a finer system under heaven: and I must freely own to you, that I think our kings have been often less blameable than their people. You remember the exclamation
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of the Scotchman, upon seeing the flatteries paid to JAMES the first at his accession, “*By my saul, mon, you feulish folk will spoil a geud king.*” The Scotchman was in the right: but we continued in our foolish ways to JAMES and his successors. Our courtly adulations are always outrageous, we know no bounds. The person flattered, must be more than human, not to be sometimes blinded by such perpetual incense. Perhaps we borrow this kind of servility from the *French*, who, in the last century, bestowed the title of JUST upon LEWIS the thirteenth, during whose reign, such repeated acts of cruelty, oppression, and injustice, were perpetrated, as scarce any other annals can produce.

An additional excuse, that may be made for the errors of our *English* kings, is the different treatment which they find at the beginning, from what they receive at the latter end of their reigns. At the beginning, all is smoothness, all is joy and felicity: but the sun-shine is seldom of a very long duration. Clouds of jealousy arise, and the whole atmosphere of the court is soon filled with noxious vapours, with heart-burnings, animosities, and personal altercations between ministers: which often ascend to such a height, as even to molest the king in his chair of state. *Delirant Achivi, plestantur reges.* These are the unhappy effects that proceed, as I have before observed, from the very noblest cause, the thirst of liberty. A free people are constantly jealous of their rights. A wise king will preserve to them those rights, and by such a maxim will establish his own. But, the great misfortune of our former *English* princes has

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been their indolent submission to the name, without the least attempt of discharging the duties of a sovereign. The life of such a prince must have proved inglorious to his people, and unhappy to himself. He must have found himself only the second person in his kingdom, nay perhaps the third or fourth; the leviathans of power being seldom, if ever, without their coadjutors: and in that case, it is a point of condescension, to permit their royal master to be one of the group. Our *English* commentaries, which are in truth a very melancholy, and a very reproachful history, give us many mortifying instances of this kind. I live so detached from the great world, and I keep myself at such a distance from the high commerce of politics, that I know little or nothing of the present times; and therefore can only instruct you from my reading, and not from my experience. Your fate perhaps may lead you to have admittance to the sacred closet, or to approach the exalted steps of the throne. If that honour is in reserve for you, use it in such a manner, as shall shew, that you think yourself accountable to God, and your country, for every action of your life. Begin by conquering your own prejudices, and then endeavour to conquer those of your master. Make him in love with parliaments, but let those parliaments be free. Bring him thoroughly acquainted, even with the minutest branch of the constitution. Study his honour. Prevent his passions. Correct his errors. Keep *England* ever uppermost in your thoughts: and consider the king of *England* as only born for the good of his people. Shield him, if possible, from flattery: it is a rock more fatal

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to princes, than *Charybdis* ever was to mariners. Guide his leisure to manly employments, such as may preserve him from the enervating delicacies of a court. In your public capacity forget your relations, and your private friends. Know none but the friends of your country. Despise all dignities that you have not more than thoroughly deserved. Fear nothing but your own conscience. Aim at nothing but the prosperity of the state. Remember, that *Great Britain* is an island; and that nature, by detaching it from the continent, has rendered our situation particularly fortunate: and has pointed out to us, in what element our chief strength is destined. Cherish upon all occasions our naval armament: and fail not to oppose your voice, against any greater number of land-forces than are absolutely necessary: I had almost said, necessary for reviews in *Hyde Park*. A king, who enjoys the true affection of his people, will never stand in need of soldiers to defend him. He will dread no competitor: he will apprehend no domestic danger. He will distinguish which of the powers abroad are his natural and political enemies, and which are so situated, as to require his friendship and alliance. He will attend to the improvement of the colonies in the *West Indies*, and to the different branches of trade that may safely and wisely be encouraged in the three different kingdoms.

You find, my HAMILTON, that I suppose your imaginary sovereign capable of receiving instruction, and you of giving it. But far be it from me to wish you his only counsellor, or (to express myself more properly) his

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sole minister : one, who draws every thing within the vortex of his own power : who is at once admiral, general, treasurer, archbishop, judge, and perpetual legislator. Such a kind of magistrate is odious to the *English* constitution.

If from the two houses of parliament you separate or withdraw the king, the government will remain in the form of a republic, where every man has his part allotted to him, and is to co-operate with the rest, for the benefit of the collective body of the people. What then is the king? Only the first and chief magistrate, who acts in a superior degree to the rest. All dignities, all honours, flow from the crown. Such a power alone, exclusive of every other, will give a prince sufficient authority throughout all his dominions : but he has many more prerogatives. He has the glorious privilege of pardoning offences, and rewarding great actions : while the odious, or at least the reluctant parts of jurisdiction, such as punishment, and condemnation, are allotted to his officers ; to himself alone, is left the god-like power of mercy and forgiveness. From hence perhaps, kings have thought themselves representatives of God. Would to God, they thought themselves representatives of the people ! The law, indeed, generously looks upon the king as incapable of doing wrong. Of what pernicious consequence therefore must be the interposition of a single man between the king and the people ? How much must he eclipse his master's glory, and the prosperity of the state ? His situation will necessarily make him act in an arbitrary manner. He is answerable

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answerable to the laws ; and, if his orders are disputed, he is unhinged ; if they are disobeyed, he is undone, unless he has artfully brought his adversaries to a greater degree of corruption than himself ; and, in that case, — But I must remember the boundaries of a letter, and must consider, that, having already finished my most material observations upon the life and writings of the Dean of St. PATRICK'S, it is time to draw towards an end. I originally chose the topic, my dearest HAMILTON, because few characters could have afforded so great a variety of faults and beauties. Few men have been more known and admired, or more envied and censured, than Dr. SWIFT. From the gifts of nature, he had great powers, and, from the imperfection of humanity, he had many failings. I always considered him as an *Abstract and brief chronicle of the times* ; no man being better acquainted with human nature, both in the highest, and in the lowest scenes of life. His friends, and correspondents, were the greatest and most eminent men of the age. The sages of antiquity were often the companions of his closet : and although he industriously avoided an ostentation of learning, and generally chose to draw his materials from his own store, yet his knowledge in the ancient authors evidently appears from the strength of his sentiments, and the classic correctness of his style.

You must have observed, my dear son, that I could not submit to be confined within the narrow limits of biographical memoirs. I have gone into a more extensive field, and, in my progress, I wish I may have thrown out such hints, as shall tend to form your mind

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to virtue and learning: the ultimate end of all my wishes, and all my cares. Heaven grant, my HAMILTON, that I may deserve from you, the honour which HORACE pays to his father (*Insuevit pater hoc me, ut fugerem exemplis vitiorum, &c.*), when you drop a filial tear over the grave of

Your most affectionate Father,

your sincerest Friend, and

your happy Companion,

*Leicester Fields,
August 28, 1751.*

ORRERY.

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