

HE LOVES HIS FRIENDS

JONATHAN SWIFT (1667-1745)



As the seventeenth century nears its end, the great age of English letter writing is beginning. Practitioners of the art who are the peers of Cicero and Pliny the Younger enrich the literature of the century that follows.

Shortly after Lady Temple, formerly Dorothy Osborne, loses her last surviving child to suicide, a young scholar of genius who is to become the author of *Gulliver's Travels* comes to serve as her husband's resident assistant. In this man, Jonathan Swift, there is a fundamental unhappiness. He laments rather than celebrates his birthday and marks it by reading the third chapter of Job: "Let the day perish wherein I was born ... " The savage indignation that lacerates, as he says, his heart, predominates over the merriment that his friend Dr. Arbuthnot perceptively sees in *Gulliver's Travels* and that finds expression in *The Bickerstaff Papers* and in *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation*. Yet while relaxing, dining and exchanging puns with friends, riding his horse, and enjoying the loving companionship of Esther Johnson and Rebecca Dingley, he is often happy. These twin facets of his life give him an affinity with another great letter-writer, William Cowper, who finds temporary relief from his fear of eternal damnation in pleasant and innocent occupations like gardening and keeping pets.

It is much to be regretted that Swift is not able to have a normal married life with Esther Johnson, whom he calls Stella and who is, he writes, "as welcome as my blood to every farthing I have in the world." Perhaps at first he prudently fears marrying without an adequate income, but ultimately his abnormal horror of the body's need to excrete and its subjection to decay may be responsible. In his *Journal to Stella*, he mentions his hatred of the word "bowels" and how his visit to a woman who has just given birth and was "pale, dead, old and yellow, for want of her paint" turned his stomach. This is of a piece with the poems such as "Cassinus and Peter"

and “A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed” that were once called his unprintables as well as with Gulliver’s disgust at the bodies of the maids of honour in the land of the giants. Although at the end of the poem “The Lady’s Dressing Room” he seems to be trying to argue himself out of his paralyzing obsession, he does not succeed.

A learned young Anglo-Irishman, Swift serves in England as secretary to the retired diplomat Sir William Temple, whom he comes to venerate. At the same time he acts as tutor to Esther Johnson, who is the daughter of Temple’s housekeeper; his pupil is eight years old. This child grows up to become a highly intelligent, well-read woman and the great love of Swift’s life, though he will only be in her company when her older companion, the unmarried Rebecca Dingley, is also present.

After Temple’s death in 1699, Swift, who has taken holy orders in the (Anglican) Church of Ireland, follows a clerical career. In 1707, he is commissioned to negotiate with the Whig Government in London for the remission of the First Fruits, a tax on the Irish clergy. He shares the firm Whig commitment to a Protestant succession to the throne, but finds that as the price of remission the Government wants the Irish Church’s support for the repeal of the Test Acts, which exclude non-Anglicans from public service, the English universities, and political life. To Swift, whose unsigned book *A Tale of a Tub* presents a vigorous argument for the reasonableness of the Anglican Middle Way, this is totally unacceptable and a recipe for a relapse into social conflict akin to that of the Civil War. He returns to Ireland without success, but in 1710, he goes back to London for a second attempt just before an election which brings a Tory ministry to power. Though the Tories may waver in their commitment to a Protestant succession, they are resolute in their support of the national church. Moreover, their leaders, the Lord Treasurer, Robert Harley, and the Secretary of State, Henry St. John, are eager to recruit a writer as gifted as Swift to win over public opinion in their campaign to end the War of the Spanish Succession against Louis XIV’s France.

During the three and three-quarter years before he returns to Ireland, Swift conducts a remarkable correspondence. In the tradition of the journal letter that goes back to Roger Ascham, Swift sends to Stella and Dingley, who are now living in Dublin, sixty-four instalments of a daily diary combined with answers to the letters they send him in reply. Living before the invention of the telephone, he feels he is talking to them as he writes and will even wish them goodnight or good morrow when he lays down his pen:

I think I am bewitched to write so much in a morning to you,
little MD. Let me go, will you? and I’ll come again to-night in a

fine clean sheet of paper; but I can nor will stay no longer now;
 no, I won't, for all your wheedling: no, no, look off, don't smile at
 me, and say, Pray, pray, Presto, write a little more.

The *Journal to Stella*, as the printed book is called, shows how, amidst all the excitements of the metropolis, he does not forget Irish pleasures. He feels some nostalgia for his grounds in his country parish of Laracor with their willows, fruit trees and canal, and he remembers social evenings in Dublin even as he is part of a society—"it must not be called a Club"—of eminent, witty men who dine together and also promote the careers of the deserving. His straitened circumstances figure as he seeks dinner invitations to eke out his meagre resources and complains about the rain and snow that put him to the expense of hiring a coach or chair. His troubles include his bouts of giddiness, which he mentions alongside his anxiety about Stella's eyesight, and the way he offends some and is offended by others, as well as his difficulties with his drunken servant Patrick. Literature figures as he discloses his authorship of unsigned poems and talks of his project for an academy to guard against the corruption of the language. The regular sequence of events is occasionally interrupted by a startling occurrence. Swift and his servant separate a drunken parson and a sailor who are fighting in the street. The aged Bishop of Worcester announces to Queen Anne that in four years Louis XIV will turn Protestant and the Papedom will be overthrown. At the peril of his life, Swift spots and dismantles the booby trap—two pistols set to discharge—in a parcel delivered to Harley and in retrospect wonders at his unaccustomed presence of mind.

The *Journal* reveals much about Swift's pride. When Harley offers him a fifty pound bank note, he returns it and refuses to see that Minister for three days. On 29 September 1711, he is at court, where, he admits, "I am so proud I make all the lords come up to me." But in spite of his prickliness and his harsh judgments—Sir Andrew Fountaine's brother is "an ignorant, worthless, scoundrel rake" and the Bishop of Raphoe "an old, doting, perverse coxcomb"—he is far from heartless. For all Dr. Johnson's denunciation of him as one who "relieved without pity, and assisted without kindness," Swift is capable of admirable compassion for the unfortunate. After the Duke of Hamilton is treacherously stabbed, he spends two hours with the bereaved Duchess and confides in his journal-letter, "She has moved my very soul." When his servant disrupts his plan for an early meeting with the Secretary of State by admitting a petitioner, he observes, "I think indeed his case is hard; but Gd knows whether I shall be able to do him any service."

Swift's judgments of people are apt to run to extremes. Sometimes, having built them up in his imagination, he suffers when his illusion is

cracked or even shattered. The fictional bookseller – in modern terms, publisher – who in 1704 appends a dedication to *A Tale of a Tub* is made to praise the unmatched virtues of the Whig Lord Somers. Seven years later Swift denounces him to Stella and Dingley as “a false deceitful rascal.” Dazzled in 1710 by the political brilliance and personal amiability of Lord Treasurer Harley and Secretary of State St. John and their early admission of him to their inner circle, he writes, “indeed it is hard to see these great men use me like one who was their betters, and the puppies with you in Ireland hardly regarding me.” In time he finds that though the restoration of peace in Europe depends on their efforts, both men can be distracted from their duty. “The Devil’s in this secretary,” he exclaims, and laments that Harley is “the greatest procrastinator in the world” and that his “great fault” is that he “cannot do all himself; and will not employ others.”

At times Swift does not scruple to lie: he promises Lord Shelburn to receive him when he calls knowing that he will do no such thing, and he tells Lord Radnor he is devoted to him when in truth he would “not care if he were hanged.” Otherwise, however, he is a strict moralist: “I give no man liberty to swear or talk b–dy,” he writes, explaining why he made an early departure from the company at St. John’s, and in his pamphlet “A Letter to a Young Clergyman Lately Entered into Holy Orders,” he asserts that the real purpose of freethinking is to excuse the “universal corruption of morals.” Nevertheless, he is free enough from self-righteousness to admit transgressors to his affection and companionship and to admire their good qualities. The Duchess of Orkney, mistress of the late William III, he terms the “wisest woman I ever saw,” and he discovers she is “perfectly kind.” He recognizes that St. John has been “a thorough rake” and is still a heavy drinker; on one occasion, Swift suspects that he (a married man) “stole away ... to pick up some wench.”

More complicated than admiration or friendship, though it includes both, is Swift’s relationship with his most intimate correspondent. Something of a father, a lover, and a tutor to Stella, he tells her that he loves her “infinitely above all earthly things.” He corrects her spelling and urges her to continue cultivating her mind by reading or being read to and to improve her health by walking. He remembers how she chides him “for meddling in othr peoples affairs” and reveals what a strong willed woman she is, for St. John, “when he is well ... is like Stella, and will not be governed” and once, when liable to sickness, “would needs drink champagne ... because I advised him against it, and now he pays for it; Stella used to do such tricks formerly; he put me in mind of her.”

As the *Journal* advances, a new element of suspense enters into it. Hazards threaten the signing of peace with France. The Ministry has to negotiate with the allies, especially the Dutch, who rely on a chain of for-

tresses to protect them from French aggression and who want economic concessions. Swift has to dampen a rising power struggle between St. John and Harley; the opposition fears Louis XIV cannot be trusted to keep any agreement; the sick Queen Anne has to be persuaded to create new peers to obtain a slender majority for peace in the House of Lords—her own sympathies are uncertain, and her life, on which the survival of the Ministry depends, is fragile. As the wished for Treaty of Utrecht comes nearer, Swift's anxiety about his own future increases. Now forty-five years of age, he has disdained to work for pay and would be ashamed to return to Ireland as a humble country clergyman. Moreover, he got used to being one of the most influential men in Britain and has acquired a circle of prized literary friends. England is where he wants to stay—as a dean or a bishop. The *Journal* records his anxiety and humiliation. He has made enemies as well as friends—and some of those enemies have the Queen's ear. He has obtained positions for others, and as early as March 1712 he notes, "this is te 7th I have now provided for since I came, & can do nothing for my self." Nine months later, sending a stop order to his printer, he resolves, "I will contract no more enemies, at least I will not imbitter worse than I have already, till I have got under shelter." In April 1713, three English deaneries become vacant, but the Queen will allow him none of them. Her confidante Lady Masham is in tears as she tells her friend Swift the Queen is immovable. The tension is unbroken as Anne concedes that the deanery of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin may be given to Swift—it is the utmost she will permit. On 21 April she agrees, but next day decides not to sign the document till the 23 April. Though mortified at the prospect of spending his life in Ireland, Swift is on tenterhooks: "while it is delayd I am not sure of te Qu— my enemies being busy." But the 23rd arrives, and now only the consent of his friend the Duke of Ormonde is needed, and of that Swift has no doubt.

It is instructive to read the *Journal* alongside the other extant letters that Swift writes at the same time. Most of these are admirably clear reports of the negotiations and of English politics dispatched to William King, Archbishop of Dublin. Sometimes he and King argue tactfully about the cases for and against peace. To other correspondents there are occasional playful and charming letters: he tells General John Hill how hard it is to hold on to the wonderful French snuffbox he has sent him, and he teases the Duchess of Ormonde, who sends him the Duke's portrait along with her own, that she is such a prude that she will not allow even her picture to be alone with a man other than her husband. But the texture of the journal-letters to Stella and Dingley is altogether different: "you must have chat," he exclaims, "and I must say every sorry thing that comes into my head." Having answered one of their letters, he adds, "O Lord, I am

in a high vein of silliness; methought I was speaking to dearest little MD face to face." "MD" is part of the system of pet abbreviations and childish pronunciation—"don't you remember Madam" becomes "dont oo lemembre Maram"—found in what he calls "our little language." "Do you know what?" he asks; "when I am writing in our language I make up my mouth just as if I was speaking it." The letters of the *Journal to Stella* give us a remarkable picture of Swift's consciousness. The cluster of thoughts and feelings recorded there is the matrix from which arise the well-ordered letters to William King and the political pamphlets and poems supporting the cause of peace.

On 15 December 1711, Swift confides to Stella and Dingley that if the Tory Government falls he will go into hiding for some months. There is widespread fear that men suspected, rightly or wrongly, of defying the Act of Settlement of 1701 by intriguing to bring James II's Roman Catholic son to the throne will suffer imprisonment or even execution, and, after the Peace and the fall of the Tory Government, Robert Harley, now Lord Oxford, is charged with treason and held in the Tower of London, though he is eventually acquitted, and Henry St. John, now Lord Bolingbroke, evades arrest by fleeing to France, where for a while he joins the Pretender's court. Returning permanently to Ireland in August 1714, Swift is suspect, but being in fact a staunch supporter of the Protestant succession is only vulnerable to guilt by association. When Archbishop King, near the end of a distinctly friendly letter, refers to a rumour that Bolingbroke will be allowed to return and adds, "I hope he can tell no ill story of you," the remark could be casual and almost flippant, but Swift is prickly enough to protest:

I am surprised to think your grace could talk, or act, or correspond with me for some years past, while you must needs believe me a most false and vile man, declaring to you on all occasions my abhorrence of the pretender and yet privately engaged with a ministry to bring him in; and therefore warning me to look to myself and prepare my defence against a false brother coming over to discover such secrets as would hang me.

Being subject to investigation—his mail is sometimes intercepted—is only one of the causes of Swift's unhappiness during his first years back in Ireland. His letters reveal that it is a time when nothing seems to go right for him. His ecclesiastical chores seem petty and irksome, and he is forced to argue about the claims of applicants for clerical posts. He struggles to promote his view that the Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral is more than *primus inter pares* in its governing Chapter. Archbishop King schemes

to limit his power, and his choir defies his authority. His bitterness is the greater for his having been given an office that leaves him for a year or two in debt—the thousand pounds he expected for his services in England is never paid.

In the comfortless deanery, Swift finds the servants are clumsy and ill behaved. To his great friend, the much younger English poet Alexander Pope, Swift describes how,

I live in the corner of a vast unfurnished house: my family consists of a steward, a groom, a helper in the stable, a footman, and an old maid, who are all at board-wages; and when I do not dine abroad or make an entertainment (which last is very rare), I eat a mutton-pie and drink half a pint of wine.

Swift hates Dublin, but discovers that his fine grounds at Laracor have been allowed to fall into ruin, and his failure to find a reliable horse deprives him of much of the riding that is so important both for his duties and his health: “Everybody,” he writes to a friend, “can get horses but I.” The Irish Parliament he despises and shuns, and he suffers from the lack of the brilliant friends and the formidable respect that surrounded him in London. In May 1719, he laments to the exiled Bolingbroke, “I have an ill head and an aching heart.”

Having little alternative, Swift concentrates on his work as Dean, but spends as much time out of Dublin as he can. He purchases additional land at Laracor, where he conducts a programme of improvement and building. As he explains to Charles Ford, a fellow Irishman whom he has seen much of in London, he declines to revisit England because he would only sink into deeper gloom on his return.

A further trouble has followed him back from London. In his journal-letters to Stella he is not afraid to tell her of the safely inaccessible society ladies in whose company he delights. Lady Ashburton, the Duchess of Shrewsbury, Lady Kerry and the wife of St. John are all dignified with the phrase “a great favourite of mine.” Yet there is one young woman who was to figure largely in his life who is hardly mentioned to Stella.

In London, Swift often dines at the house of his neighbour Mrs. Vanhomrigh, where he begins to act as tutor to her elder daughter, Hester, whom he nicknames Vanessa. This high spirited young woman has the misfortune to fall in love with the worldly, learned and witty clergyman who is by two decades her senior, so much so that after her mother’s death she takes up residence in Ireland to pursue him. Before she dies in 1723, some painful correspondence is to pass between them.

A fetching breathlessness in some of Vanessa's letters shows something of the attractiveness this vivacious but not very studious girl: Swift wonders "how a brat that cannot read can possibly write so well." By calling on her, others beside himself, he explains, are becoming objects of "the tattle of this nasty town." He is ready enough to help with the legal and financial difficulties that follow her mother's death, but his poem "Cadenus and Vanessa" fails to persuade her that her tutor will never be her lover. In Dublin, he shies away from the woman who gushes, "I was born with violent passions, which terminate all in one, that inexpressible passion I have for you." The native wit, high spirits and beauty of Vanessa cannot compete with the more substantial virtues of Stella, and after the former dies in June 1723, the embarrassed Dean finds it prudent to retreat for some months from Dublin and its gossip.

In many of the letters Swift writes in the earlier years of his deanship, he pours out his undying indignation at his banishment from his British friends and power base, as well as from the fertile landscape of prosperous England. He reserves his deepest disgust for Dublin: "the most disagreeable place in Europe," he dubs the city where he had once enjoyed a comfortable social life in a clerical circle of which Stella and Dingley were part. Bitterly he complains, too, of the increasing attacks of what is now diagnosed as Menière's disease, attacks that rob him of his hearing and afflict him with fits of giddiness. "As to myself," he informs his London printer, John Barber, in 1735,

I am grown leaner than you were when we parted last and am never wholly free from giddiness and weakness, and sickness in my stomach.... I ride a dozen miles as often as I can, and always walk the streets, except in the night, which my head will not suffer me to do.... My chief support is French wine, which, although not equal to yours, I drink a bottle to myself every day. I keep three horses, two men, and an old woman, in a large empty house, and dine half the week, like a king, by myself.

The darkness of the rage and resentment in Swift is relieved by gleams of consolation. He emerges from debt: "next to health," he tells a friend, "a man's fortune is the tenderest point." If the city he is doomed to live in is a place "which it is a shame for any man of worth to call his home," he finds a pleasure in fleeing to the estates of wealthy friends. He even discovers some joy in borrowing the dilapidated and badly staffed house his friend Thomas Sheridan owns in the wilderness of Quilca, and he exclaims in delight that the well-cultivated land at Lough-Gall makes him think he is in England. A considerable solace he lights on is landscape gardening,

primarily in "Naboth's vineyard," an enclosure which he has walled near his Cathedral at the enormous cost of £600: he tells his friend Knightly Chetwode, "I am as busy in my little spot of a town garden as ever I was in the *grand monde*."

In 1724, angered even more than hitherto by the discriminatory rulings of the Westminster Government and the absence of Irish self-help, Swift publishes his anonymous Drapier's Letters to thwart a British attempt to impose a debased currency on Ireland. Although his surviving correspondence makes only meagre reference to the campaign, one of his letters to Harley's son shows that he triumphs in the unanimous acclaim his struggle brings him. The authorship of the Letters is an open secret, but no one in Dublin is willing to name him to the authorities to make a prosecution possible, and he especially rejoices that his call to arms unites Irish Whigs and Tories, whose mutual animosity is even more ferocious than that of their English counterparts. Political hatred of this kind he lambasts as he writes his greatest book, *Gulliver's Travels*. Sailing back to England at last in 1726 to arrange its publication, he thinks how the pleasure the visit brings will increase the pain of living in Ireland, but returning to Britain again the following year, he seems briefly to re-enter the feverish political life he enjoyed under Harley as he aids Bolingbroke, who, with his periodical *The Craftsman*, is vainly trying to end the rule of the Whig Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole. Standing back from the fray, as he does when he writes *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift shows his wisdom by telling Pope that his book is intended to demonstrate "the falsity of that definition *animal rationale*," which "should be only *rationis capax*." All history confirms that the human species is indeed not a rational animal but only an animal capable of reason.

Happily, the playful side of Swift, the punster and the wit, is not extinguished, and there are a handful of delightful letters to Mrs. Howard, waiting woman to the Princess of Wales and the Prince's mistress: in one he impersonates Gulliver and in another claims to have been bitten by a houyhnhm, one of the wise horses in the last book of *Gulliver's Travels*. He can even write to her of his deafness and giddiness as "two friends," who, "being old acquaintances have now thought fit to come together," and in the same letter assert that if he makes such slips of the pen as "knights of a share for knights of a shire; monster for minister" and "sneaker" for "speaker," it "cannot be helped, while I have a hundred oceans rolling in my ears."

Just before the publication of *Gulliver's Travels* in October 1726, Swift becomes distraught at the news that Stella, now on the other side of the Irish Sea, may be dying. Reading his confession to friends that he is about to be deprived of what is most precious in his life, one may be reminded of

Dorothy Osborne's despair at the prospect of losing William Temple. Stella and Dingley, he tells the Reverend James Stopford, are "the two oldest and dearest friends I have in the world," and he bursts out to Thomas Sheridan,

I have been long weary of the world and shall for my small remainder of years be weary of life, having for ever lost that conversation which could only make it tolerable.

Another year and a half, however, pass before Swift suffers the dreaded bereavement. He has confessed to Sheridan that he will not be able to bear it "like a philosopher nor altogether like a Christian," but in the event he rallies, and a month after Stella's decease he writes a playful, affectionate letter to his and Pope's friend Martha Blount. "Dear Patty," he begins, "I am told you have a mind to receive a letter from me, which is a very indecent declaration in a young lady."

As Swift ages and suffers increasing bouts of deafness and giddiness, he adjusts his lifestyle to his affliction, curbing his travels and deciding that his companions will be of "a middle kind both for understanding and fortune, who are perfectly easy, never impertinent, complying in everything." Such people he can freely see and dismiss. A happy find is the learned but feckless and unhappily married schoolmaster Dr. Thomas Sheridan, whose portrait is the most vivid to emerge from Swift's later letters. With him, he exchanges verses and engages in playful language games. One letter to Sheridan begins:

I suppose you are now angle ling with your tack ling in a purr ling stream, or pad ling and say ling in a boat, or sad ling your stum ling horse with a sap ling in your hands, and snare ling at your groom, or set ling your affairs, or tick ling your cat, or tat ling with your neighbour Price.

Among his own relatives Swift is fond only of Mrs. Whiteway, whose letters testify to her intelligence and wit.

Swift continues to deplore his banishment to Ireland, where he feels "an obscure exile in a most obscure and enslaved country." With good reason, he continues to rage at Britain's refusing Ireland the right to import and export freely and her filling Irish civil and ecclesiastical posts with interlopers of English birth. Feeling more and more solitary but awake to his well-earned reputation as an Irish patriot, he declares, "My English friends are all either dead or in exile.... And as to this country, I am only a favourite of my old friends the rabble, and I return their love because I know none

else who deserve it." His excuse for the length of a letter concludes, "my solitary way of life is apt to make me talkative upon paper."

In 1732, when the possibility of a clerical post in England eventually opens up, Swift declines it on two grounds. Given the higher cost of living there, he would not be able to afford the large house, servants, horses and good wine that his ill health makes necessary – though the rents and tithes are hard to collect in Ireland, and he is perpetually anxious about his finances. In addition, he would suffer a decline in rank and lose his independence. He would prefer "to be a freeman among slaves rather than a slave among freemen." He explains to Pope:

I am one of the governors of all the hackney coaches, carts, and carriages, round this town, who dare not insult me like your rascally waggons or coachmen, but give me the way; nor is there one lord or squire for a hundred of yours to turn me out of the road or run over me with their coaches and six.

As the 1730s advance, Swift becomes disillusioned also with England feeling that Sir Robert Walpole is establishing arbitrary power which will lead to absolute monarchy. In a letter to Walpole's opponent William Pulteney, he argues:

It is altogether impossible for any nation to preserve its liberty long under a tenth part of the present luxury, infidelity, and a million of corruptions. We see the Gothic system of limited monarchy is extinguished in all the nations of Europe. It is utterly extirpated in this wretched kingdom, and yours must be the next.

Swift refers to infidelity, for he believes there cannot be stability without a national church, and he remains convinced that the Test Acts, which restrict public life to Anglicans, must be retained. In 1736 he observes that it has invariably been the maxim "of all wise Christian governments" to have "some established religion, leaving at best a toleration to others."

The condition of Ireland, which suffers grievously from absentee landlords and other evils, looms large in Swift's correspondence as in his published writings. Pope is invited to

Imagine a nation, the two-thirds of whose revenues are spent out of it, and who are not permitted to trade with the other third, and where the pride of women will not suffer them to wear their own manufactures, even where they excel what come from abroad.

Cut off from his best friends, the companions of his glory days, especially Pope and Bolingbroke, Swift is convinced that God "never intended anything like perfect happiness in the present life" and prizing friendship as its dearest treasure, he confides to Pope that he envies but does not love an amiable and popular man who is not troubled by the death of one of his many companions: "he gets another or takes up with the rest, and is no more moved than at the loss of his cat." Swift is especially cast down by the loss of the poet John Gay and the physician Dr. Arbuthnot. About the latter he exclaims, "O if the world had but a dozen Arbuthnots in it, I would burn my *Travels*." Gay is among the younger men and women whom Swift is pleased to admonish for their failings as he used to admonish Stella and Vanessa. They include his country hostess Lady Acheson, his Irish friend of London days Charles Ford, Gay's patron the Duchess of Queensbury, and his cousin Mrs. Whiteway. When Mrs. Pilkington complains at his scolding, he warns her, "If you cannot keep a secret and take a chiding you will quickly be out of my sphere. Corrigible people are to be chid; those who are otherwise may be very safe from any lectures of mine."

For the older Swift, the value of friendship far outweighs the value of fame. But though in one mood he recollects that in youth he longed for fame, in another, written half a year later, he dismisses desire of posthumous fame as a youthful folly but says that he still desires it: "because I cannot be a great lord I would acquire what is a kind of *subsidium*, I would endeavour that my betters should seek me by the merit of something distinguishable, instead of my seeking them."

During this decade, Swift's complaints of deafness and giddiness come to be accompanied more and more by laments that his memory is fading away and with it his power to compose verse. In 1735 he tells Mrs. Whiteway, "Earthly ladies forsake us at forty, and the muses discard us at fifty-five," and early in 1736 he admits to Pope, "I can as easily write a poem in the Chinese language as in my own." Two years further on, he refers to "my memory almost entirely gone, except what I retain of former times and friends." When he finds he needs to employ Mrs. Whiteway to write to Pope on his behalf, it is clear that the end approaches, and his short last letters to Mrs. Whiteway, penned in May and July 1740, are the agonized final cries of this man of genius disintegrating in mind and body.

Reading Swift's letters alongside his other writings, one comes close to this author, who is reputed to be so enigmatic. A proud, irascible, worrying man, he belongs to the more traditional wing of those who contribute to the work of the Age of Reason. Conscious of his mental powers but inheriting no fortune, he is compelled to make his own way in the world. From the letters he receives in his Irish exile, it is apparent that he is a delightful companion and a great humourist among his intimates, but all too

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often his anger, contempt and exasperated compassion are excited by the suffering that springs from human folly, vice and tyranny. In his belief, the only stay against these horrors is constitutional government with a balance of powers supported by a steady, unfanatical, established religion typified by the Anglican Middle Way.