THE

NEW RAMBLER

Journal of The Johnson Society of London

JANUARY, 1960

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Summary of an Address on Bishop Berkeley given by The Very Reverend W. R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's, to the Johnson Society on 17th October, 1959.

The Dean gave a lecture on Bishop Berkeley's thought. After a brief biographical introduction in which he pointed out that Berkeley's most important philosophical work was done before the age of 30, he went on to argue that Berkeley's place in the history of modern philosophy was assured and that many of his views were relevant to the philosophical problems of the present day.

'The Theory of Vision' is really a psychological work in which the problem of how the idea of space is acquired is discussed. In general terms, Berkeley's view is that it originates through sensations of a muscular kind and experiences of clearness and confusion in the act of seeing when objects approach or recede. Berkeley also insisted on the difference between tangible magnitude and visible magnitude. The two senses of sight and touch have nothing in common. Ideas of vision and ideas of touch are utterly different. Hence we distinguish between visible magnitude and tangible magnitude and tend to think of tangible magnitude as the "real" magnitude. The conclusion of Berkeley's essay is that the objects of vision constitute a universal language or symbolism.

The lecturer then went on to deal with Berkeley's most important work, "The Principles of Human Knowledge" in which the full theory of immaterialism is developed. There is an important connexion between the thought of Locke and Berkeley, particularly in respect of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. At the time when Berkeley wrote it was generally held that mass, shape and motion existed independently of the mind of the recipient. Berkeley's immaterialist philosophy may be regarded as an analysis of two terms: "substance" and "existence". He argues that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities is untenable and that the idea of material substance is not only unnecessary, but contradictory. What then do we mean by "exist"? Berkeley's famous answer to this question is "Esse est percipi", to be means to be perceived. If this is so, then the idea of material substance is dissolved. But, obviously esse est percipi is not applicable to percipients. Thus we have to add percipere et agere, to perceive and to act. We cannot have an idea of ourselves, because we cannot perceive ourselves, but obviously we exist. We have a notion of the self, but we do not and cannot know ourselves as we may know, for example, a table or

a triangle.

The lecturer then discussed the alleged "solipsism" of Berkeley's thought and pointed out that for Berkeley the existence of God was the answer to solipsism. Things exist when they are perceived - that is what existence means - but they continue to exist when there is no finite percipient because God perceives all the ideas all the time. The created universe persists because the divine Being causes all the ideas to be in our minds and "perceives the tree when there is no one about in the quad". So, in the same way, the established order of nature is directly due to the consistent will of God.

The lecturer proceeded to point out some serious difficulties in Berkeley's philosophy. He did not regard Johnson's so-called refutation as a serious difficulty, but simply as an expression of our obstinate feeling of the brute facts of the world around us.

He then gave a brief sketch of the subsequent influence of Berkeley's thought and Hume's development of some of his principles in the direction of scepticism and proceeded to make some remarks on the present day philosophical discussions. In particular, he dwelt at some length on the question of "private worlds". It would seem to be an implication of Berkeley's immaterialism that each one of us has a private spatial world. The lecturer thought it significant that the philosophical movement in this country, which began as a reaction against idealism, is now grappling with this same problem in another form. In Bertrand Russell's last book, he discusses the relation between private spaces and physical space and can find no necessary logical connexion between them. For Berkeley this problem was solved by his theistic view which, for him, was not simply a matter of faith, but a rational conclusion.

It is not difficult to conceive, however, that for many reasons a man writes better than he lives. For without entering into refined speculations, it may be shown much easier to design than to perform. A man proposes his schemes of life in a state of abstraction and disengagement, exempt from the enticements of hope, the solicitations of affection, the importunities of fear, and is in the same state with him that teaches upon land the art of navigation, to whom the sea is always smooth, and the wind always prosperous.

The Rambler, May 5th, 1750.

A FRIEND OF JOHNSON: DR. BIRKBECK HILL

by

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Editor of Boswell's Life of Johnson.

When you consult the Dictionary of National Biography, you will notice that the persons commemorated are given a brief description; one which occurs several times is "friend of Johnson". This description is given to Topham Beauclerk, Bennet Langton, Anthony Chamier, and Mrs. Thrale; it was my original intention to talk to you about these friends, but when I recently found myself in the largest and richest Johnsonian Library in the world, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Hyde, in Somerville, New Jersey, I changed my mind. This was caused by the sight of over sixty massive volumes, which form the foundation of the collection; they are Dr. Birkbeck Hill's editions of Boswell's "Life", "Johnsonian Miscellanies","Johnson's Letters", two copies of the "Footsteps of Dr. Johnson", and other works, expanded by grangerization or extra-illustration by that enthusiastic collector of Johnsoniana, Mr. R. B. Adam. It is almost certain that if Mr. Adam had not done this a very large amount of Johnsonian material would have been scattered over the world, and much of it lost. The debt we owe to Dr. Birkbeck Hill, and to our American friends, is very great; I take this opportunity of paying at least a part of it by giving an account and appreciation of this great Johnsonian, this friend of Dr. Johnson, Birkbeck Hill.

Dr. Birkbeck Hill paid this tribute to Mr. Adam, "To my friend, Mr. Robert B. Adam, of Buffalo, whose Johnsonian collection far surpasses any we have on this side of the Atlantic, I am greatly indebted for the liberality with which he has placed his treasures at my service. I wish every collector of autographs were like him, free from that petty selfishness which makes a man hug some famous author's letter as a miser hugs his gold, rejoicing in it all the more as he keeps it entirely to himself".

Dr. George Birkbeck Norman Hill was born on June 7th, 1835, at Bruce Castle, Tottenham, then a village, where his father owned and conducted a notable private school for boys. He attended this school and at the age of 19 matriculated at Oxford, becoming a

member of Johnson's College, Pembroke. He read Greats but was prevented by illness from sitting for his Final Examination and was given an "aegrotat" and granted a degree; he subsequently took a B.C.L. degree in 1866 and a D.C.L. in 1871. On leaving Oxford he married and joined his father as an assistant in the school, becoming headmaster on his father's retirement. If he had had any choice he would apparently have chosen a different profession, in this however he was very successful. His health broke down in 1875 and he gave up schoolmastering in 1877. At Oxford he was a member of the "Old Mortality Club", a small society which included John Nichol, later Professor of English at Glasgow, Algernon Swinburne, James Bryce, later Viscount Bryce, T. H. Green, and author and philosopher, Edward Caird, who was later Master of Balliol. He was friendly with Burne-Jones, William Morris, and especially with Charles Joseph Faulkner. Of his life at Oxford he wrote:- "I entered Oxford as ignorant of the new school of poetry as any one well could be. I do not think that I had ever seen a single poem of Keats or Shelley, Mr. Browning's name was, I believe, unknown to me. Of Wordsworth and Mr. Tennyson I had read only a very few poems. It was for me a most happy day which first brought me within the influence of this noble university though the first experience was bitter enough. The coat of ignorance and conceit which had formed round me had to be stripped off, and it had grown so close, that, in stripping, it seemed to bring with it a little of the skin". On leaving Bruce Castle he devoted himself to writing and editing, on which he was partly, but no wholly, dependant for a livelihood, he had since 1869 contributed freely to "The Saturday Review", then edited by his friend Philip Harwood, "Itwas my fortune" he says "for many a year to be a Saturday Reviewer - one before whose judgement seat passed a great variety of writers - most of them, I regret to say, criminals more or less guilty, worthy, if not of death, at least of stripes". But this journalism gave him no satisfaction. "The editor discovered in me a certain vein of humour and for the most part, sent me works to review which deserved little more than ridicule. What havock I made among the novelists and minor poets. I amused my readers because I was first amused myself by the absurdities which I found in these writers and by the odd fancies which arose in my mind as I read their works. At last however my humour began to fail. It was over the minor poets that I became dejected; I entreated my editor to hand them over to a fresher hand. With the novelists I struggled on for some while; but finally even they could no longer raise a natural laugh"! Some of these articles, however, were worthy of preservation and reproduction, and they, together with others contributed to "The Cornhill Magazine", "The Pall Mall Gazette" and "The Times", were collected into a volume, his first

Johnsonian volume, entitled, "Dr. Johnson, His Friends and his Critics". This interesting volume was published in 1878 and it staked his claim to be the future editor of Boswell. This is of peculiar interest as it gives what may be described as Dr. Hill's first example of Johnsonian research in the modern sense, the elucidation of the vexed question of the duration of Johnson's residence at Oxford. In the next year, 1879, he turned to Boswell and edited Boswell's "Journal of a Tour to Corsica" together with the impudent "Letters between the Hon. Andrew Erskine and James Boswell". As Professor Pottle points out this book was the first of any of Boswell's minor works to be edited. It met with a poor reception and was in fact a bad start for a great editor. In 1879 Dr. Hill's uncle, Sir Rowland Hill, the inventor of the penny post, died and he was entrusted with the editing of his "History of Penny Postage" and the writing of his "Life". He had no sooner finished this piece of piety than he was called upon to undertake another, in an entirely different field; the editing of the letters that General Gordon had written to his sister during the six years of his government of the Sudan. Gordon himself declined to take any direct part in the production of the book, beyond authorising publication. Of these works Dr. Hill said:- "The labour that I gave to them was not wholly thrown away. I was trained by it in the duties of an editor". But these books had diverted him from his main purpose, the production of a fully annotated edition of Boswell's great "Life". He had indeed read the life as a schoolboy, but it was not until 1869 that he owned a copy and read it carefully. Then, he says in the Preface to his edition:- "in an old bookshop, almost under the shadow of a great cathedral, I bought a secondhand copy of a somewhat early edition of the 'Life' in five well bound volumes. They became my inseparable companions. Before long I began to note the parallel passages and allusions not only in their pages, but in the various authors whom I studied". This was some six years before he was rash enough to offer himself as the editor of a new edition, when his offer was civilly declined. "From that moment", he continues, "I never lost sight of my purpose but when in the troubles of life I well-nigh lost sight of every kind of hope. Everything in my reading that bore on my favourite author was carefully noted, till at length I felt that the materials which I had gathered from all sides were sufficient to shield me from a charge of rashness if I now began to raise the building". In October, 1881, he placed his proposal for a new edition before the Delegates of the Oxford University Press and it was favourably received, largely through the support of Jowett, a man of power, who later offered to read the proofs. Publication was delayed by serious illness and enforced absence abroad, but the great edition appeared in 1887, when, as I said

in 1934, "it was immediately recognised by scholars to be the best that had appeared; this proud position it holds today, its authority undisputed and its value not seriously diminished". I further stated, "the chief glory of Dr. Hill's edition is the commentary. His knowledge of the eighteenth century was profound and his acquaintance with Johnson's writings unrivalled: no editor has ever illustrated Boswell's text with such a wealth of relevant comment, the amplitude of which has made the edition a book of reference". And listen to what the first editor of the Boswell Papers, the late Mr. Geoffrey Scott said in his preface to Volume 6" - they are in all probability the last words that he wrote on Johnsonian matters:- "On the first printing of Boswell's original journals one conclusion, propter pietatem, should be singled out from the rest. How far they may affect Boswell's reputation is mere conjecture, but it is certain that to one Johnsonian name they bring new honour. Here, and in papers like these, lies the evidence which Birkbeck Hill sought. Now that it has come to light, scarcely a phrase in the great Commentary calls for correction. On page after page of Boswell's record Dr. Hill's conjectures are verified, his deductions upheld. By a stroke of irony he was denied these papers, a hundred times by his vigilance and intuition he divined what they contain". Dr. Hill continued his Johnsonian studies with zest, his industry is really astonishing. In 1889 he published "Select Essays of Dr. Johnson", being essays from "The Rambler", "The Adventurer" and "The Idler", with a long and admirable introduction, in which he gave an account of each periodical and of Johnson's part in it. He was by no means content to say again what he had already said in the "Life". This selection was published in the "Temple Library" and I can recommend it to you.

In this same year, 1889, he and his wife, accompanied by the artist Mr. Lancelot Speed and another young man, made a tour through Scotland, visiting not indeed every place that Johnson and Boswell had visited, but most of them. One of the places which he visited, but into which he was refused admission, was Auchinleck. Later in an essay on Boswell's proof-sheets he said:- "I had once tried to penetrate into Auchinleck, Boswell's ancestral home; I had hoped in the library to find many curious memorials. Permission was refused me. My attempt even excited suspicion!" We know what would have happened if he had been received with the same courtesy that he met with from the other descendants and representatives of the numerous Scottish lairds and hosts who had entertained Johnson. The book which was entitled "Footsteps of Dr. Johnson, Scotland" was expensive and did not meet with the success that it deserved. I like it very much, in spite of its size and weight. Needless to say I found it very useful when I came to

edit Boswell's account of his travels with Johnson, his"Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides" which Dr. Hill had published in his fifth volume. When Dr. Hill published that volume his knowledge of Scotland, which he had however visited twice as a young man, was not so great as his knowledge of London; on this extensive tour, he certainly, like Johnson, "enlarged his notions". Dr. Hill did not disdain a humourous touch. In his "Footsteps" he says:- "We tried in vain to distinguish which among the mountains was 'the considerable protruberance' which Johnson had spotted". Perhaps the Johnson Society may not disdain to appoint a committee who shall be instructed to bid farewell for a time to the delights of Fleet Street and visit Glen Shiel with full powers to come to a final decision in this important matter. He similarly suggested that an "expedition, properly equipped, should be sent to dredge in the sound between Scalpa and Raasay for Johnson's spurs, which through the carelessness of their man-servant had been lost overboard; with instructions to proceed afterwards to the Isle of Mull and make search for that famous piece of timber, his walking stick, which was lost there".

The next important Johnsonian work was the edition of Johnson's Letters. This was published by the Clarendon Press in two volumes in 1892. At that time it was the first collected edition and it placed Johnson in the first rank of English letter-writers. This edition has now been replaced by Dr. Chapman's edition, published a few years ago, which adds over 470 letters to it; replaced but not superseded. Dr. Chapman retains Dr. Hill's numbering of the letters and refers to his notes, here, there and everywhere. He frequently accepts his inferences, opinions and suggestions. I observe in his notes:- "Hill points out"; "Hill collects here a large number of places"; "Hill is at his best in his commentary on this letter", and so on. The edition of the "Letters of Johnson" was followed after an interval of some years during which, in 1893, Dr. Hill and his wife spent some time in America - two months of it at Harvard - by two volumes of "Johnsonian Miscellanies" in 1897. This collection was undertaken at the suggestion of Leslie Stephen. It contained the first attempt to re-edit Johnson's "Prayers and Meditations", originally published by Strahan in 1785. Dr. Hill collated Strahan's edition with the original manuscripts preserved in Pembroke College. Johnson's handwriting is at its worst in many of these meditations and it sometimes defeated Dr. Hill. This work was made more difficult by Strahan, the original editor, who had heavily erased many passages. Other important works to be included were Mrs. Piozzi's "Anecdotes", which is so fully annotated that I always add a reference to this edition in my revision of the "Life"; the Rev. Thomas Campbell's "Diary of a visit to England in 1775", the authenticity of which

was doubted by the great Jowett, but not by the greater Macaulay; anecdotes from a very large number of Memoirs, biographical sketches and essays from the "Gentleman's Magazine," and full-dress biographies were included; he even pillaged Croker's edition of Boswell. Of this collection of "Johnsoniana", Professor Pottle, a great authority, has said, "The importance of the work is not to be measured by the amount of new material but by the value of the annotation". The "Miscellanies" were followed by the masterly edition of Johnson's "Lives of the Poets", to which he devoted the last three years of his life. It was published posthumously, in 1905, by Dr. Hill's son-in-law, Harold Spencer Scott, who contributed a valuable memoir of the great editor. All that I need say of this outstanding edition is that it is worthy of the parent work. These, together with an edition of "Rasselas", constitute Dr. Hill's contribution to Johnsonian scholarship.

He wrote or edited other works of which mention should be made. Soon after his edition of Boswell appeared a friendly bookseller told him of an important collection of the letters of David Hume, which he had for sale at the then high price of £200, which was beyond Dr. Hill's means; Dr. Hill never bought manuscripts or rare books. Dr. Hill approached his friend and supporter Professor Jowett, who in his turn approached Lord Rosebery, who agreed to purchase the letters on the condition that Dr. Hill edited them; Dr. Hill agreed and the letters were published, lavishly annotated; the letters were not available to Professor Greig, a more recent editor, who accepted Dr. Hill's text with confidence.

In 1891 Dr. Hill delivered a course of lectures to the "Teachers University Association" at Oxford, which were published in the following year under the title "Writers and Readers". These lectures show his wide reading, not only in the 18th century but of the 19th century writers, especially Wordsworth. His attack on "modern female novelists" are downright:- "They are a disgrace to their sex, whose views of life are as low and base as the style in which they write, and as inaccurate as their English"! and again "they have neither wit, nor humour, nor sense, nor learning, nor knowledge, to throw into the scale as a balance to the vast weight of unworthy qualities which they have heaped up on the other side". The names of these unfortunate ladies are not mentioned.

As I have previously stated Dr. Hill paid a long visit to America, spending nearly two months at Harvard University; his pen was as active as ever and whilst there he wrote a perceptive

book "Harvard College by an Oxonian" which was published in 1894 in New York and in London. This book, which was well received in America, is of importance to us as in it Dr. Hill describes the manners and customs of Oxford men of his time. Another important piece of editing was the correspondence between Swift and his friend Knightly Chetwood; it consisted of some 58 letters, most of them by Swift. Dr. Hill published them originally in the American Journal, "The Atlantic Monthly" in 1897, and they were re-published in book form, with more and fuller notes in London in 1899. Finally in 1900 he published, with a masterly Preface, and many notes, what is, I venture to think the best edition of Gibbon's Autobiography, which is entitled "The Memoirs of the Life of Edward Gibbon", the title being Gibbon's own. Dr. Hill therefore edited the best edition of both the greatest biography and the greatest autobiography in the English language.

Dr. Hill died on the 27th February, 1903, at the comparatively early age of 67, leaving behind him a remarkable series of works of enduring value to the students of English Literary History. It is also remarkable that Dr. Hill did so much as all his life he was hampered by bad health and was forced to spend his winters abroad and therefore away from large libraries. I end my brief, and I am afraid imperfect, account of this great scholar with the testimony of Professor Pottle:- "If one must fix on a single person as the initiator of modern Boswellian studies, that person would undoubtedly be Dr. Hill". This is likewise true of Johnsonian studies and we can say with confidence that he was indeed a great "Friend of Johnson".

The Incurable

Phillis, you boast of perfect health in vain,
And laugh at those who of their ills complain:
That with a frequent fever Chloe burns,
And Stella's plumpness into dropsy turns!
O Phillis, while the patients are nineteen,
Little, alas! are their distempers seen.
But thou, for all thy seeming health, art ill,
Beyond thy lover's hopes, or Blackmore's skill;
No lenitives can thy disease assuage,
I tell thee, 'tis incurable -' tis age.

Matthew Prior. 1664-1721.

OUR ENGLISH SOCRATES

by

Frederick Nixon, Esq.

Plato tells us that on a fine morning in early summer Socrates met his young disciple Phaedrus and was persuaded by him to take a walk outside the city. They wandered through the open country beside the banks of the river Ilissus talking of matters grave and gay, and at last sat down in the shade of a plane tree where they shared an alfresco meal. As they rose to return to Athens the old man said to his young friend "Really Phaedrus, you make a most admirable guide". Phaedrus smiled: "It is strange" he said, "you are agape like a tourist at the rural scene, yet you hardly ever leave the bricks and mortar of the city to enjoy the beauties which you know quite well are awaiting you here". "Listen, dear Phaedrus" Socrates replied. "Above all else I am a lover of knowledge. Now trees and fields cannot teach me anything, but mankind in the city can". More than two thousand years later another old man was to say, less gently perhaps but with equal sincerity, to a young friend "Sir, the man who is tired of London is tired of life. One field is just like another. I look on every day to be lost on which I do not make a new acquaintance".

It is a surprising fact that several of the best loved men whose minds and characters have illuminated the human race should have been notorious, both in their own day and in the minds of posterity, for the utter lack of those corporeal graces which are supposed so strongly to influence the likes and dislikes of men and women. The features of poor Socrates as depicted by sculptors and artists are familiar to us all. They are described so vividly by the words put into the mouth of Alcibiades in THE BANQUET, and by Xenophon in his RECOLLECTIONS that even without these visual reminders we should have a clear picture of his snub nose with distended nostrils, his goggle eyes, his flapping ears and his protruding belly. Johnson's countenance, although less homely in cast, was rendered grotesque by the ravages of scrofula and the distortions resulting from acute myopia. Moreover, any dignity of bearing he might have acquired was defeated by the distressing affliction which from time to time shook his ungainly limbs with monstrous tremors. Yet such was the inherent charm of these two ogres that they were, in their respective centuries,

surrounded by the brilliant and debonair youth of the day - and in the case of Johnson, by the ladies no less than by the men. Of course, the peculiar condition of Greek society precluded the ladies from enjoying Socrates' conversation. Would that it had not been so, for then no court would have dared to condemn him to drink of the hemlock bowl! It would be a fascinating exercise in ingenuity to take the men in the Socratic circle who are so skilfully differentiated in the DIALOGUES - Phaedo, Apollodorus, Crito, Phaedrus and so on - and match them with members of Johnson's Club. One or two comparisons inevitably come to mind, particularly that of Alcibiades and Topham Beauclerc, both of blue blood, handsome, brilliant: and each of them becoming a byword for a waster and a scamp. And without stretching the imagination too far we may compare Aristophanes with Oliver Goldsmith, and the munificent and dignified Crito with Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Turning back for a moment to the PHAEDRUS, there is the lovely prayer to the god of Nature, with which Socrates rounds off the day's excursion.

> "Beloved Pan, grant me to be beautiful in the inner man, and all I have of outer things to be at peace with those within. May I count the wise man only as rich; and may my treasure be such as none but the virtuous can bear."

Could it be that Samuel Johnson had this prayer in mind when he addressed this petion to his God?

> "O Lord, who hast ordained labour to be the lot of man, bless my studies and endeavours: feed me with food convenient to me: and if it be thy good pleasure to entrust me with plenty, give me a compassionate heart, that I may be ready to relieve the wants of others".

If in so many ways there is this remarkable similarity between the Athenian sage and the English grammarian, there is one point on which they differed profoundly - their marriage and their regard for their partners. Even taking into full consideration the contempt which the Athenians felt for women (Plato wrote that a soul that has sinned may be sent back to earth in the body of an animal - or even of a woman!) yet it has always been felt that the union of Socrates and Xanthippe was not an ideal one. Perhaps it is not fair to take too seriously his remark when asked why he did not divorce her: "Oh well, my friend, if I can make shift to live with her, consider how easy it makes it for me to live in peace with the rest of humanity". All the same, she does seem to have been rather a shrew; for when she went to the prison on the morn-

ing of his execution she nagged him, became hysterical, and had to be taken forcibly away. But Johnson ranks with Robert Browning as one of the happiest of literary husbands. As with the Brownings, it was a marriage of true minds, and not of minds alone. Whatever his friends saw in Tetty, to her husband she was a figure of opulent charm and radiant joy, gracing his board and comforting his bed. Her practical common sense in literary matters delighted him. Did they quarrel? Of course they did. Two such vivid persons were bound to have differences of opinion. But did they sulk? No! They laughed; and Samuel worked off his feelings by composing a saucy epigram on married life, veiled in the decent obscurity of a learned language. And Tetty made a great business of tidying up the sitting room while waiting for a suitable occasion to show that she could stand up for herself, if need be. "Nay hold, Mr. Johnson and do not make a farce of thanking God for a dinner which in a few minutes you will protest is uneatable". Long after her death Johnson rebuked Topham Beauclerc, who had spoken with levity about his marriage: "Sir, it was a love match - on both sides." Later, he told Boswell with some emotion how much pleasure he felt at her praise of THE RAMBLER. "Mrs. Johnson, in whose judgement and taste he had great confidence said to him after a few numbers of THE RAMBLER had come out 'I thought very well of you before, but I did not imagine you could have written anything equal to this'".

For many years it has been usual for some to speak slightingly of Boswell, and to suggest that his success as a biographer arose from his defects as a man. Could it not rather be that when his spirit passed to the Elysian Fields where the souls of the great ones enjoy eternal converse, as he stood furtively peeping between the boles of the trees which shade the green lawns of Paradise hoping to catch a glimpse of his master, he was confronted by the majestic figure of Plato who led him, reluctant and nervous, to the temple which stands in the centre of the grove. The company rise to greet him, and Plato says "Here, my friends, is one greater than I. For I used my master as my own mouthpiece; but here stands one who did not scruple to abase himself, that his master might live."

Bacon, in his history of the winds, after having offered something to the imagination as desirable, often proposes lower advantages in its place to the reason as attainable. The same method may be sometimes pursued in moral endeavours, which this philosopher has observed in natural inquiries, having first set positive and absolute excellence before us, we may be pardoned though we sink down to humbler virtue, trying, however, to keep our point always in view, and struggling not to lose ground, though we cannot gain it.

Rambler 14. I.p. 92.

REVIEWS

New Light on Dr. Johnson.

Edited by Frederick W. Hilles.
New Haven: Yale University Press. 1959. $6.00.

"I am willing to love all mankind, except an American". What would Johnson have made of this elegant volume of scholarly essays sponsored by The Johnsonians on the occasion of his 250th birthday? Since 1946 the society has met annually in or near New York and counts among its members scholars and critics from both sides of the Atlantic. A group of these has contributed the score of essays that make up this commemorative edition. Approximately half the items have never before been published; the remainder have existed in privately printed pamphlets or have appeared in literary periodicals. It is interesting to note that the earliest essay, 1941, and the most recent, 1959, were originally addresses to the Johnson Society of London. The essays and commentaries range widely over Johnson's multifarious achievements in the realm of letters. The critical spotlight is turned on Johnson the poet, the lexicographer, the critic, the biographer, and on the less familiar figure of Johnson the playwright, reviser, bibliographer, and student of history. With scrupulous scholarship and warm understanding, the contributors present new material recently discovered and a fresh assessment of Johnson's writings to illumine our understanding of the man and his works.

The papers follow no common pattern, and no attempt is made to present a single, orthodox point of view. Where contributors treat of the same topics there are differences of approach and interpretation. But this serves only to preserve a balance of opinions. The grouping and juxtapositioning of essays assist the reader in relating the various aspects of Johnson's theory and practice. Thus an account of Johnson's Dictionary containing a reference to the use he made of Wilkins' Mathematical Magick as a scientific source is followed by a study of the relation of that work to the "Dissertation on the Art of Flying" in Rasselas. Sometimes the essays are unexpectedly complementary, and the reader is constantly making his own cross-references to apparently unrelated articles. This in itself is confirmation that Johnson and his works are "all of a piece". As we watch him at work on the proof-sheets of his Life of Pope and observe some of

his emendations - "made it would seem for sound rather than sense ... in a metre that Pope had perfected" - we are reminded of the earlier essays dealing with Johnson's poetry and his strictures on Milton. The volume is free from the mist of panegyric: admiration for the man does not allow the contributors to ignore his limitations. When his prejudices are considered, they are not vindicated but explained. Sometimes we see Johnson more clearly in the new light that is thrown on the life and thought of the period. A just proportion of the essays is devoted to Johnson the man and his circle of friends and acquaintances. Here, new discoveries supplement Boswell and others and do much to explain the suppressions in the Life. The dark hints of Boswell and Hawkins are re-examined and frankly discussed. After a full assessment of the entry in Johnson's diary for 22nd April 1753: "As I purpose to try on Monday to seek a new wife without any derogation from dear Tetty's memory ..." (A facsimile of the complete transcript in Boswell's hand is one of the four excellent illustrations in the book), there follows an entertaining speculation on the matrimonial field. Elsewhere we are given the background of the events leading to Johnson's serious thoughts of ending his days in the English Benedictine Convent in Paris. In a brief review it is impossible to indicate the full extent of this important contribution to Johnsonian studies. Let it suffice that The Johnsonians have paid a fitting tribute to the memory of a man whose lustre has in no way been dimmed by the passing of a quarter of a millennium.

J. H. L.

The Search for Good Sense by F.L. Lucas. 1958. London, Cassell & Co. Pp.354. Price 25/- nett.

Lack of space prevented a review of this book from appearing in our last issue. The essays contained in it are of great interest to Johnsonians. In addition to a study of Dr. Johnson, there are also penetrating studies of the eighteenth century mind, and of Boswell, Goldsmith, and Lord Chesterfield. Mr. Lucas is a Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, often the wit and repartee of a Fellows Common Room sparkle out in his pages. There is the story of a recent Russian visitor who, on visiting Pembroke College, Oxford, was shown Dr. Johnson's teapot; after regarding it for some time with great respect he said, "Ah! the Dean of Canterbury". On again, commenting upon Johnson as an eccentric, Lucas has this delightful

hit at us, and at his fellow dons:- "Just because we are so traditional and conservative, once an eccentric has established himself among us, he has a chance of becoming in his turn an institution, a tradition, an ancient monument, as much cherished by our conservatism as he was at first resented by our conventionality. (This is sometimes observable with the older inhabitants of University towns). Mr. Lucas suggests that the powerful criticism made by Johnson is due not only to his intellect but also to his vitality he considers that among his great assets were his individuality, his freedom from any kind of hypocrisy, and to the fact that he always made a continual effort to think clearly; his courage, which showed itself both in its intellectual and in its physical aspects; he was one of the greatest champions of reason. The author considers that Johnson is more important as a personality than as a maker of books; he believes that the aggressiveness and rudeness of Johnson must be acknowledged and that it is an advantage to do so, he observes that "a good painting is not improved by whitewash". Again here is a consoling thought, "Faults may be a far better ladder to fame than virtues. Indeed the best lives may often be lived by men who are never heard of". Writing upon his style and especially as it is shown "the style of the Parliamentary debates is ponderous Johnsonese, it is polysyllabic, authentic, elaborately balanced with pairs and triplets" Heine is quoted as saying that Johnson was "Der John Bull der Gelertsamkeit", the John Bull of learning. Mr. Lucas observes that Johnson's preface to Shakespeare is still worth reading; he supports Johnson's attack on the necessity for the three unities and points out that in recent times, Stendhal, in his attack on the French classical drama plagiarizes Johnson's Preface. This book contains a series of essays which it is worth while to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest.

F. N. D.

That every man should regulate his actions by his own conscience, without any regard to the opinion of the rest of the world, is one of the first precepts of moral prudence; justified not only by the suffrage of reason, which declares that none of the gifts of heaven are to lie useless, but by the voice likewise of experience, which will soon inform us that, if we make the praise or blame of others the rule of our conduct, we shall be distracted by a boundless variety of irreconcileable judgements, be held in perpetual suspence between contrary impulses, and consult for ever without determination.

The Rambler, June 5th, 1750.

NOTES

The 250th anniversary of the birth of Samuel Johnson was celebrated last September in Lichfield and in Birmingham. In Lichfield a special service of remembrance was held in the Cathedral, the preacher being our President, The Very Reverend Dean Mathews. There was an exhibition of Church manuscripts and books relating to the period. A memorial tree was planted by Sir William Haley, Editor of the Times. In Birmingham there was also a memorial service in the Cathedral, the preacher being the Very Reverend H.G.M. Clarke, Provost of Birmingham. Under the chairmanship of Mr. E.A. Knight, an organising committee arranged a series of lectures, an exhibition of portraits, prints and books. The exhibition of pictures and prints in the Art Gallery was notable; an admirable loan collection had been secured, and the arrangement and lighting of the works enabled them to be viewed under exceptionally favourable conditions. The catalogue of the exhibition will be of permanent value to all Johnsonians who visited Birmingham for these celebrations.

The success of the Johnson Society of London depends to a large extent upon its secretary. For years we were under the cultured and scholarly guidance of Mr. Frederick Nixon; then, for a time, we were helped by the wide knowledge of journalism of Mr. Aubrey Noakes; now we are prospering under the guidance of Mr. Dowdeswell, and of his wife, both of whom are experts in literature. The programme for the spring session will prove of exceptional interest to our members and we urge their attendance.

In January there is a paper on "Gibbon and the Johnsonian Circle" by Mr. D.M. Low. Mr. Low is a member of Oriel College, Oxford, and has been Dean of the Faculty of Arts in King's College, London; he has written and edited many books and papers dealing with Edward Gibbon. One of the most important of them is a "Life of Edward Gibbon" which was published in 1937, and is still the standard work on his career; it is a work of great value and is carefully annotated, the references and notes being placed at the foot of the page, so that they are readily accessible to the reader, without undue interruption of his studies. An example of this may be given from p.186 of the book, where the author has been quoting a passage from which he has abbreviated; the footnote reads "The extract has been slightly shortened; apologies are offered to any ears offended by mutilated rhythms". Is this not an example of meticulous care taken for the reader combined with a careful consideration of the rounded periods of Gibbon. This is an author

who will be worth hearing on January 16th.

On February 13th Mr. F.L. Lucas reads a paper on "Thomas Gray". Mr. Lucas is a Fellow of Kings College, Cambridge, and a Reader in English Literature in the University. Many of our members have doubtless read his delightful travel book "From Olympus to the Styx" and his study of the Greek "Tragedy" which has appeared in a series of editions from 1927 to 1957, a sufficient indication of its value. In the last two years he has published studies of the eighteenth century, "The Search For Good Sense" and "The Art Of Living". Those who attend the February meeting will be well rewarded.

Mr. J.H. Leicester, in April, will tell us of Dr. Johnson and William Shenstone". Mr. Leicester is a member of Birkbeck College, London, where so much good work is being done in the Department of English, under the direction of Professor Tillotson. Shenstone is an interesting figure of the eighteenth century, both as a poet and as a landscape gardener; we shall be interested to extend our knowledge of him.

The Publications of the Modern Language Association of America for December, 1958, contains an article by Dr. Edward Ruhe, of the University of Kansas, upon "Birch, Johnson and Elizabeth Carter." Thomas Birch was a Londoner, born in Clerkenwell in 1705, the son of a Quaker; for some years he assisted his father in the business of coffee making, but in 1730 he took Holy Orders and for many years was an incumbent in London. Elizabeth Carter was the daughter of a clergyman, who was Vicar of Deal; from her father she received a thorough grounding in the classics. Her translation of Epictetus is still read in the Everyman Library edition; her poem "Ode to Wisdom" is No. 260 in the "Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse". The link between Elizabeth Carter and Thomas Birch was that they were both contributors to the"Gentleman's Magazine", which also brought an association with Samuel Johnson. Birch contributed six hundred and eighteen lives of English writers to a work known As "A General Dictionary", a "History of the Royal Society" and other works. In 1728 Birch married but a year later his wife and infant son both died; he remained a widower for ten years. When he met Elizabeth Carter he became extremely attached to her, he being a middle aged scholar clergyman and she a girl of twenty. This paper gives a most interesting account of their friendship with each other and with Dr. Johnson. It was not to end in marriage for Elizabeth had determined to live her life in single blessedness. The paper by Dr. Ruhe is a learned and interesting account of this friendship.

At the meeting held on November 14th, Mr. John Crow, M.A., King's College, Reader in English in the University of London, spoke on "Critics of Shakespeare, Johnson and Others", instead of on "Samuel Johnson's Second Thoughts", as announced. He said he felt himself an imposter as he was not an 18th century man, but a Shakespearean. He thought it would take a very long time to discuss the true business of a critic. The first criticisms of Shakespeare were really in the prefatory verses by Ben Jonson and Milton in the earliest editions. But the aim of criticism had altered with the years. We wish to deduce the state of mind of the writer, but the 18th century critics were mainly interested in the writer's observance or otherwise of the rules. Pope thought criticism should disengage the faults and excellencies of the writer. He despised pedantry, so necessary in a critic, but was often very careless. He wrote for his rather arrogant circle of friends, whereas Johnson wrote for the comman man and is most interesting when he elaborates Shakespeare's faults - when we agree we learn something of Shakespeare, when we disagree, something about Johnson. He was better equipped by scholarship and "kind of mind" than Pope, and his better character made him the better critic.

OBITUARY

A sad note was struck during the celebration dinner of The Johnson Society of Lichfield on Saturday September 18th, when the Dean of the Cathedral spoke, after a period of silence, of the great loss the Society had sustained in the death of their Chairman Dr. J. E. Hurst, C.B.E., J.P., which had taken place earlier in the year. Dr. Hurst was a well-known and much respected Lichfield Johnsonian and he worked energetically and ceaselessly in the interest of the Society and their Annual Celebrations. Many visitors to Lichfield from other Societies will greatly miss his genial presence, especially those who were privileged to attend the informal dinner held at the George Hotel during the annual celebrations. Dr. Hurst's great wish was denied him, which was to take part in the 250th Anniversary Celebrations.

The sincere sympathy of the Johnson Society of London is extended to Mrs. Hurst and his son and daughter.

M. W.