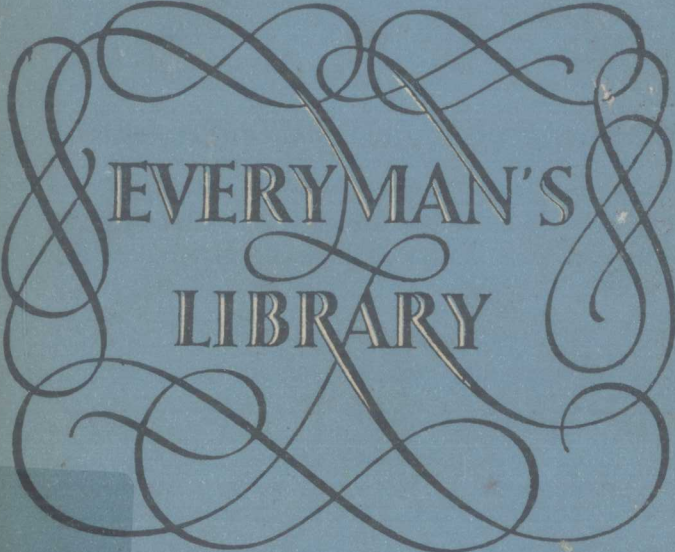


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JONATHAN SWIFT

A TALE OF A TUB,  
THE BATTLE  
OF THE BOOKS,  
AND OTHER SATIRES

A decorative frame made of dark blue or black ink, consisting of a series of overlapping loops and swirls that enclose the text.

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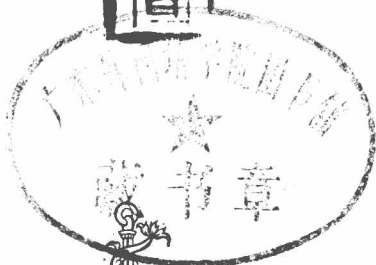
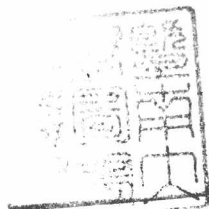
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JONATHAN SWIFT

# A Tale of a Tub

AND OTHER SATIRES

INTRODUCTION BY  
LEWIS M. LEE



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*EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,*

*and be thy guide,*

*In thy most need to go by thy side*

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## JONATHAN SWIFT

Cousin of Dryden, born at Dublin in 1667, of English origin. Secretary to Sir William Temple, 1692; ordained in Ireland, 1694; returned to Temple, 1696; to Ireland again in 1699. Dean of St Patrick's, Dublin, 1713. His mind gave way about 1740 and he died on 19th October 1745.

## INTRODUCTION

JONATHAN SWIFT was born at 7, Hoey's Court, Dublin, on November 30, 1667. His paternal grandparents were Thomas Swift, the royalist vicar of Goodrich, near Ross, and Elizabeth Dryden, the poet's aunt; and he was the son of Jonathan Swift by his wife Abigail Erick of Leicester, a kinswoman of the author of the *Hesperides*. Jonathan the elder was steward of the King's Inn at Dublin, and he died seven months before the birth of his famous son, leaving his widow with a little daughter, Jane, in poor circumstances.

Mrs. Swift returned to her family at Leicester, and her brother-in-law, Godwin Swift, charged himself with the boy's education. At the age of six Jonathan was sent to Kilkenny Grammar School, said to be the best of its kind in Ireland, and eight years later was entered as a pensioner at Trinity College, Dublin, where he distinguished himself by failing in two of three subjects taken up for his degree, which, indeed, he did secure, but only by the ignominious "special grace." That Swift, like his distant relatives Herrick and Dryden, showed no signs of precocious genius is true enough, but it is inconceivable that he was a dunce, as more than one writer has urged, and the reason for his failure at Trinity College may more readily be found in his recklessness, brought out, he declared, through his ill-treatment by relatives. Indeed, it seems that Godwin, by his general demeanour, made the bread of charity bitter to the lad, whose high spirit then, as after, made a state of dependence almost unbearable to him.

In 1688 Godwin Swift died, having made no provision for his nephew, owing to his having through unfortunate speculations passed from affluence to the brink of insolvency; and, shortly after the flight of James II., Jonathan joined his mother at Leicester to discuss plans for his future. In the following year he accepted an offer of a

position in the household of Sir William Temple, whose wife, Dorothy Osborne, was a connection of the Ericks.

Swift was soon installed at Moor Park, Temple's home near Farnham, in Surrey, and there he, "a raw, inexperienced youth," to quote his own description, became, first, humble companion of the statesman, essayist, and later, when his abilities were obvious to his master, secretary and amanuensis. At Moor Park he met William III., who, it is said, offered him a commission in a cavalry regiment and taught him to cut asparagus in the Dutch fashion. He saw the monarch again when Temple entrusted him with a mission to convince his Majesty of the necessity of triennial parliaments; however, the king declined to be convinced, which, said Swift, was "the first incident that helped to cure me of vanity."

Swift could scarcely endure his subordinate position: in his writings there are many indications of his bitterness, and there is an autobiographical note in his posthumous *Directions to Servants*, written towards the end of his life, which suggests that the memory of these unhappy days was still vivid: "To grow old in the office of a footman is the highest of all indignities; therefore, when you find years coming without hopes of a place at Court, a command in the army, a succession to the stewardship, an employment in the revenue (which two last you cannot obtain without reading and writing), or running away with your master's niece or daughter, I directly advise you to go upon the road, which is the only post of honour left you; there you will meet many of your old comrades, and live a short life and a merry one, and make a figure at your exit."

To grow old in service under Temple or another Swift determined should not be his lot. The thing he wanted most in the world was independence, and to secure this he overcame the scruples that forbade him to enter the Church for support. When he first went to Moor Park, he regarded this merely as a place where he might render service, valued at "£20 a year and board," until he was appointed to a living. But after a while he saw, or fancied he saw, that Temple, having realised the value of his *protégé's* services, was in no hurry to part with him, and made only a pretence to secure him preferment; where-

upon at last, in 1694, the young man, enlisting other influence on his behalf, returned to Ireland, was ordained, and presented to the small prebend of Kilroot, near Belfast, worth £100 a year. There he met Jane Waring, the sister of a college friend, now generally known as "Varina," the least important of the trio of women with which his name is associated.

Soon wearying of the life of an impecunious country parson, Swift embraced the offer of Temple, who missed his aid, to return to Moor Park, and in May 1696 he again took up his abode there, where he remained, diligently acquiring a profound knowledge of men and books, until the death of his famous master three years later. "I was at his death as far to seek as ever," he said; and, having his bread to earn, he returned to Ireland, and acted as chaplain to Lord Berkeley at Dublin Castle. There one of his duties was to read to Lady Berkeley her favourite Robert Boyle's *Meditations*: one day he read, apparently from the volume, a "Meditation" that Lady Berkeley accepted without suspicion—it was his own *Meditation upon a Broomstick*, that most delightful parody! In February 1700, Lord Berkeley gave him a prebend in St. Patrick's, Dublin, and the vicarage of Laracor, with the living of Rathbeggan, County Meath, worth in all about £200 a year—an income "Varina" thought sufficient for marriage, but after the expression by Swift of an opinion diametrically opposed to this suggestion, the lady passed out of his life.

With two other women Swift's name is inextricably connected, with the passionate Esther Vanhomrigh ("Vanessa") and with Esther Johnson ("Stella"), of whom he wrote: "I knew her from six years old, and had some share in her education by directing what books she should read, and perpetually instructing her in the principles of honour and virtue, from which she never swerved in any one action or moment of her life. She was sickly from her childhood until about the age of fifteen; but then grew into perfect health, and was then looked upon as one of the most beautiful, graceful, and agreeable young women in London, only a little too fat. Her hair was blacker than a raven, and every feature of her face in perfection." The



story of these women is so well known that there is no necessity to enter into it here. "Vanessa" was but an episode in his life; but "Stella" was the love of his life, and with her death in 1728 the solitary gleam of brightness in his sad existence disappeared. Whether he married her or not is, with the identity of "Junius," one of the unsolved mysteries of history; but two things seem certain: if the union took place, it was after "Vanessa" appeared on the scene, and it was never consummated.

Though in 1699 the outside world was ignorant of his existence, Swift was known to the wide circle of Temple's acquaintance as a man of great promise, and, to a select few, not only of promise but of performance. He had already fleshed his pen: he had written verses—though these called forth Dryden's oft-quoted remark, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet," a prophecy soon to be falsified; and he had prepared Temple's letters and memoirs for publication. But this work counts as nothing when it is remembered that he had composed *The Battle of the Books* and *The Tale of a Tub*, which, written in 1697 and circulated in manuscript, did not receive the honour of publication until seven years after their inception.

*The Battle of the Books* arose out of an essay by Temple in 1692 on ancient and modern learning, to which William Wotton replied in favour of the moderns, and the controversy spread, with Boyle and Bentley, respectively, for and against the ancients. Swift then took up his pen in defence of his patron, and, pretending the quarrel had spread to the books in the St. James's Library, of which Bentley was curator, wrote the mock-heroic *Full and True Account of the Battle fought last Friday between the Ancient and Modern Books in St. James's Library*, describing the forces, on each side, and the pitched battle, but, with happy inspiration, leaving the issue in doubt—the "Advertisement" runs: "The manuscript, by the injury of fortune or weather, being in several places imperfect, we cannot learn to which side the victory fell."

Brilliant as was this *jeu d'esprit*, it pales into comparative insignificance before the wonderful *Tale of a Tub*, that masterly satire on "the numerous and gross conceptions

in religion and learning." Ostensibly the history of three brothers, Peter (the Church of Rome), Jack (Presbyterianism and other forms of Protestant Dissent) and Martin (the Lutheran and Anglican Churches), the whole resolves itself into a tremendous onslaught on hypocrisy and theological shams. The wealth of satire, the deep irony, the terse style, and the brilliant imagination that inspired the pamphlet places it in the very foremost place of its kind in English literature. "Good God!" cried Swift, reading it near the end of his life, "what a genius I had when I wrote that book!" and this opinion has been echoed by every critic of English literature from Swift's days to ours.

Swift was not content to remain at his "hedge-living," as he dubbed it, at Laracor, and he came frequently to England, where he interested himself in all questions of the day, though he contrived, so far as possible, to hold himself aloof from party. The impeachment of the Whig lords in 1701 provoked him to write a *Discourse on the Contests and Dissensions between the Nobles and Commons in Athens and Rome*, which, like all Swift's works, was published anonymously:<sup>1</sup> it was attributed to Somers and to Burnet, and it was only when Thomas Sheridan told Swift that the latter had written it, that Swift avowed the authorship. Then, in gratitude, although there is nothing in the pamphlet committing the writer to Whig principles, the leaders of that party welcomed him heartily when he next visited England, and promised him preferment. Soon after came the publication of *The Battle of the Books* and *The Tale of a Tub*, when, at a bound, Swift took his place amongst the leading men of letters and wits of the day, and made the acquaintance, and eventually became the friend, of Congreve, Steele, Addison, Halifax, and other notabilities.

In 1707 Swift came to London with an official mission to obtain the application of Queen Anne's Bounty to Ireland, and while he was still pressing this proposal upon the government, the bishopric of Waterford fell vacant. There

<sup>1</sup> The only work to which Swift put his name was a letter addressed to Lord Oxford in 1712, entitled *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue*, and containing suggestions for the foundation of an English Academy of Letters.

is no doubt he expected the preferment, and was disappointed when he was passed over in favour of Dr. Thomas Milles; and in the following year his claims were again ignored when an appointment had to be made to the see of Cork. His anger, however, was kept within bounds, and, though he felt himself injured, he did not break with his untrustworthy friends. However, the breach was to come, and it arose out of Swift's *Letter on the Sacramental Test* (1708), which vexed the Whigs, who were allied with Dissent. The matter that had brought Swift to England made no progress, and Swift returned embittered to Ireland.

On his next visit to England his hatred of Dissenters led him to the Tory camp, where Harley met him with an undertaking to settle the Bounty question. He then threw in his lot with this party, contributed to the Tory *Examiner*, attacked Godolphin and Wharton, and in 1711 wrote *The Conduct of the Allies*, which urged that the war was carried on from corrupt motives, and did more than anything else, it was believed, to make the Peace of Utrecht acceptable to the English nation.

He was the supreme pamphleteer of his, perhaps of any, time, for this benefit he had derived from his years of servitude at Moor Park: he had learnt public business from the inside; and so when he engaged in political conflict, he wrote not as a *doctrinaire*, but as a man of affairs. Sir Leslie Stephen has said that Swift's political pamphlets were blows rather than words, and this effect was undoubtedly produced, not only by the author's inspired common-sense, but also by his practical knowledge of the working of governments. A master of irony and invective and of logic, his simple, forcible style, never decked out with meretricious adornment, made his meaning clear even to the dullest intellect; and made him the most valuable adherent of any principle he thought fit, in his honesty of purpose, to support.

So powerful an ally must be kept in good humour even by the most high and mighty statesmen, and Swift's influence between 1710 and 1714 was enormous. To his lasting credit he never committed a "job," and, equally to his credit, he took advantage of his power to further the

interests of men of letters, irrespective of party: he secured the promise of an office for Nicholas Rowe, and did his best to keep Steele's place for him; he obtained subscriptions for Pope's translation of Homer, and rendered yeoman service to Congreve and Parnell, and such minor lights as William Diaper and William Harrison. It seemed as if he could do anything for anybody except himself. The Whigs had done nothing for him, and the Tories seemed equally determined to shuffle out of their obligations—would have done so, too, had not he in 1713 demanded at the point of the sword, as it were, "something honourable;" if that were not forthcoming, he said plainly to Oxford, he would return forthwith to Ireland. Then, and then only, since it was clear he could not longer be put off with vague promises, did they move: they promoted John Sterne, Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, to the see of Dromore, and installed Swift in the vacant deanery in June 1713.

We find Thackeray speaking of Swift as an outlaw, who says, "These are my brains; with these I'll win titles and compete with fortune. These are my bullets; these I'll turn into gold!" The accusation sounds weighty, but, when examined, to what does it amount? That Swift desired advancement in his profession, and hoped to secure it because he was head and shoulders above every man in it! How many men of genius are there who do not hope that their talents may secure this delectable end, whether churchmen, soldiers, statesmen, lawyers, novelists? And, so long as they do not prostitute their great gifts, who shall object? It is right and fitting that genius shall have its reward, and it is far better that an intellectual rather than a soulless adventurer shall succeed in climbing the tree and plucking the fruit. Swift may not have been the ideal dean or the possible bishop; indeed he was not; but he compares favourably with many who held these positions. At least his life was clean, his honour untarnished; he wronged no poor man, hurt no woman, and he never wrote a line except as his conscience dictated. It is said he was never promoted to a see because he was the author of *The Tale of a Tub*: we may well agree with Mr. James Hannay who, in his excellent and unjustly forgotten book on *Satire and Satirists*, denounces this as "odious and sickening cant,"

as indeed it obviously is, when we remember the age in which Swift lived, that age which is revealed in his terrible satires and in Hogarth's prints, that age in which corruption, sensuality, and irreligion was rife, when statesmen intrigued round the deathbed of a queen, and the mistresses of royalty were advanced to the highest honours.

Thirteen months after Swift became Dean of St. Patrick's, Queen Anne died, and, his hopes of a bishopric at an end, anyhow for the time being, he returned to Ireland, where the Whigs, now in power, kept watch, it is said, for any opportunity to impeach their erstwhile ally for high treason. The last stage of Swift's life shows him transformed from an English into an Irish favourite, and this almost in spite of himself. He always looked upon himself as an Englishman, and regarded the Irish as of little political importance, at all events until after he settled there for some years. At first he concerned himself little about the affairs of the nation, and might never have taken an active part had it not been for the infliction of Wood's Halfpence, the injustice of which aroused him, first, to protest privately, and, that failing of its effect, then, in 1714, to attack the disgraceful "job" in the vigorous *Drapier Letters*. Two years later he went to England, visited Pope and Gay, and dined with Walpole, to whom he complained in vain of the treatment of Ireland by the government; and he paid his last visit to this country in 1727, when the death of George I. gave him some hope that he might assist in displacing Walpole from the office of prime minister. He returned to find Stella on her death-bed.

Though, of course, Swift was not on friendly terms with the official society of the capital, his stalwart opposition to the oppression of the hated Saxon, together with his far-reaching charities, drew all hearts to him, and for the rest of his life he was the idol of the Irish people. When Sergeant Bettesworth, whom he had outrageously ridiculed, threatened him with violence, an association was formed to defend the "person of the Drapier," and in such profound reverence was he held by the ignorant that he

dispersed a crowd gathered to see an eclipse by sending word that it had been put off by his orders!

He diligently pursued his literary work in the quiet retreat of the cathedral close. In 1726 he made a departure from his usual practice of seeking no remuneration for his writing, and permitted Pope to dispose for £200 of the manuscript of the only lengthy work that came from his pen. This bore upon the title-page the legend, "*Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. By Lemuel Gulliver, first a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships,*" and, though issued anonymously, was at once ascribed to its author, and set the seal on his fame. If it is not intellectually equal to *The Tale of a Tub*, it is only second to that in the list of his major achievements, and its interest is far more universal. Dr. Johnson might say of this masterpiece, "When we have once thought of big men and little men, it is easy to do the rest:" yet neither he nor any other man had "thought of big men and little men," and it is quite certain that neither he nor even Defoe, nor any other man whose name is proudly enrolled in the annals of English literature, could have done "the rest." It is, indeed, not the conception but the execution that is so wonderful. Granted the postulates, the realism is so remarkable—Emerson accurately but somewhat prosaically remarked that Swift described his fictitious persons as if for the police—and the whole work is so amazingly truthful a satire on existing social conditions, and so convincing an attack on "the animal called man," that it seems almost as if its accuracy could be proved mathematically: and yet—and this is the miracle of the work—its irony is so deep that it has been a favourite gift-book for children!

There are critics who have averred that Swift was mad when he wrote the latter parts of the book, for, they declare, no sane man could have been so cruel, so inhuman; but to express this view is to show a splendid ignorance of the Dean's character. No brain could have been clearer than his, even when, always with that redeeming quality of humour, he described the bestial Yahoos and the passionless Houyhnhnms. Swift knew full well what he was doing: he was no playful satirist desiring, as, for example, Addison

did, to please while he instructed, but a man terribly in earnest, realising the weaknesses and the vices of mankind. As another famous philosopher looked for an honest man, so he sought for a good one: "If there were but a dozen Arbuthnots in the world," he said, "I would burn my *Travels*!"

In his later years Swift wrote many things that would have made the reputation of a lesser man. He gave vent to his sardonic humour in *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from being a Burden to their Parents or Country, and for making them Beneficial to the Public* (1729) and in *Directions to Servants* (written in 1737, but published posthumously); but while he attacked ignoble things fiercely, he could rebuke folly with a gentle hand, and the playful humour that years earlier had inspired the *Bickerstaff Papers*<sup>1</sup> was again apparent in 1730 in the good-natured satire on *Polite Conversation*.

All his life Swift had been subject to attacks of giddiness and deafness, and now as old age came upon him these afflictions became more and more frequent and severe. Young stated that the Dean had once said to him, "I shall be like that tree: I shall die at the top;" and as the years passed, the great man dreaded not death, but life. "Good-night, I hope I shall never see you again," he is reported to have said to his friends when taking leave of them. The fate that he had foretold for himself came to pass: his brain became overclouded in 1738, in 1741 guardians were appointed by the Court of Chancery, and in the following year, after suffering great agony, he fell into a state of apathy which mercifully endured until the end. He died, at the age of seventy-seven, on October 19, 1745, and was buried in his cathedral by the side of "Stella" Johnson. As we pause to reflect upon these last years, and compare them with the virility of those two-score that preceded them, there will surely be none to dispute Thackeray's pronouncement: "An immense genius: an awful downfall and ruin. So great a man he seems, that thinking of him is like an empire falling."

<sup>1</sup> "Written to prevent the people of England from being farther imposed on by vulgar Almanack makers."

This is not the place to enter into a criticism of Swift, but space must be snatched for a few passing words of appreciation. Perhaps there has never been in this country another writer, with the exception of the supreme head of English letters, in whom can be discerned the same force of intellect. Others may amuse, may touch the heart, may arouse good passions and bad, but no man appeals so directly to the brain. Yet, curiously enough, Swift has found his severest critics among men of genius. What Dr. Johnson said of *Gulliver's Travels* has already been recorded, and this great man had so erroneous an impression of the gifts of a man still greater that he would not ascribe to him the honour of having written *The Tale of a Tub*. "Swift has a higher reputation than he deserves," he said in 1763. "His excellence is strong sense; for his humour, though very well, is not remarkably good. I doubt whether *The Tale of a Tub* be his; for he never owned it; and it is much above his usual manner." This may serve to make critics humble, for if in this manner Johnson tripped, who may not fall? Macaulay's estimate is too familiar to be repeated here, and Thackeray's, for the same reason, will not be given. These men were repelled by Swift's ferocity, and they seem not to have inquired what prompted it: yet Swift's apparent malignity arose from a great love of his fellow-creatures, soured by continual disappointment in their nobility, and from a love of truth and of righteousness that on every hand he saw trampled under foot.

This ferocious satirist had a heart as tender as beats in any breast. He was disappointed in material ambition, a victim of hope deferred; far sadder, he was debarred from conjugal love, either by his fear of madness or by some other and more mysterious ban. Yet he won the love of a people, and kept it for thirty years; he was the friend of Gay and Prior, of Pope and Berkeley, of Addison and Arbuthnot, and many more, though it must be confessed he did not suffer fools gladly; and he was beloved in middle-age, as all the world knows, by two devoted women: let those who doubt his tenderness read the *Journal to Stella*, never meant but for the eyes of the person to whom it was addressed. There are those, how-



ever, who will not be convinced, and these see only in the inscription, "Only a woman's hair," attached to a lock of Stella's hair, found at his death, a last sneer of him whom Addison pronounced "the greatest genius of the nation!"

LEWIS MELVILLE.

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