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**Gulliver's Travels into several remote regions of the
world**

Swift, Jonathan

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Chapter VIII

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CHAPTER VIII.

A further account of Glubdubdrib. Ancient and modern history corrected.

HAVING a desire to see those ancients who were most renowned for wit and learning, I set apart one day on purpose. I proposed that Homer and Aristotle might appear at the head of all their commentators; but these were so numerous that some hundreds were forced to attend in the court and outward rooms of the palace. I knew and could distinguish those two heroes at first sight, not only from the crowd, but from each other. Homer was the taller and comelier person of the two, walked very erect for one of his age, and his eyes were the most quick and piercing I ever beheld. Aristotle stooped much and made use of a staff. His visage was meagre, his hair lank and thin, and his voice hollow. I soon discovered that both of them were perfect strangers to the rest of the company, and had never seen or heard of them before. And I had a whisper from a ghost, who shall be nameless, that these commentators always kept in the most distant quarters from their principals in the lower world, through a consciousness of shame and guilt, because they had so horribly misrepresented the meaning of these authors to posterity. I introduced Didymus and Eustathius to Homer, and prevailed on him to treat them better than perhaps they deserved: for he soon found they wanted a genius to enter into the spirit of a poet. But Aristotle was out

of all patience with the account I gave him of Scotus and Ramus, as I presented them to him ; and he asked them whether the rest of the tribe were as great dunces as themselves.

I then desired the governor to call up Descartes and Gassendi, with whom I prevailed to explain their systems to Aristotle. This great philosopher freely acknowledged his own mistakes in natural philosophy, because he proceeded in many things upon conjecture, as all men must do, and he found that Gassendi, who had made the doctrine of Epicurus as palatable as he could, and the *vortices* of Descartes were equally to be exploded. He predicted the same fate to *attraction*, whereof the present learned are such zealous assertors. He said that new systems of nature were but new fashions, which would vary in every age ; and even those who pretend to demonstrate them from mathematical principles would flourish but a short period of time, and be out of vogue when that was determined.

I spent five days in conversing with many others of the ancient learned. I saw most of the first Roman emperors. I prevailed on the governor to call up Eliogabalus's cooks to dress us a dinner, but they could not show us much of their skill for want of materials. A *helot* of Agesilaus made us a dish of Spartan broth, but I was not able to get down a second spoonful.

The two gentlemen who conducted me to the island were pressed by their private affairs to return in three days, which I employed in seeing some of

the modern dead, who had made the greatest figure for two or three hundred years past, in our own and other countries of Europe ; and, having been always a great admirer of old illustrious families, I desired the governor would call up a dozen or two of kings, with their ancestors in order, for eight or nine generations. But my disappointment was grievous and unexpected. For, instead of a long train with royal diadems, I saw in one family two fiddlers, three spruce courtiers, and an Italian prelate. In another, a barber, an abbot, and two cardinals. I have too great a veneration for crowned heads to dwell any longer on so nice a subject. But as to counts, marquises, dukes, earls, and the like, I was not so scrupulous. And I confess it was not without some pleasure that I found myself able to trace the particular features, by which certain families are distinguished, up to their originals. I could plainly discover from whence one family derives a long chin, why a second hath abounded with knaves for two generations, and fools for two more ; why a third happened to be crack-brained, and a fourth to be sharpers ; whence it came, what Polydore Virgil says of a certain great house, *Nec vir fortis nec fœmina casta* ; how cruelty, falsehood, and cowardice grew to be characteristics by which certain families are distinguished, as much as by their coats of arms. Neither could I wonder at all this, when I saw such an interruption of lineages, by pages, lacqueys, valets, coachmen, gamesters, fiddlers, players, captains, and pickpockets.

I was chiefly disgusted with modern history. For, having strictly examined all the persons of greatest name in the courts of princes for a hundred years past, I found how the world had been misled by writers, to ascribe the greatest exploits in war to cowards, the wisest counsel to fools, sincerity to flatterers, Roman virtue to betrayers of their country, piety to atheists, chastity to the unchaste, truth to informers; how many innocent and excellent persons had been condemned to death or banishment by the practising of great ministers upon the corruption of judges and the malice of factions; how many villains had been exalted to the highest places of trust, power, dignity, and profit; how great a share in the motions and events of courts, councils, and senates might be challenged by pimps, fools, parasites, and buffoons; how low an opinion I had of human wisdom and integrity, when I was truly informed of the springs and motives of great enterprises and revolutions in the world, and of the contemptible accidents to which they owed their success.

Here I discovered the roguery and ignorance of those who pretend to write *anecdotes*, or secret history; who send so many kings to their graves with a cup of poison; will repeat the discourse between a prince and chief minister, where no witness was by; unlock the thoughts and cabinets of ambassadors and secretaries of state; and have the perpetual misfortune to be mistaken. Here I discovered the true causes of many great events that have surprised the world; how bad a person can govern the back-stairs, the

back-stairs a council, and the council a senate. A general confessed, in my presence, that he got a victory purely by the force of cowardice and ill conduct; and an admiral, that for want of proper intelligence, he beat the enemy, to whom he intended to betray the fleet. Three kings protested to me that, in their whole reigns, they never did once prefer any person of merit, unless by mistake or treachery of some minister in whom they confided; neither would they do it if they were to live again; and they showed, with great strength of reason, that the royal throne could not be supported without corruption, because that positive, confident, restive temper which virtue infused into a man was a perpetual clog to public business.

I had the curiosity to inquire, in a particular manner, by what method great numbers had procured to themselves high titles of honour and prodigious estates; and I confined my enquiry to a very modern period, however, without grating upon present times, because I would be sure to give no offence even to foreigners; for I hope the reader need not to be told that I do not in the least intend my own country in what I say upon this occasion. A great number of persons concerned were called up, and, upon a very slight examination, discovered such a scene of infamy that I cannot reflect upon it without some seriousness. Perjury, oppression, subornation, fraud, pandarism, and the like *infirmities*, were amongst the most excusable arts they had to mention; and for these I gave, as it was reasonable, great allowance. But,

when some confessed they owed their greatness and wealth to the betraying their country or their prince, some to poisoning, more to the perverting of justice in order to destroy the innocent, I hope I may be pardoned if these discoveries inclined me a little to abate of that profound veneration which I am naturally apt to pay to persons of high rank, who ought to be treated with the utmost respect due to their sublime dignity by us their inferiors.

I had often read of some great services done to princes and states, and desired to see the persons by whom these services were performed. Upon inquiry I was told that their names were to be found on no record, except a few of them whom history hath represented as the vilest rogues and traitors. As to the rest, I had never once heard of them. They all appeared with dejected looks and in the meanest habit, most of them telling me they died in poverty and disgrace, and the rest on a scaffold or a gibbet.

Among others, there was one person whose case appeared a little singular. He had a youth about eighteen years old, standing by his side. He told me he had for many years been commander of a ship; and, in the sea-fight at Actium, had the good fortune to break through the enemy's great line of battle, sink three of their capital ships, and take a fourth, which was the sole cause of Anthony's flight, and of the victory that ensued; that the youth standing by him, his only son, was killed in the action. He added that, upon the confidence of some merit, the war being at an end, he went to Rome, and solicited at the court

of Augustus to be preferred to a greater ship, whose commander had been killed; but, without any regard to his pretensions, it was given to a boy who had never seen the sea, the son of Libertina, who waited on one of the emperor's favourites. Returning back to his own vessel, he was charged with neglect of duty, and the ship given to a favourite page of Publola, the vice-admiral; whereupon he retired to a poor farm at a great distance from Rome, and there ended his life. I was so curious to know the truth of this story, that I desired Agrippa might be called, who was admiral in that fight. He appeared, and confirmed the whole account, but with much more advantage to the captain, whose modesty had extenuated or concealed a great part of his merit.

I was surprised to find corruption grown so high and so quick in that empire, by the force of luxury so lately introduced, which made me less wonder at many parallel cases in other countries, where vices of all kinds have reigned so much longer, and where the whole praise, as well as pillage, hath been engrossed by the chief commander, who perhaps had the least title to either.

As every person called up made exactly the same appearance he had done in the world, it gave me melancholy reflections to observe how much the race of human kind was degenerated among us, within these hundred years past. How new diseases had altered every lineament of an English countenance, shortened the size of bodies, unbraced the nerves, relaxed the sinews and muscles, introduced a sallow

complexion, and rendered the flesh loose and rancid.

I descended so low as to desire that some English yeomen of the old stamp might be summoned to appear; once so famous for the simplicity of their manners, diet, and dress; for justice in their dealings; for their true spirit of liberty; for their valour and love of their country. Neither could I be wholly unmoved, after comparing the living with the dead, when I considered how all these pure native virtues were sold for a piece of money by their grandchildren, who, in selling their votes and managing at elections, have acquired every vice and corruption that can possibly be learned in a court.

CHAPTER IX.

The Author returns to Maldonada. Sails to the kingdom of Luggnagg. The Author confined. He is sent for to court. The manner of his admittance. The King's great lenity to his subjects.

THE day of our departure being come, I took leave of his highness the governor of Glubdubdrib, and returned with my two companions to Maldonada, where, after a fortnight's waiting, a ship was ready to sail for Luggnagg. The two gentlemen, and some others, were so generous and kind as to furnish me with provisions and see me on board. I was a month in this voyage. We had one violent storm, and were under