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A New Letter of Swift to Marcus Antonius Morgan, July [1735]

G. S. Rousseau and David Woolley

IN the jargon of fishing this could be called "the one that got away," for it was hooked in the nineteenth century but eluded the two principal anglers of the twentieth century — Elrington Ball, whose *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift* appeared in 1910–14, and Sir Harold Williams, whose edition was published by the Clarendon Press, 1963–65. Its provenance is only partly known. The letter is listed in Locker Lampson's *The Rowfant Library* (1886), p. 216, where a brief quotation appears. It was advertised in an unidentified catalogue around the turn of the century as "Aut. note signed, to M. A. Morgan, Esq. relative to an appointment to see his Library, Deanery House, July 23, VERY RARE." And the Houghton Library, Harvard University,¹ acquired it in 1953; it is catalogued Locker-Warburg-Grimson autograph 1041 (f MS. Eng. 870.28B). More recently, it is mentioned by George P. Mayhew in *Rage or Raillery, The Swift Manuscripts at the Henry E. Huntington Library* (1967), p. 7, note 9, where it is ascribed without comment to 1736.

The following is a literal transcription of the text:

St.

I had appointed M^{rs} Whiteway to attend me to morrow with her Litter, If you can prevent that, I will wait on You and your Lady and see your Library.

I am St

Your most obed^t

humble Serv^t

J: Swift.

Deanry House

July 23^d I suppose if you send to M^{rs} Whiteway &c she will attend You
Address: To Mar. An Morgan Esq^r.

With the printing of this brief letter another name is added to the list of Swift's known correspondents, but it is chiefly interesting for

¹ This unpublished letter appears by generous permission of Dr. W. H. Bond, Librarian of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

the further light it throws on Swift's relationship with Morgan, of which very little is known. Marcus Antonius Morgan, who is memorable if only for his "heathenish Christian name," was M.P. for the borough of Athy in the Irish House of Commons. It is unfortunate that in this, the only surviving letter between them, Swift has omitted the year from the date, obliging us to seek other evidence from which to supply it.

All the half-dozen references to Morgan and his wife in Swift's correspondence with Sheridan and Mrs. Whiteway, occur in November and December 1735. Their slightly formal tone suggests a newly-formed acquaintance. But within a few months, in the spring of 1736, Swift must have been composing *The Legion Club*, which carries a substantial attack on Morgan, running to thirty lines of bitter reproach. In early March of that year, Morgan and Richard Bettesworth (serjeant-at-law, and Swift's sworn enemy of two years earlier over another petition in Parliament) had been appointed to a Committee of the House of Commons of Ireland to consider a petition against the tithe of agistment; the proceedings aroused Swift's deepest anger, for he viewed them as yet another attack on the Irish Church, and the Committee's report, favorable to the petition, was presented to the House on 17 April. On 24 April, Swift confided to Thomas Sheridan, "I have wrote a very masterly Poem on the *Legion-Club*; which, if the Printer will be condemn'd to be Hang'd for it, you will see in a three-penny Book. . . ." On 22 May he added, "I hear it is charged to me, with great Personall threatnings from the Puppies offended." (See *Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Williams, IV, 480, 492.) The poem is known to have circulated in manuscript, but no Dublin printing of the time survives; and the first English printing, in *S — t contra Omnes*, n.d., can be placed with some probability in June 1736. (See *Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Williams, Oxford, 1958, III, 827–828.)

If we are to locate this letter in the period of their recorded acquaintance, it must be in either July 1735, or July 1736, i.e. before or after the events over which they fell out.

Clearly the strongest internal evidence is the reference to visiting Morgan's library which must have been a source of special pride to its owner, and which is made to rebuke him in four couplets of *The Legion Club* in a scene exactly recalling *The Battle of the Books*:

When you walk among your Books,
They reproach you with their Looks;

Bind them fast, or from the Shelves
 They'll come down to right themselves:
Homer, Plutarch, Virgil, Flaccus,
 All in Arms prepare to back us:
 Soon repent, or put to Slaughter
 Every *Greek* and *Roman* Author.

(*Poems*, III, 838)

In the light of the foregoing it would seem more likely that Swift was, in the letter now first printed, planning his initial visit to inspect Morgan's library; and rather less likely a later visit, so soon after the offence of the poem (of which only the immediately relevant part has been quoted).

For a date in the year 1736, however, it can be argued that Swift somehow was able to direct to Morgan (in the address of this letter) with his Christian names, while it is clearly established that at Cavan in November 1735 (*Correspondence*, IV, 442-443) he was apparently enquiring for Morgan's "heathenish Christian name" with the object of using him as his "franker" in the place of John Rochfort (IV, 418) who "may go out of town" (IV, 435). We are disposed to regard this less as evidence of ignorance than a necessity to employ accurately the name of a Member of Parliament for postal purposes, since Mr. and Mrs. Morgan in fact visited Swift at Cavan almost immediately (in the first week of December 1735, *vide* Deane Swift's footnote in 1768 to the first printing of Swift's letter of 6 December 1735, which is not quoted by Williams). Moreover, Morgan's name in full appears in the list of subscribers prefacing volume I of Faulkner's edition of Swift's *Works*, 1735 (which actually appeared in November 1734), and indeed is retained in a slightly different form in the 1738 reprinting of this list, which may be found in either volume I or V (see Teerink's *Bibliography of Swift*, 1963, p. 30). Consequently it is not, on this admittedly tenuous evidence, possible to assert that Swift never knew Morgan's full name in mid-1735: one can presume he read the list of subscribers with some interest early in 1735. Further, no firm conclusion as to the state of their relations can be drawn from the recurrence of Morgan's name in the 1738 list, since Faulkner sought subscribers to his additional volumes, V and VI, as early as 5 February 1736 (*Correspondence*, V, 264), and Morgan could then have subscribed; certainly he did not choose to withdraw his name from the list by 1738.