

THE
NEW RAMBLER

Journal of The Johnson Society of London

JANUARY, 1964

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JOURNAL OF THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

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SAMUEL JOHNSON¹.

by

Frederick Nixon.

Illustrious men have the whole earth for their sepulchre, for their memorials are graven not only on marble monuments but also in the hearts of mankind.

These inspiring words form the climax of the great funeral oration spoken by Pericles nearly two and a half millenia ago, to honour and perpetuate the memory of the brave young men who had given their lives on the field of Marathon, that their city and all that Athenian civilization represented should be saved from a relentless enemy. No individual burial was possible as the holocaust was too great, and the bodies were left to time and the elements in the sacred comradeship of death.

But these noble words, spoken to mark a particular occasion, have a meaning and a significance far beyond their original application. In a sense quite different from that in which they were originally used, they apply to the great man whose memory we revere today. For services of remembrance are not confined to Lichfield where Samuel Johnson first saw the light of day, or to London where his weary eyes closed for the last time. It is not only here in these hallowed walls that his friends gather to do him honour. Far over the ocean, in New York, in Chicago, on the shores of the Amazon, and on the banks of the River Plate, his admirers pay him homage according to their tastes in a diverse number of ceremonies. And this diversity would be agreeable and welcome to one like Samuel Johnson who found pleasure and inspiration in every walk of life. The solemn calm of the Church of St. Clement-Danes, the lively exchanges of the tavern, the elegant conversation of the tea-table - all alike were agreeable to his spirit and stimulating to his mind. This wide range of his thought is perhaps the chief reason why his memory lives as it does in the hearts of men: for every man and woman can find in Johnson that particular facet which arouses interest and admiration. There can hardly be another whose appeal is more diverse - who scales the heights and explores the depths as he does. To the

1. Address given at the Annual Commemoration of the Johnson Society of London on Friday, December 13th. 1963, in Westminster Abbey.

grammarian he is the compiler of the dictionary which did so much to crystallize our native tongue while it was still in a somewhat fluid state. To another he is the classic scholar who could compose an epigram in Greek or Latin on the spot, and without apparent effort, or he is the brilliant journalist who could turn out a constant stream of moving or witty articles on every subject under the sun - grave, gay, facetious or tragic. He even produced a technical thesis on the building of bridges, and the proportions of their arches which would be most conducive to stability. But there is something else, the greatest of all virtues - charity. And not merely a perfunctory giving of alms as a social duty, but a tender regard for poverty, and a sympathy for those in need. Who can remember without emotion the young man pacing the London streets with his friend and confessing that he had not a coin to pay for a night's lodging, and later gently placing money in the hand of a sleeping beggar - and his reply to his friend's remonstrance "I did not say that I had not one for charity." Who is not touched by his tender solicitude and sympathy as he knelt in prayer at the bedside of his mother's old servant when she lay dying, comforting her with thoughts of the joys awaiting her beyond the dark gate of death. Then there is his respect and admiration for that strange man Robert Levet, who devoted his life to tending and healing the needy and the sick, and who has been commemorated by Johnson in a short poem which for a moment touches the sublime.

Well try'd through many a varying year,
See levet to the grave descend,
Officious, innocent, sincere,
Of every friendless name the friend.
His virtues walked their narrow round,
Nor made a pause, nor left a void;
And sure the Eternal Master found
The single talent well employed.

What could be more moving than the reference to the "single talent"!

Beyond these there is one aspect of his life that outweighs all the rest. His devotion to the Church. It was a period when Ecclesiastica Anglicana had touched the depths; one recalls the words of a great Anglican leader a century later, that he was convinced of the authenticity of our Church, for nothing short of this would have allowed her to survive the degradation of the preceding era. Yet, in spite of this destructive atmosphere, Samuel Johnson retained a faith, simple and almost childlike in the redemptive power of the Church, the validity of the sacraments

and, what is today particularly valuable, the literal truth of the Gospels. They were to him, as to that great teacher who has just been taken from us, C.S. Lewis, a true record, miraculously protected and preserved for the duration of the human race by the providence of God, that all men might know of the life and actions of his Son, our Saviour. It is interesting to imagine the torrent which would have swept away the cold reasoning of any philosopher of his day who was bold enough to try to rationalise the miracles. The peal of thunder from the cloudless sky which recalled Horace from the vague byeways of religion, would have been nothing to it. So this may be not the least of the good works accomplished by the great man we are honouring today. And it finds expression in the sublime humility of his prayers, and also in his emotion on seeing the ruins of Iona, which occasioned an expression which for simple grandeur might well have been taken by Matthew Arnold for one of the "touchstones" of our language: "The man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the Plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona."

And that is why I stand in humble gratitude, and proudly and reverently place on his tomb this wreath.

ON JOURNALISM.

One of the amusements of idleness is reading, without the fatigue of close attention, and the world therefore swarms with writers, whose only wish is to be read. No species of literary men has lately so much multiplied as the writers of news. Not many years ago the nation was content with one Gazette, but now we have not only in the metropolis papers for every morning, and every evening, but almost every large town has its weekly historian, who regularly circulates his periodical intelligence, and fills the villages of his district with conjectures on the events of war, and with debates on the true interest of Europe. To write news in its perfection requires such a combination of qualities, that a man completely fitted for the task is not always to be found. In Sir Henry Wotton's jocular definition, "An Ambassador is said to be a man of virtue sent abroad to tell lies for the advantage of his country"; a News-writer is a man without virtue, who writes lies at home for his own profit. To these compositions is required neither genius nor knowledge, neither industry nor spriteliness, but contempt of shame, and indifference to truth are absolutely necessary. He who by a long familiarity with infamy has obtained these qualities may confidently tell today what he intends to contradict tomorrow; he may affirm fearlessly what he knows that he shall be obliged to recant, and may write letters from Amsterdam or Dresden to himself.

The Idler, No. 31.

WILLIAM COLE, FRIEND OF WALPOLE AND GRAY.¹

by

R. W. Ketton-Cremer, M.A., F.S.A., F.R.S.L.

In every century there are a few admirable men, with strong literary interests but small creative gifts, who largely devote their lives to assisting other writers. They publish little or nothing themselves; but they observe, they remember, they compile immense collections of notes, they preserve just those facts which would otherwise be forgotten; and they are always ready to help their more articulate brethren. In the seventeenth century one thinks of John Aubrey, always piling up notes and never getting them into any sort of order: putting together the marvellous collection of anecdotes which we now know as the "Brief Lives", solely to assist his crochety and not over-grateful friend, Anthony Wood, in writing his "Athenae Oxonienses". Just such another was the Reverend William Cole, whose merits I wish to bring to your notice today.

William Cole was born in 1714, the son of a Cambridgeshire farmer of substantial means. He was sent to Eton, where he first formed that friendship with Horace Walpole which was to play such an important part in his life. He was acquainted with Gray at Eton, although this friendship only ripened in later life. From Eton he went on to Cambridge, first to Clare, later becoming a Fellow Commoner of King's. For some years he led a rather desultory life, sometimes travelling abroad, but always keeping on his rooms at King's. At the age of thirty he was ordained, and obtained one or two small pieces of preferment; but he did not fulfil the duties of an incumbent, or give up residence in Cambridge, until 1753, when his friend Browne Willis, the antiquary, offered him the excellent living of Bletchley in Buckinghamshire. Long before this, of course, he had developed his two outstanding characteristics. The first of these was his passionate interest in antiquities. From an early age he immersed himself in every branch of antiquarian study, and began to compile those vast collection of notes which are his great legacy to posterity. In the first volume of all he inscribed, many years later, the rather engaging sentence: "Memorandum. There are many absurdities, mistakes, and blunders, it is to be feared, in all my books; but

1. With the permission of Mr. Ketton-Cremer this paper has been abbreviated.

more especially in this and some others that were written when I was a young Antiquary". I do not know that there were many mistakes or blunders; but there were a good many of what his contemporaries would have agreed in calling absurdities. For Cole had a wonderful and lifelong talent for the irrelevant. His notes and disquisitions are interspersed with all sorts of personal details, about his fellow antiquaries, the dons at Cambridge, the parsons whose churches he visited, the squires of the parishes, every one who impinged upon his life in any way. Absurd, perhaps, but like Aubrey's similar jottings, fascinating and invaluable to us now.

His second outstanding characteristic was what we should call nowadays his extreme right-wing views. From boyhood he was the highest of High Churchmen in religion, and a most ardent Tory in politics. And on those points, although they never met, he would have been in full sympathy with Samuel Johnson. Cole had a particular admiration for the famous non-juring antiquaries who were his predecessors, Thomas Hearne at Oxford and Thomas Baker at Cambridge. Had he lived at the time of the Revolution of 1688, I have not the smallest doubt that he would have been a non-juror himself. Johnson, you will remember, was not very polite about non-jurors in conversation with Boswell. "I was startled by his argument", wrote Boswell; "and I think it was one of the occasions when he was talking for victory." But he would have agreed with Cole's great dislike of dissenters and decided tenderness towards Roman Catholics; and he would have concurred in his view of the Stuart claims as opposed to the claims of the Hanoverians.

Cole, in short, was a man of prejudices; and we should take his prejudices into account when estimating the value of his biographical jottings. When we find a Provost of King's denounced as a "pimping rascal" and a "snotty-nosed wretch", we begin to have our suspicions; and it turns out that this particular Provost was senior to Cole at Eton, and had more than once been responsible for having him flogged. We must remember also that, like Johnson, he would not allow the Whig dogs to have the best of it. Horace Walpole, his closest friend, was an ardent Whig. Fond though he was of him, Cole could write in the privacy of his study that Walpole's "Violence and warmth in party matters, and lately even to enthusiasm, abates and takes off from many of his shining qualities --- his zeal against churchmen and the church carries him to such lengths as is scarcely consistent with a wise and ingenuous heart". But these were passing clouds. Walpole was speaking the truth when in 1777 he wrote, "Let us be a little vain; you and I

differ radically in our principles, and yet in forty years they have never cast a gloom over our friendship".

I For several years after Cole became Rector of Bletchley in 1753, we know little of his life. From 1762 onwards we know a great deal. In that year Walpole's "Anecdotes of Painting" appeared; and Cole addressed to him a very long letter of comments. They had been in touch for years; but if they ever corresponded, their letters have not been preserved. For the remaining twenty years of Cole's life they carried on an antiquarian correspondence of the utmost fullness, and of the greatest human interest as well. Both sides are printed in the first two volumes of Mr. W.S. Lewis's magnificent Yale Edition. To anyone who loves the calm, leisurely, gossiping atmosphere of the eighteenth century I can only say "Read them".

Further light upon Cole is afforded by his diary, two volumes of which were printed in the thirties, edited by Mr. F.G. Stokes, with very agreeable introductions by Miss Helen Waddell. It is not until you read these diaries, with their ramblings and disquisitions, their likes and dislikes, their deep essential kindness and good feeling, that you realise what a delightful man Cole was. The first begins when he paid a long visit to France in 1765, mainly because Horace Walpole was staying in Paris at the same time. Cole had some intention of retiring from parish duty and settling in France. He soon gave up this idea, because Walpole told him that if he died there, his property - including his precious collections of notes - would be forfeit to the French crown, as the goods of all aliens were. So the diary only consists of sightseeing notes of places he visited in company with Walpole; and very entertaining, as well as valuable they are.

The second published volume is entitled "The Bletchley Diary", and contains two years of his life in that parish. At the end of those years, in 1767, he felt obliged to resign the living in favour of a relation of Browne Wills, who had presented him to it. He was under no legal obligation to do so, but the act was characteristic of his high sense of honour. He retired to a most uncomfortable parsonage at Waterbeach in the Fens, where he held the curacy for a rich antiquary whom he heartily disliked. Two years later he moved again, to Milton, close to Cambridge, where he remained for the rest of his days, in close touch with a host of friends in the University, where he was known as "Cardinal Cole". The Waterbeach and Milton diaries were also prepared for publication; but so poor was the sale of the first two volumes that the publishers could not run to the expense of bringing out a third. I continue

to hope that they may one day do so. These diaries continue to show Cole in the best possible light, friendly to his neighbours, indulgent to his servants, dutiful in his parish. I will only quote one passage, "Sent for by Mrs. Segars to pray for her. I stayed but a short time, as the hall or kitchen where we sat was but newly washed. I was surprised at being sent for as last Sunday, supposing her to be ill, I sent her some roast pig, but she had gone to Barnwell. She was up today and seemingly hearty, and wanted to talk to me how she could get to Heaven. I told her she must certainly know the way at her age, but that I dared not stay in her wet room". I need hardly say that on occasions of genuine distress his tone was very different from this.

As for the biographical sidelights interspersed among his notes, it is difficult to give you their full flavour. They consist often of little flashes of observation, unimportant perhaps when they relate to the obscurer writers and scholars of his time, but invaluable in connection with his eminent friends, Walpole and Gray. Henry Coventry, a Cambridge friend of Gray's, is thus described, "He used to dress remarkably gay, with much gold lace; had a most prominent Roman nose; was, I think, a bastard of the Earl of Coventry; and was much a gentleman". John Gilbert Cooper, the minor poet, "He is a lively young man; but a most accomplished coxcomb; yet a good scholar". Soame Jenyns, "a man of lively fancy, and pleasant turn of wit; very sparkling in conversation, and full of many conceits and agreeable drollery, which is heightened by his particular inarticulate manner of speaking through his broken teeth". William Mason, "This flippant republican poet takes liberties, as a free man, to abuse all whom his politics are adverse to"; but he had a great veneration for Mason's character, when he could overcome his distaste for his politics. And, of course, the individual glimpses of Cambridge life are of great interest. I was amused by the description of one sporting young gentleman, who filled the College with dogs, pointers and hounds, and a cow, actually kept in the College Close for milk for them. What a contrast to the overcrowded Universities of our time.

The light that he throws on Horace Walpole is invaluable, both in his correspondence and in his notes. Were it not for his description of a few days stay at Strawberry Hill, we should know nothing of Mrs. Daye, the illegitimate daughter of Sir Robert Walpole, whom Horace heard of by chance living in poverty and obscurity, and brought to live with him to the end of her days. She did not appear on grand occasions. Cole says, "she was of a squab, short, gummy appearance"; but she dined when Cole was there,

and it is wholly through him that we know of this typically kind action of Horace Walpole, Walpole whom foolish people regard as shallow and coldhearted.

As for Gray, Cole saw him constantly at Cambridge. When I was writing my life of Gray, I realised for the first time how much they saw of one another, and how many little personal details we owe entirely to Cole; details of Gray's appearance, his manner, his dress, the fact that he had "never been across a horse's back in his life", his window-boxes full of mignonette, and a great deal more.

In later years Cole received another substantial benefice, Burnham in Buckinghamshire, but he continued to reside at Milton, and his duties were performed by a curate. He was much troubled with gout, and moved less and less from home; but he continued to correspond with Walpole and many other friends, and to compile his great volumes of notes right up to his death on the 16th. of December, 1782. He had been much exercised as to the disposal of his manuscripts; and he finally left them to the British Museum, with a proviso that they should not be opened for fifty years. Part of his estate was left for the erection of a new tower for St. Clements Church, in Cambridge. The tower is as his executors built it with the words "Deum Cole" on a panel facing the street - not perhaps a very good pun or suitable for its place. It happens also to be the motto of the Cole family, Earls of Enniskillen, with whom our Cole never claimed any kinship.

Although Cole never knew Samuel Johnson, he certainly read him. There is a passage in the 71st Rambler which he copied into one of his volumes, about the unmethodical and dilatory antiquary. Johnson says, citing Thomas Hearne the Oxford Antiquary in support of his view, "the general forgetfulness of the fragility of life has remarkably infected the students of monuments and records." He goes on to say, "when they have undertaken a work, they go on searching and transcribing, and at last leave their work unfinished." Cole saw that this was exactly his case; but he suggested in favour of his own type of antiquary, that though "the years slide from under us, we leave our collections to others to piece together, who have not had the drudgery to collect, but have all ready to their hands." He did his work for others. In his lifetime he ungrudgingly gave his help to all Horace Walpole's antiquarian enterprises; to Bentham for his "History of Ely"; to Masters for his "History of Corpus"; to Grose, to Granger, to Gough, to Percy, to Lort; in fact to nearly all the antiquaries of his day. Since he died his work has been of untold use to every historian of

Cambridge or of Cambridgeshire, to many others in the wider field of history, and to every one who has written about Walpole and Gray and their circle. Walpole once wrote to him, "We both labour, I will not say for the public, for the public troubles its head very little about our labours, but for the few of posterity that shall be curious." Posterity has not been so few in number: indeed both their names are recalled with gratitude and affection by an ever increasing multitude. But Cole would not have minded, one way or the other. He loved his manuscripts for their own sake. As he touchingly said, "They are my only delight; they are my wife and children; they have been my whole employ and amusement for these twenty or thirty years". He was the perfect type of the disinterested scholar and antiquary.

OBITUARY - MR. T.D. FITZGERALD.

The Society has suffered a great loss in the death of Mr. T.D. Fitzgerald, who for many years was an active member, both of this Society and of its Executive Committee. An Irishman, brought up in Dublin, he came to London early in life. A barrister by profession, he worked for a great number of years as an Assessor in the legal department of the London County Council. It is probable that reduction of house space has led to the diminution of the private libraries which our members formerly owned but some years ago it was a distinctive feature of the meetings of the Johnson Society that members produced their own books and read from them passages relating to the subject under discussion; this practice gave a personal literary flavour to our proceedings. In this Mr. Fitzgerald was adept; his wide knowledge of literature, the legal precision with which he framed his remarks, made his contribution to any discussion a memorable event. The quiet humour which usually accompanied anything which he had to say, the slight suggestion of an Irish brogue, made him a most attractive speaker to whom all listened with great attention. A steadfast adherent of the Roman Catholic Church, he was a man greatly admired by all who knew him, both for the strength of character which he always showed and for the kind and friendly manner in which he always behaved towards all who met him.

F.N.D.

DR. JOHNSON, JOHN DYER AND THE RUINS OF ROME

by

Arthur Johnston, M.A., Ph.D.,

Lecturer in English Literature, Birkbeck College, University of London.

In his life of the poet John Dyer, Johnson writes,

"The idea of The Ruins of Rome strikes more but pleases less (i.e. than Grongar Hill), and the title raises greater expectation than the performance gratifies. Some passages, however are conceived with the mind of a poet, as when in the neighbourhood of dilapidating edifices he says,

'At dead of night
The hermit oft, 'midst his orisons, hears
Aghast the voice of time disparting towers.'"

Now Dyer "is not a poet of bulk or dignity sufficient to require an elaborate criticism", so Johnson tells us no more about this poem. My purpose is to expand Johnson's two sentences.

The only poem of Dyer's which is still read, and indeed elaborately criticised, is Grongar Hill. It is short, it describes a pleasant scene, its meditative parts contain thoughts that, as Johnson said, are "consonant to the general sense or experience of mankind". Above all, its octosyllabic couplets are memorable. Dyer is rarely memorable in the blank verse poems The Ruins of Rome and The Fleece. Johnson misquoted even the lines he admired. These more ambitious poems are as characteristic of their time, in subject and treatment, as Grongar Hill. The Ruins of Rome is, in fact, like the earlier poem, a "prospect" poem. The Fleece is a Georgic, and as such languishes unread. It has not been tried by the standards of Virgil and found wanting. It has been put with all the other Georgics - except Thomson's Seasons - "to harbour spiders and to gather dust", on the assumption that the subject is impossibly unpoetic. Yet Johnson admitted to Boswell in 1776 that there were many people who would speak of "that excellent poem", though five years later he said that it "never became popular and is now universally neglected." Walpole thought it insipid and could not read it through. But Wordsworth found innumerable beauties in it, of a high order. "In point of imagination and purity of style," he wrote, "I am not sure that

he is not superior to any writer in verse since the time of Milton."

John Dyer, a Welshman from Carmarthenshire, gave up the study of law to become a painter. He was a pupil of Richardson's and in 1724 went to Rome to continue his training. I do not know of any painting that he did. By the 1730's he was back in England, and from 1740 till his death in 1758 he held various poor livings in Leicestershire and Lincolnshire. His painting was clearly not a success. He does not mention any painter, so far as I know, though he was in Rome at the same time as Canaletto and Pannini, and could have been taught by the latter at the French Academy in Rome. We must learn about his painting from his poems. For example, in his epistle to Aaron Hill on the latter's epic poem Gideon, Dyer selects for praise the passages that could form the subjects for paintings - "glorious prospects", "surprising pictures... With all the life of colours and of line, And all the force of rounding shade and light". "Here in red colours glowing bold A warlike figure strikes my eye". What he hoped to paint himself he describes in a verse epistle "To a famous painter". He includes landscapes with ruins

...some old building, hid with grass,
Rearing sad its ruin'd face,
Whose columns, friezes, statues, lie
The grief and wonder of the eye!

He would like to paint "foaming cataracts", and the sea, either calm and smooth, or lashed by storm with "vessels toss'd" and "lightning flashing".

Or that which gives me most delight,
The fair idea (seeming sight !)
Of warrior fierce, with shining blade.
Or orator, with arms display'd,
Tully's engaging air and mien
Declaiming against Cataline;
Or fierce Achilles towering high
Above his foes, who round him lie.

He is clearly an admirer of Nicholas Poussin and Claude Lorrain.

In the poem which concerns us, The Ruins of Rome, one can see the painter in him, in his attention to the light - "the purer air", the "varied light" of Rome; in many a set scene - of temples "globose and huge" against a background of wilderness and clefted domes, with goats clinging precariously and nibbling the vine leaves; in scenes that remind one of paintings by Pannini or Piranesi,

collections of ruined fragments giving the impression of clutter
and grandeur -

And vases bossed and huge inscriptive stones,
And intermingling vines; and figured nymphs,
Floras and Chloes of delicious mould,
Cheering the darkness; and deep empty tombs,
And dells, and mouldering shrines, with old decay
Rustic and green, and wide-embowering shades,
Shot from the crooked clefts of nodding towers;
A solemn wilderness! (11.79-86).

It was the painter in him that saw the masses and picked out the significant details - the colours of the pebbles in the water; the attitudes of the statues, the elaborate bas-relief (which I am afraid he invented) of the Alban brothers; the wolf suckling Romulus and Remus stretching her head back to lick their limbs; the Temple of Peace, imagined in all its glory, with its majestic pillars rising like stately beech trees beside a lake, with a background of the Etruscan mountains crowned with ruins, and blue Soracte "Wrapping his sides in tempests". But because Dyer is a poet and working with words, he gives not only the ruined scene, but often also a picture of the building as it once was. Or, looking at the shepherd and his sheep on the Palatine Hill, he can go back to the scene when Aeneas on that spot was entertained by Evander in just such pastoral conditions, and then swing back to the present, where a heap of mouldering ruins, a snake gliding away from the base "down the green desert street", and a hoary monk, convey the sense of "the things of pride" rolled "from dust again to dust".

Scenes such as this form the bulk of Dyer's poem. It is a poem of progress through the classical ruins of Rome, intermingled with progress through the history of Rome, its rise, decline and fall. The history grows naturally out of each significant ruin observed. It is also a "prospect" poem - the climb up the Palatine Hill is described and all the principal ruins surveyed from the top, then a visit to the site of Virgil's house on the Esquiline Hill, with a subsidiary prospect from there, moving naturally into an account of the growth and decline of Rome. The poem is in the tradition of the guide-book to Rome's antiquities, a conducted tour evoking past grandeur through enormous fragments of ruin. He glances at such things as the architectural revival of Palladianism, the exporting of statues and columns to deck English houses and gardens, the characteristic sights of modern Rome - monks, temples, and statues turned to Christian use - the proliferation of Roman and later fountains. And he surveys a past

civilisation from which we have much to learn, not only in its development, its ideals, training of youth, the virtues of bravery, but also in the terrible warning of its collapse through luxury and tyranny. He pushes the poem towards contemporary significance not so much by explaining the parallels with England in 1740, but by leaving them to speak for themselves. In only two places does he draw political parallels. The conspiracy of Cataline evokes

O liberty,
.....be Britain's care;
With her secure, prolong thy loved retreat;
Thence bless mankind. (11.210-15).

And at the end of the poem

O Britons, O my countrymen, beware,
Gird, gird your hearts; the Romans once were free,
Were brave, were virtuous. Tyranny howe'er
Deigned to walk forth awhile in pageant state
And with licentious pleasures fed the rout,
The thoughtless many. (11.511-16).

When the poem was read to Hawkins Brown in December 1738, Brown objected to this conclusion as "too much in the commonplace of declamation on liberty", and suggested that Sir George Lyttleton might help to get the poem published. Now Lyttleton was a poet and a patron of poets. But he was also Secretary to the Prince of Wales, around whom had gathered all the political opponents of Walpole. We can see the appropriateness of Brown's suggestion of Lyttleton in what Johnson says when writing of Thomson's poem Liberty, which came out in 1736.

At this time a long course of opposition to Sir Robert Walpole had filled the nation with clamours for liberty, of which no man felt the want, and with care for liberty, which was not in danger. Thomson, in his travels on the continent (he had been in Italy in 1731) found or fancied so many evils arising from the tyranny of other governments that he resolved to write a very long poem, in five parts, upon Liberty.

Of course Thomson dedicated his poem to the Prince of Wales, and acquired Lyttleton as a patron. Lyttleton himself, in his verse "Epistle to Mr. Pope from Rome, 1730" had urged Pope to abandon to satire and instead to celebrate "the land which yet alone can boast That liberty corrupted Rome has lost". This theme, of the loss of liberty by the Romans, consequent upon their growing

luxuriousness, and resulting in their loss of artistic and poetic genius, was a favourite with Lyttleton in his epistles to Dr. Ayscough and to Mr. Glover. It is the theme of Thomson's long poem, which begins among the ruins of Rome, and goes on to a vision of the goddess of Liberty who conducts the poet on a tour, geographical and historical, in which the progress of Liberty and the arts is traced from ancient Greece to Rome and ultimately to England. When the poet wakes "on my waking eye Rushed the still ruins of dejected Rome". The ruins are merely backcloth for Thomson; for Dyer they are the centre of his poem. But the themes of luxury and liberty, which predominate in the thinking of parts of Dyer's poem, are the same as those elaborated in Thomson's poem which has a deliberately political bias. When, then, Johnson found Dyer's poem disappointing, we might conjecture that this cant politics contributed to his irritation. Reviewing Thomas Blackwell's Memoirs of the Court of Augustus in 1756 he wrote

I know not why anyone but a schoolboy in his declamation should whine over the commonwealth of Rome, which grew great only by the misery of the rest of mankind.

And in the same review he attacked Blackwell (and through him many other writers) for his "affectation", "a furious and unnecessary zeal for liberty". Dyer, when he was thinking in his poem, would have irritated Johnson. What he was saying was not new, and to Johnson it wasn't true.

The connection between liberty in the state and the flourishing of the arts, and between tyranny and the triumph of Dulness, is of course a popular theme. Swift, for example, asserts that "Arts and Sciences took their rise and flourished only in those few small territories where the people were free". And this idea is used in many poems - in Addison's Letter from Italy, in the fourth book of the Dunciad, in Collins' Ode to Liberty, in Gray's Progress of Poesy and The Bard, as well as in Thomson's Liberty. Dyer's warning to Britons to guard their liberty perhaps did not win Lyttleton's support. At least, the poem, when published as a shilling quarto in February 1740 (Dyer had begun the poem eleven years earlier) was dedicated only to the Roman Club.

Johnson, who had arrived in London in the midst of this outburst in defence of Liberty, would notice this aspect of Dyer's poem more than a modern reader would. But he would also fasten on it because he looked eagerly in poetry for the thoughts that were evoked in the poet by the images he described. He liked

Grongar Hill because, when the thoughts came, they were true to human experience. From the top of a hill, says Dyer,

How close and small the hedges lie!
What streaks of meadows cross the eye!
A step methinks would pass the stream.
So little distant dangers seem;
So we mistake the future's face,
Eyed through hope's deluding glass.

The poet who wrote of "Hope's delusive mine" would assent to the truth of Dyer's sentiment.

The trouble with ruins, even those of Rome, is that the emotions and ideas they arouse are very limited. Before the ruins of Iona Johnson felt the romance of place, and recognised it as natural. "That man is little to be envied whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plains of Marathon or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of Iona". When he found himself near Forres, where Macbeth met the witches, his imagination was "heated". As he left the illustrious ruins of Iona he reported that Boswell was much affected by them, "nor would I willingly be thought to have looked upon them without some emotion". Rome, like Iona, would have excited him as a place that had been "dignified by wisdom, bravery and virtue". But of History as the begetter of ideas he had no high opinion. "There is but a shallow stream of thought in history" he told Boswell. The idea was developed by Byron, looking at the ruins of Rome and thinking, not about England in the 1730's as Dyer was, but about the French Revolution and Napoleon,

There is the moral of all human tales;
'Tis but the same rehearsal of the past,
First Freedom, and then Glory, - barbarism at last.
And History, with all her volumes vast,
Hath but one page.

For Johnson, history was dull - it dealt with mere facts, it called for no exercise of invention and very little imagination. Dyer's poem had too much, for Johnson, stale history.

Standing before the cemetery of a nunnery at Icolmkill, Johnson felt what he calls "mornful pleasure" at these "relics of veneration". If Johnson were not always surprising me, I should say that this is a surprising feeling for Johnson. Johnson's phrase is just right to express the emotion. Dyer, I imagine, would have disappointed Johnson by a passage in The Ruins of Rome

when, looking at urns emptied of their ashes, he writes,

There is a mood, ...
There is a kindly mood of melancholy,
That wings the soul, and points her to the skies;
When tribulation clothes the child of man,
When age descends with sorrow to the grave,
"Tis sweetly-soothing sympathy to pain,
A gently wakening call to health and ease ...
How sweet thy diapason, Melancholy. (11.344-55).

For Johnson, Melancholy was more real - "dejection, gloom, and despair, which made existence misery". It had no kindly moods, no sweet diapasons. Dyer's "fine romantic kind of melancholy", as Thomson would have called it, would have been a flippant emotion in the face of "tribulation" and age descending "with sorrow to the grave".

Dyer's poem contains other thoughts that would be equally unattractive to Johnson. One is his lament that whereas in Augustan Rome "even the rugged sons of war, Even the rude hinds revered the poet's name: But now - another age, alas! is ours - Yet will the Muse a little longer soar, Unless the clouds of care weigh down her wing." This was the sort of affectation - of praising the past at the expense of the present, and of exaggerating the importance of the poet in Rome and feebly pretending to be weighed down by the unpropitious present, that Johnson always dismissed.

I am, as you see, conjecturing why Johnson said of Dyer's poem "the title raises greater expectation than the performance gratifies". Having spoken with delight of Grongar Hill, Johnson goes on, "The idea of The Ruins of Rome strikes more but pleases less". This can only mean that while the idea of a poem about Roman ruins was more striking, than the idea of a poem about a Welsh hill, yet it held less promise of pleasure for the reader. Johnson was always ready to enjoy descriptions in verse of pleasing natural scenery, and to welcome the images and moral reflections raised by such scenes. Of course he hated conversations about such things. Mrs. Piozzi tells us that "he hated to hear about prospects and views and laying out ground and taste in gardening". That is not quite the same as the prospect from Grongar Hill. In Adventurer 108 Johnson propounds as a general principle the attraction of descriptions of Spring, of the coming of evening, of cool sequestered bowers, and of moral sentiments drawn from nature. In Ramblers 36 and 37 he discusses what he calls "true pastoral" and declares unequivocally his unfailing delight in such

poetry. He could bear to read yet another description of spring, even though - one might say "because" - the elements of it were familiar to him from many poetical accounts, and from experience of Springs. "All this we know already", he writes, "yet we hear it repeated without weariness". Far from objecting to any shallow stream of thinking in "true" pastoral, in poems about "mere" nature, Johnson tells us that the comparison of the life of man with the duration of a flower excites a gentle emotion in him, not because it is new, but because "every heart feels its justness and every hour confirms it by example". Grongar Hill, one feels, had a flying start, in Johnson's mind, over The Ruins of Rome. One might ask Johnson why he is never tired of repeated images in pastoral, but, when writing of Thomson's Liberty, he says "the recurrence of the same images must tire in time". I think the answer is that Johnson loved images of nature, but not images of art - of sculpture, painting and architecture - which poems on the growth and decline of liberty in various civilizations were confined to. He didn't like to hear about laying out ground and taste in gardening - because these were images of art not nature.

Dyer's poem was less pleasing, to Johnson, than Grongar Hill before he began to read it, because it was going to be about buildings and history. Johnson loved to travel, and when he couldn't, to read travel books. He was anxious to see Italy, and thought that "a man who had not been in Italy is always conscious of an inferiority". But travelling for Johnson was not a matter of seeing buildings. When he advised Boswell on travelling, Boswell noted that he did not dwell on cities and palaces and pictures and shows and arcadian scenes. During his own visit to Paris in 1775 he naturally went with his companions to see the palaces and churches, which he thought "very splendid and magnificent". His comments in his journal show that he noticed buildings in general terms, - the size of rooms, the elegance of the furnishings. He noted such things as "the rooms at the top are small, fit to sooth the imagination with privacy"; or "the middle aisle is very lofty and awful". Of the palace at Versailles he wrote "the front long; I saw it not perfectly". Like most travellers he was overwhelmed by the multiplicity of rooms and chapels. He might have admired Dyer's power to combine a sense of the clutter of Roman ruins with distinct description of details. Since Johnson lacked detailed architectural knowledge and interest, particulars were not memorable for him, and he wrote, "the sight of palaces and other great buildings leaves no very distinct images, unless to those who talk of them". The buildings he saw were not impressed on his mind through animated discussion of architectural details, of plans and styles and decorations. He rarely talked of architecture. When he did, it was to express disapproval of

ornamental architecture "such as magnificent columns supporting a portico", says Boswell, "because it consumes labour disproportionate to its utility"; or to mock at statuary, which he believed was valued merely because it was difficult. Johnson was more interested in the quality of men's actions than in the settings in which they were performed. A building he judged by its usefulness.

Boswell is clearly right in inferring that Johnson could see far more of a scene than Hawkins was willing to allow. When Boswell was surprised at Johnson's distinct and vivid account of Islam, the former seat of the Congreves, Johnson replied that if he had a bad instrument, yet he played well on it. Had Johnson every visited Rome he would have observed the ruins carefully. Of the granite used for building in Aberdeen, he said "It is beautiful" - which is not the remark of a man unmoved by texture. But Johnson's business is with life and manners, not with ruins and history.

The 545 lines of Dyer's poem, in blank verse, "encumbering and encumbered" reminded him of nothing he knew and told him nothing he didn't know. There was no imagination at work in such passages as Dyer's account of the Pantheon

plain and round; of this our world
Majestic emblem; with peculiar grace,
Before its ample orb, projected stands
The many-pillard portal; noblest work
Of human skill: here, curious architect,
If thou assay'st, ambitious, to surpass
Palladius, Angelus or British Jones,
On these fair walls extend the certain scale,
And turn the instructive compass.

Versified information is not poetry. You will probably have noticed in the quotations some of Dyer's tricks of style whereby he moves his language away from ease towards what he thinks of as "a loftier flight". The use of repetition

Fallen, fallen, a silent heap; her heroes all
Sunk in their urns; behold the pride of pomp,
The throne of nations fallen.

The occasional awkward syntax and inversions

Tumbling all precipitate down-dashed,
Rattling aloud, loud thundering to the moon:
While murmurs soothe each awful interval
Of ever-falling waters.

The intervals, as Lamb pointed out, are those between the sounds of falling stones. The excessive use of compound epithets - "plaintive-echoing", "cloud-piercing", "vine-mantled", "thick-surrounding", "high-boasting", "slow-widening". The building up of adjectives - "Amid the towering ruins, huge, supreme". The affectation of Miltonic echoes

Deep lies in dust the Theban obelisk,
Immense along the waste; minuter art,
Glyconian forms or Phidian, subtly fair,
O'erwhelming; as th'immense Leviathan
The finny brood, when near Ierne's shore
Outstretched, unwieldy, his island length appears,
Above the foamy flood. (11.26-32).

"My business is with the poetry", Johnson said when approaching Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination. And in Dyer's poem he recognised the mind of a poet. The passage he quoted - or misquoted - was

The pilgrim oft
At dead of night, 'mid his oraison hears
Aghast the hand of Time, disparting towers. (11.38-40).

It had already been quoted by James Hervey in his Reflections in a Flower Garden (1746-7), where the poem is praised as "small but solemn, picturesque and majestic". Later on Wordsworth instanced the lines as an example of the "modifying and investive power of imagination". Any eighteenth-century critic might be expected to admire these lines as a successful example of the use of "circumstance" that is, the inclusion of a brief piece of circumstantial detail in a description or narration, which vivifies an otherwise bare statement. Examples in Pope spring to mind - "And lick the hand just raised to shed his blood", "His faithful dog shall bear him company". The danger of the circumstantial was that it might detract from the grand or sublime idea being presented. Dyer, who was conscious, - perhaps too much so - that a characteristic of ruins is the occasional falling of a piece of masonry, transforms the bald fact by imagining the pilgrim at his prayers at dead of night startled by the sound. The bare fact unmodified by the investive imagination is what we get in Grongar Hill,

While, ever and anon, there falls
Huge heaps of hoary mouldered walls.

Dyer transforms the fact into a picture. But Dyer's success

depends on more than this. The picture achieves its effect by the interplay of all its elements. The pilgrim at prayer is one of the noticeable facts of modern Rome, which Dyer uses elsewhere in the poem - the juxtaposition of Christian priests and pagan antiquity. He is accurate scenery as well as picturesque circumstance. He is the right choice for a further reason - the pilgrim at prayer, a figure withdrawn from the world, preparing for eternity, is the most forceful living contrast with the ruins of man-made structures which Time is steadily destroying. The "dead of night" almost ceases to be a cliché, as it adds to the frightfulness of the ruins, which remind of death and decay and impermanence. The sound of the falling stone is magnified by the silence implied in the "dead of night". The image is heightened by personification and by the use of dignified archaisms - "oraison", "aghaist", "disparting". The picture created is memorable.

Johnson said that the idea of the poem was striking. He might have added that it was original, for Dyer owes nothing to the poem about mutability by du Bellay that Spenser translated as The Ruines of Rome. Dyer wrote a poem for those doing the Grand Tour, a poetic guidebook to Roman antiquities and history, in the form of mingled progress and prospect. He is, as Gray said, "rough and injudicious" often. But he keeps his poem interesting and varied throughout - one of the main difficulties of a descriptive poet, as Johnson was the first to explain - and proves that his is the mind of a poet, if not in the whole poem then in the lines and phrases he makes -

or at his lonely meal
Starves a wide province.

But see along the north the tempest swell
O'er the rough Alps, and darken all their snows.

while now the rising sun
Flames on the ruins in the purer air.

Johnson's view of the poem is brief, but it is just. What he says should encourage at least one reading of the poem. It was Wordsworth who wrote of Dyer

Though hasty Fame hath many a chaplet culled
For worthless brows, while in the pensive shade
Of cold neglect she leaves thy head ungraced,
Yet pure and powerful minds, hearts meek and still,
A grateful few, shall love thy modest Lay.

THE WOMEN IN JOHNSON'S LIFE

An inspiring address on this subject was given to the Society on November 16th, 1963 by Mrs. Phyllis Rowell, who for many years was the Curator of Johnson's House and who has given broadcasts on this subject. A large audience was thrilled by the Address of which an account is given by our reporter below:

Our reporter sends us the following account of this meeting; in his references B. stands for Boswell, James. "The Life of Samuel Johnson. Hill Powell edition, and H. for Hawkins, Sir John. 1787. Life of Samuel Johnson. Dublin.

Johnson's mother was very kind and devoted to him. As a boy she helped him and watched over him. Knowing his love of coffee she used to give him her share, not only of coffee, but also of sugar, both being at that time very expensive luxuries. After his father's death Mr. Levett of Lichfield, allowed them to live on in the house although the rent was often in arrears. After the death of Michael Johnson in 1731, Samuel Johnson's circumstances were much embarrassed; yet his affection for his mother was so warm, and so liberal, that he took upon himself a debt of hers, which though small in itself, was then considerable to him. In 1739 Johnson and his mother mortgaged the family home to Theophilus Levett for £80. with interest at 4½%; Johnson appears to have made himself responsible for the payment of the interest, and although he often had great difficulty in raising the money, he ultimately, in 1757, paid off the principal. Mr. Levett was Town Clerk of Lichfield from 1741 until his death. In 1743 Johnson wrote this letter² to him regarding the interest on the mortgage, in which his mother was still living.

Sir, I am extremely sorry that we have encroached so much upon your forbearance with respect to the interest, which a great perplexity of affairs hindered me from thinking of with that attention that I ought, and which I am not immediately able to remit to you, but will pay it (I think twelve pounds) in two months. I look upon this, and on the future interest of that mortgage, as my own debt; and beg that you will be pleased to

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1. Clifford, James, L. 1955 "Young Samuel Johnson" p. 19. London, William Heinemann Ltd.
 2. B.I.p.160.

give me directions how to pay it, and not to mention it to my dear mother. If it be necessary to pay this in less time, I believe I can do it; but I take two months for certainty, and beg an answer whether you can allow me so much time. I think myself very much obliged for your forbearance, and shall esteem it a great happiness to be able to serve you. I have great opportunities of dispersing any thing that you may think proper to make public. I will give a note for the money, payable at the time mentioned, to anyone here that you shall appoint. I am, Sir, Your most obedient and humble servant,

At Mr. Osborne's, bookseller, in Grays Inn.

Sam. Johnson.

In B. Vol. I. App. B. p. 512 et seq. there are printed a series of letters written about the time of the death of his mother, giving touching expression of Johnson's devotion to her.

The sister of Dr. Hector, of Birmingham, has been described as being the first woman with whom Johnson was in love. Edmund Hector (1708 - 1794) was a nephew of the Dr. George Hector, who attended Johnson's mother when Samuel was born. Edmund Hector qualified as a doctor and practiced in Birmingham from 1748 until his death in 1794. When Johnson and Boswell visited Birmingham in March, 1776, Dr. Johnson said,³ "You will see, Sir, at Mr. Hector's, his sister, Mrs. Carless, a clergyman's widow. She was the first woman with whom I was in love. It dropped out of my head imperceptibly; but she and I shall always have a kindness for each other." He laughed at the notion that a man can never be really in love but once, and considered it as a mere romantic fancy. Boswell continues "On our return from Mr. Bolton's, Mr. Hector took me to his house, where we found Johnson sitting placidly at tea, with his first love; who though advanced in years, was a genteel woman very agreeable and well bred." A note in the Hill - Powell edition tells us that years later Johnson wrote, "Mrs. Carless took me under her care, and told me when I had tea enough." In July, 1770, Johnson wrote to Mrs. Thrale, "I have passed one day at Birmingham with my old friend Hector - there's a name - my mistress is grown much older than my friend." Quoting from Horace he translated,

"Of her, of her what now remains
Who breathed the loves, who charmed the swains,
And snatch'd me from my heart."

3. B. II. p. 459.

The most important entry into Johnson's life was Mrs. Elizabeth Porter. When her husband died Johnson took charge of her affairs and cleared up her husband's debts. Johnson fell deeply in love with her. Her sons by her first marriage, who were then only boys, strongly opposed her marriage to Johnson; it was probably on this account that the marriage took place in Derby. The story of Johnson's lesson to her, when they were on horseback, is well known. Later in life when Tetty was ill Johnson watched over her with devoted care, getting up at night and giving her brandy, in which opium had been dissolved to relieve her cough. At this time Johnson was so short of money that Samuel Richardson, the bookseller and novelist, lent Johnson £5. 10. 0. to pay for the brandy. After Tetty's death Johnson always observed the day with fasting and with prayer. She died on March 17th. 1752, and was buried in the Parish Church at Bromley, in Kent.

Miss Molly Ashton, (1706-1765) was a great favourite of Dr. Johnson and he wrote this epigram about her.

"Persuasions to freedom fall oddly from you;
If freedom we seek --- fair Maria, adieu!"

Boswell⁴ tells us that when Mr. Thrale once asked Johnson which had been the happiest period of his life past he replied, "It was that year in which he spent one whole evening with Molly Ashton. That indeed (said he) was not happiness, it was rapture; but the thoughts of it sweetened the whole year. Dr. Johnson said that Molly was a beauty and a scholar, and a wit and a whig; and she talked all in praise of liberty. Molly, or Mary, Ashton was one of the eight daughters of Sir Thomas Ashton, Bart. She became the wife of Captain Brodie of the Royal Navy and died in 1765. There is a charming portrait of her in Professor Clifford's book.⁵

Elizabeth Carter (1717-1806) was the daughter of the Rev. Nicholas Carter, Vicar of Deal, who was an excellent classical scholar and who educated his daughter to a very high standard in the ancient languages. She came to London and was one of the group who assisted Cave, the publisher, by contributions to his "Gentleman's Magazine". Some of her translations are still sold at the present day, for example "Epictetus", No. 404 in the Everyman Library. A London clergyman, Dr. Birch, was enamoured

4. B.I. p.83. n.

5. Clifford, James L. Opus cit, p.177.

with her but she did not respond; Samuel Johnson⁶ was sometimes in their company for dinner. Hawkins records that Johnson said, "A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table, than when his wife talks Greek. My old friend, Mrs. Carter, could make a pudding as well as translate Epictetus." On another occasion he said "I have composed a Greek epigram to Eliza, and think she ought to be celebrated in as many different languages as Lewis le Grand." In 1780, Fanny Burney described her as "really a noble-looking woman; I never saw age so graceful in the female sex yet; her whole face seems to beam with goodness, piety, and philanthropy."

Mrs. Lennox, wrote a novel called "Harriet Stewart".⁷ Hawkins gives a description of a dinner to celebrate this. He writes "To return to Johnson, I have already said that he paid no regard to time or the stated hours of refection, or even rest; and of this his inattention I will here give a notable instance. Mrs. Lennox, a lady now well known to the literary world, had written a novel entitled, "The Life of Harriet Stewart" which in the spring of 1751, was ready for publication. One evening at the club, Johnson proposed to us the celebrating the birth of Mrs. Lennox's first literary child, as he called her book, by a whole night spent in festivity. Upon his mentioning it to me, I told him I had never sat up a whole night in my life; but he continued to press me, and saying, that I should find great delight in it, I, as did all the rest of our company, consented. The place appointed was the Devil Tavern, and there, about the hour of eight, Mrs. Lennox and her husband, and a lady of her acquaintance, now living, as also the club, and friends to the number of near twenty, assembled. Our supper was elegant, and Johnson had directed that a magnificent apple-pye should make a part of it, and this he would have stuck with bay-leaves, because, forsooth, Mrs. Lennox was an authoress, and had written verses; and further, he had prepared for her a crown of laurel, with which, but not till he had invoked the muses by some ceremonies of his own invention, he encircled her brows. The night passed, as must be imagined, in pleasant conversation, and harmless mirth, intermingled at different periods with the refreshment of coffee and tea. About five Johnson's face shone with meridian-splendour, though his drink had been only lemonade; but the far greater part of us had deserted the colours of Bacchus, and with difficulty rallied to partake of a second refreshment of coffee, which was scarcely

6. Ruhe, Edward, 1958. Birch, Johnson, and Elizabeth Carter.

Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.

7. H. p.253.

ended when the day began to dawn. This phenomenon began to put us in mind of our reckoning; but the waiters were all so overcome with sleep, that it was two hours before we could get a bill, and it was not till near eight that the creaking of the street door gave the signal for our departure. Mrs. Anna Williams was the daughter of a Welch physician; she had a cataract in both eyes and came to London in the hope of its being cured, but unfortunately this did not occur and she became totally blind. She was kindly received into Johnson's house while his wife lived; after her death Mrs. Williams continued in the house for the remainder of her life. Hawkins tells us that she "not only cheered Johnson in his solitude, and helped him to pass with comfort those hours which, otherwise, would have been irksome to him, but had relieved him from domestic cares, regulated and watched over the expences of his house." When she died in September, 1783, Johnson wrote "I have lost a companion, to whom I have had recourse for domestic amusement for thirty years, and whose variety of knowledge never was exhausted." Hawkins writes that she had acquired a knowledge of the French and Italian languages, and had made great improvements in literature --- she was a woman of an enlightened understanding --- Johnson, in many exigences found her an able counsellor, and seldom showed his wisdom more than when he hearkened to her advice.

On Friday, March 20th. 1778, Boswell records,⁸ "I found him at his own house, sitting with Mrs. Williams, and was informed that the room formerly allotted to me, was now appropriated to a charitable purpose; Mrs. Desmoulins and I think her daughter, and a Miss Carmichael, being lodged in it. Such was his humanity, and such his generosity, that Mrs. Desmoulins, herself told me that he allowed her half a guinea a week. Let it be remembered, that this was above a twelfth part of his pension." Mrs. Desmoulins was the daughter of Dr. Swinfen, Johnson's godfather, and had married Mr. Desmoulins, a writing master. Another lady in poor circumstances to with whom Johnson used occasionally to dine was Mrs. Gardiner, a tallow chandler on Snow Hill, who showed great interest in the support of the Ladies Charity School in the neighbouring Parish of St. Sepulchre.

The following account⁹ is given of Fanny Burney's first meeting with Dr. Johnson at the Thrale's, "Not until dinner time did Dr. Johnson appear, by which time Mrs. Thrale's friendliness had put Fanny somewhat more at her ease. She was introduced;

8. B. III p.222.
 9. Lloyd, Christopher, 1936. Fanny Burney, p.90 - London. Longmans, Green and Company.

the great man bowed in silence. His eye had been caught by some little pies on the table. What, he asked Dr. Burney in his stentorian voice was in them? "Nothing but mutton, Mr. Johnson," interposed Mrs. Thrale before Burney had time to answer, 'so I don't ask you to eat such pies, because I know you despise them.' 'No, Madam, No! I despise nothing that is good of its sort. But I am now too proud (smiling) to eat mutton pies! Sitting next to Miss Burney makes me very proud today!" It was fortunate for Fanny that she did not have to reply to many such compliments. The talk raced on, lively enough as the meal progresses; and everyone tactfully steered clear of Evelina, save for an occasional apt quotation on Johnson's part. "Fanny Burney thus describes the first visit of Dr. Johnson to her father's house in St. Martin's St. "Everybody rose to do him honour; and he returned the attention with the most formal courtesie. My father --- whispered to him that music was going forward; which he would not, my father thinks, have found out; and placing him on the best seat vacant, told his daughters to go on with the duet; while Dr. Johnson, intently rolling towards them one eye - for they say he does not see with the other - made a grave nod, and gave a dignified motion with one hand, in silent approval of the proceeding." He was next introduced to Miss Burney, but his attention was not to be drawn off two minutes longer from the books, to which he now strided his way - he pored over them shelf by shelf, almost brushing them with his eyelashes from near examination. At last, fixing on something that happened to catch his fancy, he took it down, and standing aloof from the company, which he seemed to clean and clear forget, he began --- very composedly, to read to himself; and as intently as if he had been in his own study. We were all excessively provoked: for we were languishing, fretting, expiring to hear him talk." One day when Fanny Burney was walking with Dr. Johnson in the Strand, he repeatedly gave money to beggars. At last she asked him how much he had left; when he turned out his pockets nothing was left, all had been given away. When he was dying Fanny visited him from time to time, and Johnson would murmur, "Little Burney, little Burney, pray for me."

During his later years, when on visits to Oxford, Johnson stayed with Dr. Adams, who was then President of Pembroke College, where Johnson had been an undergraduate member. Boswell relates that Dr. Adams had a daughter, Sarah. This lady's good qualities

10. B. IV. 364. n.3.

11. B. IV. 292.

merit, and accomplishments, and her constant attention to Johnson, were not lost upon him. She happened to tell him that a little coffee pot, in which she had made his coffee, was the only thing which she could call her own. He turned to her with a complacent gallantry, "Don't say so, my dear; I hope you don't reckon my heart as nothing." Another pleasant story of this lady and Dr. Johnson is told by Sir Francis Hyett,¹² "Dr. Johnson when at the age of was visiting at the house of his friend Dr. Adams in Oxford, when an artist who had just completed and brought home a portrait of the latter, offered to present Miss Adams with a sketch of anything which she might prefer. She immediately asked for a likeness of Dr. Johnson, who agreed to sit, but cries he "You Slim (meaning Miss Adams) must stand before me to make me look pleasant, for I am but a sour looking old man."

12. B.IV. Appendix J. p.533.

OBITUARY - WILLIAM KENT. Historian of London.

"Among the happy ones he is enjoying the rewards of his labours."

When in 1951 in connection with the Festival of Britain William Kent's most important work "An Encyclopaedia of London" was revised and re-issued by Dent, the author definitely took his rightful place as the chief authority on our capital city. The book was first published in 1937 and prior to the re-issue of his most important work Kent had produced a dozen volumes. William Kent was brought up in an earnest non-conformist home but in early manhood he abandoned the dogma but not the ethic of Christianity. Behind his rather forbidding exterior there was a sensitive and compassionate heart, feeling the sorrows of his fellow men and deeply moved by the suffering of animals. Second only to his enthusiasm for London was his passionate conviction that the plays attributed to Shakespeare were the work of a nobleman whose eminence forbade him to disclose his authorship. The nobleman in question was Edward de Vere, 17th Earl of Oxford, and on many occasions Kent entered into public debate with scholars and others who held the orthodox view. He was an enthusiastic cricket watcher and wrote a small book on the pleasures and pains of this hobby. Kent was a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and an honoured member of several important literary and social clubs, among them the oldest in London, "The Cogers". He was a faithful member of the Johnson Society and on many occasions gave highly interesting lectures there. His activity in debate was always stimulating to the company. For many years he acted as librarian, and was a member of the committee until failing health obliged him to leave London.

Frederic Nixon.

REVIEWS

Johnson's Dictionary. A Modern Selection by E.L. Mc Adam Jr. & George Milne. London. Victor Gollanz. Price 30/-.

This book has been well described by The Times reviewer as "an ideal bedside book". Yes, it can be read for lazy pleasure, and for a low pleasure as well as a higher - the compilers, it seems, have adopted the policy of giving us all the coarse words and their definitions. But for Johnsonians and others there is also instruction. Some of both is present when we come across the occasional definition that only Johnson could have dared to give us, e.g. his definition of sonata as "A tune"! Few of us have read far in the Dictionary, having been defeated by the size and ungainliness of it - in all versions but the octavos and duodecimos "abstracted" or "in miniature", which no Johnsonian looks at. But here in a shape that can be handled is Johnson's Dictionary, complete for the entries under "z" and excerpted elsewhere. None of us would consult it as a dictionary (I mean as an eighteenth-century dictionary). But because of its convenient form we can now read it - or what there is of it - for pleasure and profit. We can learn at ease things we could learn more fully but less comfortably from the Dictionary itself. The book is a welcome sop to our bodily frailty.

Reading in it, we are constantly reminded that Johnson intended his Dictionary as a guide to the usage of the best writers of the past as well as a guide to usage in the present. Some senses of the words illustrated from past literature are surprising, whether or not the words were obsolete by his time. I do not mean the senses of words like shardborn, which Johnson does not know enough to understand correctly, but words like sensuous and retail. When he comes to sensuous he glosses it as "Tender; pathetick; full of passion;" and his example is Milton's description of poetry as "simple, sensuous, and passionate", and his illustration is from Shakespeare:

"Bound with triumphant garlands will I come,
And lead thy daughter to a conquer's bed;
To whom I will retail my conquest won,
And she shall be sole victress, Caesar's Caesar."

This third definition of the same word is "To sell at second hand", and his illustration comes from Pope:

"the sage dame,
By names of toasts, retails each batter'd jade."

These are senses of the words that we should not have attributed to the words as used in the passages quoted, though perhaps we ought to have. Those of us who are interested in learning how earlier writings were understood by those - Johnson or other - who criticised them, sometimes closely, will find the implications of these instances disturbing. Misjudgments would seem, on this evidence, to be inescapable. Without knowing it we shall be criticising a critic's view of something he read in a different way from our way. A partial remedy lies in consulting the Dictionary - in its full form - more often than we may hitherto have thought necessary. Another interesting thing has emerged from the labours of the compilers: "References of an even more personal character are often, as Gibbon remarked in another connection, veiled in a learned language." Johnson salutes his birthplace, Lichfield, under lich, "Salve, magna parens." Elsewhere, in Greek, he apparently laments the recent death of his wife (rest). Also in Greek or Latin he comments ironically on the spiritual home of "writers of dictionaries" under "grub street, on his poverty under necessaries, and on his age under measure. Sometimes he uses English. In a slurring reference to Swift, under tale, he gives modern biographers new evidence for an old puzzle: why, though he enjoyed Swift, did he so often malign him? Perhaps the answer is simple: Swift, a Tory and an Anglican clergyman, used dirty language; Johnson could have accepted this, perhaps, in one who was not a priest, and, like himself a Tory and an Anglican.

We all know about the invocation to Lichfield, but not many of us knew about the others. Perhaps the compilers are being too clever about the Swift reference. Johnson's definition of tale reads: "A narrative; a story. Commonly a slight or petty account of some trifling or fabulous incident: as, a tale of a tub." To my mind the compilers read too much into the definition. I see no reference to Swift in it, but only to the slang phrase Swift used as his title.

Geoffrey Tillotson.

PROGRAMME FOR SPRING SESSION 1964. Meetings at 3 p.m. at the

Kenilworth Hotel, Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1.

January 18. Lockhart and Boswell. Dr. Ian Jack.

February 15. Johnson in the Highlands. H.A. Morgan, Esq.

March 21. Johnson and Dr. Burney, Dr. Roger Lonsdale.

April 18. Dr. Johnson and Isaac Watts. J.H. Leicester, Esq., M.A.

BOSWELL: The Ominous Years 1774-1776. Edited by Professor
C. Ryskamp, Princeton University and Frederick A. Pottle, Yale
University. Pp xxiv, 427. William Heinemann Ltd., 1963. £2. 2. 0.

As was the case with the earlier volumes, this is most admirably
produced and edited.

In spite of the title, which, with some comments in the
Introduction might lead one to expect some weakening of perception
or in vividness of recording, it does not disappoint the expecta-
tions aroused by its predecessors. All the old magic is there -
the product of having seized with avidity the acutest sensations,
both mental and physical, that life had to offer, together with
the compulsion to distil and record the experiences in their
quintessence. The book then, is enthralling. Boswell may at
times irritate or even be distasteful; he is never dull. Must
then criticism be directed to his personal qualities? How self-
revealing he is! One could quote endlessly, but the following
more-or-less random selections must suffice:-

"I am a man very much consisting of feelings. I have some
fixed principles. But my existence is chiefly conducted
by the powers of fancy and sensation" (p. 97). "My avidity
to put as much as possible into a day makes me fill it until
it is likely to burst" (p. 118). "I was depressed with
black melancholy. Gloomy doubts of a future existence
harrassed me. I thought myself disordered in mind" (p.158).
"I have a star or chip in my mind, which a little matter
will kindle into a blaze" (p. 165) "There is an imperfection,
a superficialness, in all my notions. I understand
nothing clearly, nothing to the bottom" (p. 203). "I have
a kind of strange feeling as if I wished nothing to be
secret concerning myself" (p. 214). I was struck with a
passage in Young's "Night Thoughts", how "man resolves,
resolves (to be better) and dies the same." It is very
applicable to myself". (p. 230). "I should live no more
than I can record. There is a waste of good if it be not
preserved". (p.265).

Gradually we are getting to know Boswell more thoroughly than
any writer we can recall. The self-portrait which emerges from
his writings taken as a whole is certainly that of a weak man,
volatile sometimes to the borderline of insanity, self-indulgent
and vain. But it is relentlessly honest. His wife (p.174)

thought it was "leaving myself embowelled to posterity." Boswell "drops his guard" and must have realised how he was exposing himself to future condemnation. But is it not the very fact of his not shrinking from so doing, which lends the Journal its unique fascination? It has always, for example, seemed unfair to sneer at him for his cowardice in the storm off Mull (Hebrides). How easy for him to have omitted the passage....

At times the revelations are so intimate that it is almost embarrassing to read them; one feels the author is undressing in public. But should we therefore condemn him and indulge in the old sport of artist baiting, dead or alive, because of their private lives and morals? I think not and whilst not courting controversy, consider some of the editorial comments: "a man torn by violence and saturated with vice" (p.ix) - "these pages reveal how fancy and sensation can be vitiated by the coarse lines of sensuality" (p.x) which are perhaps unduly harsh. Boswell did live to give the world a supreme masterpiece and let us accept the fact with gratitude and be charitable to his memory: Let Johnson who was well aware of his friend's failings: "He has led a wild life" (p.351) have the last word:

"He reckoned the day on which he and I became acquainted
as one of the happiest days of his life" (p.110).
"Johnson was delighted, held him with both hands, and said
"glad to have you here".

Eric M. Bonner.

The Poems of Alexander Pope, edited by John Butt, London,
Methuen & Co. Ltd., Pp 850. Price 42/- nett.

Lovers of English poetry will welcome this one volume edition of the poetical works of Alexander Pope, edited by John Butt, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh, our readers will remember a paper by him, read before this Society and published in our issue of June, 1959. When the great Twickenham edition of Pope's work, in six volumes, appeared, with Professor Butt as general editor, the Times Literary Supplement of July 29th, 1939, commenting on Volume IV, wrote that "In learning, commonsense, --- and clarity of arrangement --- Mr. Butt has set a standard which it will be hard to surpass." This is also true of the one volume edition. The notes made by

Pope are reprinted in full and distinguished by the letter P in square brackets and those by the editor, or others, by diagonal brackets. During his lifetime Pope was constantly engaged in revising his poetry, the final edition from his hands was in three volumes octavo. In the standard Twickenham edition and in the work under review the minor poems are grouped chronologically, the major poems being placed in their order in the years in which they were written. The reader is greatly helped by the fact that with the title of each poem there is given the year in which they were composed and the date when it was published. Pope is undoubtedly one of the major English poets but the thoughtful reader will put to himself the question as to whether this is a technical perfection, or whether it has that perfect appreciation of nature which is shown in the work of many other poets. Pope made himself master of the heroic couplet, but the diligent reader is apt to find this irksome if he sets out to read consecutively some of the longer poems, for example the translation of Homer's Iliad, which is not included in this volume, or the famous essays "On Criticism" or "On Man". Many English poets have shown greater variation in the planning of their verse. In his youth we find Pope practising various metrical schemes, but as the years passed he made more and more use of the rhyming couplet. The poetry of Pope is notable for its epigrammatic sayings, many of which have become proverbial in our language. As an example we may quote from his younger poems.

"A little learning is a dangerous thing,
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring."

or from his later verse,

"Hope springs eternal in the human mind,
Man never is, but always to be blest."

Pope was a man of brilliant intellect; but he was the child of elderly parents, and was born with a very imperfect body; this profoundly affected his life and his poetry. He quarrelled with Wycherley, who had been his early friend and counsellor; he behaved in a churlish way to the Rev. William Broome and Mr. Elijah Fenton, two Cambridge men who helped him with the translation and notes for his Homer; he had some very dubious transactions with Curll, a publisher of no repute. Yet we enjoy his poetry and admire his wit. The true poet has a sure place in life; as Pope put it in his translation from the IXth Ode of the 4th Book of Horace,

"Vain was the chiefs and sage's pride
They had no poet and they dyd!
In vain they schemed, in vain they bled
They had no poet and are dead."

F.N. Doubleday.

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A Johnson Sampler edited by Henry Darcy Curwen.

Harvard University Press; distributed in Great Britain by O.U.P.
pp. 320. Price 48/- net.

In these selections from Samuel Johnson's written and spoken words, the editor has the layman in mind and expresses the hope that he will be tempted to explore the works of Johnson for himself and thus enter the fellowship of Johnson lovers. It is quite clear that H. D. Curwen entered the fellowship early in life and that throughout his teaching career he has devotedly extended the fellowship. His enthusiasm for his subject pervades the book. Extracts from Johnson are grouped around twelve major themes: Conversation and Talk; Reading and Writing; Teaching and Learning; Work, Wealth, and Their Opposites; Man as a Social Animal; Wooing and Wedding; Law and Government; The Pursuit of Pleasure; Youth and Age; God, Religion, and Man's Salvation; Man and His Conduct in the World of Men; and, Johnson with Extensive View Surveys Mankind. A sixteen page biographical sketch of Johnson the man and his career as a writer precedes the selections. Each main section of the work is prefaced by a short essay signposting the way ahead for the reader. With undue modesty, the editor informs us in his preface that these introductory observations can, without much loss, be left unread. The reader will find, however, that they can be read with profit. Without some guidance, the layman may well be perplexed at times by Johnson's self-contradictory and conflicting views. To ask for more than this is to go beyond the requirements of a book designed primarily to be "opened anywhere and read with pleasure and profit." A key to the sources is provided at the end of the book for the diligent reader who wishes to determine the date of a pronouncement, and to ascertain whether Johnson was on oath or talking for victory. A full index adds to the value of the Sampler as a reference book. Unlike the numerous anthologies of Johnsonian wit and wisdom culled from Boswell and the major works, this collection draws widely from a variety of sources. The reader is constantly delighted, chastened, or uplifted by quotations from the lesser known writings. He is indeed confronted with a "hogshead of sense." For those who prefer to drink deep rather than sip their Johnson, a Suggested Reading List is provided as a guide to books by and about Johnson. When we are told elsewhere, for example, that Johnson never met Benjamin Franklin, or - without qualification - that Johnson hated history, we could wish that New Light on Dr. Johnson had been included in the bibliography. A Johnson Sampler is well produced and should prove a most companionable book to the layman and to the confirmed Johnsonian. It will be read with delight even when consulted by occasional necessity.

J. H. Leicester.