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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 Swift's Directions to Servants,

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pressions were often so full of humour and sarcasm, that, to this day, they are recorded as pieces of wit. Such was the famous reply of ARCHY to King JAMES the first, when his Majesty, amidst all his wisdom, was sufficiently inspired with folly, to send his only son into Spain. But, fools at present are no longer admired in courts, or, if they are, they appear there without their cap and bells.

And now, my dear HAMILTON, to quit reflections, that tend in general rather to terrify, than to improve your understanding, let me observe, in honour of my friend SWIFT, that his establishment of an hospital for idiots and lunatics, is remarkably generous: as the unhappy persons, who receive the benefit, must, for ever, remain insensible of their benefactor.

I am your affectionate Father,

O R R E R Y.



LETTER XXII.

*T*HE *Directions to Servants*, which is the tract immediately following SWIFT's *Will*, is imperfect and unfinished. The editor tells us, that a preface and a dedication were to have been added to it. I think it was not published till after the Dean's death; but I remember the manuscript handed about, and much applauded,

in his life-time. To say the most that can be offered in its favour, the tract is written in so facetious a kind of low humour, that it must please many readers: nor is it without some degree of merit, by pointing out with an amazing exactness (and what in a less trivial case must have been called judgment) the faults, blunders, tricks, lyes, and various knaveries, of domestic servants. How much time must have been employed in putting together such a work? What an intenseness of thought must have been bestowed upon the lowest, and most slavish scenes of life? It is one of those compositions, that the utmost strength of wit can scarce sustain from sinking. A man of SWIFT'S exalted genius, ought constantly to have soared into higher regions. He ought to have looked upon persons of inferior abilities, as children, whom nature had appointed him to instruct, encourage, and improve. Superior talents seem to have been intended by Providence as public benefits, and the person, who possesses such blessings, is certainly answerable to Heaven for those endowments, which he enjoys above the rest of mankind. Let him jest with dignity, and let him be ironical upon useful subjects: leaving poor slaves to *beat their porridge, or drink their small beer*, in such vessels as they shall find proper ^a. The Dean, it seems, had not this way of thinking: and having long indulged his passions, at last perhaps mistook them for his duty. The mistake, my dear HAMILTON, is neither extraordinary nor surprising. In points of religion it has carried men into

^a See Vol. VIII, page 8.

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great extravagancies; in those of morality, into no less; but in politics, into the greatest of all. Our inclinations are so apt to hurry us into inconsiderate actions, that we are afterwards inclined to flatter ourselves they are right, only because they have proceeded from our own thoughts and directions. Thus SWIFT, when he had once established the rule of *Vive la bagatelle*, was resolved to pursue it at all hazards. I wish his thoughts had taken another turn. The lower classes of mankind pass on unnoticed; the great only are censured. They ought to be particularly attentive to every step they take. The Dean of St. PATRICK'S should have known himself, as *Rex idem hominum, Phœbique sacerdos*, and should have remembered, that kings and priests are extremely liable to be censured. Poor SWIFT! why did he sink below himself before he was deprived of reason? Forgive him that error, my HAMILTON, and draw a veil of oblivion over certain excrescencies of wit and humour, you will then admire him, as an honour to the public, and a scourge to all the knaves and fools of his time.

Three pamphlets, relating to *Ireland*, successively follow the *Directions to Servants*. The first is entitled, *Reasons humbly offered to the Parliament of Ireland, for repealing the Sacramental Test in favour of the Catholics*: The second, *Some Reasons against the Bill for settling the Tythe of Hemp, Flax, &c. by a Modus*: The third, *Some farther Reasons against the Bill for settling the Tythe of Hemp, Flax, &c.* The subject-matter of these pamphlets may perhaps be little worth your consideration; but their style will always command your attention.