MR SWIFT AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

Irvin Ehrenpreis

SWIFT:
THE MAN, HIS WORKS, AND THE AGE

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Volume 1

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IRVIN EHRENPREIS

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SWIFT

THE MAN, HIS WORKS, AND THE AGE

VOLUME ONE

Mr Swift and his Contemporaries

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by Irvin Ehrenpreis

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CONTENTS

PREFACE *page* ix

Part I

1. ERICKS, DRYDENS, AND SWIFTS 3
2. IRELAND 8
3. DUBLIN 21
4. INFANCY 27
5. KILKENNY 34
6. TRINITY COLLEGE 43
7. STUDIES 57
8. THE DUBLIN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY 78

Part II

1. TEMPLE 91
2. MOOR PARK 102
3. EARLY POEMS (I) 109
4. EARLY POEMS (II) 132
5. SWIFT AND TEMPLE 142
6. KILROOT 150
7. MOOR PARK AGAIN 169

Part III

1. *A TALE OF A TUB* (I) 185
2. *A TALE OF A TUB* (II) 204
3. *A TALE OF A TUB* (III) 216
4. *THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS* 226
5. *THE MECHANICAL OPERATION OF THE SPIRIT* 238
6. LAST YEARS AT MOOR PARK 247

Appendices

A. THE FAMILY OF SWIFT'S FATHER *page* 267

B. THE WILL OF THOMAS SWIFT OF GOODRICH 268

C. SWIFT'S MATERNAL GRANDFATHER 270

D. ST GEORGE ASHE'S SPEECH 275

E. ROLL OF STUDENTS' MARKS AT TRINITY COLLEGE 279

F. DISCIPLINARY FINES OF SWIFT AND OTHER STUDENTS 284

G. BOOKS BOUGHT BY TEMPLE IN 1698 286

H. ABBREVIATED REFERENCES AND A NOTE ON THE QUOTATIONS 288

PREFACE

Compared with the ideal of a definitive biography, the present volume has more faults than its author has blushes; compared with available biographies, it aims at a new standard of thoroughness and accuracy. The two remaining volumes are already complete in a preliminary draft, and will appear in reasonably quick succession to the first.

Biographers find Swift's character so fascinating that often they treat him in comparative isolation, telling the single story of his inner development and employing other people, as well as public events, only as these bear unavoidably upon the man or his works. Presented with so stark an image, the reader must come with unusual resources if he hopes to judge both the degree to which Swift was representative of his generation and the degree to which he was either independent or eccentric. Since I think this judgment is important, I have drawn many parallels between Swift and his contemporaries. I have tried, by revealing unexpected connections and relationships, to suggest the narrow, close-knit nature of the social fabric to which he belonged. I have further tried to indicate how far intellectual traditions and public events could, as it were, endow Swift with principles which might seem arbitrary to us.

I have been less concerned to add than to eliminate fables; and those readers who look for my views on a long train of legendary Swiftiana will search in vain. Here, neither Swift nor Stella is made a bastard; Swift does not say, 'My uncle gave me the education of a dog'; Dryden does not say, 'Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet'; and Temple does not seat Swift and Stella at the servants' table. But I have looked minutely into Swift's intentions and principles. Since his early works contain bold expressions of his ideals and intricate examples of his satirical methods, I have given them a detailed examination. Because *A Tale of a Tub*, his hardest and most brilliant work, has been misunder-

stood by many critics, I have gone over it with unusual care.

For early encouragement, steady guidance, and innumerable kindnesses, I am indebted to my teachers, George Sherburn, Louis Landa, and Sir Harold Williams.

For generous support of the work, I am indebted to Indiana University, the U.S. Educational ('Fulbright') Commission, the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the American Philosophical Society.

For their incredible patience and hospitality, I am indebted to Dr William O'Sullivan, Dr Richard Hayes, Mr L. W. Hanson, and the other librarians of those sanctuaries where my work was mainly done: Indiana University, the British Museum, Trinity College (Dublin), the National Library of Ireland, and—condition to which all others naturally aspire—the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

For generously permitting me to use manuscript materials, I thank the Board of Trinity College, Dublin, the Trustees of the British Museum, the officers of the Leicester City Museum, Bodley's Librarian, and Mr James Osborn. I thank the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for allowing me to quote from R. L. Colie, *Light and Enlightenment*, and A. R. Hall, *Ballistics in the Seventeenth Century*; the Delegates of the Clarendon Press for L. A. Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*; and the officers of the University Press, Dublin, for C. E. Maxwell, *A History of Trinity College, Dublin*.

For many kinds of assistance over many years of work, I am indebted to Mr Giles Barber, Professor Frederick L. Beaty, Mr James T. Boulton, Mr John Russell Brown, Mr G. A. Chinnery, Professor James L. Clifford, Professor Rosalie L. Colie, Professor Ronald S. Crane, Professor Philip B. Daghlian, Professor Herbert Davis, Professor Oliver W. Ferguson, Mr Alastair D. S. Fowler, the Rev. J. G. Frostick, Professor Rudolf B. Gottfried, Professor Donald J. Gray, Professor John C. Hodges, Professor A. Rupert Hall, Professor Colin J. Horne, Mr Emrys Jones, Professor Alexander C. Judson, Mr Hugh F. Kearney, Professor

George P. Mayhew, the late Professor William Thomas Morgan, Major P. D. Mundy, Mr James M. Osborn, Professor Gordon N. Ray, Professor Robert W. Rogers, Lord Rothschild, Professor Edward L. Ruhe, Miss Nicolete Shawyer, Mr John Gerald Simms, Professor Charles H. Taylor, Jr, the late Mr W. H. Welply, Miss Kathleen Williams, the Rev. R. G. Williams, Mr David Woolley, Mr Jonathan Wordsworth. And finally I must acknowledge an extraordinary obligation to Mr M. R. Ridley, whose sagacity has saved the reader from being exposed to some scores of pedantries and who would have liked to preserve him from more.

I. E.

NOTE ON SECOND IMPRESSION

For this impression I have made corrections at the following points, which I list for the use of anyone who may wish to notice them in a copy of the first impression: p. 128, ll. 5–3 from bottom; p. 156, l. 22; p. 172, n. 5; p. 175, n. 6; p. 240, l. 4 from bottom; p. 246, n. 1; p. 253, ll. 21–2. I am indebted to Mr Barry Slepian for suggesting the second of these changes.

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Part I

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Chapter One

ERICKS, DRYDENS, AND SWIFTS

For a man who claimed that his family were 'of all mortals what I despise and hate',[1] Swift surely had much to do with them. His early years were sheltered by an uncle's hospitality; the last years were eased by a cousin's devotion. He paid a lifetime allowance to a needy sister; he supported and regularly visited a widowed and distant mother. In his era of intimacy with peers and statesmen, he saw and gave help to humble relations. When, ageing and ill, he lived withdrawn from the world, he lent a fortune to a young cousin; another cousin's husband was for a while his curate. Probably, Swift's ironical, ostentatious contempt for 'what the world calls natural affection'[2] betokens an instinct grown too powerful for him to handle directly.

Contrary both to received opinion and to the hints dropped by Swift himself, his relatives influenced in fundamental ways his literary ambitions, his political sympathies, and his religious convictions. He was born into a family allied with two of the great names of seventeenth-century literature, Dryden and Davenant: his cousinship with Dryden he repeatedly mentioned; Davenant's grandson played the part of a brother to Swift during his childhood and youth. The high church, anti-Whig political alignment of Swift as an adult follows the course of his father's generation and of the father's father. In his vocation of priest and dean Swift, with belligerent persistence, supported policies which not only tie him to one grandfather but oppose him to the other; for though both were parsons, one had been persecuted by Puritans and the other by Laudians.

But Swift has not only misled us as to the effect of his forebears

[1] Ball vi. 113. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 126.

upon him; he has even misled us as to plain facts of his ancestry; and several early biographers have deepened the darkness by assertions and conjectures which can now be dismissed. Swift's exact relationship to Dryden, the identity of his mother's father, the large number of clergymen in his background, the early division, in associations, between his sister and himself—these are some of the points established by a survey of his descent. We shall discover how, in a literal sense, 'natural' it was for Swift to grow up into a high church Anglican priest, bitterly opposed to nonconformity, separated from his sister, and preoccupied with literary ambitions.

One ancestor he venerated above all, his parson grandfather Thomas Swift. Writing toward the end of his life, when he was almost seventy-two, Swift still flamed at the idea of that royalist vicar's sufferings from the Puritans—'persecuted and plundered two and fifty times by the barbarity of Cromwell's hellish crew'.[1] Yet Swift knew little about his own extraction, and that little was often wrong. In a fragment of autobiography, he traced his paternal line to a Yorkshire family which had really a negligible tie or none with the Reverend Thomas Swift (1595–1658), vicar of Goodrich and rector of Bridstow, Herefordshire.

His own maternal grandparents Swift skips over in this account, blandly tying his mother, Abigail Erick, to 'the most antient family of the Ericks, who derive their lineage from Erick the Forester'. Genealogists believe it more likely that she belonged to a modest branch of the Erick or Herrick family of Leicestershire, 'very private gentlemen' in her son's odd phrase[2]; her father was no doubt the Reverend James Ericke (B.A., Cambridge, 1624), vicar of Thornton, Leicestershire, from 1627 to 1634.[3] (Although she is supposed to have been related to Dorothy Osborne, the connection has not been traced.)[4]

Swift owed his Christian name, in the last instance, to neither the Ericks nor the Swifts, but to the family of his father's mother

[1] Ball VI. 127. [2] *Autob.*, f. 6^{v}. [3] See Appendix B.

[4] When Sir William Temple died, Swift's mother was one of those who received an allowance for mourning.

From these more remote ancestors were descended cousins with whom he was to spend much time when he lived in England; and from the same ancestors, as Swift readily pointed out, John Dryden was also derived. Both writers—Dryden in the male line, Swift in the female—are traced to a Northamptonshire gentleman, John Dryden of Canons Ashby; for one of his sons was Dryden's grandfather, and another, Nicholas, was Swift's great grandfather. This—second cousinship once removed—is what Swift termed a 'near relation'.[1]

The name 'Jonathan' appears only after Nicholas Dryden's marriage; and with it we meet other names belonging to the generation of Swift's father. Nicholas Dryden married a Mary Emyley, both whose grandfather, Thomas Godwin, and uncle, Francis Godwin, were bishops. Nicholas and Mary Dryden called their eldest son Jonathan and their eldest daughter Elizabeth. A son who died in infancy was called Godwin, after (one assumes) either or both of his episcopal forebears.

Here begins the tale which Swift knew: for it was Jonathan Dryden's sister Elizabeth who married the Reverend Thomas Swift of Goodrich; and their fifth son, Swift's father, was named Jonathan, probably after his Dryden uncle. The eldest and by far the most important uncle of Swift himself was named Godwin; another uncle, Dryden. Such names and such connections show that Swift's links with literature and the church go back in one direction as far as the female side of this favourite grandfather's family.

On the other side, Thomas Swift came not of Northamptonshire gentry but of Kentish clerics. Both his father, William Swift (1566–1624), and his grandfather, Thomas Swyfte (1535–92), had been rectors of St Andrew's, Canterbury; and his great grandfather, William Swyfte, had also lived in Canterbury.[2] In

[1] Ball v. 162, 452–3; P. D. Mundy, *N. & Q.*, 4 Oct. 1924, pp. 243–4; 18 Oct. 1924, pp. 279–80, 334; 30 Oct. 1948, pp. 470–4; J. M. Osborn, *John Dryden: Some Biographical Facts and Problems* (New York 1940), p. 237. Swift was not—as has been said—also related to Dryden through descent from Bishop Thomas Godwin: see Mundy, *N. & Q.*, 1 Sept. 1951, pp. 383–4.

[2] Mundy, *N. & Q.*, 1 Sept. 1951, pp. 381–7.

naming his many sons, however, Thomas Swift seems to have drawn more on his wife's family than his own. Godwin, the eldest son (1628–95), must go back ultimately to one of the bishops—probably Francis (1562–1633, Bishop of Hereford), who had collated Thomas Swift (his cousin) to the Goodrich living and, being alive, might still do some duty.[1] Dryden, the second son (born 1629), obviously perpetuates Elizabeth Swift's maiden surname. Thomas, the third (born 1633), continued one Swift tradition; and William, the fourth (1637–*c.* 1705), continued another. Jonathan, the fifth (baptized 24 May 1640, died March or April 1667), has already been linked to Mrs Swift's brother.

Swift's fragment of autobiography reflects more concern with the parson Thomas than the parson's children; for Uncle Godwin is dismissed in five sentences, Thomas in three, and Dryden, William, and Adam,[2] all together, in one. Of the three last, Swift remarks that 'none of them left male issue', but that Jonathan, 'besides a daughter left one son'.[3] This daughter's name may yet again have significance: it was Jane, and it must belong to Abigail Swift's family; we know that Mrs Swift had a niece, Jane, daughter of a brother, the Reverend Thomas Errick, whose wife was named Jane as well. On his father's side, Swift had many female cousins, and they had many female offspring; but none of them seem, like his sister, to be called Jane. By every token, Swift counted himself as belonging to his paternal grandfather's family, not to his mother's. By sex and by name, by earlier birth, and—as we shall find—by constant association, Jane would belong to his mother's side.

It is not certain that Swift's mother knew much of her father, since he may have died when she was a child; it is far less certain that her son did. Yet Swift made many visits to Leicester; so he must have been familiar with the city's Puritan tradition and its anti-royalist role in the Civil War. Thomas Errick, Swift's mother's brother, only died in 1681, but there were other ways as well to pick up hints of James Ericke's sympathies; and no admirer of the Laudian tradition would have welcomed these

[1] Mundy, *N. & Q.*, 1 Sept. 1951, p. 384. [2] See Appendix A. [3] *Autob.*, f. 6.

hints. For after seven years as vicar of Thornton, James Ericke had confessed to holding an unlawful conventicle in his brother-in-law's house. He had been brought before the Court of High Commission; and though that court had first 'resolued to make tryall of him for a tyme to see how and in what manner he did demeane and carry him selfe in the execution of his ministry',[1] he was probably, in the end, deprived of his living.[2] If Swift was at all aware of the Puritan strain in his mother's background, his remarkably intense devotion to the royalist Anglican of Goodrich would seem to imply a corresponding repudiation of the vicar of Thornton's family.[3] I am confident that he was indeed aware of the strain and that while Swift's lifelong polemic against nonconformity could not be simply due to this element in his background, it does reflect the degree to which he considered himself a 'Swift' rather than an 'Erick'.

[1] P.R.O. MS. SP 16/261, 8 May 1634.

[2] On the Induction Mandate for his successor, John Summerfield, the parish is stated to be vacant 'per cessionem derelictionem sive deprivationem Jacobi Ericke', which suggests but does not confirm deprivation (Leicester City Archives MS. 1D41/28/442).

[3] See Appendix C.

Chapter Two

IRELAND

The meaning of Swift's work will escape anybody who forgets that his English career, long and important as it was, only interrupted an Irish life. Although a residence in Whitehaven during infancy was to remain a cherished fact for Swift (and though he may perhaps have briefly visited England during his adolescence), he had no real experience of Leicester, London, or Surrey till he left the university of his native city as a young adult. The traditions of his Herefordshire and Kentish ancestors had to receive a strange Irish setting before he was introduced to them; and around the immediate frame of a Protestant English family living in Ireland extended the larger frame of the so-called 'English interest' there. Let us understand the evolution of the unstable social order to which Swift belonged—with its splits between the native Irish and their conquerors, nonconformity and the Established Church, landlord and priest, old settlers and new administrators—and we shall see many of his distinguishing features emerge not as eccentricities but as intelligible reflections of the backgrounds of his career: for example, his conservative morality, or his uneasiness about property and wealth, or his unwillingness to call himself a Tory; his attacks upon Presbyterianism, his sympathy with the sufferings of the native Irish, coupled with his contempt for Roman Catholicism; his aggressive identification of himself with England, matched by his violent criticism of English policies in Ireland; his love of the church and his loathing of bishops.

In the development of that uneasy social order, however, certain forces did touch the dependent and half-orphaned boy more than most of his contemporaries: one was the shaky condition

both of property titles and of money; another, the mutual distrust of northern, Scottish Presbyterians and the Anglican population of Ireland. Under such influences, Swift struggled to accumulate an estate for himself; he battled all his life for the strengthening of the Church of Ireland; and in his greatest political essays, *The Drapier's Letters*, he evoked the principles of human freedom out of a controversy over the coinage of money. Yet it is in the more general pattern of Irish history that we can observe not only what brought the Swifts to Dublin originally but also how they became involved with two great families, the Temples and the Ormondes; for the Temples directly and the Ormondes by way of the institutions they controlled were to guide young Jonathan Swift through the first stages of his career. At the same time, moreover, these families embodied the polar traditions of the English in Ireland: the Ormondes or Butlers, anciently established there, accepting responsibility for the whole population's welfare; the Temples, come over as administrators, regarding the kingdom only as a province that should be of some use to the rulers and their dependents, with no care for the condition of the vast, stubborn majority. We shall see that Swift, assigned by birth to the social philosophy of the Temples, educated himself to transcend it and to support that of the Ormondes. In remarking this movement, however, as in studying any aspect of Restoration Ireland, we shall acknowledge that it derives in turn from the ultimate principle of the history of the kingdom, the difference in number and religion between the rulers and the ruled.

Swift, then, grew up in a middle-class, Anglican community within a much greater population of rural Irish Roman Catholics. The Ireland he knew was the result of several violent but inconclusive military and colonizing projects of the English. The earliest effort, accompanying the invasion of Strongbow and the Normans in the twelfth century, planted among the Irish a number of great ruling families whose interests merged only very gradually with those of the natives. Into the seventeenth century the descendants of these invaders continued to wield something

of their traditional power. From one of them, the Butlers, came the first Duke of Ormonde, who dominated the institutions which shaped Swift's career; and the second Duke, his grandson, whom Swift well knew and too much admired. By the end of the thirteenth century such families possessed (at least, nominally) most of arable Ireland.

During the next three hundred years the English settler did not exterminate the Irish; he did not admit the Irish to civil or political rights; and he did not multiply so as to outnumber the Irish. Instead, he continued to live in the conquered land as overlord, holding high offices under the crown, and despising the natives until their resentment boiled over into armed rebellion. A ferocious suppression would regularly end each uprising, with confiscation of the land of the leaders. Undisputed English supremacy, however, hovered around the dimensions of the Pale. This enclave, where English law was regularly enforced, had been established by Henry II; it centred on Dublin, but varied in extent, generally including most of what is now the county of Dublin and much of Louth, Meath, and Kildare. Sir John Temple, writing about 1646, described it as 'a large circuit of land possessed at the time of the first conquest of Ireland by the English, and ever since inhabited by them; it contains several counties, viz., the counties of Dublin, Meath, Lowth, Kildare, &c.'[1]

The feckless but mercenary administration, by the king's officers, of the English colony itself, fed a spirit of separatism. During the fifteenth century this grew into a resentful hostility toward England and English interests; what mainly irritated the settlers was the steady neglect of the authorities to assist in their defence. By Elizabeth's time three of the most pervasive elements in Irish history were established: the political alienation of the natives, who remained by far in the majority; the distrust of the so-called Anglo-Irish and the natives for each other—a hatred nourished by the long history of mutual terrorism; and the clash of interests between the descendants of the English born in Ire-

[1] *The Irish Rebellion*, 1679, p. 63.

land, and those Englishmen either directing Irish affairs from England or recently arrived in Ireland on administrative or plundering missions.

It is always to the interest of a mother country to prevent individual colonists from winning entrenched power for their families through the cumulative effect of intermarriage, legacies, hereditary perquisites, and traditional apportionments of privilege. At least, it is to the interest of ambitious statesmen, who must control every source of preferment. For this end, and to keep the colonists' regime generally subservient, it is common for the home government to bring in, as administrators, new men who will not direct their superiors but obey them. Thus the Domviles, Boltons, Percivals, Doppings, and Temples, whom Swift was to consider proper (if imperfect) leaders of Irish society, would only have risen to high office in the latter half of the sixteenth century.[1] In Ireland, moreover, just as 'old' English Catholic landowners saw themselves ousted, under Elizabeth and James, by new Anglican families associated with the army or the plantations, so the heirs of those recently established families were to find themselves displaced, under the later Stuarts and George I, by fresh carpet-baggers sent over from England.

A further complication was introduced with the plantation of Ulster, early in the seventeenth century. In that northern province a tremendous conspiracy had been smashed, and the usual confiscations had taken place. These in due course opened the way to a new settlement of loyal Britishers; and because careful limits were put on the type of participation allowed, the project did achieve permanent success. Of all the undertakers, the Scots were the most energetic. Since, in addition, the counties of Antrim and Down, bordering on the escheated lands, were already well colonized by Scots, the enduring character of the new settlement was Scottish. When the Presbyterian ministers, persecuted by James's episcopacy, came after their people, they established a religious bent which has remained a distinguishing mark of northern Ireland.

[1] H. F. Kearney, *Strafford in Ireland* (Manchester 1959), p. 18.

The strongest block to Anglo-Irish amity may also be blamed on the Tudors. This was the failure of the Reformation in Ireland. Although a parliament sat in Dublin 1536–7 for the purpose of establishing the new church, such legislation had negligible effect outside the Pale. The Roman Catholic Church had always commiserated the sufferings of the Irish, and there was in the country no sentiment favouring a break. The suppression of the regular clergy and the reversion of ecclesiastical property to the crown gave the whole movement a venal, lawless stamp which was attended by neither the piety nor even the proselytizing which might have relieved it. Recognizing their advantage, the Roman Catholic clergy laid down a policy of complete loyalty to Ireland and relentless opposition to English Protestant ascendancy. This strategy was so successful that, by Swift's time, to be Irish was to be Roman Catholic, although to be English was not always to be Anglican.

The forces behind all these developments came into play during the vast rebellion which started in 1641 in Ulster, spread over the whole of Ireland, and was not finally suppressed until 1652. The results of it gave Irish history its direction at least up to Swift's death. At the centre of the conspiracy was a group of prominent Irish Catholic clan leaders and landowners. Worried by the progress of the Puritans but encouraged by the vacillations of Charles I, they acted as though they thought the last opportunity had come for them at one stroke to preserve their church from extinction, to frustrate a final seizure of their estates, and to rectify the abuses of centuries. As the Civil War went on in England, a split developed within both this group and the British power which opposed them, so that the Irish divided between those who remained loyal to the king himself and those who demanded complete independence, while the British in Ireland divided between Parliamentarians (including, naturally, the Scottish Presbyterians) and loyalists (including the Anglicans). In August 1649—six and a half months after the execution of the king—the Irish Rebellion reached the point where Cromwell himself marched in. But though he spread a ferocious, if uniform,

terror for nine months, active resistance endured into the spring of 1652. Then at last, under the Articles of Kilkenny, the utter conquest of a nation was done.

By this date, unfortunately, the cost to Parliament of putting down the Rebellion had swollen so high that out of the twelve million acres of arable land in Ireland, five would be wanted to pay the accumulated debt. In the summer of 1652, therefore, an Act of Settlement was passed—as arrogant and arbitrary as it was inevitable—by which the whole territory of Ireland was treated as confiscated property. The basis of this expropriation (and later ones) was no longer racial but religious. Every Irishman, whether English, Scots, or Gaelic, who could not demonstrate his innocence in the Rebellion and his constant good affection to the Commonwealth of England, was to suffer punishment by loss either of life or of property or of both, 'wholly or partial according to the degree of their guilt'.[1] Such was the so-called 'Cromwellian Settlement'. But if the Rebellion was thus extinguished, its primitive causes remained untouched and continued to flourish: land titles were still not secure; the English renewed their mistreatment of the Irish and their neglect of 'Anglo-Irish' families; and the Roman Catholic Church still underwent a harsh, though unsystematic, suppression.

While the main victim of Cromwell's army was the native Irish Catholic population, the Parliamentary troops were not, of course, careful of Anglican property. When Swift went to school at Kilkenny, he was to see a monument to their energy in the cathedral of St Canice: 'They left it roofless,' writes the first Restoration bishop, 'took away five great and goodly bells, broke down all the windows and carried away the glass, also broke down the doors, the font, and many goodly marble monuments.'[2] Cromwell's administration of Ireland, intended, in Macaulay's words, 'to make Ireland thoroughly English, to make it another Yorkshire or Norfolk', went far toward its goal. There was a 'con-

[1] Dunlop, p. 116.
[2] George Seaver, *The Cathedral Church of St Canice, Kilkenny* (Kilkenny 1953), p. 19, quoting Griffith Williams.

stant and large emigration from England to Ireland', and 'the native race was driven back before the advancing van of the Anglo-Saxon population.'[1] In general, hideous agonies were inflicted upon the Irish Catholics; for although some managed to find either farms they could rent or else other employment, many were transported to the West Indies and many became simply vagabonds.

At the Restoration, the trend naturally reversed itself, in a movement which did not cease until 1691. The Act of Settlement (1662) and the Bill for the Explanation of the Act of Settlement (1665) re-established many of the old proprietors. Numbers of them had indeed returned to their homes when Charles II became king, since they had no reason to think he would deal kindly with the Cromwellians. Very roughly, the outcome was that a third of the pasture and plough land went to native Roman Catholic landlords, a third to the older Protestant colonial families, and a third to the more recent 'adventurers' and soldiers. All serious attempts to modify this Act failed until the death of Charles.

With the accession of James II, the native Irish, led by Richard Talbot, now Earl of Tyrconnel, found their opportunity. A younger brother of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, and a crony of James II when Duke of York, Tyrconnel had long been the most influential spokesman for the Irish Catholics at the court of Charles II. Not until the Revolution, however, did he have his way. Then, during the War of Williamites and Jacobites in Ireland, an irregular Irish Parliament—packed with Catholics—repealed the 1662 Act of Settlement. Yet even this change had no real effect, since in October 1691 the war ended.

On this occasion the famous Treaty of Limerick was signed, among the civil provisions of which appeared the last grand attempt to regulate the tenure of land in Swift's lifetime. This was the agreement that all submissive Roman Catholics should 'be secured in the free and undisputed possession of their estates as

[1] Macaulay, *Constitutional Essays*, World's Classics ed., p. 332.

they possessed them under the Act of Settlement'.[1] However, the civil Treaty (unlike the military) was never ratified by the Irish—i.e., 'Anglo-Irish'—Parliament, which on the contrary rejected it at last in 1697; and so it remained invalid.

Under William and Mary, the confiscations, grants, and resumptions made by crown and parliament had effects too elaborate to be detailed; but they can be roughly summarized. In 1688, between a quarter and a fifth of the profitable land of Ireland had belonged to Roman Catholics, whether of Gaelic Irish or of 'old English' extraction. By 1703, this fraction had declined to something like a seventh. Yet the area forfeited over these fifteen years was much less than what such proprietors had lost through the combined effects of the Cromwellian and the Restoration settlements. 'After 1703 there were no more confiscations on the wholesale scale of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Stability had at last been reached.'[2]

Through the evolution of this land problem, the fundamental instability of Irish society during Swift's early years becomes unpleasantly clear. The basic form of wealth was real estate. From the outbreak of the Rebellion, however, the titles to thousands of acres changed hands with crumbling rapidity. Not regard for justice, but political and ecclesiastical expediency, guided these shifts. And if even property in land seemed shaky, money was more so. From the year of the Restoration until well into the reign of William and Mary, Irish coinage passed through alchemical transformations. Under Charles II a series of private persons obtained licences to supply the kingdom with copper and brass small change; but as each licensee failed to honour his pledge to redeem these pieces with gold and silver, the public always suffered from the consequent depreciation. James II, during his Irish campaigns, made a chaos of the coinage. He raised the price of gold and silver, struck brass sixpences, issued coins from two mints as fast as materials could be collected: church bells, cooking utensils, old cannon; he even recalled his

[1] Dunlop, p. 128.
[2] J. G. Simms, *The Williamite Confiscation*, 1956, pp. 17, 160–2.

own large half-crowns and restamped them as crowns. Then in 1691 all these coins ceased to be current. But still under William III one patentee flooded the kingdom with halfpence until it became common—a historian writes—for creditors to compound for 'one fourth copper'.[1] And all the time, of course, by inexorable, universal process, the value of gold and silver fell gradually in both England and Ireland; for Swift well knew that it took thirty pounds under Queen Anne to buy the equivalent of five pounds under Henry VI.[2]

To Swift's private reasons for worrying about his material fortunes, such a history would have given a special sharpness. The English for centuries have found prestige in the ownership of land, and put a price upon estates beyond the economic value. In Swift's day it was a truism that 'power follows property' (i.e., ownership of land); and although the maxim was often realized in reverse—through the alleged effect's giving rise to the supposed cause (power likes to be respectable)—Swift's obsession with 'real' property, as superior both morally and substantially to moneyed wealth, would have had all the weight of tradition behind it. If to this common tradition and to Swift's early poverty and dependence we join the peculiar course of Irish history, we shall not feel puzzled by his fear of inflationary trends ('the perpetual decrease of the value of gold and silver')[3] and his consequent insistence that land is the only sound bottom of a man's prosperity. As he struggled to build 'some little oeconomy of [his] own',[4] Swift was to reflect that within his memory even the most stable form of capital had several times been shaken.

Over this same period, of course, the 'settlement' acts and penal laws (against the Papists' acquiring large estates) operated so severely that there were few Roman Catholic freeholdings of any size, and those were constantly dwindling.[5] Yet for ordinary natives, in this period, emigration was hardly a practicable

[1] Davis, *Drapier*, p. 233.

[2] William Fleetwood, *Chronicon Preciosum*, 1707, p. 167. Swift owned and apparently used a copy of this book.

[3] Davis IX. 48. [4] Sherburn III. 96.

[5] For a detailed analysis of Protestant and Catholic landowners, see Simms.