

A Fragment of the History from William Rufus

TO THE
COUNT DE GYLLENBORG

Running Commentary

p. 1

COUNT DE GYLLENBORG] See Historical Introduction, p. 1.

p. 1, ll. 3-4 IT is now about sixteen years since I first entertained the design of writing a history of *England*] If the date of the draft dedication, 2 November 1719, is correct, and there is no evidence to the contrary, Swift would have started work on the miscellany of disparate materials later covered by the title *History of England* in c.1703. But then, Swift's memory was notoriously unreliable, and here again, the reference to 1703 is no exception to the rule. May 1696, when Swift returned from Ireland to Moor Park (Ehrenpreis, *Mr Swift*, p. 169), has to serve as *terminus post quem*. As George Faulkner asserted in a note added to the 1762 18mo reprint of Swift's *Works*, the death, on 8 March 1702, of William III, at whose "Request" Swift ostensibly embarked on the project, provides the *terminus ante quem*. This may not apply to all segments of the whole work, but it certainly does to the *Abstract*, the part immediately preceding the Dedication to Gyllenborg, whose composition points to 1700/1 if not earlier. This date ties in neatly with Swift's later remark that "he was diverted from pursuing this history ... chiefly by the indignation ... at the proceedings of a faction, which then prevailed" (p. 2, ll. 12-13), an allusion to the Paper War occasioning the *Discourse of the Contests and Dissentions*. This, Swift's first minutely topical political allegory, was published in October 1701 but had engrossed his attention between April and September of that year, and the interview at which William III is likely to have uttered his "Request" also happened when Swift was in England in 1701 (*A Discourse of the Contests and Dissentions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome*, ed. Frank H. Ellis [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967], particularly pp. 1-14, 175-81; see also Historical Introduction to *An Abstract of the History of England*, Online.Swift, forthcoming).

p. 1, ll. 4-5 from the beginning of *William Rufus* to the end of queen *Elizabeth*] From 1056 to 1603, that is, covering the reigns of 22 monarchs.

p. 1, ll. 5-7 such a history, I mean, as appears to be most wanted by foreigners, and gentlemen of our own country] Swift was in the habit of imagining types of readership throughout his works, both poetry and prose, and in ever-increasing complexity, too, in the more mature satires and pamphlets of the 1720s and 1730s (see, for example, Peter J. Schakel, “Swift’s Voices: Innovation and Complication in the Poems Written at Market Hill,” *Reading Swift* [2003], pp. 311-25), but “foreigners” and “gentlemen” seem strange bedfellows for Swift’s envisaged audiences. But then, “foreigners,” presumably early visitors to England with an insufficient command of the language (see Andreas Selling, *Deutsche Gelehrten-Reisen nach England, 1660-1714* [Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990], pp. 43-45, and *passim*) and “gentlemen,” who would have no pronounced interest in scholarly issues, perhaps best account for the relative ‘simplicity’ of Swift’s annalistic *History*, both linguistically and intellectually. Either group is unlikely to have shown concern for the authenticity and accuracy of historical sources, the ostentatiousness of *variae lectiones* and *apparatus critici*, the ‘pedantry’ of learned debates and their accompanying controversies.

p. 1, ll. 7-8 not a voluminous work, nor properly an abridgment, but an exact relation of the most important affairs and events] An intention illustrated by the very title of Valerius Maximus’ *Dictorum factorumque memorabilium libri IX* ([Amsterdam: Jan Jansson, 1647], p. 258 [VI, i, ext. 3]), of which Swift owned no less than three editions and of which he annotated one with care (PASSMANN AND VIENKEN III, 1886-89).

p. 1, ll. 9-11 My intention was to inscribe it to the king your late master, for whose great virtues I had ever the highest veneration, as I shall continue to bear to his memory] This declaration was accompanied by an asterisked note in the copy text, Deane Swift’s 1768 edition of Swift’s *Letters*: “Charles XII, King of *Sweden*, who was unfortunately killed by a cannon-ball at the siege of *Frederickshall*, in the year 1718” (VI, 307). In a letter to Ford of 6 January 1718/9, the Dean showed himself to be “personally concerned” by the King’s death, in the “trenches before Fredriksten fortress on 30 November [OS], [his] fifty-first birthday” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 289 and n9; see also II, 291). This ‘personal concern’ for Charles XII was also expressed on the news that, after his defeat in the Battle of Poltava in 1709 (Burnet, *History of his Own Time*, II, 534; Hatton,

Charles XII of Sweden, pp. 292-96), Charles with a small troop of his followers fled across the Turkish frontier to the Ottoman Empire, where it was feared “that Prince [might be] dead among those Turkish Dogs” (*Journal to Stella*, ed. Williams, II, 650-51 and n37; *The Marlborough-Godolphin Correspondence*, ed. Henry L. Snyder, 3 vols [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975], III, 1322 and n5). It is presumably best accounted for by “the honour of an invitation” the King had extended to Swift at an earlier occasion (p. 2, ll. 3-4; see also the gloss on p. 2, ll. 3-5).

Given Swift’s detestation of war and his criticism of warfare and warmongering virtually throughout his career (see Ian Simpson Ross, “Satire on Warmongers in Gulliver’s Travels, Books One and Two,” *The Perennial Satirist: Essays in Honour of Bernfried Nugel, Presented on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, eds Peter E. Firchow and Hermann J. Real [Münster: LIT, 2005], pp. 49-65, with a full bibliography of studies on the subject), it is more difficult to account for Swift’s “veneration” of a warrior king like Charles XII (for his ‘character,’ see Burnet, *History of his Own Time*, II, 535-36) as well as “the profound respect” he professed to have for the King’s memory (p. 2, l. 24). This has led to speculation that Swift’s “veneration” may have been “inspired by accounts of Charles from personal observations, such as were available at the Court of Queen Anne intermittently 1710-14 from Dr John Robinson,” who “in his Department, and every Thing else,” was widely known as “a *Swede*” after having served as English envoy at the court of Sweden for over twenty-five years, and “whose ability and fluent Swedish won him that King’s respect” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 290n10; Hermann J. Real, “‘The Most Fateful Piece Swift ever Wrote’: *The Windsor Prophecy*,” *Swift Studies*, 9 [1994], 76-99 [pp. 97-98]). Under the circumstances, Wagstaff’s declaration, in his “Introduction to the Following Treatise,” that he would “resent it as the highest Indignity, to be put upon the Level, in Point of Fame, in after Ages, with *Charles XII*, late King of Sweden” (*Prose Works*, IV, 122), is replete with irony.

pp. 1-2, ll. 11-2 I confess it is with some disdain that I observe great authors descending to write any dedications at all: and for my own part, when I looked round on all the princes of *Europe*, I could think of none who might deserve that distinction from me, besides the king your master] In his letter to Ford of 6 January 1718/9, Swift explained: “I intended him an honor & a Compliment, w[hi]ch I never yet thought a Crownd head worth, I mean, dedicating a Book to him” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 289 and n10). This all too solemn declaration is inconsistent with Swift’s former practice inasmuch as he had

dedicated his 1700 edition of the *Letters Written by Sir William Temple* “TO HIS Most Sacred Majesty William III, King of *England, Scotland, France, and Ireland*” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, Plate 11; Preface to *Temple's Letters*, eds Kirsten Juhas and Hermann J. Real, with the assistance of Dirk F. Passmann, and Sandra Simon (Online.Swift/Ehrenpreis Centre for Swift Studies, Münster, October 2011) [<http://www.uni-muenster.de/EnglishDepartment/Swift/online.swift/works/templeletters/>], p. 3.

p. 2

p. 2, ll. 3-4 his present *Britannick* majesty, to whose person and character I am an utter stranger, and like to continue so] The “*Britannick* majesty” is King George I, who was proclaimed on 1 August 1714 (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 49 and n4; Ragnhild Hatton, *George I, Elector and King* [Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978], pp. 108-10), but who did not arrive at Greenwich from Hanover before 18 September (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 81 and n4). On 16 August (Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, pp. 755-63), Swift had left for Ireland, never to return to England before his long visit in 1726, so the two had never met by November 1719. Swift repeated the sentence almost *literatim* a little over a year later in his Letter to Pope dated Dublin, 10 January 1721: “King George, of whose character and person I am utterly ignorant, nor ever had once the curiosity to enquire into either” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 357; *Prose Works*, IX, 28).

p. 2, ll. 6-8 some years after I had the honour of an invitation to his court before you were employed as his minister in *England*, which I heartily repent that I did not accept] In his letter of 6 January 1718/9, Swift told Ford: “I am personally concerned for the Death of the K of Sweden, because I intended to have begged my Bread at His Court, whenever our good Friends in Power thought fit to put me & my Brethren under the necessity of begging” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 289).

before you were employed as his minister in *England*] This probably puts Charles XII’s “invitation” to Swift before April 1710, when Count Gyllenborg was appointed Swedish ambassador in London. This assumption is corroborated by a letter of 30 October 1709, in which Swift, commenting on the bad news of Charles’s Russian campaign having foundered before Poltava, told Ambrose Philips that his “Heart [was] absolutely broke with the Misfortunes of K. of Sueden” because “nothing pleased [him] more in the Thoughts of going abroad

than some hopes [he] had of being sent to that Court” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 268 and n4). Gyllenborg’s appointment lasted till 1717, when, on a day ominous in British history, 30 January, the Count “was arrested for complicity in the plot to support a new Jacobite rising with 12,000 Swedish troops” (*The Letters of Jonathan Swift to Charles Ford*, ed. Nichol Smith, p. 75n1). See also Historical Introduction, pp. 1-2.

minister] Here probably meaning “political agent accredited by one sovereign state to another” (OED), but, as Johnson reminds us, the word also meant “agent from a foreign power, without the dignity of an ambassador” in the eighteenth century (JOHNSON, II, s.v.). In that case, “minister” would refer to Gyllenborg’s activity as secretary of legation to his predecessor, Leijoncrona, implying that the King’s “invitation” to Swift was extended even earlier. On the other hand, Swift gave Pope and Parnell “hints” of “a Correspondence with the King of Sueden” on their visit to Letcomb in July 1714, at a critical stage of his political career, and “a contingency arrangement seemed on the cards” then (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 646 and n3).

p. 2, ll. 9- 10 I might have avoided some years uneasiness and vexation, during the last four years of our excellent queen] Swift is referring to his years as *chef de propagande* for the Harley administration (1710-14), which are recorded in great detail in the *Journal to Stella* and which constitute a continued chronicle of personal disappointments frustrating his “very natural, and in no way dishonourable” desire for ecclesiastical preferment in England, no matter whether *A Tale of a Tub* or *The Windsor Prophecy*, or both, debarred him from a bishopric in the end (C. H. Firth, “Dean Swift and Ecclesiastical Preferment,” *The Review of English Studies*, 2 [1926], 1-17 [p. 4]; see also *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 415n2, 479 and n1). Swift himself attributed Queen Anne’s refusal to give him the preferment to which he felt entitled to the alliance of “a Crazy Prelate, and a Royal Prude.” The “Prelate” was the Archbishop of York, Dr John Sharp, who allegedly represented the heterodox author of the *Tale* “as unfit for a seat on the episcopal bench,” and the “Royal Prude” refers to Anne’s Whiggish confidante Elizabeth Percy, Duchess of Somerset, who “was infuriated by *The Windsor Prophecy*” (*Poems*, ed. Williams, I, 193, l. 2 and n2). Thus, Sweden would indeed have provided “a refuge from the wrath of the Whigs” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 588 and n1).

p. 2, ll. 11-12 a long melancholy prospect since, in a most obscure disagreeable country, and among a most profligate and abandoned people] The evidence of

Swift showing profound compassion for the miseries of Ireland and its impoverished, starving, and oppressed population is counterbalanced by equally emotional denunciations of Ireland as “a dirty obscure nook of the World,” as the country of “Exile, Distress, or Imprisonment,” and of its people, “stupid, slavish, complying beasts” that they are, as blighted by “Poverty, indifference, ignorance and pride” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 411, 441; III, 305, 307; see also Oliver W. Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962], pp. 49-50, 60-61, 114-20, 145-49, and *passim*).

p. 2, ll. 13-15 I was diverted from pursuing this history, partly by the extreme difficulty, but chiefly by the indignation I conceived at the proceedings of a faction, which then prevailed] See p. 1, ll. 3-4.

p. 2, l. 16 until you saw me in *England*] No certain information on Swift’s first meeting with the Count is extant. It is known, however, that before Gyllenborg was appointed Swedish ambassador to the Court of St James’s in April 1710, he worked as secretary of legation to the former envoy, Christoffer Leijoncrona (1662-1710), himself appointed ambassador in 1703. Gyllenborg may have been a member of Leijoncrona’s entourage on arrival; if he was, there would have been plenty of occasions for his encountering Jonathan Swift, the best chances being afforded perhaps during Swift’s extended London stay from November 1707 through June 1709 (Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, pp. 195-349).

p. 2, ll. 17-18 I was engaged in thoughts and business of another kind] Since this depends on the exact date of Swift’s first meeting Count Gyllenborg, it is impossible to state the character of his “business” with any degree of certainty. During Swift’s 1707 to 1709 sojourn, a good guess would be his “solicitations,” with various representatives of the Government, for the remission of first fruits and twentieth parts on behalf of the Church of Ireland. These negotiations are chronicled at some length in Swift’s letters (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 166 and n2, 177 and n1, 289-90, 309 and n1, 311-12 and nn, and *passim*), and they would certainly account for his being immersed in important “business” (John Irwin Fischer, “Learning ‘*David’s* Lesson’: Some New Information concerning the Remission of First Fruits and Twentieth Parts in Ireland,” *Swift Studies*, 1 [1986], 15-23).

p. 2, ll. 18-19 Upon her majesty's lamented death, I returned to my station in this kingdom] Queen Anne’s death, on Sunday, 1 August 1714 (Edward Gregg,

Queen Anne [London, Boston, Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980], pp. 391-95), was widely lamented as “ill” and “dismal news” as well as a “melancholy” and “sad occasion” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 37 and n1, 43 and n2; 45, 47; HMC, Portland MSS, V, 481). Swift provisionally fixed Monday, 2 August, for his departure to Dublin but in fact set out two weeks later, on 16 August, also a Monday (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 28 and n4, 29 and n1, 63 and n1). He “returned to [his] station” in Ireland inasmuch as he had been in Dublin the previous year to be installed as Dean of St Patrick’s, an appointment which Swift took to be not only an inadequate recompense for his merits (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 444n4, 479 and n2, 498n,n2; Ehrenpreis, *Dr Swift*, pp. 661-62) but also a condemnation to lifelong exile, “the greatest punishment to Men of Virtue” in “the Land of Slaves and Fens,” to which “*nothing could have driven him, but the Queen’s Death, who had determined to fix him in England*” (*Poems*, ed. William, II, 568, ll. 396-97, 570n1; see also II, 420-21; *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 441, 486, 515). “Without question,” one critic has concluded, “the cruelest disappointment of [Swift’s] life was the reward which, in 1713, the ministry gave him, the deanery of St Patrick’s Cathedral” (Ferguson, *Jonathan Swift and Ireland*, p. 6).

p. 2, ll. 19-21 not a northern curate among you who hath lived more obscure than myself, or a greater stranger to the commonest transactions of the world] This combines Swift’s recollection of life in Presbyterian Kilroot, his first geographically isolated, impoverished, and hostile parish in the north-east of Ireland, on the shore of Belfast Lough (Louis A. Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland* [Oxford: Clarendon Press 1954], pp. 1-24; Ehrenpreis, *Mr Swift*, pp. 157-62), with the disenchanting reminiscences of his “sorry,” “dull,” and “obscure” life in Dublin, which increasingly permeate his correspondence after 1714. “In a few weeks after the loss of that excellent Princess [the death of Queen Anne], I came to my station here,” Swift recalled in January 1721, “where I have continued ever since in the greatest privacy, and utter ignorance of those events which are most commonly talked of in the world” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 355; see also II, 576, 343, 549, and *passim*).

curate] “Properly, a clergyman who has the charge (‘cure’) of a parish ... Such a clergyman is also known as the ‘incumbent.’ He is chosen by the ‘patron’ (the person having the right to nominate a clergyman for the parish in question), and is admitted to the cure of souls ... by the bishop of the diocese ... In general speech, however, the word is now [and then] used to denote an assistant or unbeneficed clergyman ... appointed to assist the incumbent in the performance

of his duties, or to take charge of a parish temporarily during a vacancy, or while the incumbent is unable to perform his duties” (ODCC s.v.). Swift himself made use of curates. While at Laracor, for example, his “regular duties were in the hands of curates,” the most prominent being Thomas Warburton and Stafford Lightburne (Landa, *Swift and the Church of Ireland*, pp. 38-39; *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, II, 120n2, 132n2; I, 121n3, II, 224n2, and *passim*).

p. 2, ll. 26-28 the second reason is, to have an opportunity of declaring the profound respect I have for the memory of your royal master] See the note on p. 1, ll. 9-11.

p. 2, ll. 28-29 and the sincere regard and friendship I bear to yourself] There is only one record of Swift’s “regard and friendship” for Gyllenborg, and it speaks for an easy, sociable relationship, marked by tolerance, understanding, and good humour: “I cannot rememb Appointments,” Swift told Stella somewhat fussily in March 1713, “I was to have suppd last night with the Swedish Envoy at his House, & some othr Company; but forgot it: & He raillyd me to day at Ld Bolingbr’s, who excused me by saying the Envoy ought not to be angry, because I serve Ld Tr, and him the same way” (*Journal to Stella*, ed. Williams, II, 637). See also p. 2, ll. 30-31. Provided that Swift was familiar with the subtle nuances of the diplomatic hierarchy, and its heterogeneous classes in the various European countries, an envoy was a representative below the rank of ambassador and was consequently paid less, depending on his status of envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary or envoy extraordinary (D.B. Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789* [Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961], pp. 42-53). See also note on p.2, ll. 30-31.

p. 2, ll. 30-31 how proud I was to distinguish you among all the foreign ministers, with whom I had the honour to be acquainted] In contemporary diplomatic usage, ‘minister’ denotes a function below the ranks of ambassador and envoy (Horn, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1689-1789*, pp. 45-47). In the *Journal to Stella*, however, Swift is notoriously ambivalent in his designations of diplomatic representatives, and it is possible that he may have thought of ‘envoy’, or ‘ambassador’ when referring to ‘minister’ and vice versa. Candidates who spring to mind are Johann Caspar von Bothmar (1656-1732), the Elector of Hanover’s Envoy to the Court of St James’s, the Venetian ambassador, Signor Bianchi, the secret envoys Nicolas Ménager (1658-1714) and Abbé Guillaume Dubois (1656-1723), “two private ministers from France ... come about the Peace,” and

numerous others (*Journal to Stella*, ed. Williams, II, 400 and n9; I, 250 and n13; II, 372 and 8, and *passim*; *Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, I, 412 and n2, 386n5).

pp. 2-3, ll. 32-1 the zeal you shewed not only for the honour and interest of your master, but for the advantage of the Protestant religion in *Germany*, and how knowingly and feelingly you often spoke to me upon that subject] No written evidence for this claim has survived, and it may have been inserted here for the sole purpose of countering the rumours that the Count had been implicated in Jacobite doings and dealings (see Historical Introduction, p. 2). On the other hand, Swift may have drawn on the kind of oral information on which Voltaire relied in *The History of Charles XII, King of Sweden* and in which Charles is presented as the protagonist of Lutheranism, who “upon his coming to the crown ... found himself absolute and undisturbed master” not only of Sweden and Finland but also of a sizable number of Protestant city states and provinces in the north of Germany, all “conquered by his ancestors, and secured to the crown” by the Treaties of Westphalia and Ryswick. More particularly, at one stage after the Treaty of Altranstädt in September 1706, by which Augustus II, Elector of Saxony who “from a Protestant was turned *Roman Catholic* to gain the [Polish] crown,” was dethroned, Charles also “declared himself protector of the Emperor’s protestant subjects in *Silesia*,” forcing the “*Roman-catholics* ... to give up to “the *Lutherans* ... above an hundred churches” (3rd ed. [London: C. Davis and A. Lyon, 1732], pp. ix, 365; 94, 13, 96, 111, 148; Hatton, *Charles XII of Sweden*, pp. 214-15). Comparing the young Charles at this stage of his military career with Alexander the Great – “as much a soldier, and as enterprizing; but more indefatigable, more robust, and more virtuous” – Voltaire triumphantly concluded: “At last, all difficulties being removed, and whatever he had a mind to execute, after having humbled the Emperor, given law in the Empire, protected the *Lutheran* religion in the midst of *Roman-Catholics*, dethroned one King, crowned another, and seen himself the terror of all the Princes around him, [Charles] prepared for his departure” (p. 150). It would have been but natural for a diplomat like Gyllenborg to identify with the deeds of his royal “master.”

p. 3

p. 3, ll. 6-7 my affection towards persons hath not been at all diminished by the frown of Power upon them] Contempt of power is a recurrent theme in Swift’s letters, most particularly in his later, more disillusioned correspondence: “You are an expectant from the world and from Power,” he lectured his “dear friend,”

Revd Dr Henry Jenney, in June 1732, only to snap in conclusion: “I have long done with both,” and three years later, in September 1735, he must have stunned Pope with a vehemence unwonted in the relationship: “I heartily wish you were what they call disaffected, as I, who detest abominate & abhor every Creature who hath a dram of Power in either Kingdom” (*Correspondence*, ed. Woolley, III, 486; IV, 174). These letters are entirely in line with Swift’s view, expressed elsewhere, “that monarchs were inherently untrustworthy and prone to seek arbitrary power” (S. J. Connolly, “Old English, New English and Ancient Irish: Swift and the Irish Past,” *Politics and Literature in the Age of Swift: English and Irish Perspectives*, ed. Claude Rawson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010], pp. 255-69 [257]); a conviction perhaps articulated most famously in the Rose-tavern monologue of *Verses on the Death of Dr Swift* (1731, published 1739): “He follow’d *David’s* Lesson just / *In Princes never put thy Trust*” (*Poems*, ed. Williams, II, 566 [ll. 341-42]). In the same poem, the Dean had his life in his Irish exile described as “within the Frown of Power” (ll. 393-94).

p. 3, ll. 9-10 only with a ***** *Cætera desiderantur.*] While in *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*, lacunae marked by asterisks and accompanied by phrases like *Desunt nonnulla* and *Hic pauca desunt* as well as chasms such as *Ingens hiatus* or *Hiatus valdè deflendus in MS* contribute to the complex texture of Swift’s paradoxical configurations (Historical Introduction, *The Battle of the Books*, ed. Hermann J. Real, with the assistance of Kirsten Juhas, Dirk F. Passmann, and Sandra Simon [Online.Swift/Ehrenpreis Centre for Swift Studies, Münster, October 2011] [<http://www.uni-muenster.de/EnglishDepartment/Swift/online.swift/works/battleofthebooks/>], p. 27), here the phrase simply means what it says it means, “The remainder is missing.”