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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 upon the Houyhnhnms, and the Yahoos.

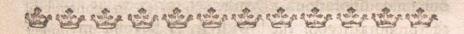
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pray. God Almighty's providence protect and guide you, my HAM, whatever fate of life, or fortune attends

Your affectionate Father,

ORRERY,



LETTER XV.

T I is with great reluctance, I shall make some re-I marks on Gulliver's voyage to the Houghnhams. In this last part of his imaginary travels, Swift has indulged a mifanthropy that is intolerable. The reprefentation which he has given us of human nature, must terrify, and even debase the mind of the reader who views it. His fallies of wit and humour lofe all their force, nothing remaining but a melancholy, and difagreeable impression: and, as I have said to you, on other parts of his works, we are difgusted, not entertained; we are shocked, not instructed by the fable. I should therefore chuse to take no notice of his YA-Hoos, did I not think it necessary to affert the vindication of human nature, and thereby, in some measure, to pay my duty to the great author of our species, who has created us in a very fearful, and a very wonderful mannes.

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We are composed of a mind, and of a body, intimately united, and mutually affecting each other. Their operations indeed are entirely different. When ther the immortal spirit, that enlivens this fine machine, is originally of a fuperior nature in various bodies (which, I own, feems most consistent and agreeable to the scale and order of beings) or, whether the difference depends on a symmetry, or peculiar structure of the organs combined with it, is beyond my reach to determine. It is evidently certain, that the body is curiously formed with proper organs to delight, and fuch as are adapted to all the necessary uses of life. The spirit animates the whole; it guides the natural appetites, and confines them within just limits. But, the natural force of this spirit is often immersed in matter; and the mind becomes subservient to passions, which it ought to govern and direct. Your friend Ho-RACE, although of the Epicurean doctrine, acknow-Jedges this truth, where he fays,

Atque affigit humo divinæ particulam auræ.

It is no less evident, that this immortal spirit has an independent power of acting, and, when cultivated in a proper manner, feemingly quits the corporeal frame within which it is imprisoned, and foars into higher, and more spacious regions; where, with an energy, which I had almost faid was divine, it ranges among those heavenly bodies, that, in this lower world, are scarce visible to our eyes; and we can at once explain the distance, magnitude, and velocity of the planets,

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and can foretel, even to a degree of minuteness, the particular time when a comet will return, and when the fun will be eclipsed in the next century. These powers certainly evince the dignity of human nature, and the furprifing effects of the immaterial spirit within us, which, in fo confined a state, can thus difengage itself from the fetters of matter. It is from this pre-eminence of the foul over the body, that we are enabled to view the exact order, and curious variety of different beings; to confider, and cultivate the natural productions of the earth; and to admire, and imitate the wife benevolence which reigns throughout the whole system of the universe. It is from hence, that we form moral laws for our conduct. From hence, we delight in copying that great original, who, in his essence, is utterly incomprehensible, but, in his influence, is powerfully apparent to every degree of his creation. From hence too, we perceive a real beauty in virtue, and a distinction between good and evil. Virtue acts with the utmost generosity, and with no view to her own advantage: while vice, like a glutton, feeds herfelf enormously, and then is willing to difgorge the nauseous offals of her feast. But I shall wander too far, especially as I flatter myself, that your mind is so good, and so unprejudiced, that you will more easily feel, than I can illustrate, the truth of these affertions.

Swift deduces his observations from wrong principles; for, in his land of Houyhnhums, he confiders the foul and body in their most degenerate, and un-

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cultivated state: the former as a slave to the appetites of the latter. He seems insensible of the surprising mechanism, and beauty of every part of the human composition. He forgets the sine description which Ovid gives of mankind.

Just, et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus.

In painting YAHOOS he becomes one himself. Nor is the picture, which he draws of the Houyhnhums, inviting or amusing. It wants both light and shade to adorn it. It is cold and infipid. We there view the pure instincts of brutes, unassisted by any knowledge of letters, acting within their own narrow fphere, merely for their immediate prefervation. They are incapable of doing wrong, therefore they act right. It is furely a very low character given to creatures, in whom the author would infinuate fome degree of reafon, that they act inoffensively, when they have neither the motive nor the power to act otherwise. Their virtuous qualities are only negative. Swift himfelf, amidst all his irony, must have confessed, that to moderate our passions, to extend our muniscence to others, to enlarge our understanding, and to raise our idea of the Almighty by contemplating his works, is not only the business, but often the practice, and the fludy of the human mind. It is too certain, that no one individual has ever possessed every qualification and excellence: however fuch an affemblage of different virtues, may still be collected from different perfons,

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fons, as are sufficient to place the dignity of human nature in an amiable, and exalted station. We must lament indeed the many instances of those who degenerate, or go astray from the end and intention of their being. The true source of this depravity is often owing to the want of education, to the false indulgence of parents, or to some other bad causes, which are constantly prevalent in every nation. Many of these errors are finely ridiculed in the foregoing parts of this romance: but the voyage to the Howybubnums is a real infult upon mankind.

I am heartily tired of this last part of GULLIVER'S travels, and am glad, that, having exhausted all my observations on this disagreeable subject, I may finish my letter; especially as the conclusion of it naturally turns my thoughts from Yahoos, to one of the dearest pledges I have upon earth, yourself: to whom I am a most

Affectionate Father,

ORRERY.

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