Hunt, Theodore Whitefield
The prose style of Jonathan
Swift

THE PROSE STYLE

of

JONATHAN SWIFT

(In Representative English Prose Writers
by
Theodore W. Hunt.)

- too Victorian for me.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PROSE STYLE OF JONATHAN SWIFT. This is terrible!

Brief Biographical Sketch.

Born Nov. 30th, 1667, in Dublin. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, 1682. Thence to England 1689. Secretary to Sir William Temple. Went to Ireland as Prebendary of Kilroot, 1694. Took Church Orders. Returned to Temple, 1696. In the Vicarage of Laracor, Ireland, 1699. Dean of St. Patricks Dublin, 1713. Visited England, 1726, Died Oct. 19th, 1745.

English critics with but few exceptions, consent to give to Jonathan Swift, a prominent place among our standard prose writers. Whatever views may have been entertained by different biographers and readers relative to his moral character or the occasion of his eccentricities, there has been but little difference of opinion as to his authorship. Historians speak of him as the erratic but brilliant Dean. Others declare that whoever relies upon his authority in the use of language may regard himself safe, while not a few go so far as to place him at the very front of the literary talent of his time.

His Prose Writings.

Swift was emphatically a writer of prose. It is true that he indulged at times in the composition of verse as in his Poems to Stella, his Legion Club and the Pindaric Odes, but this was his strange work. The remark made to him by Dryden in referenence to the Odes, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet," would apply equally well to all his poetic productions. He was even more distinctively a prose author than Addison himself and his fame must rest solely upon what he did in this department.

First in order and rated by many critics as the ablest of his productions is, THE TALE OF A TUB. This was probably written as early as 1692, but not published till 1704. In this pamphlet the author uses allegory as the medium of expression and places before his readers the three prominent ecclesiastical orders of his day, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Papal. Under the image of

three sons of a deceased father tampering with the will which had been left them, he takes occasion to hold up to ridicule these conflicting sects. At one time, he lashes with unsparing vigor the extreme procedures of the Papal Church. In a milder but an equally effective vein, he holds up to derision the heresies of the English Dissenters, taking occasion when decisions must be made, to make them in accordance with the acknowledged claims of the Established Church. Equally sarcastic are what he calls The Digressions from the Tale. In these, he defines the true and the false critic; treats of instruction and diversion; and gives a digression in praise of digressions. In all these discussions his weapon is irony and he wields it with pronounced effect. The literary success of the work was unbounded. As to the general moral effect produced, relative to the pending questions of ecclesiasticism, we find the very church it was designed to favor regarded it as conducive to levity and looseness in practical religion. This is the fact despite the author's assertion - "If any one opinion can fairly be deduced from the book contrary to religion and morality, I will forfeit my life."

In the same year (1704) appeared - THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS. This was based upon a narrow controversy between Boyle and Bentley as to the genuineness of the epistles of Phalaris, based also, on the far wider question as to the relative excellence of the ancients and moderns.

The dispute was opened in favor of the Moderns by the French writers - Fontenelle and Perrault. Sir William Temple, the patron of Swift, answered on behalf of the Ancients. To this, in turn, reply was made by Wotton and Bentley on behalf of the Moderns. At this point Swift took up the discussion in his usual satirical vein. Under the image of a battle in the royal library at St. James' between ancient and modern books, he vindicated the old at the expense of the new, and dealt out some merciless criticisms upon the authors of the later school.

Resting awhile from authorship when engaged in the duties of his parish and the state, he appeared in 1708, in several successive papers. In his paper entitled - THE SENTIMENTS OF A CHURCH OF ENGLAND MAN - we have the religious and political views of one who with apparent inconsistency called himself - "A Whig wearing a gown." In the same year appeared the highly popular Bickerstaff Papers - elicited by the morbid excess to which the astrology of the eighteenth century was carrying the English people. The contemptuous burning of the treatise by the Inquisition at Portugal exactly expressed the enraged sentiments of all the almanac compilers in the British realms.

Now appeared also his famous - ARGUMENT AGAINST ABOLISHING CHRISTIANITY - in which irony is expressed in essence and which Dr. Johnson is pleased to call "happy and judicious." To this there succeeded in the following years -

A VINDICATION OF BICKERSTAFF (1709); LETTER TO THE OCTOBER CLUB (1711) - a company of a hundred Tories bent upon the reform of the existing government; A PROPOSAL FOR CORRECTING, IMPROVING AND ASCERTAINING (making sure) THE ENGLISH TONGUE (1712). THE CONDUCT OF THE ALLIES (1712). In this state paper he took occasion to protest against the unfair relation in which England stood in the Triple Alliance between Germany and the Low Countries in the Spanish War. He brought to light the sufferings of his country at the hands of the mercenary Marlbourough, and called upon the nation for its own protection, to institute immediate peace.

Swift's influence here is seen in the fact that the call was heard and heeded. In the space of two months eleven thousand copies were sold. The cry was for peace, and now was open that national movement, the approaching result of which was, the deposition of the existing authorities, the elevation of the Tories to political power and the final peace of Utrecht in 1713. Dr. Smith pronounces it "the most successful pamphlet ever printed." In close relation to this there followed -

THE PUBLIC SPIRIT OF THE WHIGS.(1714). THE DRAPIER LETTERS (1724). This occasion, as is well known, was the attempt made by a Mr. Wood of England, to secure a patent by which he could coin £180,000, of half-pence and farthings for Ireland, so destitute then of copper money. The patent was ratified by the king and about to be applied. Swift caught at once, the meaning of the movement and the animus of the man behind it. He saw it to be a selfish and purely personal scheme, and began to expose it. The Irish were aroused and such a storm of indignation as burst forth had never been seen in social history. Drapier was the idol of the hour.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS appeared in 1726, in four parts.

In Part I., is, The Voyage to Lilliput, in which is satirized the government of George I.

In Part II, is, The Voyage to Brobdingnag, and special reference is made to William III.

In Part III, the learned world becomes the victim of the satire, in a Voyage to Laputa.

In Part IV, is the Voyage of the Houyhnhnms. The book is a satire on the human race.

Other productions may be cited as follows: Memoirs as to the Queen's Ministry. Journal to Stella. Memoirs of Captain Creighton. Discourse as to Nobles and Commons. Paper on various topics - Religion, etc.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS STYLE - FAULTS.

In order to pursue such a discussion impartially, care must be taken to connect the man and the author. His personal peculiarities and his violations of moral propriety are to be noted as we study his style. There is a sense in which it may be said that Swift was a somewhat better author than a man and yet his personality goes far to determine his character as a writer. We remark -

(1) Absence of Literary Elegance.

In this particular at least the man and the author agreed. If Swift had been a purer man his literary style would have been more attractive. Comparing his prose at this point with Addison's or Lamb's or with that of Irving, its inferiority is at once seen. The texture of his spirit was too gross and coarse to make it possible for him to conceive of literary grace and finish as Macauley conceived of them. This defect is seen in subject matter and in style alike. He discusses all topics in a kind of rough and ready method better adapted to the satisfaction of the many than of the cultured few. No one is so bold as to connect Swift's name with the highest forms of literary art.

Hence he is never more at home as a prose writer than in the unrefined imagery of Gulliver's Travels or in those harsh invectives which he pours out against his political and ecclesiastical foes. In some of his papers, such as, The Modest Proposal, this buffoonery descends to ribaldry and the low water mark of literary rudeness is reached. His Journal to Stella reminds one of Rousseau's Confessions. The points of similarity between the French infidel and the English Dean are not infrequent.

The fact is, that with the character he had it is amazing that his style is as clean as it is. His tendencies were low. He would rather pen a quasi-moral letter to Stella than discuss a high class theme on the lofty ground of reason and moral law. Even if his theme be - A Project for the Advancement of Religion - he will succeed in disgusting every sensitive taste ere he has advanced a half dozen paragraphs. In Gulliver's Travels, especially at the close, the effect is simply revolting until we are assured that of all satires on humanity, Swift himself is the most pronounced. Dr. Johnson is rugged in his style; Swift is rude. Johnson lacks smoothness and finish; Swift lacks propriety.

(2) An Inferior Order of Imagination.

Though this faculty has its special function in poetry as creative and pictorial, it has in prose, also, rightful place as historic, philosophic and constructive. It saves prose from being prosaic. Both on its mental and moral side, Swift's imagination was of the lower type. Even where it is free in its action from moral obliquity, it takes the form of fancy rather than that of imagination proper, and rarely if ever rises to the level of original constructive power. There is an absence of a high poetic power of representation as applied to prose, and as seen in the prose of Milton and Hooker. In this respect, he was far below Addison, where imaginative ability was sound if not brilliant. One of his biographers - Sir Walter Scott - goes so far as to say "He never attempted any species of composition in which either the sublime or the pathetic was required of him." In the sphere of allegory, wit and analogy he was at home, but these are forms of mental action lying on the borders of true imagery and not within them. Here again, the relation of mind to character is evident. It was morally impossible for Swift to rise to that sublimity of conception which marks the action of natures ethically pure. Such a modus was totally foreign to him nor could he adopt it when offered. The main feature of sublimity in an author is what Longinus terms - elevation of spirit. Of this the Irish Dean was devoid. He walked with his face to the earth.

FEATURES OF MERIT.

(1) Force and Spirit.

Strange extremes exist here among the opinions of the English critics. Those who follow the guidance of Dr. Johnson assert that there was little or no force in anything he wrote and that those treatises which seemed to occasion such radical changes in public sentiment at the time did so through the excited passions of the readers. Others see nothing but impassioned cogency in his papers and are willing to credit to him all those general movements in society and the state of which the history of that time is so full. There is apparent truth in each of these positions. The first is plausible in that those political changes might have been due to the good judgment of Swift as an interpreter of the nature of the times rather than to his style as an author. This theory would give him credit on the score of foresight rather than of force. As to the second view, it cannot be denied that some of these questions were so presented as to awaken and maintain attention and modify materially the secret councils of Queen Anne. No one can note the signal triumph

of the Drapier letters as to the social economy of the realm, or the effect produced by the Bickerstaff Papers and other writings and consistently charge their author with mental weakness. Many of the topics which he discussed were of such a nature in their practical relation to the state and people that he could not but be fervent in their expression. It is true that the allegorical character of his style detracted somewhat from its literary power, that he had in his style little of the strictly persuasive element of oratorical writing or impassioned strength such as Milton evinced, still Swift cannot in justice be termed a nerveless or indifferent prose writer. The more prolonged and thorough one's study is of his real character as seen in his writings the more evident it is that he was possessed of true literary vigor and rose at times to the level of true passion Some of his papers such as, A Letter to Young Clergymen, seemed to decry feeling in favour of cold rational methods. Here he has been misunderstood. He is not pleading against fervent force in style, but in behalf of more decided intellectual skill. One of his trenchant paragraphs well expresses his view as he writes to his young clerical friend, "If your arguments be strong, in God's name offer them in as moving a manner as the nature of the subject will properly admit, but beware of letting the pathetic part swallow up the rational, for I suppose philosophers have long agreed that passion should never prevail over reason." This is perfectly clear and eminently safe doctrine. He holds to a wise and sound rhetorical principle when he insists that discourse shall be possessed of as much passion as the subject matter will allow. To come short of that would betray weakness; to go beyond it would expose to ridicule.

In fact Swift was deeply in earnest in most of his writings. Against the fraud of Wood as to the coinage and against what he conceived to be the political abuses of the time he protested with all the ardor of a Chatham or a Burke.

Swift's style is in no sense tame or insipid. It bristles and sparkles at times, and in its idiomatic terseness often reminds us of the manner of Carlyle. Pungency and point abound. In some of his writings which are morally objectionable and which as Mr. Stephen argues justly "ought to have been burnt" this incisive element is most apparent. In a literary sense, the style is, thus, readable. Its animation attracts to the perusal of it and we are not allowed to become weary.

Swift played a part here that was played in France by Voltaire, or by Rabelais to whom Voltaire compared him.

(2) His Satirical Power.

In this he has been rarely if ever equalled. He has been aptly called - The Lord of Irony. He is not simply ironical at times by way of a pleasing literary variety but is so throughout. He is more than sarcastic. Sarcasm itself seems to be embodied in him. He was born and bred a satirist. The element is in the blood and bone. It was his meat and drink to indulge in it. He enjoyed nothing more than this literary dissection of a victim in cold blood. "Swift", says Taine, "has the genius of insult. He is an inventor of irony as Shakespeare is of poetry." As he himself proudly asks in one of his own poems -

> "Who dares to irony pretend
> Which I was born to introduce
> Refined it first and showed its use?".

This was an honour which truly belonged to him in prose as to Dryden and Pope in verse, and it was unsafe for any of his day to question his right in this realm. Ironical as he was, he was always the master of the irony and in the main used it for wise and proper purposes. He knew where and when and whom to strike. It is a redeeming feature in his character and style that he rarely exercises his sarcasm apart from the element of pleasantry. There is always visible a vein of genuine humour and good nature so that however much the language might sting and smart, it did not awaken revenge on the part of its subject. Addison in one of his letters to Swift praises him for this quality of style. One of his intimate friends speaks of it as his"unlucky quality" in that it placed him at the disposal of designing men. Swift himself speaks of

> "His vein ironically given,
> As with a moral view designed
> To cure the vices of mankind."

He suggestively alludes to his manner of writing "as his own humorous biting way." In this respect, Swift was something of a humorist. He had a kind nature after all and in this particular reminds us more of the manner of the genial Cervantes than of the sour and cruel Voltaire. In some of his shorter papers such as,- An Argument against Abolishing Christianity, A Project for the Advancement of Religion, A Scheme to make a Hospital for Incurables, this playful pleasantry rises to its acme. Beyond doubt,

lasting good was done by him in his own day through this serio-comic method. He struck straight and hard and yet with no malice in the blow. Swift is said to have cultivated, purposely, the cynical, cen- serious style and to have indulged in irony because he loved to wound a sensitive spirit. Something of this there was here and there evident, but it is not frequent enough to characterize his style as acrid and captious. He believed in the thorough criticism of men and measures and adopted satire as Butler and Pope did and as Horace and Juvenal did - for benign ends. In - The Apology - which he wrote as an answer to those who were offended by some passages in - The Tale of a Tub - he dwells at length on this very topic and proved conclusively that his motive as good throughout his satire. No one can read this Apology and not be convinced as never before, of the ingenuousness of the author as a literary critic.

(3) Individuality and Independence.

Swift is unique in personality and style. He was himself and no other one. In the most wayward of his eccentricities he was consistent with himself. His oddness was to him perfectly natural and had he attempted to imitate any one in any particular he would have failed as certainly as Dr. Johnson would have done in a similar attempt. Swift never attempted strictly dramatic writing. He could not successfully personate another. Even in his lunacy there was this personal element. There was "a method in his madness" and it was his own. There was no other lunatic in Britain like him. As this principle applies to literature, it is not strange to read in a preface to one of the editions of his works - "that he had never been known to take a single thought from any writer ancient or modern." This is of course an extreme statement and yet approximately true. No prose writer of English will stand testing at this point better than Swift. He aptly expresses of himself the same sentiment which Denham expresses of Cowley - that he

("To steal a hint was never known,
But what he wrote was all his own.")

In his words of sound advice to a young clergyman he says, in speaking of the excessive use of commonplace books for quotations, "I could wish that men of tolerable intellectuals would rather trust their own natural reason improved by a general conversation with books." This was, in fact his own uniform practice. He was an author in the strict etymological sense of the word - an increaser of knowledge and ideas. He pursued the plan of his notable predecessor - Bacon - in aiming to add to the sum and enlarge the bounds of human knowledge.

Swift does not appear to have been so much a reader of books and as an observer of men and movements and he learned from the latter more by far than he could have learned from the former. He trusted, as he would say, to his own intellectuals. In so far as general reading would enable him the better to utilize what he saw and heard, he availed himself of it.

Swift's style indicates clearly that he was a man who observed and thought for himself. His most extensive productions have for their very occasion and leading idea this independence of view in matters secular and religious. In many instances he ran right athwart the current opinions of the hour and by his bold assertions assumed the part of a reformer of abuses. The opposition that he so provoked by his ecclesiastical and state papers proves alike his independence of view and his personal courage, and when assailed he was always ready to give a reason for his methods.

Mention has been made of the force and spirit of his style. This quality was the direct result of this freedom from servility that marked the man as it did the author. Swift had grave faults but he was not a time-server in an age of time-servers. In this respect, he was even Addison's superior as he was Lord Bacon's and more akin in temper to the intrepid Milton. Swift's style is his own. Its merits and faults are his. This does much to enhance the merits and atone for the faults.

(4) Good use of English.

No other English writer up to his time had a more sincere love for his native tongue than did Swift. No one took a deeper interest in its development and proper use.

One of the first questions he asked as to any scholar brought to his notice was, as to his knowledge of English and interest in it. If there were ignorance and indifference that was enough to mark the man as grossly deficient. This feature appears at frequent intervals. In his political treatises he speaks of it. In Gulliver's Travels he speaks of it; in his Journal to Stella, he naturally refers to it in that among his early pleasures at Temple's, had been Stella's instruction in English. At times, in the course of his writing when the logical structure would not demand it he would digress to the praise of his native speech. There are two of his papers in which he dwells with special emphasis on the subject; these are,- A Letter to a Young Clergyman, and,- A Proposal for Ascertaining, Correcting, and Improving the English Tongue. In the name of the educated classes of the nation he protests against the existing imperfections and corruptions of the language, especially as seen in common conversation and pulpit discourse. To the young divine he writes, "I should have been glad if you had applied yourself a little more to the study of the English language, the neglect whereof is one of the most general defects among the scholars of this kingdom who seem not to have the least conception of a style, but remain in a flat kind of phraseology often mingled with barbarous terms and expressions peculiar to the nation." It is inspiring thus to see a master of English style rebuking and stimulating his countrymen as to their vernacular. It was because there were so few of such reformers that Swift's position was important. In this respect he was taking up the work which Milton in his own way had furthered and which Dr. Johnson was materially to advance. Scarcely too much can be said on Swift's behalf in that he saw, in this respect, the need of the hour and up to the measure of his personal ability, satisfied it. The debt of modern English Philology to these earlier enthusiasts can never be fully paid.

In his Proposal, he laments that "our language is less refined than those of Italy, Spain or France;" notes the various ways in which a language may change; alludes to the special excellence of English from the time of Elizabeth to the Commonwealth; deprecates the

excessive corruptions that came in with the civil wars so that the court was "the worst school in England;" grieves over the tendency to undue abbreviations of words and syllables and to false refinements of language and proceeds to suggest the organization of a body of scholars for the express purpose of "ascertaining (making sure) and fixing our language forever." He closes his Proposal by showing how such an enterprise would add to the glory of the English nation and serve to make the history of that day full of interest to the "times succeding". No later scholar has ever pleaded for a special educational object with more zeal and disinterested love than did Swift for this Proposal. This, if nothing else, would make his name one of interest to every English student and lead us to expect as we open his writings the presence of a master of English. Hence, we find that in compass, and quality of diction as, also, in correctness and vigor of sentence, Swift stands on a high literary level. In these respects, no writer up to his time has fewer prominent faults or reads more as a modern essayist. We are no longer obliged to do as is necessary with Hooker and Bacon and even Milton, to have frequent resort to a glossary for the exposition of words and phrases. These are so rare as to afford no barrier. The language is English throughout, and is a more modern English than the Elizabethan. We are in the period of Settled English rather than Formative or Transitional. We have as yet met no essayist who reads as smoothly and fluently and none to which, in a literary point of view, the student of style can be more safely referred.

In speaking of the author's use of English there are two features of style needing emphasis.

(a) Ease and naturalness of expression.

He had what is called in Scripture "the pen of a ready writer." He had "the gift of utterance".

Eccentric as he was, his manner as a writer was marked by freedom and naturalness. Whatever art there was in his style was adroitly concealed and every movement was marked by fluency and readiness. However forced his imagery seems at times to be, his diction was spontaneous and always germane to the subject. No writer had more thorough contempt for the affected fancies of Euphuism and the later French school in England than had Swift, and no one more fully carried out his theory. There was nothing artificial.

One of the clearest confirmations of this fact is, that in the Journal to Stella, containing Swift's private correspondence, there is no greater frankness of statement than in his more public productions. He is outspoken and ingenuous everywhere and in this respect widely differs from such authors as Goethe, Schiller and Addison who adopted one manner in public discourse and quite another in private.

Swift's ease of style - the absence of studied effect, is worthy of note. If the law propounded by Quintilian is correct and one is to write so clearly that the reader must understand him whether he will or not then Swift was clear and natural. He wrote as if it were the easiest thing possible for him to do. The page is in no sense labored but facile and free. The reader as he goes on rarely thinks of the author but of the subject matter. Language with Swift was a means, not an end. To set forth his ideas was the one object and no undue attention was given to the medium itself. Herein lies the perfection of literary style - that in its consummate art it gives the impression of absolute spontaneity. As Pope phrases it - "True ease in writing comes from art not chance." Swift possessed this ease which is the final result and recompense of all art. His sentences read as smoothly as those of Macaulay and Lamb.

Nor had Swift gained such ease by haphazard but in the line of faithful devotion to authorship and literary law.

(b) Verbal Plainness

In the twelfth chapter of his Travels he writes - "My principal design being to inform and not to amuse, I rather choose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner."

"Proper words in proper places" is his terse definition of a good style. In his advice to his clerical friend, he is especially explicit on this point. The first error to which he calls attention is, the use of "obscure terms" of which he adds "that he does not know a more universal and inexcusable mistake." He speaks of it as especially noticeable among the educated "that whereas a common farmer will make you understand in three words that his foot is out of joint, a surgeon, after a hundred

terms of art will leave you in ignorance." In a somewhat indignant spirit at the ostentatious diction of the clergy he writes - "I defy the greatest divine to produce any law, either of God or man which obliges me to comprehend the meaning of ubiquity, entity idiosyncrasy and the like." He is of the opinion that nine-tenths of the terms used could be changed to the profit of the hearer. He asserts the principle, that the divine should have nothing to say to the wisest of men which the most uneducated could not understand; that the comprehension of washer-women and servant girls and daily laborers, should be the standard rather than the conversation of savants. He is never weary in speaking of simplicity of style as that without which no human production can arrive at any great excellence. He takes the strong position, that when men are not plain , it is either from malice or pride of learning. He holds that the path of clearness lies in the line of nature. On this theory, a man to be obscure must be somewhat perverse. Continuing his attack against the pride of learning, his wrath gives way to irony and humor as he avows, that all the terms of abstract philosophy have with all their defects, one great advantage - that they are equally understood by the vulgar and the preacher. He alludes very pertinently in this connection to the style of Bunyan with whose simplicity he was charmed. -"I have been better entertained and more inspired by a few pages in Pilgrim's Progress than by a long discourse on simple and complex ideas." He felt attracted as Mr. Froude has been by the honest Saxon homeliness of the dreamer's diction.

In all this language we have a revelation not only of Swift's theory but of his daily practice as a writer. It is safe to say that in respect to plainness he has no superior in English Prose. No one has written so much and written more clearly. In the study of his style, there is a marked absence of any show of learning; of the drawing of distinctions without a difference or of using words for the sake of using them. So prominent is this feature, that what is called the natural style of prose was often sacrificed to it.

He preferred intelligibility to high sounding eloquence of phrase. He was so intent upon saying plain things in a plain way for plain people that he was in danger, at times, of reaching the opposite extreme of tameness or undue familiarity. Hence, some critics speak of his style as ordinary. The fact is that because of its simplicity it is quite exceptional. Nothing is more common than literary obscurity. In his Antony-like method of "speaking right on" he needed but few of the devices of the schools and it was his bluntness that offended his enemies and secured his victories. He called things by their names, used terms in their commonly accepted senses and had no faith in Talleyrand's theory "that language is the art of concealing thought."

"'Twas his occupation to be plain". As to this quality of style, Swift followed in the line of Bunyan, Taylor, Fuller and De Foe and anticipated all the best essayists of the following centuries. He wrote a simpler English than any of his contemporaries, Addison not excepted, and in phraseology and structure was the most modern writer of the Augustan Age. In this respect, the student of expression may find in Swift much to admire and imitate. It is, certainly, a matter of deep regret that the moral character of the man was such, and many of his discussions of such a nature that the true excellence of the style is not allowed to have its full effect. One additional feature of his style must be noted.

(5) Freedom from Pedantry & Hypocrisy.

Mr. Leslie Stephen in the biography of the author makes frequent allusion to this characteristic of Swift's style. If we examine closely we shall find that most of his important writings were occasioned by his intense opposition to sham and parade of every sort. He was the Carlyle of the Augustan Age in his hatred of isms and frauds, and felt himself to be as Carlyle did, a self-appointed censor and reformer. Thus, "The Tale of a Tub", was as his biographer writes "another challenge thrown down to pretentious pedantry." So, in The Battle of the Books, he fought against scholastic

pedantry as distinct from ecclestiastical. In The Drapier Letters, he rose to indignant protest against practical corruption under the pretense of public spirited benevolence, while in Gulliver's Travels he indulged in a scathing satire against humanity itself as in turn, the author and the victim of whims and delusions. He feels it to be his mission to expose the disguise. So, even in his sermons and smaller papers, satire is the prominent word. There is, as might be supposed, a dangerous extreme in all this which Swift in his style did not escape. He laid himself open to the charge of cynical criticism and is not yet wholly exonerated. At times, as in Gulliver, he fairly prefigures the modern pessimists and lacerates for the sake of pleasure. Hence the intense bitterness expressed against him in his own day so that on his own confession, no less than a thousand papers were penned against him as a partisan in church and state. At heart, however, he was a better man and the explanation of his rancor is found in his opposition to hypocrisy. As far as this sentiment was healthy and under control it added vigor, point and spirit to his style and made him a practical rather than a speculative writer. His hatred of philosophy arose from its overdrawn distinctions and he thoroughly believed in everyday sense. One is struck in this respect with the business like character of many of his papers. He did not confine himself to the great questions of church and state, society and letters, but wrote on the most practical topics of common life even down to - Directions to Servants. In his best mood Swift was a helpful critic. In his wayward moods he was a cruel heartless cynic, and not a little of his literary defect as a writer must be laid at the door of mental despondency.

In fine, the prose style of Swift had far more merits than faults. Lacking in grace and high imaginative power and often bordering on the censorious and cynical, it still possessed a force, a satirical point, an individuality, an ease and plainness of English usage and a downright practical bluntness that marked it as superior and make it still representative. No one probably will ever know the poignancy of his personal trials. The world was a ainst him from the outset nor has

he ever elicited to any degree such sympathy as has been freely accorded to Lamb and Goldsmith in hours of similar discouragement. That he wrote as he wrote amid such experiences is the greatest marvel of all. He has left a style notable for most of the essential qualities of good writing save literary finish and cannot be said to have had his superior in English prose up to the days of George II.

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