

THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF DEAN SWIFT

by

T. G. WILSON, M.B., LITT.D., M.R.I.A.

President, Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

See, how the Dean begins to break!
Poor gentleman, he drops apace!
You plainly find it in his face.
That old vertigo in his head
Will never leave him till he's dead.
Besides, his memory decays
He recollects not what he says.

The doctors, tender of their fame
Wisely on me lay all the blame
We must confess, his case was nice
But he would never take advice.
Had he been ruled, for aught appears,
He might have lived these twenty years;
For, when we open'd him, we found,
That all his vital parts were sound.

JONATHAN SWIFT is one of the greatest geniuses of English letters, and one whose stature increases with the years. In the last few years alone a vast amount of critical and biographical literature about him has been published. In spite of this he remains a most enigmatic personality. His public career abounds with contradictions and paradoxes, and his private life, particularly his relationships with women, is at first sight equally puzzling.

Swift was indeed a most mysterious person, and the mystery surrounding him seems to be very largely of his own making. Most authors delight in recounting the experiences of their youth and adolescence, but Swift seldom does this, openly at least. He tells us very little of his origins and early upbringing, possibly because his knowledge was equally scanty. In the short *Autobiographical Fragment*, written in his later years, we get the feeling that he is telling us what he would like us to think and that what he is telling us may not necessarily be the truth. We are driven to the conclusion that he does not want the world to know too much about him. This is all the more striking because he was a very personal writer. He was also both introspective and a valetudinarian, and his medical history is in contrast fully documented, particularly in his letters. For his own reasons, which will be explained later, he could not disburden himself of the intimate matters of his tangled private life, but he could to some extent relieve his inner tensions by writing about his health.

Nevertheless there is still a great deal of ignorance about Swift's medical

history. Much of this is due to the fact that Sir William Wilde's book, *The Closing Years of Dean Swift's Life*, published in 1849, is still regarded by many lay authors as the leading authority on the subject. It is now, of course, quite out of date, and in any case it is often wrong both in fact and deduction. It is, in fact, quite unworthy of either Swift or Wilde. Another cause of error is the curiously persistent and quite erroneous idea, denied by Wilde, that Swift became a lunatic in his later years and died insane. To this day the man in the street is firmly convinced that he ended his life a raving lunatic in the asylum he himself founded.

It is well known that from his youth onwards Swift suffered from periodic attacks of giddiness, nausea and deafness, now recognized to have been caused by Ménière's disease. The diagnosis was first made by Bucknill, writing in *Brain* in 1882. There is every excuse for the earlier writers who missed the diagnosis, for Ménière's disease was not described as an affection of the ear until 1861. Wilde thought Swift's symptoms were of cerebral origin, originally brought on by gastric disorder. Giddiness, deafness and vomiting are apparently unrelated symptoms, and in the state of knowledge of the time there was no obvious reason to connect them with a single disease of the internal ear. However, if Wilde and the physicians of the middle of the nineteenth century thought Swift's symptoms were of separate origin, the doctors of the previous century realized that they were related symptoms. Since Wilde's time Swift's letters to Charles Ford have come to light. In his letter of 20 November 1733 he says:

And although in the London Dispensary approved by the Physicians there are Remedyes named both for Giddyness and deafness, none of them that I can find, were prescribed to me. . . . The Doctors here think that both these Aylments in me are united in their Causes, but they were not always so; for one has often left me when the other stayd.

Swift's habitual vagueness about dates makes it difficult to say exactly when he first suffered an attack of Ménière's disease, but it was apparently in his early twenties. He continued to suffer from it for the rest of his life. In the letter to Stella dated 31 October 1710 he says:

This morning, sitting in my bed, I had a fit of *giddiness*; the room turned round for about a minute, and then it went off, leaving me sickish, but not very. I saw Dr. Cockburn to-day, and he promises to send me the pills that did me good last year; and likewise has promised to send me an oil for my *ears*, that he has been making for that ailment for somebody else.

On 1 September 1711 he writes:

My head is pretty well; only a sudden turn at any time makes me feel giddy for a moment, and sometimes it feels very stuffed.

In October he says:

My head has ached a little in the evening, but it is not of the true giddy sort, so I do not much value it.

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And again:

I had a little turn in my head this morning, which, though it did not last above a minute, yet being of the true sort, has made me as weak as a dog this day.

Later, in 1724, he complained:

I have been this month past so pestered with a return of the *noise and deafness* in my ears that I had not the spirit to perform the common offices of life.

Writing to Charles Ford on 9 October 1733 he says:

it is very long since I writ to you, or heard from you; and indeed it is long since I writ to anybody else, For I have been some months in a bad dispirited way with Deafness, and giddyness, and Fluxes. I am now and have been a month confined to the house, by the two former ayment(s), though the last has left me at present. I let no Company see me except Mr. Worrall and his Wife, who is a Chearfull woman with a clear voice.

It is clear that although he became more gloomy and depressed as he grew older, at no time until his terminal illness was he in any way incapable. When in 1737 after the Bettsworth affair an address of gratitude and support was presented to him it is on record that

when this paper was delivered Swift was in bed, giddy and deaf, having been some time before seized with one of his fits; but he dictated an answer in which there is all the dignity of habitual pre-eminence and all the resignation of humble piety.

The popular idea that Swift was mad seems to originate from biographies written by Johnson and by Sir Walter Scott. Both these *Lives* contain phrases such as 'madness . . . compounded of rage and fatuity' and 'Frantic fits of passion'—but neither adduce any real evidence to show that Swift's mind was diseased. The idea seems to have arisen in the first instance from Swift's habit of referring to his attacks of giddiness, deafness and sickness as 'fitts', 'fitts of deafness', 'a small giddy fitt and swimming in head—M.D. and God help me'. This constant talk of 'fitts' also led to the theory being put forward that the Dean suffered from epilepsy. There is nothing degrading in suffering from the disease which is said to have afflicted St. Paul, Caesar and Mohammed; but Swift was not an epileptic. It is quite obvious from reading his journals that he used the word 'fit' when we would say 'attack'.

Swift was therefore a life-long sufferer from Ménière's disease, and he was not insane. But he was undoubtedly a psychopath, for his constant references to the bodily excreta amount to a pathological obsession. Dr. Johnson wrote:

The greatest difficulty that occurs, in analysing his character, is to discover by what depravity of intellect he took delight in revolving ideas, from which almost every other mind shrinks with disgust. The ideas of pleasure, even when criminal, may solicit the imagination, but what has disease, deformity, and filth, upon which the mind can be allured to dwell?

The answer of course is that Swift like John Donne, Charles Dickens and Johnson himself was an obsessional, and this was the form his obsession took.

Sir Walter Russell Brain (1952) says that the answer is that not only was Swift an obsessional personality but he was also emotionally arrested at an immature state of development. He reminds us that jokes about excretion are normal in boys below the age of puberty, after which their place is taken by jokes about sex. Further, it is acknowledged that sexual immaturity is not incompatible with great intellectual development, or even especially with intellectual development amounting to genius.

Such a man as Swift, however, cannot be regarded as merely emotionally immature. He is exposed by the very combination of his intellectual genius with his emotional immaturity to mental stresses and strains greater than those to which ordinary men are subject and which themselves contribute to his emotional instability.

Sir Walter goes on to quote the well-known passage from Gulliver's *Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*:

As soon as I entered the house, my wife took me in her arms and kissed me, at which, having not been used to the touch of that odious animal for so many years, I fell in a swoon for almost an hour. At the time I am writing it is five years since my last return to England: during the first year I could not endure my wife or children in my presence, the very smell of them was intolerable, much less could I suffer them to eat in the same room. To this hour they dare not presume to touch my bread, or drink out of the same cup, neither was I ever able to let one of them take me by the hand.

No author, surely [says Sir Walter] would project these feelings upon one of his characters if he had not experienced them himself and no man so revolted by the flesh could achieve a normal married life.

This is plausible, but if it is accepted we must go some distance farther. The passage continues:

The first money I laid out was to buy two young stone-horses, which I keep in a good stable, and next to them the groom is my greatest favourite; for I feel my spirits revived by the smell he contracts in the stable. My horses understand me tolerably well; I converse with them at least four hours every day. They are strangers to bridle or saddle; they live in great amity with me, and friendship to each other.

If we believe Sir Walter in the first instance, it now follows that Gulliver and therefore Swift himself preferred horses and men to women. In other words, he is open to charges of homosexuality and—shall we be squeamish and say hippophilia?—Gulliver's sentiments in this respect are underlined by a curious poem printed among the preliminary pages of some of the early editions of *Gulliver*. This poem is said to have been written by Pope (Eddy, 1925). It is entitled *Mary Gulliver to Capt. Lemuel Gulliver, an Epistle*, and part of it goes as follows:

WELCOME, thrice welcome to thy native
Place!
—What, touch me not? what, shun a
Wife's Embrace?

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Have I for this thy tedious Absence born,
And wak'd and wish'd whole Nights for thy Return?
In five long Years I took no second Spouse;
What *Redriff* Wife so long has kept her vows?

Not touch me! never Neighbour call'd me Slut?
Was *Flimnap's* Dame more sweet in *Lilliput*?
I've no red Hair to breath an odious Fume;
At least their Consort's cleaner than thy *Groom*.
Why then that dirty Stable-boy thy Care?
What mean those Visits to the *Sorrel Mare*?
Say, by what Witchcraft, or what Daemon led,
Preferr'st thou *Litter* to the Marriage Bed?

My Bed, (the Scene of all our former Joys,
Witness two lovely Girls, two lovely Boys)
Alone I press; in Dreams I call my Dear,
I stretch my Hand; no *Gulliver* is there:
I wake, I rise, and shiv'ring with the Frost,
Search all the House; my *Gulliver* is lost!
Forth in the Street I rush with frantick Cries;
The Windows open; all the Neighbours rise;
Where sleeps my Gulliver? O tell me where?
The Neighbours answer, '*With the Sorrel Mare.*'

This is all very odd, and indeed builds up to a formidable indictment if, as Sir Russell Brain suggests, we read 'Swift' for 'Gulliver'. But when examined more closely it all falls to the ground, and with it Sir Walter's suggestion of sexual immaturity, for the simple reason that Swift's relations with women were normal, perhaps indeed to a fault. The only reason for suspecting otherwise is that as far as we know he never married Stella, and for this, as we shall see, he probably had a good reason.

He was, in fact, attracted to many women during his life. His first serious flame may have been his cousin Betty Jones whom he met when staying with his mother in Leicestershire in the autumn of 1691. Mrs. Swift did not approve of this flirtation, or liaison, or whatever it amounted to, and removed him from the temptress by sending him away. Writing some months later from Moor Park, Sir William Temple's place in Surrey, he expressed his somewhat chastened views on marriage. He says:

... the very ordinary observations I made with going half a mile beyond the University, have taught me experience enough not to think of marriage till I settle my fortune in the world, which I am sure will not be in some years; and even then I am so hard to please that I suppose I shall put it off to the other world.

These sentiments have been held to express his permanent views on marriage, but they are no more than any prudent young man who has not yet met the right person might express. The tragedy in Swift's life was that when he did meet the woman of his heart he could not marry her.

He goes on to say:

How all this suits with my behaviour to the woman in hand you may easily imagine, when you know that there is something in me which must be employed, and when I am alone turns all, for want of practice, into speculation and thought. . . .

Who 'the woman in hand' was we do not know. Elrington Ball says that she 'seems to have been a substitute' whom he found to amuse him during his stay at Leicester.

Betty Jones disappears from the scene, but we hear of her again long afterwards in a letter Swift wrote in 1728–9 to the Reverend John Worrall, the Dean's Vicar and the husband of the 'cheerfull woman with a clear voice'. Swift says, referring to Betty:

My prudent mother was afraid I should be in love with her; but when I went to London, she married an innkeeper in Loughborough. . . . This woman, my mistress with a pox, left several children, who are all dead but one daughter, Anne by name.

There is no suggestion that Anne was Betty's daughter by Swift, and indeed no reason to think she was. What he meant by the somewhat unclerical reference to Betty as 'my mistress with a pox' is beyond the present writer, but no doubt a student of the period would understand it immediately.

The next affair of Swift's which we know of is the celebrated episode with Miss Jane Waring, or Varina, as he called her. This took place during Swift's first incumbency, as Vicar of Kilroot, near Carrickfergus, County Antrim. He has been severely taken to task for his treatment of poor Varina, but probably without just cause. It is a simple story. He fell in love with her and proposed to her; she refused him, but some years later, after he had left Kilroot, she changed her mind and wrote to him saying so. In the meanwhile Swift had also changed his mind, as any other young man might have done. But Swift was not an ordinary young man. The letter he wrote back to her was very characteristic, and it is on the score of this letter that criticism lies. Varina may have been fortunate for she does not appear to have been likely to make a suitable wife for Swift. She cannot have been a very hot-blooded creature, for she died unmarried about the year 1720.

Next we must consider Vanessa, to whom this comment certainly does not apply. Swift's liaison with Vanessa took place between the years 1709 and 1723. Before, during and after this time he was also closely concerned with Stella, and this is the key to the whole affair.

Esther Vanhomrigh was the daughter of a Dutch merchant who had risen to eminence in Dublin. He died in 1703, and in 1707 his widow and her four children moved to London. In 1710 Swift had lodgings in St. Albans Street only five doors away from them, and although he changed his residence to Chelsea in 1711, he obviously remained on close terms with them, for he kept his best wig and gown with them and changed there twice daily on his visits to

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town. His acquaintance with Vanessa rapidly ripened into something much stronger. The letters which passed between Swift and Vanessa at this period are cryptic enough, but quite clearly their meaning had no mystery for either party. This was the period of the *Journal to Stella*, and it is noteworthy that in it the Vanhomrighs are mentioned seldom and cursorily.

It was at Windsor in 1713 that Swift wrote the famous verses *Cadenus and Vanessa*.^{*} This is a remarkable work in many ways. It tells of two people, a youthful pupil and her elderly teacher, who become embroiled in a secret love affair. Cadenus is at times remorseful, and would like to withdraw when he realizes that Vanessa has fallen in love with him, but the final outcome is left indefinite.

The story is told in the form of an allegory about Venus and the Court of Love.

The shepherds and the nymphs were seen
Pleading before the Cyprian queen
The counsel for the fair began
Accusing the false creature Man.
The brief with weighty crimes was charg'd,
On which the pleader much enlarg'd;
That Cupid now has lost his art
Or blunts the point of every dart:—
His altar now no longer smokes
His mother's aid no youth invokes.

Cupid, to avenge his mother Venus, determines that Vanessa shall fall in love with her teacher. He shoots an arrow to her heart, and leaves the pair to work out their destiny. Cadenus does not at first realize that she is in love with him, but when he does so he feels that they must part. Vanessa, however, thinks otherwise:

Had he employ'd his time so long
To teach her what was right and wrong;
Yet could such notions entertain
That all his lectures were in vain?
She own'd the wandering of her thoughts;
But he must answer for her faults.

Both parties now realize the exact position, and much heart-searching ensues. Cadenus is alternately shamed, surprised, and guilty and he is worried about public opinion. Surely Vanessa is not serious? Of course she is, she replies, and it is his own fault for teaching her so much reason and learning, wit and wisdom. Cadenus acknowledges to himself that this is so, and now his shame turns to pride that such a creature should love him. And, indeed, why should she not do so? But what can he give her in return? He can at least offer friendship:

^{*} This poem, one of Swift's finest works, was published by Vanessa's executors after her death in 1726. Swift said he wrote it in 1712, but he was not a dean (Decanus, hence Cadenus) until 1713.

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A constant rational delight
On virtue's basis fixed to last
When love allurements long are past.

Vanessa listens to this, but she has other views:

While thus Cadenus entertains
Vanessa in exalted strains,
The nymph in sober words entreats
A truce with all sublime conceits.

The roles are now in fact reversed, and the pupil has become the teacher.

He has a forfeiture incurr'd,
She vows to take him at his word,
And hopes he will not think it strange,
If both should now their stations change;
The nymph will have her turn to be
The tutor; and the pupil he:

Vanessa will now instruct Cadenus in the matters of the heart, with what result we are not told:

But what success Vanessa met,
Is to the world a secret yet.
Whether the nymph, to please her swain,
Talks in a high romantic strain;
Or whether he at last descends
To act with less seraphic ends;
Or, to compound the business, whether
They temper love and books together;
Must never to mankind be told,
Nor shall the conscious Muse unfold;

Cadenus and Vanessa is a long and quite extraordinary poem. Its full meaning is obviously concealed from the casual reader and intended for Swift and Vanessa alone. In taking extracts from it one is reminded of the saying that the devil can quote the Bible for his own purposes, and in fact different meanings have been taken from it. But one cannot believe that anywhere it implies that Cadenus was incapable of physical love. Surely no man would address such a long and carefully composed poem to a female friend unless he were in love with her.

After 1712 the correspondence between Swift and Vanessa is on increasingly intimate terms. From reading it most people would come to the conclusion that Swift and Vanessa were not only in love with each other, but that she was his mistress. What else can be the meaning of the various references in Swift's letters to 'coffee', first referred to by Horace Walpole, and again recently by Middleton Murry and by Denis Johnston? Here are a few extracts:

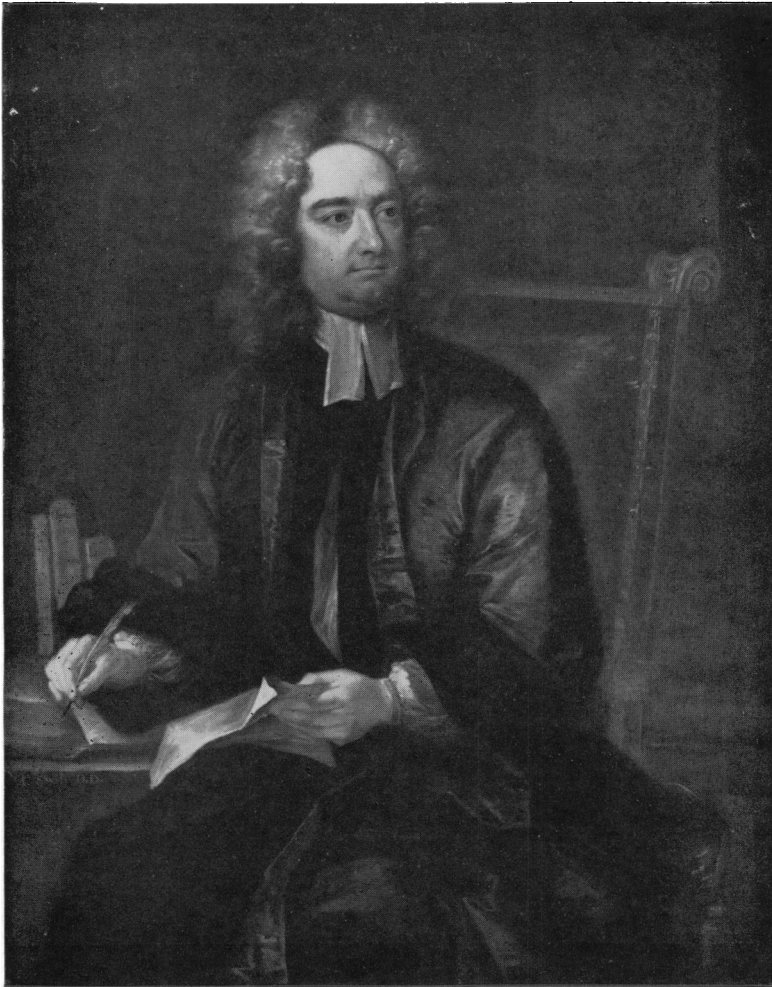


Fig. 1

JONATHAN SWIFT IN EARLY MIDDLE-AGE

*From the painting by Charles Jervas
in the National Portrait Gallery, London.*

*(By kind permission of the
Governors of the National Portrait Gallery.)*



Fig. 2
'STELLA', ESTHER JOHNSON
*From the portrait attributed to Charles Jervas
in the National Gallery of Ireland.*

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I wish I were to walk with you fifty times about your garden, and then—drink your coffee. [15 October 1720.]

Cad— assures me he continues to esteem and love and value you above all things, and so will do to the end of his life, but at the same time intreats that you would not make yourself or him unhappy by imaginations . . . without health you will lose all desire of drinking your coffee. I can say no more, being called away, *mais soyez assurée que jamais personne du monde a été aimée, honorée, estimée, adorée par votre amie que vous*. I drank no coffee since I left you, nor intend till I see you again. There is none worth drinking but yours, if myself may be the judge. [5 July 1721.]

. . . remember that riches are nine parts in ten of all that is good in life, and health is the tenth. Drinking coffee comes long after, and yet it is the eleventh; but without the two former you cannot drink it right; [1 June 1722.]

The best maxim I know in this life is, to drink your coffee when you can and when you cannot, to be easy without it. . . . This much I sympathise with you, that I am not cheerful enough to write, for I believe coffee once a week necessary to that. [13th July 1722.]

If these passages mean what one imagines they must, and Swift was on these terms with Vanessa, why did he not marry her? She was a personable young lady, and quite a suitable *parti*.

I have been assured [wrote Swift's nephew Deane Swift] that Miss Vanhomrigh was in her general converse with the world, as far from encouraging any stile or address, inconsistent with the rules of honour and good-breeding; as any woman alive. Neither can it be said . . . that she was either a vain woman, or fond of dress; although she was extremely nice and delicate, as well in the cleanliness of her person, as in everything she wore. Her only misfortune was that she had a passion for Dr. Swift. . . .

The reason, of course, was that Swift's loyalty, and probably his true affection also was engaged elsewhere—with Stella, in fact. There can be little doubt that he and Stella shared a deep and lasting affection. Whether he was married to her or not is of small consequence. His affair with Vanessa was like the temporary aberration of a married man, with the important difference that he and Stella probably were not married.

Esther, or Hester, Johnson was born on 13 March 1681. She was reputedly the daughter of Edward Johnson who according to Lord Orrery was steward to Sir William Temple, and his wife, who was in the service of Temple's sister, Lady Giffard. It appears probable, however, that she was in fact Temple's illegitimate daughter.

Among the reasons adduced for alleging that Stella was Temple's daughter are the strong resemblance she bore to him and to his niece, Lady Portland, her similarity in taste and temperament, and the high quality of her intelligence.

. . . Miss Hetty's eyes and hair were of a most beautiful black; and all the rest of her features bore so strong a resemblance to those of Sir William Temple that no one could be at a loss to determine what relation she bore to that gentleman. And could the striking likeness have been overlooked, Sir William's uncommon regard for her and his attention to her education, must have convinced every unprejudiced person that Miss Hetty Johnson was the daughter of one who moved in a higher sphere than a Dutch trader.

In addition to this, Stella had as a companion Miss Rebecca Dingley, who was a near cousin of Sir William himself, and it is difficult to explain this if she was really his housekeeper's daughter. Again, Temple left her fairly comfortably provided for in his will. And finally, in the year 1693 one de Cros, a diplomatic official employed by the Duke of Holstein, published a letter attacking Sir William Temple. In it he said:

I shall enlarge no further, that I may not engage myself to publish the misfortune of Sir William's family, which I suppose would not be like a gentleman. I have no reason that I know of to complain, neither of his lady, nor of his son, nor of his *daughters*.

Sir William had only one legitimate daughter, Diana, who died in 1684; and the italics were in the original pamphlet. The inference is obvious.*

When Swift entered Temple's household at Moor Park in 1689 Stella was about eight years of age. In her early years he tells us,

he had some share in her education, by directing her in the principles of honour and virtue; from which she never swerved in any one action or moment of her life.

He goes on to say:

She was sickly from her childhood until about the age of fifteen; but then grew into perfect health, and was 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.

Temple seems to have entrusted the care of Stella to Swift. He died when Swift was vicar of Laracor in County Meath, and 'the ladies' then came to live near by at Trim. Except for one visit to England in either 1705 or 1708 Stella never went to England again. She and Swift lived in ever-increasing intimacy, with Dingley as chaperone and companion. It was obvious that the move from England would excite gossip—as Swift said 'a secret history in such a removal' was suspected (*Prose Works*, xi, 128), but Stella's 'excellent conduct' put a stop to it. They did in fact take great care to observe the proprieties. Stella and Dingley often stayed in the vicarage at Laracor, or later in Swift's Dublin lodgings or at the Deanery, but never when he himself was in residence. On these occasions the ladies moved out—to a cottage in the vicinity, to a house in Trim, or later to their own lodgings in Dublin. Many people, including Swift's cousin, the Reverend Thomas Swift, and Archbishop King expected them to get married, but this curious relationship was never altered.

Whatever her position would have been in England, Stella's gaiety, her ready wit and high intelligence soon gained her an accepted place in Dublin society. She loved an evening out, was very fond of a game of cards and frequently went to stay with friends in the country. Her life seems to have been happy and equable. Her means were fairly adequate and any financial shortcomings were met by Swift, who made her a regular and not inconsiderable allowance. To

* From Courtney's *Life of Temple*, quoted by Middleton Murry.

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his credit there is reason to believe that he did not let her realize that this addition to her income came out of his own pocket.

There can be little doubt that Swift and Stella were in love with each other, and in a deep and lasting manner. The tender and intimate *Journal to Stella* with its 'little language' is proof enough of this. There are also the various poems he wrote to her on her birthday and other occasions. They are enigmatic, it is true, and capable of differing interpretations. He constantly draws attention to the changes wrought by time in her appearance, but never fails to praise her qualities of mind and heart:

STELLA this day is thirty-four
(We shan't dispute a year or more);
However, Stella, be not troubled.
Although thy size and years are doubled
Since first I saw thee at sixteen,
The brightest virgin on the green;
So little is thy form declined;
Made up so largely in thy mind.

In the verses for 1721 he wrote:

Now, this is Stella's case in fact,
An angel's face a little crack'd,
Could poets or could painters fix
How angels look at thirty-six:
This drew us in at first to find
In such a form an angel's mind;
And every virtue now supplies
The fainting rays of Stella's eyes.

Quite why he dwells so insistently on her physical deterioration is hard to understand: possibly it is to console her for the obvious ravages of phthisis from which she suffered, like Vanessa and so many of Swift's other women friends. She herself refers to this change in her appearance in her poem, *St. Patrick's Dean, Your Country's Pride*. In any case, raillery of some sort is necessary in verses of this kind to prevent them from becoming too extravagantly sentimental. Swift also repeatedly reminds her that he too is growing old.

Here is what he says about Stella as a nurse:

When on my sickly couch I lay
Impatient both of night and day,
Lamenting in unmanly strains,
Call'd every power to ease my pains;
Then Stella ran to my relief
With cheerful face and inward grief,
And, though by Heaven's severe decree
She suffers hourly more than me,
No cruel master could require
From slaves employed for daily hire,
What Stella, by her friendship warm'd
With vigour and delight perform'd:

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My sinking spirits now supplies
With cordials in her hands and eyes:
Now with a soft and silent tread
Unheard she moves about my bed.
I see her taste each nauseous draught,
And so obligingly am caught;
I bless the hand from whence they came
Nor dare distort my face for shame.

If further proof of Swift's devotion is required, one only has to read his essay *On the Death of Mrs. Johnson*, written just after she died, a tribute charged with emotion in every line.

There can be no doubt that Swift's estimate of Stella was true. As W. A. Eddy says, one can read history for a very long time without encountering another woman who surpassed Stella in gentleness and heroism.

And what did Stella think of Swift? She tells us herself, in poetry as good or better than any Swift ever wrote:

St. Patrick's Dean, your country's pride,
My early and my only guide,
Let me among the rest attend,
Your pupil and your humble friend,
To celebrate in female strains
The day that paid your mother's pains;
Descend to take that tribute due
In gratitude alone to you.

Long be the day that gave you birth
Sacred to friendship, wit, and mirth;
Late dying may you cast a shred
Of your rich mantle o'er my head;
To bear with dignity my sorrow,
One day alone, then die to-morrow.

Why, then, did Swift and Stella never live together as man and wife? The only reasonable explanation is that put forward by Denis Johnston (1941). This in brief is that Swift was the son of Sir John Temple, Sir William Temple's father, and therefore Stella's doubly illegitimate uncle. If true, this was an effective barrier to their marriage, for marriage or intercourse between uncle and niece was, and is, contrary to Canon Law and also an indictable offence under Criminal Law. This theory receives some support from the fact that it was widely rumoured in Swift's time that he, as well as Stella, was Sir William's child, but this was later proved to be impossible as at the operative time Sir William was Ambassador to the Low Countries.

The Temples were a distinguished Leicestershire family. The first to come to Ireland was the William Temple in whose arms Sir Philip Sidney died at Zutphen. This William Temple became the fourth Provost of Trinity College. His son, Sir John, became Master of the Rolls in Ireland and was presumably instrumental in obtaining the Stewardship of King's Inns for Swift's father. Swift's mother was Abigail Erick, or Herrick, of Leicestershire. She was ten years

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older than the elder Jonathan Swift, and Denis Johnston suggests that she was in fact Sir John Temple's farmed-out mistress. Swift's father died before his son was born—at least nine or ten months after his death, according to Johnston. What is more natural, he says, than that when widowed she should turn for consolation to her former protector? Possibly, but to have a child by him at this late stage is another matter, although stranger things have happened. However, the argument is convincing, and the reader is recommended to Denis Johnston's work for further details. The Temples were certainly a brilliant family. Since Swift's time it has produced three First Lords of the Treasury, two Secretaries of State, two Keepers of the Privy Seal, four First Lords of the Admiralty, the famous Lord Palmerston and a recent Archbishop of York. The Swift family has no such record.

It seems therefore reasonable to suppose that Swift was an illegitimate Temple. Once accepted, this explains the facts of Swift's life as no other theory does. It is easy to imagine the shock which would be suffered by a gifted young man like Swift when he discovered such a tragic and irreversible fact. He was conscious of his great intellectual endowment and knew that he had the ability to reach great heights, but here was an effectual barrier in his path. When he found that the same reason prevented him from living with Stella as man and wife his cup of bitterness was filled to overflowing. 'You have just seen the most unhappy man on earth, but on the subject of his wretchedness you must never ask a question,' said Archbishop King to the Reverend Patrick Delany.

Add this to the fact that he suffered from Ménière's disease, a most distressing ailment in which the sufferer feels as though he is being 'violently sea-sick in the middle of an earthquake' (Cawthorne, 1947), and which is recognized as being enough to unnerve the strongest character—so much so that the 'severity of the symptoms of worry and mental distress makes . . . the diagnosis of a functional disorder very tempting' (Cawthorne, *ibid.*). Is it any wonder that he became morose and gloomy, that growing bitterness caused a vicious circle of increasing frustration? He was not always like this, for in the early years of the century he was often gay and happy. And is it so very surprising that he developed even such a disquieting scatological obsession as he did?

Great authors cannot of course be measured by the same yard-stick as ordinary mortals. They are subjected to mental stresses and strains peculiar to themselves, and are frequently very concerned about their health—often quite unnecessarily, for if they avoid or survive the excesses of youth they frequently live to a great age. There is also a popular theory that most great authors are mentally unstable. As Dryden said:

Great wits are sure to madness near allied
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.

This is very true. Many great authors are sane enough in some ways—for instance, where money is concerned—and at the same time show psychopathic characteristics. Other famous authors who were obsessionals were John Donne, Samuel Johnson and Charles Dickens.

After the death of Stella in 1728 Swift still led an active life politically and socially. 'The Drapier' was idolized in Dublin and wielded great power, and he continued to have many friends, both male and female: Sheridan, Delany and Ford; Mrs. Delany, Mrs. Pilkington, Mrs. Howard and Lady Betty Germaine. In spite of this he grew steadily more gloomy and depressed: 'vertiginosus, inops, surdus, male gratus amicis' while his writings became more mordant and obsessed.

See how the Dean begins to break
Poor Gentleman, he drops apace,
You plainly see it in his face;
That old vertigo in his head
Will never leave him till he's dead;
Besides, his memory decays,
He recollects not what he says.

As he became more introspective he worried more about his health. He kept his diet very simple, at times subsisting on rice and gruel alone. He cut out tea, coffee and fruit, of all of which he was very fond.

I take no snuff, and will be very regular in eating little, and the gentlest meats. . . . I drink little, miss my glass often, put water in my wine, and go away before the rest.

He was fanatically fond of exercise, whether it was riding, rowing or walking. After he was sixty he used to pursue his friends around the Deanery, up and down stairs, round tables and from room to room. This he called his *Medicina Gymnastica*. In this he was apparently an earnest follower of Francis Fuller who published a treatise under this title in the early eighteenth century on the virtues of exercise, particularly in the form of horse-riding. Swift was such a fervid believer in riding that he urged it on Vanessa's sister Moll when she was practically on her death-bed.

He was never a believer in bleeding.

. . . A fig for your physician and his advice, Madame Dingley. . . . I will trust to temperance and exercise.

He did, however, take many medicines—snuffs, pills and potions.

I am deep in pills with assafoetida, and a steel bitter drink. . . . I take eight pills a day, and have taken, I believe, a hundred and fifty already.

On Arbuthnot's advice he took

cinnibar of antimony and castor oil made up into boluses with confect of alkermes.

Another favourite recipe was the 'Tinctura Sacra', which was made up with aloes, cardamom, ginger and Spanish white wine.

The physicians are merciless dogs in purging and vomiting [said Charles Ford]. I heartily wish you would try the Bath waters which are allowed to be the best medicine for strengthening the Stomach.

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But the Spa waters were unsuccessful, for they increased his vertigo and brought on swelling of the legs. In 1730 he was put on a strict regimen by Dr. Arbuthnot, who advised him to take

emetics first; then an electuary every morning, chiefly composed of conserve of orange and absinth, with some tincture of bark. . . .

Lavender drops, antispasmodics, and bitters all show us some doctors thought his illness originated in the stomach.

The liver, spleen and other viscera have had their day since [said Wilde], but in Swift's time all diseases were referred to the stomach.

As he grew older his mind turned again and again to a matter which had interested him in his younger days. Wandering through the Liberties of St. Patrick's he must have seen many of the mentally afflicted roaming the streets, accepted by the common man as part of the social order of the day. To Swift their plight was a challenge. He worked and saved for fifteen years to establish a hospital for their care. That hospital still flourishes, still largely governed by the enlightened constitution which he devised. It is a sad post-script that so many people should still believe that he founded his hospital because he was afraid that he himself might become insane, and that he died as one of its inmates.

This, of course, is far from the truth. He died in his Deanery of that saddest of diseases, senile decay. About the year 1741 or 1742 when he was about seventy-five years of age he began to lose his memory and to act irrationally, and it was evident to those about him that his brain had failed, and that he had lapsed into a state of

Second childishness and mere oblivion
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

He was, in fact, suffering from what Dr. Oliver Gogarty somewhat cynically described as 'delayed burial'. He remained in this pathetic condition for three years before he died.

In 1742 he suffered from a series of boils on his arms and body, and the swelling of his left upper eyelid which occurred at this time was probably also due to a boil. Russell Brain suggests that the aphasia from which he suffered may have been due to a resulting infective thrombo-phlebitis of the lower part of the frontal lobe. This may have been so, although the orbit appears quite normal in the death-mask in spite of Wilde's statement that the eye was 'sunken and collapsed within the orbit'. It is more likely that the aphasia was due to senile changes.

During his last years he was looked after by guardians appointed by the Commissioners in Lunacy, the principal of whom was the Reverend John Lyon. Other *habitués* of the Deanery were the Reverend Francis Wilson, whom the Dean, with justification, seems to have disliked considerably, and the Reverend

David Stevens. The latter gentleman, with the readiness to make a diagnosis which is so marked in many people who are not doctors, was most insistent that the Dean's symptoms of senility were really due to 'water on the brain', and guided by some atavistic instinct he repeatedly urged that the Dean should be 'trepanned' in the hope that he might obtain relief from his sufferings. Fortunately Stevens was resisted, and Swift died a natural death on Saturday, 19 October 1745.

We know little of the circumstances surrounding his death. There are two authoritative but quite contradictory accounts of its manner. 'His end was easy, without the least pain or convulsion,' said Lord Orrery. 'He died in very great agony, having been in strong convulsive fits for thirty-six hours before,' said Faulkner, the publisher. Which of these statements is correct now matters little, either to us or to the Dean, but the first is the more probable.

His will directed that he should not be buried for three days after his death. He lay in state in the hall of his Deanery, a place which although greatly altered internally since his time still seems haunted by his presence. His 'nursentender', Mrs. Barnard, sat at his head. Great numbers of people came to pay their last respects, but it is said that some unscrupulous souvenir-hunter cut off some of his hair during Mrs. Barnard's temporary absence, after which nobody else was allowed in to see him. Sheridan's version of this story is that his head was completely stripped of hair within an hour of his death: this is almost incredible, but possible.

During his long life Swift was attended by many doctors, some of them famous men like Arbuthnot and Helsham. In his last illness he was looked after principally by James Grattan, John Nichols, the Chirurgeon-General, and by his cousin John Whiteway, who became the second President of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. These three gentlemen were all on the staff of Dr. Steevens' Hospital, which was endowed by both Swift and Stella and lies next door to his own foundation, St. Patrick's Hospital 'for Lunaticks and Idiots'.

'He gave what little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad;
And show'd by one satiric touch,
No nation wanted it so much.
That kingdom he has left his debtor,
I wish it soon may have a better.'—
And, since you dread no further lashes,
Methinks you may forgive his ashes.

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