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THE

# NEW RAMBLER

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*L. Radson*

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JOURNAL OF THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

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C O N T E N T S Page

Johnson on Shakespeare by Helen Gardner, C.B.E., M.A., D.Litt. F.B.A, F.R.S.L.	2
Johnson and the Classics by H. Mac L. Currie, M.A.	13
James Lackington, Bookseller (1746-1815) by Professor Arthur Brown, M.A.	28
Summary of talk on "T.S. Eliot as a critic of Dr. Johnson" by W.W. Robson	42
Reviews	43, 44, 45
Obituary	27
Notes	12, 41, 47
Balance Sheet for 1964	48

## JOHNSON ON SHAKESPEARE

By

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When I was invited to address the Johnson Society I was conscious of the honour but rather alarmed at the prospect, for I have to confess myself very much an amateur Johnsonian. In its best and oldest sense an amateur is 'one who loves or has a taste for' a subject or a writer; and in this sense I imagine we would all like to call ourselves 'amateurs of Johnson'. But in the later and worse sense of 'a superficial student' I have to confess myself an amateur also.

The range and quality of Johnsonian studies in this century is formidable. He is one of the authors to whom a whole 'news-letter' is devoted. Our knowledge of the Johnson circle and of Johnson's acquaintances both professional and personal grows monthly. One wonders what Johnson's own comments would have been on all this activity, and particularly what he would have thought of the 'Boswell Factory'; just as one has wondered during the course of 1964 what Shakespeare would have thought had he been allowed to return for the year's celebrations. Which would he have thought the more extraordinary: the bibliographers and editors studying the habits of Compositors A and B, the critics discovering hidden significances, or the producers giving him 'a modern look'?

I knew that it was no use my appearing before you as a Johnsonian pur sang, and that I have nothing very original to say on the topic that the year 1964 suggested; but I take comfort from Johnson's own remark that 'men more frequently require to be reminded than informed' and come before you to remind you of Johnson's greatness of mind and heart as exercised upon the elucidation, interpretation, and criticism of the greatest of our poets.

When I say that Johnson is in my view if not the greatest at least one of the two or three greatest of the English critics of Shakespeare, I am not committing myself to accepting the adequacy of his general

critical principles or all his particular judgments. Johnson, like Shakespeare, belongs to history. The canons of judgment of an eighteenth-century critic, however, great his genius, cannot be our canons. Between us and Johnson comes that great adventure of the human spirit that we loosely call 'The Romantic Movement', which gave to the concept of 'Imagination' dimensions undreamed of by Johnson and restored the concept of the poet as Vates or seer. And beyond the Romantic conception of the poet as uttering truths before unapprehended, there lies the concept of the work of art as an aesthetic object, delighting us by the coherence and harmony of all its parts, and creating a symbol that is self-consistent and has its own inner laws and its own field of reference. Why then, in spite of all the subtle, brilliant, and often profound criticism of Shakespeare since Johnson, do I so often return to Johnson as 'a perpetual fountain of good sense' on Shakespeare, and as a critic who seems again and again to show a kind of natural sympathy with his author, a response uncorrupted by theory, and unsophisticated by the desire to prove a case or make a point, and who, even in his occasional asperities, complains in terms that suggest his deep engagement with the object, the power of Shakespeare's created world over his imagination, and his understanding of the nature of Shakespeare's art. I want to suggest three reasons that set Johnson apart from other English critics of Shakespeare and help to explain the perennial freshness and vigour of his Shakespearean criticism.

With insignificant exceptions, Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare is embedded in his edition. His one long, extended piece of criticism is the Preface to his edition, a masterly exposition of the range of critical problems and questions that an editor must face. Johnson has the sense of responsibility towards Shakespeare's work as a whole that is the concomitant of serious editing.

I think that the sense of proportion that one feels behind Johnson's notes springs from the fact that they are the notes and comments of an editor. This masterly sense of proportion is most apparent in what are for sheer intellectual power the most striking of Johnson's notes on Shakespeare: his attempts to summarize the distinctive qualities of the plays. I find myself recurring again and again to the distinctions Johnson draws between the four great tragedies, giving to Hamlet 'the praise of variety', to Macbeth the opposite praise, that 'the events are too great to admit the influence of particular dispositions'; seeing in Othello 'such proofs of Shakespeare's skill in human nature, as I suppose



it is vain to seek in any modern writer' and in King Lear a play that above all plays 'agitates our passions and interests our curiosity'. What is so striking about Johnson's summaries is his sense of the play as a whole. His recognition of the social realism of Hamlet, whose hero, as son and lover, prince and friend, moves in a solid world of social ties and obligations that is presented to us as a real world going about its business, is as just as his recognition of the contrasted intensity of the world of Macbeth, in which the persons of the drama appear, not in their quotidian reality as living in a world in which 'at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine and the mourner burying his friend', but as agents or victims of temptation or images of goodness, and there is no place for 'nice discriminations of character'. Again he sees in Othello a play of individual temperaments and passions, in which the psychological veracity of all the characters in their personal and individual being is what engages us and demands our response; while in King Lear it is the 'current of the poet's imagination' that hurries us irresistibly along and engages our moral feelings so deeply that the rapid changes of fortune seem like the realisation and the destruction of our own hopes.

This power of summary, of response to the whole effect, seems to me one of Johnson's greatest gifts. It is of great value in an era which has triumphed in minute criticism, in close analysis and explication, to be thus reminded of the whole. Johnson admired in Shakespeare's plays 'the wide extension of design which fills the plays with practical axioms and domestic wisdom', but, he added, 'His real power is not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenour of his Dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as specimen.'

The second thing that marks Johnson out from many Shakespearean critics is that Johnson, like Shakespeare, was a professional writer who earned his living by his pen. He knew, as Shakespeare must have known, the tyranny of the date-line: that if a piece of writing was not all that it might be it was as good as he could make it in the time allowed. We must take with a grain of salt Johnson's own words that 'No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money', and we need another grain for Pope's statement that Shakespeare

For gain, not glory, winged his roving flight,  
And grew immortal in his own despite.

But a substantial modicum of truth remains. Not all the Rambler essays are distillations of profound wisdom; but Johnson had, by hard work, evolved a style in which he could, if pressed, turn out a respectable essay while the printer waited. Shakespeare had evolved a style, and knew enough of the tastes of the theatre-going public of his day to enable him to finish off a play or to write one fairly quickly if this was required. Both were popular writers, with professional claims upon them which had to be met. Shakespeare turned out, on an average, two plays a year for his company to act. He could not say to them 'I am sorry, but something has gone wrong with my fourth act and I must go back and revise it before I can write my fifth.' They were waiting for a play to put on. Johnson understands this professionalism of Shakespeare and realises that he was a popular writer writing for a public and under the necessity of pleasing. He is perhaps sometimes too ready to accuse Shakespeare of carelessness, or of haste in finishing off his play, or to suggest that the poet's matter failed him in the fifth act and that he was glad to fill it up with whatever he could get; but there is some justice in the view that Shakespeare's beginnings are often finer than his endings, Johnson's understanding of the conditions under which Shakespeare wrote, and of his dependence on the tastes of his audience is a distinctive strength of his criticism. As he salutes Shakespeare's characters as 'the genuine progeny of common humanity', so he conceives of Shakespeare as writing to please and instruct common humanity, not a select audience of poets, thinkers or sages, and certainly not an audience of professors. And if at times he suggests that Shakespeare was too ready to gratify the less elevated side of our common humanity, his firm grasp on the great principle of pleasure and his sane and generous views on what does deeply and truly please enable him to praise and illuminate Shakespeare's wisdom and humanity without substituting Shakespeare the moralist, or Shakespeare the political philosopher, or Shakespeare the metaphysician for Shakespeare the dramatic poet.

Compared with some later critics Johnson may seem to speak of Shakespeare with scant reverence and with admiration well this side of idolatry. But the things for which he praises Shakespeare and the warmth with which he praises him are tributes to Shakespeare as a great creative genius whose knowledge of human life is so wide and deep, and power to utilise it in art is so extraordinary, that from his plays 'a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.' This has always been the central

appeal of Shakespeare to the 'common man' - I will not say the 'common reader', for I am thinking of the man in his seat in the theatre: his power to arouse a response akin to the response we give in daily life. 'As he commands us we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquillity without indifference.' This power to engage, hold and move our human feelings by the truth of his presentation of human beings and by the large charity of his imagination is the quality that Johnson salutes again and again in Shakespeare, the great popular dramatist.

It might be thought that Johnson's third distinction as a critic of Shakespeare was a limitation, and indeed it is often spoken of as one. He is the one great critic of Shakespeare whose popular reputation was that of a great moralist; and Johnson was, of course, not only a moralist in the ancient classical tradition, he was profoundly a Christian moralist. No one can doubt the strength of Johnson's Christian commitment or the depth of his personal piety. I would venture the paradox that it is the very strength of Johnson's personal religious convictions and the firmness of his moral principles that are the main source of his freedom in approaching Shakespeare. He is, to use C.S. Lewis's splendid distinction, 'a serious but not a solemn reader'. He does not expect from a play that it will provide instruction of the same kind as a sermon or a philosophic treatise or an essay on morals; nor does he expect the plays of Shakespeare to throw light on the mysteries of the Christian faith by presenting a picture of human life that allegorically or symbolically justifies the divine economy and makes clear the wisdom of Providence. He believes that we go to a play to be entertained, amused and pleased; and that one basis of our pleasure is recognition of the truth of the author's presentation of life. He knows too that other things beside this truth to life please: that it is not a mere imitation of life that we go to see. The play must also gratify our moral sense: must show us things as they ought to be, as well as please us by allowing us to recognise that this is how they are. We need to feel our sympathies directed towards what in life we should be moved to sympathise with, admire or extenuate. We should not be confused and bewildered, so that our sympathy is checked by uncertainty of direction. We have come to see a play, not an exercise in casuistry.

Two modern critical views stand in sharp contrast to Johnson's. Bradley thought that 'the constant presence of Christian beliefs confuse or even destroy the tragic impression'. Some recent critics, on the contrary, declare that 'the analogy with the crucifixion' is central to

the tragedies and 'the analogy with the resurrection' is central to the tragi-comedies. I think Johnson would have thought both statements blasphemous. He could no more have thought of himself as hanging up his Christianity on a hook, like an overcoat, when he settled to read a Shakespearean tragedy than he could have conceived of a Shakespearean play as a presentation of the Gospel message of salvation. I cannot resist quoting here a remark by my former tutor at Oxford, who had a Johnsonian bent of mind and a Johnsonian piety, on a modern theologizing critic who had written on *The Winter's Tale* as inspired by the doctrine of the Atonement: 'Well if it was, I can only say that Shakespeare seems to have understood the doctrine as little as I do.' To Johnson the plays of Shakespeare were secular in the best sense of the word: their concern is with the secular order of things, the temporal world. When Johnson demanded of a playwright that he should please by instructing he was not asking him to construct cautionary tales or provide us with theologically inspired allegories. He was asking him to present to us a picture of life that does not conflict with our experience of reality and does not flout the moral sense of mankind as it has developed from antiquity. Johnson believed in a universal ethic consonant with Christian teaching but not dependent on the Christian revelation. He found this in the great writers of antiquity and looked for it in Shakespeare.

When Johnson criticizes Shakespeare for 'suffering the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause' this is not because he thinks such things do not happen in real life, nor because he thinks that the representation of innocent suffering impugns the doctrine of Providence. The author of the review of Soame Jenyns's *Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil* knew well that the doctrine of Providence is not something that can be demonstrated; it is to be believed and lived by. His criticism is based on the innate human desire to see justice done, which makes the death of Cordelia, as reward for her rescue of the father who had wronged her, too painful to contemplate at the close of a play. The audience will rise distressed and disturbed, feeling 'Oh, it is too cruel', rather than satisfied by a dramatic representation of life. Similarly Johnson's objection to the blinding of Gloucester on the stage is on dramatic grounds: it is 'an act too horrid to be endured in dramatick exhibition, and such as must always compel the mind to relieve its distress by incredulity.' In other words a terrible act of violence such as this destroys the dramatic illusion. We say 'Oh, it's only a play after all; it isn't real.' In both these cases Johnson assumes a high degree of sensibility in the audience. He takes for granted that the

common man whom the dramatist is to please is pitiful and compassionate and troubled by the spectacle of suffering. One can hardly imagine what he would have said of the 'Theatre of Cruelty'.

Johnson the moralist is able to take a large and generous view of characters whom later critics have been less inclined to tolerate. I need not quote Johnson on Falstaff and the famous note on the Stage Direction 'Exit Pistol', when, after listing all the calamities that have befallen Falstaff's crew, he adds 'I believe every reader regrets their departure.' Johnson salutes in Falstaff 'the most pleasing of all qualities, perpetual gaiety,' and manages, without compromising his moral position, to discover that Falstaff may be 'admired but not esteemed, despised but hardly detested.' He shows the same easy magnanimity over Parolles. Commenting on the dismissal of Parolles by Lafeu, 'Though you are a fool and a knave, you shall eat,' he writes: Parolles has many of the lineaments of Falstaff, and seems to be the character which Shakespeare delighted to draw, a fellow that had more wit than virtue. Though justice required that he should be detected and exposed, yet his vices sit to fit in him that he is not at last suffered to starve.

One is struck by the fact that Johnson found what he called 'the light or comick part' of *Measure for Measure* 'very natural and pleasing', whereas later critics have found Shakespeare's presentation of the inhabitants of the stews and gaols of Vienna distasteful. Johnson the moralist does not have to prove his moral credentials by being shocked.

Johnson does, of course, criticize Shakespeare on moral grounds. He disapproves of unnecessary profanity. He blames Shakespeare for at times neglecting an opportunity of instructing us, as when he suppressed the dialogue between the usurper and the hermit at the end of *As You Like It* 'and lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson worthy of his highest powers.' At other times the complaint is more subtle, as when he comments on the horrible behaviour of Prince John of Lancaster who, having made peace with the rebels, does not disband his army as they do theirs and, as soon as their troops are dispersed, arrests them as traitors and sends them off to execution. Johnson comments 'It cannot but raise some indignation to find this horrible violation of faith passed over thus slightly by the poet, without any note of censure or detestation.' Johnson is not, I think, complaining that Shakespeare does not preach us a short sermon on good faith; but that nobody in the play expresses any of the feelings of outrage that such

cold-blooded treachery must evoke in decent people. He again assumes the decency of the audience whose feelings require dramatic expression.

A complex of reasons lies behind the famous note on the reason Hamlet gives for sparing the King at prayers:

that his soul may be as damn'd and black  
As hell, whereto it goes.

'This speech, in which Hamlet, represented as a virtuous character, is not content with taking blood for blood, but contrives damnation for the man that he would punish is too horrible to be read or uttered.' Johnson makes a similar comment on Iden's speech in 2 Henry VI, 'So wish I, I might thrust thy soul to hell.' 'Not to dwell on the wickedness of this horrid wish,' says Johnson, 'with which Iden debases his character, this whole speech is wild and confused.' To Johnson, of course, damnation is not a poetic fiction or a hyperbole for a state of extreme misery; it is an awful reality and a terrible possibility for all men. It is perhaps in his feeling too awful a concept to be intruded into a 'dramatick spectacle,' and his sense of outrage is reflected in the strength of 'too horrible to be read or uttered.' But what is interesting is the implied attitude to Hamlet's character. Obviously Johnson is not asking that the hero of a tragedy should be a model of Christian conduct. He is willing to regard Hamlet as 'a virtuous character' even though he is determined to take 'blood for blood.' He feels that this speech is outside the range of Hamlet's character as Shakespeare presents it; that it shows real malice and wickedness. Most striking is his use of the word 'contrives.' Johnson has picked it up from the play, where Claudius says of Hamlet that he is 'most generous and free from all contriving.' Hamlet is not a schemer or a plotter, and Johnson feels that this speech with its cold-blooded note of calculation is inconsistent with the generosity of Hamlet's nature. His comment on another crux in Hamlet criticism, Hamlet's apology to Laertes before the fencing match, is milder. It has the tone of someone disappointed in a friend's rather uncharacteristic behaviour: 'I wish Hamlet had made some other defence; it is unsuitable to the character of a good and brave man to shelter himself in falsehood.'

Much more severe is his famous comment on Bertram, the hero of All's Well that Ends Well:

I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram; a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves



her as a profligate: when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness.

It is his heart that Johnson cannot reconcile to Bertram. He knows that in life unpleasant and foolish young men have often been lucky in their wives and have escaped punishment for their weakness and nastiness; but the spectacle is distasteful to him. He thinks Bertram is a cad and he wants to find some recognition of his feelings in the play. To put it crudely, someone should tick Bertram off. As with Prince John of Lancaster, decency requires it. Johnson feels in the same way that Angelo in Measure for Measure is let off too lightly: 'I believe every reader feels some indignation when he is spared.' He finds Isabella's argument most extraordinary and ascribes her plea for Angelo's forgiveness to her feminine vanity. Since one of the finest of living Johnsonians, Miss Mary Lascelles, has written so beautifully on this difficult play, I will not say more of its last act than that its defence has required a lot of ink in this century, and that Johnson is here, I think, again in touch with the feelings of the common man who, when unaided by the critics, does find the ending of this play unsatisfactory. But there is another note on Measure for Measure that illustrates admirably Johnson's clarity of moral perception. He is commenting on Isabella's retort to her brother in prison when he pleads with her to sacrifice her virginity to save his life:

Is't not a kind of incest to take life  
From thine own sister's shame?

Johnson comments 'In Isabella's declamation there is something harsh, and something forced and far-fetched. But her indignation cannot be thought violent when we consider her not only as a virgin but as a nun.' Johnson is sensitive, as later critics have been, to a disquieting shrillness in Isabella's response, but he roots it properly in the circumstances that the play puts before us, which are often ignored in modern productions. In one recent performance that I saw Isabella, ravishingly beautiful, bare-headed and with her hair loose, wearing a blue satin gown which if not topless was as near frontless as makes no matter, came to plead with Angelo. Her obvious attractions for any homme moyen sensuel made nonsense of the scene; and when she went to visit Claudio in prison she had merely cast a kind of riding-cloak, Lady Blakeney-wise, over her gorgeous gown. I was brought up with a steel-engraving of Isabella and Claudio in prison, after Holman Hunt, in the hall. She is there very properly dressed as a nun, as Johnson rightly saw her; she responds to

her brother with something of fanaticism and with a greater sense of outrage than a girl not vowed to virginity would feel.

Johnson the moralist appears to advantage not only in his comments on the conduct of the action and the characters. He appears again and again when his note salutes the wisdom, the perception and the truth of Shakespeare's presentation of human feeling. These notes call attention to a side of Shakespeare's genius somewhat neglected today: his power to moralize upon life and help us to know ourselves. I would quote as a splendid example Johnson's note on Macbeth's reply to his wife's taunts:

I dare do all that may become a man,  
Who dares do more is none.

Johnson writes:

The arguments by which Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to commit the murder, afford a proof of Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature. She urges the excellence and dignity of courage, a glittering idea which has dazzled mankind from age to age, and animated sometimes the housebreaker, and sometimes the conqueror; but this sophism Macbeth has for ever destroyed by distinguishing true from false fortitude, in a line and a half; of which it may also be said, that they ought to bestow immortality on the author, though all his other productions had been lost.

And for a passage showing Johnson's own experience of life responding to the truth of Shakespeare, I would quote the note on Henry V's soliloquy on the night before Agincourt:

There is something very striking and solemn in this soliloquy, into which the king breaks immediately as soon as he is left alone. Something like this, on less occasions, every breast has felt. Reflection and seriousness rush upon the mind upon the separation of a gay company, and especially after forced and unwilling merriment.

But, finally, what most impresses me in Johnson's criticism of Shakespeare is the simplicity and sincerity of his response. 'The Child is Father of the Man.' Johnson did not sophisticate as a mature man the impression Shakespeare made on his imagination at its most impressionable. Boswell records that he read Shakespeare at a period so early that the speech of the ghost in Hamlet terrified him when he was alone.

Mrs. Thrale says that he told her that he was just nine years old when 'having the play of Hamlet to read in his father's kitchen, he read on very easily until he came to the ghost scene, when he hurried upstairs to the shop door, that he might see faces about him.' In his notes to Shakespeare Johnson attached this reaction to Macbeth's description of night which he compared with Dryden's: 'He that reads Dryden feels himself lull'd with serenity, and disposed to solitude and contemplation. He that peruses Shakespeare looks round alarmed and starts to find himself alone.' It was his extreme tenderness of heart that made him unable to bear the terrible ending of King Lear. 'I was,' he writes, 'many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.' If we are to defend Cordelia's death and Gloucester's blinding as artistically necessary and proper, we must be certain that we have the same capacity for imaginative response as Johnson shows here and that we do feel that the one is shocking and the other dreadful in the extreme. The same strength of natural feeling is shown in Johnson's comment on the last act of Othello; 'I am glad I have ended my revisal of this dreadful scene. It is not to be endured.' I think Johnson was wrong both about the end of King Lear and about the last scene of Othello; but it is the kind of error for which, to borrow one of his own phrases, 'I could hug him.'

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Mr. Currie, who is himself a teacher, raises interesting questions regarding the instruction which should be given in schools to those who are only able to study the classical authors of Greece and Rome in translation.

There was a time when at meetings of the Johnson Society one speaker after another would read translations from well thumbed copies out of his own library. The front page article in the Times Literary Supplement of May 20th tends to decry the importance attached to this study in modern times, and almost sneers at such a book as 'The Glory that was Greece,' which brings both the art and the philosophy of ancient Greece to the reader in a colloquial style. Surely the basic thought and the conciseness of expression of the Greek and Roman authors is the example needed to counteract the torrent of sound and of print which tends to replace thought at the present time. Mr. Currie quotes Johnson, 'Greece appears to me to be the fountain of knowledge; Rome of eloquence.'

Mr. Currie observes that between the 16th and 18th centuries a great development in the curriculum of our schools was the increase in the teaching of Greek and quotes Johnson "Greece appears to me to be the fountain of knowledge; Rome of eloquence."

## JOHNSON AND THE CLASSICS

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by

H. MacL. Currie, M.A.

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Two hundred years ago in this country a very necessary quality in reader and writer alike was a knowledge of the classics, whether first- or second-hand. That age found its inspiration in Greek and Latin literature from which it derived its characteristic sense of propriety, order and elegance. The case has altered; we have lost, or some would say, grown out of, this habit of veneration; the classics have since ceased to be a common standard of reference, but emulation of the literary achievement of Greece and Rome was then the aim of every writer and was enjoined by the authorities. Horace figures very largely in the 18th century scene; his success as a craftsman in his lyric poetry, his "curiosa felicitas," as Petronius had called it, attracted universal admiration, and the pronouncements made in, or read into, his Ars Poetica were accorded legal status. "Apply yourselves sedulously to Greek models!" he had counselled his fellow-Romans, and the 18th century reflected that from this procedure had grown the greatness of Virgil who used the Homeric epic as an exemplar, of Cicero who was deeply imbued with Greek ideals of culture and felt he was the Roman Demosthenes, and of Horace himself who was a devoted student of the Greek lyricists, Pindar, Alcaeus, Sappho and the rest. To admire and try to resemble what was established as the best seemed the only proper course for a cultured man, but this easily led to charges of plagiarism, about which Pope remarked: "Those who say our thoughts are not our own because they resemble the Ancients may as well say our Faces are not our own because they are like our Fathers'."

After the revolution of 1688 large changes took place in the economic and social organisation of this country as well as in its ways of thinking and ideals. In education there was a good deal of theorising and a critical review of the traditional academic syllabus. The demand was for "useful knowledge," and if classics were to maintain their place in the curriculum they had to do more than merely amuse or impart to students a skill in handling words (though this function was never undervalued). Horace had spoken in the Ars Poetica of the need to blend the

utile and the dulce, which the 18th century attempted to do in its classical teaching and reading. It was to Horace above all that they turned, finding in him a satisfying mixture of qualities, and Mr. R.M. Ogilvie in his book "Latin and Greek" (London, 1964), has excellently analysed the reasons for this devotion to the poet (pp.65-66): "It was partly the well-bred delicacy of his relationship with Augustus, and other leading citizens, evident, e.g. in Epistles 1.13, or the obvious propriety which governed his attitude to his dependants (Epistles 1.20), partly the quiet scepticism of his religious beliefs (cf. Odes 1.10; Epistles 1.4) appropriate to a deist age that witnessed the publication of Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious (1692) and Locke's Essay, partly the professed simplicity of his way of living - Persicos odi, puer, apparatus - but chiefly it is the feeling of restraint and moderation, of consideration for others, that pervades all his poetry." Morally and artistically Horace spoke to the condition of the 18th century. Apart from his social attitudes and behaviour, his style was peculiarly agreeable, with its tasteful choice of vocabulary and polished inevitability. It was just the kind of regulating influence required by the English language at the end of the 17th century when it was still clumsy, lacking systematic grammar, recognised style and a lexicographically standardised vocabulary. Much of the precision of Johnson's style may be ascribed to his reading of Horace but in general the rich orotundity of Cicero combined with the epigrammatic crispness of Silver Latinity (whose leading prose representatives are Seneca and Tacitus) would seem to have mainly contributed to the formation of his habitual mode of expression.

The contemporary taste for Horace was shared by Johnson: he told Boswell that Horace's Odes were the compositions in which he took most delight, although however it was long before he grew to like his Epistles and Satires, which is perhaps surprising since one would expect that the charming urbanity of these would have instantly appealed to him. In the later 17th century and early 18th the theory of translation in which, to quote Johnson in his Life of Pope, "the ancients are familiarised by adapting their sentiments to modern topicks, by making Horace say of Shakespeare what he originally said of Ennius, and accommodating his satire on Pantolabus and Nomentanus to the flatterers and prodigals of our own time," was widely accepted, Denham, Cowley, Dryden and Roscommon bestowing on it their critical approval. The same theory, it is interesting to observe in passing, had been held by the Romans themselves who looked upon this kind of work as an extension of creative writing; the literary man took over a piece, naturalising or modifying it, as the case might be, to suit its new public. Horace in his Satires,

for instance, was deeply indebted to his predecessor in the same genre Lucilius, but from the scant fragments of the latter which survive it can be seen that Horace brought much of himself to bear upon the material.

Pope issued between 1733 and 1738 a series of what he called Imitations of Horace which were the most famous of such adaptations of classical writings and which gave Johnson an idea resulting in his London, a Poem, in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal, issued, piquantly enough, on the same day as the last of Pope's Horatian compositions. Several reasons may have disposed Johnson to choose Juvenal as his model. He possibly considered that Horace as a source had been pre-empted by Pope, but also he may still have felt something of his earlier aversion to the Satires. Furthermore, the passionate vigour and rhetorical fire of Juvenal would suggest to his mind opportunities clearly not afforded by the easy-going, conversational mildness of Horace - we must recall that to render the spirit and intention of the chosen model was the principal object of the exercise. In his Life of Dryden Johnson has this to say: "The peculiarity of Juvenal is a mixture of gaiety and stateliness, of pointed sentences, and declamatory grandeur." Note "pointed sentences" and "declamatory grandeur": he might have been writing about himself. He made too the claim to Boswell that he had Juvenal's satires "all in his head," and in the Life there is abundant evidence that he had soundly studied this poet's work. Lastly, it may well be that he apprehended a kind of kinship with the ancient Roman about whom nothing for certain is known. From a close reading of the satires, however, there emerges the picture of an indigent man without influence and acquainted with hardship, a picture that Samuel Johnson would readily recognise. Though, like Pope, he adopted in his London a pose and advanced views alien to his own, following, for example, the denunciation of the town which he had found in the Latin original, nevertheless the well-known lines on poverty, touched off by a hint or two in Juvenal, sound an unmistakably personal and sincere note:-

Has Heav'n reserv'd, in pity to the poor,  
No pathless waste, or undiscovered shore?  
No secret island in the boundless main?  
No peaceful desert yet unclaim'd by Spain?  
Quick let us rise, the happy seats explore,  
And bear Oppression's insolence no more.  
This mournful truth is everywhere confess'd,  
Slow rises Worth, by Poverty depressed.

(170 ff.)



The sentiments of Juvenal and his imitator here coincide; they would have understood one another.

For his satirical themes Johnson applied to Juvenal rather than Horace. The lyrical part of his imagination never ceased to find Horace's Odes fascinating, and he fully recognised and accepted as a challenge the difficulty of translating them. When he was a schoolboy he made an English version in four-line stanzas of the integer vitae ode (1.xxii) which was the earliest verse translation he preserved. It is not at all a bad performance for a young lad, quite faithful but with some "padding" here and there to fill out the interstices of Horace's filigree-work. In his youth Johnson tried his hand at other odes too (II, ix;xiv-xx) and the second epode; the transcript of his version of another epode is reported to exist among the Yale Boswell papers (J.L. Clifford, "Young Samuel Johnson," London, 1955, p.322). A free imitation of Odes IV.13, is only tentatively to be assigned to Johnson (Poems, ed by Nichol Smith and McAdam, p.126). Johnson's last English poem was a rendering dated November, 1784, of Odes IV.vii, a poem declared by A.E. Housman, himself both poet and scholar, to be the finest in the Latin language. From his boyhood till the close of his life Johnson found Horace a pleasing and congenial companion. Of his renderings it can in general be said that he reproduces the smoothness of the original, sometimes to the point of monotony, but not its compression or its subtlety of organisation (which chiefly subsists in a varied and intricate word-order deployed for maximum effect and possibly only in a highly inflected tongue).

In the Life references to Horace often occur. Boswell mentions a discussion between John Wilkes and Johnson of the words difficile est proprie communia dicere, one of the numerous passages in that key text for the 18th century, the Ars Poetica, whose interpretation excited scholarly dissension. - Few nowadays, I think, would agree with Johnson's explanation of the meaning ("it is difficult to appropriate to particular persons qualities which are common to all mankind, as Homer has done.") Travelling once in a chaise with Boswell, Johnson quoted extensively from the Odes of which his companion particularly remembered eheu fugaces (II.xiv. - already translated by Johnson as a boy). An anecdote from Dr. Burney a propos of Johnson's habit of talking to himself reports that he once overheard Johnson "repeating some lines in an ode of Horace (1.ii.21ff.), over and over again, as if by iteration to exercise the organs of speech, and fix the ode in his memory." Burney adds that the incident took place during the "American war" and since the words Johnson was so earnestly murmuring to himself refer to the

See Selected  
Writings of Dr. Johnson  
Ed. by Davies

horrors of internecine conflict, that vigorous human-heartedness of his and readiness of recourse to his favourite poet are both again exemplified, albeit in eccentric circumstances. On another occasion when the conversation touched on Horace and religion, William Seward suggested that the poet had returned to orthodoxy, citing the ode (l.xxxiv, - parcus deorum cultor et infrequens) in which he claims that a thunderbolt from a clear sky had brought home to him, an unenthusiastic and infrequent worshipper, the divine power of Jupiter. Johnson, with his usual robust scepticism that so often, as here, hit the mark, replied that Horace was not in earnest but was merely being poetical. Finally, we should recall that some fitting words from Horace's second book of *Epistles* are used as a motto for the Dictionary and that Horace is notably well represented among the mottoes in "The Rambler."<sup>1</sup>

In his own life-time Virgil became a classic and though over the past two thousand years his work has encountered now and again a certain amount of disparagement it has firmly stood as a central influence in the making of Western European culture. The 18th century was aware of its excellence; the *Eclogues*, the *Georgics* and the *Aeneid* were along with the works of Horace basic to a school-boy's classical training. One of Johnson's youthful exercises was a version of part of the first *Eclogue*, and in 1783 when he was seventy-four he mentioned to his biographer that he had read all Virgil through that year, covering the twelve books of the *Aeneid* in as many nights and taking "great delight" in it; the *Georgics* except for the fourth, he said, had not given him so much pleasure; the *Eclogues* he had "almost by heart." Johnson revealed that he did not find the story of the *Aeneid* interesting but preferred that of the *Odyssey*. This judgment on Virgil's epic is not unique to Johnson, while comparison with Homer is natural and in the Augustan age inevitable, when examination of the merits of the two by contrasting their "beauties" and "faults" was a regular activity among the literary-minded. Earlier in his life Johnson, dealing with this perennial subject of debate, declared: "We must consider whether Homer was not the greatest poet, though Virgil may have produced the finest poem. Virgil was indebted to Homer for the whole invention of the structure of an epick poem, and for many of his beauties." The 18th century saw the beginnings of systematic higher criticism of Homer with the publication of F.A. Wolf's "Prolegomena"

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1. Of the Latin mottoes attached to Johnson's essays more than 80 are from Horace, 35 from Juvenal, 25 from Ovid, 22 from Martial, and 14 from Virgil.

and Richard Bentley's discovery of the digamma, but the results of these recondite enquiries did not have immediate effect. The 19th century distinguished between Primitive or Homeric epic on the one hand, and Secondary or literary (like Virgil's) on the other. Today most scholars would rather employ the term "Primary" for the former since "Primitive" carries the wrong connotation. Researches pursued in the present century have demonstrated that the Iliad and Odyssey consist of a series of separate lays constructed according to traditional bardic formulae and patterns, alongside which discovery archaeological investigations have thrown light on the probable stratification of the constituent elements. Textual and linguistic studies, amongst which must be mentioned the decipherment of linear B in 1953 by Michael Ventris, have assisted further penetration into the structure of the Homeric corpus, but the question how far a unifying intelligence worked upon it remains unsettled.

The progress in Virgil studies has not been so dramatic by the nature of the case, but it has been solid. During the past half-century researches of various kinds at different levels have been leading us to a fuller understanding of his achievement. On his relationship to his predecessors, Homer in particular, there has been notably good work: a German, Richard Heinze, produced his masterly "Virgil's epische Technik" at the beginning of this century, a book which examines in detail Virgil's independence of Homer despite the ostensible similarities. From under Heinze's cloak there has come forth a large number of scholars who in varying degrees have followed his method. Amongst these must be named Viktor Pöschl, another German, who in a sensitive and stimulating short book (published in 1950) showed that Virgil was the first European consciously to write symbolic poetry, but he allows that Homer may do so on occasion, though only by accident. Brooks Otis, an American has recently gone further with a profound study of Virgil's "civilised" or "ideological" epic of which Homer was but the outer mould.

The fact is that in the 18th century men were still taking an inventory of the contents of classical literature. They read widely, but critical depth was yet to come. Many of the aids to study which we take for granted (reliable dictionaries, manuals of antiquities, et hoc genus omne) were still largely lacking and the texts they had to hand were often riddled with corruptions. Scholars, the prince of whom was Richard Bentley, the domineering and truculent Master of Trinity for forty years, were labouring hard to purge them of errors of which a large proportion were really fairly trivial. Bentley became so good at the game that he took to detecting deeply seated corruptions on every side which he then

cured with the most amazingly ingenious emendations; and so great did his self-confidence grow that, acting on the hypothesis that a fraudulent editor took advantage of Milton's blindness to change bits of "Paradise Lost" or interpolate lines of his own, he rampaged through the poem making wholesale conjectures. But this was a morbid by-product of the genuinely useful work he and his fellow-scholars were doing. They were eagerly surveying the barely tilled ground and few of the landmarks that we have grown to recognise were there. Fundamental research on the chronology of antiquity, for example, had still to be carried out; (Greek lyric metres) and (the prosody of Latin comedy) were yet to be explained (though even today there are in these two subjects questions on which neither certainty nor agreement has been reached). A clear and rational methodology for textual criticism was being laid down; Erasmus in his day when preparing his edition of the New Testament had held on to one or two "good" manuscripts through thick and thin, whereas the 18th century came to realise that manuscripts must be "weighed and not counted." The ancient historians awaited that analytical scrutiny which has since been possible by the discovery and painstaking collation of parallel evidence, epigraphical and archaeological. Whole areas have been developed in classical learning within the last century from which valuable information supplementing what can be extracted from the literary texts has been derived to enlarge our picture of the civilisations of Greece and Rome.

The energy of 18th century scholars initiated and promoted investigations in many directions and made real gains in throwing back the frontiers of darkness. But since that age knowledge has become more departmentalised as its complexity has increased. One could almost say that a classics specialist today feels he is progressing the more he knows about less and less. Although from the absolute point of view which cherishes knowledge for its own sake this may be acceptable, nevertheless we must not forget that in Johnson's time the reading of the

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2. Pope approved of many of Bentley's proposals and wrote "recte", "bene", "pulchre" beside them in the margin where Bentley chose to put them, printing the received text whole and italicising the alleged corruptions. Bentley's hypothesis of an editor was condemned in typically forthright fashion by Johnson as "a supposition rash and groundless, if he thought it true; and vile and pernicious, if, as is said, he in private allowed it to be false."

classics or at least of Latin was very much more widespread than it is now. (We have, however, the great sales of paperback translations, which may palliate the situation. And, of course, in the Augustan age translations of the classics abounded, for not every reader was "learned in the lore of either tongue.") An enthusiastic amateurism of the many drawing from the classics an invigorating pabulum for mind and spirit has been replaced by a rather narrow professionalism of the few. There is a tendency among modern scholars to look upon Greek and Latin as inert material for scientific dissection, and any attempts at literary criticism have frequently been crudely primitive, though a younger school that hopes to correct this deficiency is gradually forming. On the Augustans the classics were a dynamic influence moulding their thoughts and refining their sensibilities. But practically nothing else was then taught, while with us the competing urgencies of the time-table have been crowding out classics till they are the preserve of, it would seem, an ever dwindling minority. Some balance must be struck; to exclude or deliberately reduce study of the classics at school level is injurious to the sense of cultural history and development normally expected in the properly educated person; to omit classics from the curriculum, said Thomas Arnold of Rugby, is to make pupils think the human race first came into existence in 1500. A loss of some of the old, dearly loved amenities in classical teaching - a rigorous formal exactitude and strict attention to syntax and quantities - could perhaps be sustained so long as compensation came with greater diffusion of the message and appreciation of the relevance of this discipline. There is scope for "classics in translation" courses to buttress the modest requirements of the O-level syllabus in Latin or Greek. Adults may commonly nowadays buy translations, but to have at the school stage authoritative guidance in the reading of them is highly desirable.

For the Augustans the distinction between the scholar and the cultivated reader was not to be clearly drawn. They had classical values as part of the fabric of their lives. It was not till the end of the 18th century that Latin ceased to be the second language of the educated, a language they would spontaneously employ to speak or write to foreigners, and to confide their private thoughts to a diary, as did Johnson. De Quincey rightly observes that Johnson did not understand Latin "with the elaborate and circumstantial accuracy required for the editing critically of a Latin classic," and then continues: "But if he had less than that, he also had more: he possessed that language in a way that no extent of mere critical knowledge could confer. He wrote it genially, not as one translating into it painfully from English, but as one

using it for his original organ of thinking. And in Latin verse he expressed himself at times with the energy and freedom of a Roman." To Johnson and his cultured contemporaries Latin was not the language of the past but of the present, and its study carried them into a civilisation which they understood and whose continuity they strongly felt; to read Latin was not, to borrow Descartes' phrase, like travelling in a foreign land.

Virgil, to whom we now return, had certainly been absorbed into Johnson's system. He would often quote "with great pathos" the lines from Georgics III 66ff.:-

optima quaeque dies miseris mortalibus aevi  
prima fugit; subeunt morbi tristisque senectus  
et labor, et durae rapit inclementia mortis.

The air of brooding sadness found here and elsewhere in the poet would appeal to his own constitutional melancholy. Apposite citations of Virgil occur from time to time as mottoes in "The Rambler," but with regard to such classical citations it is right to add that many of them were literary commonplaces and their use by an author does not necessarily entail first-hand knowledge (though we ought to be chary about believing this imputation true of Johnson who read at least in Latin constantly and discriminatingly with mind alert and ready to seize and hold). In judging the qualities of Theocritus and Virgil, he emphatically pronounces for the latter - "Virgil has much more description, more sentiment, more of nature, and more of art." A just assessment so far as it goes. This admiration for Virgil's Pastoral poetry was typical of the 18th century, going back to Spenser, Milton and Dryden.

Between the 16th century and the 18th a great development in the curriculum of our schools was the increase in the teaching of Greek, and where this subject was on the syllabus Homer, for Johnson, according to Boswell, "the prince of poets," received careful attention. While in Johnson's age Latin was still regarded as the mother-tongue of civilisation and technical competence in it was common and abundant, there was nevertheless a growing interest in Greek with all that it conveyed which is reflected, for example, in the immense success of Pope's version of Homer. "Greece appears to me," said Johnson, "to be the fountain of knowledge; Rome of elegance," which neatly sums up the new attitude. But for all that, Johnson himself was essentially a Latinist; his practical commonsense, his directness of approach to the affairs of life (Boswell comments on his eagerness to exercise his



wisdom on real, everyday problems), and his very prose style indicate a man who would have a natural sympathy for things Roman. But, as befits one who recommended that the mind be kept clear of cant, he was no uncritical admirer of Rome, writing once in a review of a work entitled "Memoirs of the Court of Augustus": "I know not why any one but a school-boy in his declamation should whine over the Commonwealth of Rome, which grew great only by the misery of the rest of mankind. The Romans, like others, as soon as they grew rich, grew corrupt; and in their corruption sold the lives and freedoms of themselves, and of one another." We are reminded of the candour of the Roman historian, Tacitus, who in his Agricola ventured to make the British chieftain, Calgacus, exclaim of Roman imperial conquests that "where they make desolation they call it peace."

Temperamentally inclined to Latin as Johnson was, he yet, according to his own assertion, read "solidly" in Greek literature when at Oxford - "not the Grecian historians, but Homer and Euripides, and now and then a little epigram." The omission of the Greek historians he made some attempt to repair, it seems, for in the year 1778 when he was sixty-nine we find him refuting an observation from General Paoli on the supposed antiquity of Homer by appealing without book to the inferential evidence of Thucydides on the matter. Another instance of his prodigious memory and "quickness on the draw"! Johnson spoke of reading "solidly" in Greek as a student, but here as elsewhere his reading was in fact patchy and desultory and remained so; in old age he confessed to his friend William Windham that he had never read through the Odyssey entirely in the original, but in his under-graduate collection of books, brought for the most part, we may assume, from Lichfield, there was the whole of Pope's Homer, and so he was well placed for getting to the end of the story somehow. At school he had turned into rhyming couplets a portion of the scene in the sixth book of the Iliad in which Hector takes leave of Andromache, a famous and affecting passage. In their note Nichol Smith and McAdam (Poems, p. 74) remark that Johnson's version apparently owes nothing to Pope, whose celebrated translation of Homer Johnson as an old man praised, calling it "the greatest work of the kind that has ever been produced." The paternal admonition to an Homeric hero "always to excel and be superior to others" (again from the sixth book of the Iliad, line 208) was for Johnson "the noblest exhortation that could be instanced in any heathen writer" according to the testimony of the Irish cleric, Dr. Maxwell, but it is perhaps surprising that such a liberal spirit should have approved so warmly of this narrow competitiveness which was an integral part

of Greek morality.<sup>3</sup> Among the mottoes in "The Rambler" too Homer is also represented.

"Greek, Sir, is like lace; every man gets as much of it as he can." Just how much had Johnson managed to acquire for himself? The question is discussed by Boswell who is anxious to dispel "a very erroneous notion" which had circulated "as to Johnson's deficiency in the knowledge of the Greek language, partly owing to the modesty with which, from knowing how much there was to be learnt, he used to mention his own comparative acquisitions." Johnson acknowledged to Mr. Cumberland, Boswell reports in the same paragraph, that his familiarity with Greek tragedy was not very extensive, and the evidence tends to show that of the three dramatists whose work has survived in any bulk, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, it was the last named who stirred his interest. Boswell goes on to say that Charles Burney, the younger, had assured him that Johnson could give a Greek word for almost every English one (hardly a contemptible achievement), and that Professor Dalzel of the Edinburgh chair of Greek had formed a favourable estimate of Johnson's proficiency in that tongue after a conversation with him. Though not a great Greek scholar, then, Johnson was by the standards of his time a good one in that he had a sound basic competence. Further, what he read remained with him, and however little in any department of literature it might have been he could always make it go a long way, for he was a real literary person with the instincts of the born scholar to whom books were a living force, providing him with a sort of "iconography by which to interpret or sum up" his experience (to borrow an expression of the late C.S. Lewis in another context). The vicissitudes of his fortune denied him an academic career and prevented his becoming a finished classic, but he had within him the main attributes necessary for distinction in pure scholarship - keen discernment, a powerful memory, quick imagination and a command of logical precision. Had he been a don, however, his native indolence, encouraged by the security and leisure, would most likely have clogged these qualities (which he perforce but successfully employed in other fields) and our cultural heritage would have been impoverished thereby.

The traceable course of Johnson's Greek reading beyond what I have mentioned will not detain us long. Anacreon he read in youth and

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3. Johnson had apparently forgotten the generous altruism of Socrates' teaching as reported by Plato. But Greek philosophy was not his strong point, it seems: see p.

at sixteen designed a translation of his Dove, "the first Greek Verses that had struck him as a Boy" (Mrs. Thrale), but he did not actually make it till he was sixty-eight (Poems, pp.184-5). The Greek Anthology was a constant delight: during the winter of 1783-84 when he was troubled with sleeplessness he translated into Latin elegiacs a great number of the epigrams (Poems, pp.209-225); His "Essay on Epitaphs" (1740) included Latin versions of two epigrams; under the entry "Grubstreet" in the Dictionary a quotation was introduced; two of the epigrams were cited in the original Greek in "The Rambler" (Nos. 71 and 180) and subsequently translated into Latin (during the period mentioned above) as well as into English (Poems, pp.133 and 140). The sententious brevity of these Greek poems held a special attraction for Johnson's mind and it has an echo in his own style. This "pointed" manner is a product of rhetoric which became firmly embedded in the Greek and Roman systems of education and is a conspicuous feature of the two literatures in what is known as their "Silver Age." It has been said that rhetoric was the ruin of Latin poetry. However that may be, Martial catered for the taste of his time with his epigrams which have been enjoyed by a wide public of which Johnson was an appreciative member. His private library at Oxford included, on the Greek side, the Iliad, Sophocles, Anacreon, Theocritus and Longinus (whose treatise "On the Sublime" was highly rated by the Augustans), while on the Latin there were Lucretius, Catallus, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Petronius and Quintilian. Livy, Tacitus, Suetonius, Seneca and Lucan also were there in some measure along with various more modern composers in Latin such as the two Scaligers and Vida, George Buchanan and Jean le Clerc. The bias is heavily towards Latin; indeed the Greek in the collection is decidedly sparse, but the signs are that Johnson did not stop there; he seemingly read or skimmed (his nervous irritability tended to keep him from reading books thoroughly) Hesiod, whom he once recommended to Boswell, Pindar, Xenophon, Lucian and Aelian. There is no suggestion of a systematic course of study and the gaps are large - there is, for example, no philosophy. But an argument from silence is never safe and his Greek reading may have been wider than it appears. His affection for Euripides was lasting: in 1779 he translated lines 193-203 of the Medea, firstly into rhymed couplets for Burney's "History of Music" and secondly into quatrains rhyming a b a b, burlesquing the style of Robert Potter, the translator of Aeschylus. He also rendered the same verses into Latin, probably about the same time. (see Poems, pp. 190-193).

An interesting document dating from Johnson's schoolmastering

phase in his twenties has been preserved by Boswell. In it he lays down the classical curriculum he thinks desirable for the "Classes of a Grammar School." The prescription accords in the main with modern ideas, but the differences are sufficient to remind us that the canon of classical authors acceptable for school study has diminished between the 18th century and now. The cause of this has been the growth of publicly administered school examinations which have brought about a certain uniformity, and the reduction of available time which has concentrated this uniformity on a small number of the agreed "best." Erasmus and Justin are Latin authors rarely if ever encountered in a school course today, while Aelian, a late Greek writer on natural and human history who had a high reputation for the purity of his Attic style, and Lucian, a miscellaneous writer of the 2nd century A.D. who was popular in the 18th century, Swift being amongst his devotees, are likely to turn up only in "easy selections" and are hardly likely to be read continuously. Another item on Johnson's Greek list is "Cebes" - by which he means "The Picture of Cebes," a philosophical dialogue once wrongly ascribed to Cebes, the follower of Socrates, who plays a leading part in Plato's "Phaedo." Modern scholarship assigns it with probability to the 1st century A.D., but beyond the small circle of specialists in the history of ancient philosophy it is scarcely known at all. In Johnson's age, however, it enjoyed quite a vogue and references to it are not uncommon.

The classical element in Johnson's vocabulary has often received comment, not always favourable. Think of Johnson and you straightway think of portentous, rumbling words mostly of Latin, but not infrequently of Greek, origin. It is easy enough to exhibit a florilegium of exquisite terms, but W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., in the third chapter of his masterly study, "The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson" (1941), correctly warns us against such lexical compilations, for what do they really tell us? Style consists in more than the individual words employed by the author; contextual meaning and the total effect he intends must be primary considerations for us as we examine the question. Johnson's tendency in his writing, Wimsatt points out, was towards the general, the abstract and the non-sensory, qualities which are conveyed in our language by classically derived diction.

The tropes and figures of classical rhetoric had by Johnson's day been absorbed into English literary practice and he proved himself an adroit manipulator of them. Chiasmus, antithesis, parallelism and the rest - there cannot be a page which does not yield an instance or instances of the standard devices. When he says of Lord Chesterfield,

"This man I thought had been a Lord among wits; but, I find, he is only a wit among Lords," or again, when he advises Boswell in a letter, "If you are idle, be not solitary; if you are solitary, be not idle," he is using a special kind of chiasmic construction which depends upon (to borrow the economic definition of "Webster's Dictionary") "repetition of the same words or ideas in transposed order" and which was called antimetabole by the Greeks and commutatio by the Romans. It has a long history which it would be interesting to trace some time. In the following century we find Macaulay much affecting it.<sup>4</sup>

In now drawing this paper to a close I would refer briefly to Johnson's general views on classical learning. He greatly admired it himself and despite his interrupted education and the difficulties he encountered in life he continued to read, enjoy and draw sustenance from ancient literature. For him classical quotation was not pedantry (as Wilkes once suggested to him) but "the parole of literary men all over the world." He used to quote "with great warmth" (according to Boswell) the saying attributed to Aristotle by Diogenes Laertius that the difference between the learned and the unlearned was the same as that between the living and the dead. And he affirmed to Boswell on one occasion that Greek and Latin were an essential requisite to a good education, declaring that those who know them have a very great advantage over those who do not; - "Nay, Sir, it is wonderful what a difference learning makes upon people in the common intercourse of life, which does not appear to be much connected with it." There are also some today who would dare to make this claim.

But Johnson was a reasonable man. His own high esteem for classical learning did not prevent him from recognising that too much could be made of it, that there was a danger of cant. We have already noted his strictures on Rome's ruthless policy of aggrandizement. In

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4. Compare Pope's "A wit with dunces, and a dunce with wits." (Dunciad, iv, 90). Macaulay provides at least four examples: "The conformation of his mind was such that whatever was little seemed to him great, and whatever was great seemed to him little." ("Horace Walpole"); "Temple was a man of the world among men of letters, and a man of letters among men of the world." ("Sir Wm. Temple"); "He was a rake among scholars, and a scholar among rakes." (Steele in "Addison"); "There were gentlemen and there were seamen in the navy of Charles the Second. But the seamen were not gentlemen; and the gentlemen were not seamen." ("Hist. of England" i, ch. 3).

the matter of classical imitation, accepted as normal and desirable by the litterati of the age, Johnson was more considerate of the needs of the "common reader" than most contemporary critics, as Professor Sutherland has pointed out ("A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry" (1948), p.57). Though the classics were central in the educational system, Johnson wisely refused to believe that all readers reached the same high level of knowledge which writers commonly seemed to presuppose. Latin certainly and Greek probably were effectively possessed by a proportionately greater number than today, we may safely assume. From the prevalence and popularity, however, of translations from the classics in the eighteenth century it can be properly inferred that, apart from the self-sufficient scholars with a full training behind them, there were many who welcomed such works whether as a means to extending and enriching an acquaintance already begun with the originals or as guides for a much more elementary approach. Thus Johnson in discussing Pope's imitations of Horace stresses the drawback of this form of composition: "The man of learning may be sometimes surprised and delighted by an unexpected parallel; but the comparison requires knowledge of the original." To enquire whether such knowledge could always be fairly assumed was to raise an important critical point.

The classics permeated the cultural atmosphere of the eighteenth century. Classical ideals and concepts, not always accurately or even sensibly interpreted, were predominant in the age's thinking. This survey of Johnson's attitude to the classics does not claim to be definitive; significant pieces of evidence have probably been overlooked, and I should like to have said more from a technical point of view about Johnson's versification, Greek and Latin, but time did not allow. All I hope is that my account may prove to be not entirely without use or interest in the understanding of the great man whose genius and achievement this Society exists to study and celebrate.

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#### OBITUARY

We record with regret the death of Dr. Rolv Laache who has been President of the Societas Johnsoniana of Norway since its foundation in 1921.

Professor Amundsen writes of him as follows:- 'No Member of our Society has had a more decisive influence on its spirit and activity than Dr. Laache, through his inspiring enthusiasm, his Johnsonian eloquence, and charming personality.' Here also in London we honour his memory.



JAMES LACKINGTON, BOOKSELLER (1746-1815)

By

Professor Arthur Brown, M.A.,

University College, University of London.

The bare facts of James Lackington's life are quickly told. He was born the son of a shoemaker on 31 August 1746, at Wellington in Somerset; he was apprenticed to this trade himself, and followed it until he was 28 years old, at which time he decided to take up bookselling; he was twice married, his first wife having died after a serious illness; he wrote two books, his Memoirs in 1791 and his Confessions in 1804; he retired from bookselling in 1798, living first of all in Gloucestershire, later in Taunton, and finally in Budleigh Salterton in Devonshire, where he died from the effects of apoplexy and paralysis on 22 November 1815. He was buried in the churchyard of Budleigh Salterton.

The Memoirs of the Forty-Five First Years of the Life of James Lackington, Bookseller, written by himself, in forty-seven letters to a friend, appeared first in 1791; a second, enlarged, edition was published in 1792; a third, further enlarged, in 1794; by 1810 it had reached thirteen editions. The work is a strange mixture of straight autobiography, of a great deal of anecdote, much of it quite irrelevant, of moralising and philosophising, and of attack, sometimes quite bitter, on Methodism, although he retracted almost all of this in his Confessions. We begin to get some notion of his character from the form of the dedication. This is in three parts: the first, 'To the Public' begins as follows: 'Worthy Patrons, were I to address you in the accustomed declamatory strain which has long been adopted as the universal language of dedications, viz. flattery, I should not only merit your contempt, for thus endeavouring to impose upon your understandings, but also render myself ridiculously conspicuous, by a feeble attempt to perform that, for which, as well by nature as long established habit, I am totally disqualified.' Although he will not flatter them, he wishes to express his gratitude for their patronage, and to assure them that he will do his best to continue to deserve their support by conducting his business on the same lines as he has always done. The second part of the dedication

is addressed 'To that part of the numerous body of Booksellers of Great Britain and Ireland, whose conduct justly claims the additional title of RESPECTABLE; whose candour and liberality he has in numerous instances experienced, and feels a sensible pleasure in thus publicly acknowledging,' and the third part 'To those sordid and malevolent Booksellers, whether they resplendent dwell in stately mansions, or in wretched huts of dark and grovelling obscurity ... to whose assiduous and unwearied labours to injure his reputation with their brethren and the public, he is in a considerable degree indebted for the confidence reposed in him, and the success he has been honoured with, productive of his present prosperity...' His constant battle with fellow-members of his trade, and his satisfaction at outwitting them, is reflected too in the preface which he wrote to the second and subsequent editions: 'The first edition of my Memoirs was no sooner published, than my old envious friends, mentioned in the third class of my dedication, found out that it was "d---d stuff, d---d low!", the production of a cobbler, and fit only to amuse that honourable fraternity, or to line their garrets and stalls; and many gentlemen, who are my customers, have informed me that, when they ask for them at several shops, they received for an answer, that they had already too much waste paper, and would not increase it by keeping Lackington's Memoirs; and some kindly added, "You need not be in haste to purchase, as in the course of the Christmas holidays, Mr. Birch in Cornhill will wrap up all his mincepies in them, and distribute them through the town for the public good".' He is glad to say, however, that their machinations have had no effect, since the book has been well received by the public and the reviewers, and the sales have been good enough to warrant a second, enlarged, edition.

Lackington's childhood was a far from happy one. His father, George Lackington, was a journeyman shoemaker, 'who had incurred the displeasure of my grandfather for marrying my mother, whose maiden name was Joan Trott. She was the daughter of a poor weaver in Wellington.' His paternal grandfather relented to some extent after his son and Joan Trott had produced three or four children (of whom James was the eldest), and supplied his son with money to open a shop for himself. 'But that which was intended to be of very great service to him and his family, eventually proved extremely unfortunate to himself and them; for, as soon as he found he was more at ease in his circumstances, he contracted a fatal habit of drinking, and of course his business was neglected; so that after several fruitless attempts of my grandfather to keep him in trade, he was, partly by a very large

family, but more by his habitual drunkenness, reduced to his old state of a journeyman shoemaker. Yet so infatuated was he with the love of liquor, that the endearing ties of husband and father could not restrain him; by which baneful habit himself and family were involved in the extremest poverty... So that neither myself, my brothers, or sisters, are indebted to a father scarcely for anything that can endear his memory, or cause us to reflect on him with pleasure.' His mother, on the other hand, was of a very different calibre. 'Never did I know or hear of a woman who worked and lived so hard as she did to support eleven children; and were I to relate the particulars, it would not gain credit. I shall only observe that, for many years together, she worked nineteen or twenty hours out of every twenty-four; even when very near her time, sometimes at one hour she was seen walking backwards and forwards by her spinning-wheel, and her midwife sent for the next. Whenever she was asked to drink a half-pint of ale, at any shop where she had been laying out a trifling sum, she always asked leave to take it home to her husband, who was always so mean and selfish as to drink it. Out of love to her family she totally abstained from every kind of liquor, water excepted; her food was chiefly broth, (little better than water and oatmeal) turnips, potatoes, cabbage, carrots, &c.; her children fared something better, but not much, as you may well suppose.'

James, as the eldest child, was sent to a dame-school for two or three years, and seems to have shown considerable promise as a pupil.

At the age of 14, Lackington was apprenticed to Mr. George Bowden, a shoemaker at Taunton, and refers to the Bowdens as 'an honest and worthy a couple as ever carried on a trade.' They had two sons, of 17 and 14, both of whom could read, write, and keep accounts, though their range of reading was strictly limited. Bowden's library consisted of 'a school-size bible, Watt's Psalms and Hymns, Foot's Tract on Baptism, Culpepper's Herbal, the History of the Gentle Craft, an old, imperfect volume of Receipts in Physic, Surgery, &c., and the Ready Reckoner.' The family was Anabaptist by persuasion, and attended to their religious duties very seriously. All went well, until George, the eldest son, attended a Methodist sermon, and 'was now persuaded that the innocent and good life he had led would only sink him deeper into hell; in short, he found out that he had never been converted, and of course was in a state of damnation without benefit of clergy.' He not only became a Methodist himself, but did his best to persuade the rest of the family, and Lackington, to join him, telling them that they were in a deplorable

state, that morality 'was of no avail, that as for good works, they were only splendid sins; and that in the best good work that any creature could perform, there was sin enough to sink the doer to the nethermost hell; that it was faith alone that did everything, without a grain of morality; but that no man could have one particle of this mysterious faith before he was justified; and justification was a sudden operation on the soul, by which the most execrable wretch that ever lived might instantaneously be assured of all his sins being pardoned; that his body from that very moment became the living temple of the Holy Ghost...'; and so on. Mrs. Bowden did her best, in arguments night after night, to dissuade him from these beliefs, but in vain; five months later John, the younger son, was converted to Methodism, and not very long after Lackington, who had meanwhile been taught to read by John, followed suit. 'I soon after went to hear an old Scotchman, and he assured his congregation that they would be damned, and double damned, and treble damned, and damned for ever, if they died without what he called faith... This marvellous doctrine and noisy rant and enthusiasm soon worked on my passions, and made me believe myself to be really in the damnable condition that they represented; and in this miserable state I continued for about a month, being all that time unable to work myself up to the proper key. At last, by singing and repeating amorous hymns, and ignorantly applying particular texts of scripture, I got my imagination to the proper pitch, and thus was I born again in an instant, became a very great favourite of heaven... I had angels to attend all my steps, and was as familiar with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as any old woman in Mr. Wesley's connection; which, by the bye, is saying a great deal.'

Although so large a part of the Memoirs is taken up with a discussion of Methodism, and especially with accounts of its more outrageous forms of extremism, this is perhaps the least interesting aspect of Lackington's life from our point of view. One good thing did emerge from his conversion, as he tells us himself: 'it caused me to embrace every opportunity to learn to read, so that I could soon read the easy parts of the Bible, Mr. Wesley's hymns, &c., and every leisure minute was so employed. In the winter I was obliged to attend to my work from six in the morning until ten at night. In the summer half year I only worked as long as we could see without candle; but notwithstanding the close attention I was obliged to pay to my trade, yet for a long time I read ten chapters of the Bible every day; I also read and learned many hymns, and as soon as I could procure some of Mr. Wesley's

tracts, sermons, &c, I read them also....I had such good eyes, that I often read by the light of the moon, as my master would never permit me to take a candle into my room, and that prohibition I looked upon as a kind of persecution, but I always comforted myself with the thought of my being a dear child of God, and as such, that it was impossible for me to escape persecution from the children of the devil, which epithets I very piously applied to my good master and mistress.' He gives us detailed accounts of the various Methodist meetings that he attended, but since at the time he was writing he was undergoing a very strong reaction against the sect, it is difficult to know how seriously to take them - certainly he retracted a great many of his accusations at the end of his life.

At the age of 21, his apprenticeship being over, he moved to Bristol, and settled down as a journeyman shoemaker. Here he became friends with a Mr. John Jones, another shoemaker of the same age, and with him he went to the theatre for the first time in his life to see Shakespeare's As You Like It, which seems to have greatly impressed him. He tells us that although he still could not write, Jones acted as his secretary, and he 'composed several songs, one of which was sold for a guinea; some were given to the Bristol printers, who printed them, and the ballad-singers sang them about the streets, on which occasions I was as proud as though I had composed an opera.' They both decided to become better acquainted with literature, but both so ignorant about books that they did not know where to begin, and were ashamed to go into the booksellers' shops since they did not know what to ask for. Lackington adds that even now, when he sees the situation from the bookseller's angle, there are thousands in England in the same situation as he was then: 'many, very many, have come to my shop, who have discovered an enquiring mind, but were totally at a loss what to ask for, and who had no friend to direct them.' He and Jones picked up one day Hobbes's translation of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. 'I had somehow or other heard that Homer was a great poet, but unfortunately I had never heard of Pope's translation of him, so we very eagerly purchased that by Hobbes. At this stall I also purchased Walker's poetical paraphrase of Epictetus' morals; and home we went, perfectly well pleased with our bargains.' Homer they found almost beyond them, but the principles of the Stoic seem to have taken Lackington's fancy, and he made the book his companion wherever he went. From this point on, every shilling that they could spare was laid out in books, until they had what they called a very good library. 'This choice

collection consisted of Polhill on Precious Faith, Polhill on the Decrees, Shepherd's Sound Believer, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Bunyan's Good News for the Vilest of Sinners, his Heavenly Footman, his Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, his Life and Death of Mr. Badman, his Holy War in the Town of Mansoul, Harvey's Meditations, Hervey's Dialogues, Roger's Seven Helps to Heaven, Hall's Jacob's Ladder, Divine Breathings of a Devout Soul, Adams on the Second Epistle of Peter, Adam's Sermons on the Black Devil, the White Devil, &c., &c....', and so the list goes on with a score or more of similar books. He adds that they had some of the better sort, such as Gay's Fables, Pomfret's Poems, Milton's Paradise Lost, and the Hobbes and Walker that he had mentioned earlier. 'But what we wanted in judgment in choosing our library, we made up in application; so anxious were we to read a great deal, that we allowed ourselves but about three hours sleep in twenty-four, and for some months together we never were all in bed at the same time... But lest we should oversleep the time allowed, one of us sat up to work until the time appointed for the others to rise, and when all were up, my friend John and your humble servant took it by turns to read aloud to the rest, while they were at their work.' He became completely indifferent to the pleasures of eating and drinking, and for a long time lived almost entirely on bread and tea, using the money he saved for the purchase of more books.

In 1769 Lackington moved to Kingsbridge, near Exeter, and the following year rejoined John Jones and his brother Richard in Bristol. In this year, 1770, he also renewed his acquaintance with his old sweetheart, Nancy Smith. 'I informed her that my attachment to books, together with travelling from place to place, and also my total disregard for money, had prevented me from saving any; and that while I remained in a single unsettled state, I was never likely to accumulate it. I also pressed her very much to come to Bristol to be married, which she soon complied with; and married we were, at St. Peter's church, towards the end of the year 1770; near seven years after my first making love to her.' They found that after the wedding celebrations they had precisely one halfpenny between them, but they had laid in enough food for a day or two, and were confident of soon finding work. 'For the next two months it was extremely severe weather, and yet we made four shillings and sixpence per week pay for the whole of what we consumed in eating and drinking. Strong beer we had none, nor any other liquor (the pure element excepted), and instead of tea, or rather coffee, we toasted a piece of bread; at other times we fried some wheat, which when boiled in water made a tolerable



substitute for coffee; and as to animal food we made use of but little, and that little we boiled and made broth of.' Over the next two and half years his wife became seriously ill, and they moved backwards and forwards between Bristol and Taunton (her place of birth) in order to try to cure her. There was no improvement in either place, nor could Lackington find enough work in either place to meet the expenses of her illness. In 1773 he left her all the money he could spare, and with half a crown in his pocket went to London. A month later he had saved enough to bring his wife up too, and they both found enough work to enable them to live in reasonable comfort. Books still called him, however, and he records that one Christmas, when they had precisely half a crown left to buy a joint of meat, he stumbled upon Young's Night Thoughts in a bookshop, and brought that home instead. He lectured his wife on the superiority of intellectual pleasures over sensual gratifications, and thought that he had acted wisely, for, he said, 'had I bought a dinner we should have eaten it tomorrow, and the pleasure would have been soon over; but should we live fifty years longer we shall have the Night Thoughts to feast upon. This was too powerful an argument to admit of any farther debate; in short my wife was convinced. Down I sat, and began to read with as much enthusiasm as the good doctor possessed when he wrote it; and so much did it excite my attention as well as approbation, that I retained the greatest part of it in my memory.' One can only add that Mrs. Lackington must have been a remarkably long-suffering woman.

In June 1774 he heard that there was a little shop and parlour to be let in Featherstone Street, and that if he took it he might set up in business on his own. He decided to do so, and at the same time decided to become a bookseller. When asked why he thought of selling books, he replied that 'it had never once entered into my thoughts; but that when he' (the friend who told him of the shop) 'proposed my taking the shop it instantaneously occurred to my mind, that for several months past I had observed a great increase in a certain old bookshop; and that I was persuaded I knew as much of old books as the person who kept it. I further observed, that I loved books, and that if I could but be a bookseller I should then have plenty of books to read, which was the greatest motive I could conceive to induce me to make the attempt... My private library at this time consisted of Fletcher's Checks to Antinomianism, &c. 5 volumes; Watt's Improvement of the Mind; Young's Night Thoughts; Wake's Translation of the Apostolical Epistles; Fleetwood's Life of Christ; the first twenty numbers of Hinton's Dictionary of the Arts and Sciences;

some of Wesley's Journals, and some of the pious lives published by him; and about a dozen other volumes of the latter sort, besides odd magazines, &c. And to set me up in style, Mr. Boyd recommended me to the friends of a holy brother lately gone to heaven, and of whom I purchased a bagful of old books, chiefly divinity, for a guinea. With this stock, and some odd scraps of leather, which, together with all my books, were worth about five pounds, I opened shop on Midsummer Day 1774. Six months later his stock was worth twenty-five pounds, and he moved to better, and permanent, quarters at 46 Chiswell Street. Soon after this he said farewell to shoemaking altogether, and converted his stock of leather into more books.

For some time all went well, but in September 1775 Lackington was struck down by fever, and a few days later his wife too; she died on 9 November, and he remarked of her that 'she was in reality one of the best of women; and although for about four years she was ill the greatest part of the time, which involved me in the very depth of poverty and distress, yet I never once repented having married her.' His own illness continued for many weeks, and his life was often despaired of. Several of the nurses hired to look after him robbed him of household goods and disappeared, and had it not been for the kindness of two of his sisters who came to his rescue, and two of his friends who locked up the shop and his stock as a precaution against theft, he would certainly have been ruined. He had recovered completely by January 1776, and by the end of that month had remarried, his second wife being a Miss Dorcas Turton, who had nursed his first wife in her illness. About this time he made a complete break with Methodism, and several of his letters at this point spend a good deal of time in attacking the errors of that belief.

We are more concerned, however, with his bookselling activities. His new wife was as fond of books as he was, and proved to be of great assistance in the shop. He also entered into a partnership with a Mr. John Dennis, who advanced him money to increase his stock. In 1779 he published his first catalogue of twelve thousand volumes, and this seems to have had a mixed reception. Although Lackington wrote the major part of it, Dennis contributed some of the pages, 'and as his own private library consisted of scarce, old, mystical and alchymical books, printed above a century ago, many of them in bad condition, this led him to insert 'neat' in the catalogue to many articles, which were only neat when compared with such as were in very bad condition;

so that when we produced such books as were called neat in our catalogue, we often got ourselves laughed at, and sometimes our neat articles were heartily damned. We also had a great deal of trouble on another score; Mr. Dennis inserted a number of articles without the authors' names, and assured me that the books were well known, and to mention the authors was often useless. The fact was, Mr. Dennis knew who wrote those articles, but was soon convinced that many others did not, as we were often obliged to produce them merely to let our customers see who were the authors.' But in spite of these and other difficulties, the partnership and the business flourished for rather more than two years. Dennis then felt, apparently, that Lackington was making purchases too quickly; they quarrelled, and although the quarrel was made up, and they continued firm friends for the rest of Dennis's life, the partnership was dissolved on 20 May 1780. 'After his death', says Lackington, 'he left behind him in his private library the best collection of scarce valuable mystical and alchymical books that ever was collected by one person.' In his lifetime he prized these kind of books above everything; in collecting them he never cared what price he paid for them. This led him to think, after he became a bookseller, that other book-collectors should pay their money as freely as he had done his, which was often a subject of debate between him and me, as I was for selling everything cheap, in order to secure those customers already obtained, as well as increase their numbers.'

This insistence on selling as cheaply as possible was one of the cardinal principles in Lackington's business. Elsewhere he attacks at some length the foolishness of bargain-hunters who will often go to pawnbrokers and what he calls 'beggary shops' under the mistaken impression that they will have to pay less for what they get. On the contrary, they 'often purchase old locks at the stalls in Moorfields, when half the wards are rusted off or taken out, and give more for them than they would have paid for new ones to any reputable ironmonger. And what numerous instances of this infatuation do we meet with daily at sales by auction, not of books only, but of many other articles,' and he goes on to give a number of examples of books which have been sold at such sales for more than twice the price at which they stood in his catalogue. He adds that he 'sells a great number of books to pawnbrokers, who sell them out of their windows at much higher prices, the purchasers believing that they are buying bargains, and that such articles have been pawned.' At first his cheap selling policy met with suspicion from his customers, who came prepared to find fault with his

goods, and were determined to find faults even when none existed. 'The best editions were merely from prejudice deemed very bad editions, and the best bindings said to be inferior workmanship, but for no other reason than because I sold them so cheap; and I often received letters from the country, to know if such and such articles were really as I stated them in my catalogues, and if they really were the best editions; if really in calf; and really elegantly bound; with many other reallys. Oh, my friend! I really was afraid for some years that I really should be mad with vexation. But these letters of reallys have for years happily ceased, and the public are now really and thoroughly convinced that I will not assert in my catalogues what is not really true. But imagine, if you can, what I must have felt, on hearing the very best of goods depreciated, on no other account whatever, but because they were not charged at a higher price!' Some of his trade rivals lost no opportunity of spreading falsehoods about his stock, such as, for example, that all his books were bound in sheep, 'and many other unmanly artifices were practised; all of which so far from injuring me, as basely intended, turned to my account; for when gentlemen were brought to my shop by their friends, to purchase some trifling article, or were led into it by curiosity, they were often very much surprised to see many thousands of volumes in elegant and superb bindings. The natural conclusion was, that if I had not held forth to the public better terms than others, I should not have been so much envied and misrepresented.'

Another difficulty he had to face, and one which he confesses was never entirely overcome, arose when he wished to make purchases of private libraries and collections. 'Many of my customers for several years had no objection to buying of me because I sold cheap; but were not equally inclined to sell to me such books as they had no use for, or libraries that were left them at the death of relations, &c. They reasoned, very plausibly, it must be confessed, thus: "Lackington sells very cheap; he therefore will not give much for what is offered him for sale. I will go to those who sell very dear, as the more they sell their books for, the more they can afford to give for them". Lackington deals with this argument in a very common-sense kind of way, pointing out that someone who has been selling as cheaply as he has for so many years must presumably have a considerable streak of generosity which will reveal itself in his buying activities too. He points out, furthermore, that he can now afford to give more for books than he could have done if he had charged higher prices, for, 'were I to sell them dear, I should be ten times longer in selling them; and the expenses for warehouse

room, insurance from fire, together with the interest of the money lying long in a dead stock, would prevent my giving a large price when books were offered for sale.' He evolved his own method for dealing with the situation, and once again we find the man's basic honesty and common sense coming through. 'When I am called upon to purchase any library or parcel of books, either myself or my assistants carefully examine them, and if desired to fix a price, I mention at a word the utmost I will give for them, which I always take care shall be as much as any bookseller can afford to give. But if the seller entertains any doubts respecting the price offered, and chooses to try other booksellers, he pays me five per cent for valuing the books; and as he knows what I have valued them at, he tries among the trade, and when he finds that he cannot get any greater sum offered, on returning to me he not only receives the price I at first offered, but also a return of the five per cent which was paid me for the valuation. But to such as fix a price on their own books I make no charge (if in, or very near town), either taking them at the price at which they are offered to me, or, if that appear too much, immediately declining the purchase.'

Other problems arose over his refusal to give credit to any of his customers, even to the most respectable of them, and even to his own friends, his porters being enjoined 'by one general order, to bring back books not previously paid for, except they receive the amount on delivery.' His respectable customers felt that they were being insulted; many people in the country found it difficult at that time to remit small sums, since the day of the postal-order had not yet arrived; new customers did not like to send the money first, since they did not know how he would treat them, and were in any case suspicious of his low prices. He tells us that on many occasions he was tempted to give way, and to follow the usual practice of allowing credit. But he persevered, explained the position tactfully when necessary, and found that he not only retained his former customers, but increased their number. His stock was being continually enlarged. His first catalogue contained twelve thousand items, his second thirty thousand; 'this increase was not merely in numbers, but also in value, as a very great part of these volumes was better, that is, books of a higher price.' He also refused, after a time, to take part in the normal practice of destroying about a half or three-quarters of 'remaindered' copies so that the rest could be sold at full publication price; his policy was to keep all copies of books that he considered worth saving, and to sell them at a half or a quarter of the publication price. In this way he

claims to have disposed of many hundreds of thousands of volumes, making them available to people who would not otherwise have been able to find copies, or would have been unable to afford them at the original prices; his customers increased as a result, and so, of course, did his enemies in the trade. He thought nothing, apparently, of buying hundreds, even thousands, of copies of a single book, 'and at one time I actually had no less than ten thousand copies of Watt's Psalms, and the same number of his hymns, in my possession, and...I have purchased books to the amount of five thousand pounds in one afternoon.' His expenses must have been enormous, since he kept each article in a variety of bindings to suit the tastes of individual customers, and he was committed to the policy of making large purchases. He tells us that looking back he was often astonished at his courage, or temerity, in laying out so much money, yet 'somehow or other a torrent of business suddenly poured in upon me from all sides,' and the risk had obviously been worth taking.

He never, apparently, relied upon his shopmen to help him either in writing catalogues or in pricing books, preferring to do all this himself until his health compelled him to give up. He continued his reading, moving from his earlier attention to divinity through the philosophers and free-thinkers to the English poets and translations of the classics and of Italian and French poets. History, voyages, travels, biography, all was grist to his mill, and he did not neglect either the works of the great novelists. He thought at one time of learning French, but decided that there were more essential things for him to do at that time of life. He was prepared to admit that his knowledge of literature was in fact superficial, but there is no denying the pleasure he got out of it. He found, too, that being a bookseller provided him with as much knowledge of human nature as he could wish for: 'among all the schools where the knowledge of mankind is to be acquired, I know of none equal to that of a bookseller's shop.' He comments favourably upon the growth of the reading habit and the sale of books to all classes of people, even the poorer classes of farmers and the country people. 'If John goes to town with a load of hay, he is charged to be sure not to forget to bring home Peregrine Pickle's Adventures, and when Dolly is sent to market to sell her eggs, she is commissioned to purchase "The History of Pamela Andrews".' He welcomes the growth of book clubs and circulating libraries, pooh-poohing the idea that booksellers' sales have in any way suffered from them. In 1787, and again in 1790, he visited Edinburgh, calling on the way at York, Newcastle, Glasgow, Carlisle,



Leeds, Lancaster, Preston, Manchester, and a number of other cities, and he comments very unfavourably on the nature of the book trade in all of them. 'I was surprised as well as disappointed at meeting with very few of the works of the most esteemed authors, and those few consisted in general of ordinary editions, besides an assemblage of common trifling books, bound in sheep, and that too in a very bad manner. It is true, at York and Leeds there were a few, and but very few, good books; but in all the other towns between London and Edinburgh nothing but trash was to be found; in the latter city indeed a few capital articles are kept, but in no other part of Scotland.'

In 1793 Lackington sold to Mr. Robert Allen a quarter share of the profits in his trade. 'This young gentleman was brought up in my shop, and of course is well acquainted with my method of doing business; and having been a witness to the profitable effects resulting from small profits, is as much in love with that mode of transacting business as I am; and as the trade is continually increasing, I suppose I shall be obliged to take another quarter partner very soon, as I cannot bear to see even trifles being neglected.' By 1798, however, he retired, leaving a third cousin, George Lackington, at the head of the firm. His Confessions appeared in 1804, consisting very largely of a recantation of all that he had said against the Methodists in his Memoirs. At Thornbury, his first place of retirement, he erected a small chapel for the Methodists on his own property, and eventually preached regularly himself, both there and in the neighbouring villages. He visited the sick, distributed tracts, relieved the sufferings of the poor, and apparently spared no pains to convince his friends that he was thoroughly ashamed of his irreligious life in London. When he moved to Taunton in 1806, he built another chapel at the cost of £3000, and added a salary of £150 per annum for the preacher. Similarly, when he moved for health reasons to Budleigh Salterton in 1808, he built a third chapel at the cost of £2000, and again provided the preacher's salary of £150 per annum. He died on 22 November 1815.

This year, then, marks the 150th anniversary of his death. Much has happened in the world of bookselling in the intervening period, and one cannot be sure how much of it Lackington would have approved of. I think we may be certain, however, that he would have faced the new problems with the same sturdy independence that he showed in his own day, holding fast to his aim of making literature of all kinds more widely and more cheaply available to the public at large, both by keeping

his own prices down, by refusing to join in any kind of restrictive practices, and by encouraging the movement for cheap reprints which made so great an advance in his day. He wrote his own epitaph, in fairly poor verse and too long to quote in full here; the last half, however, may fittingly bring this paper to a close:

In poverty he found content,  
Riches ne'er made him insolent.  
When poor, he'd rather read than eat;  
When rich, books form'd his highest treat.  
His first great wish, to act with care  
The several parts assign'd him here;  
And, as his heart to truth inclin'd,  
He studied hard the truth to find.  
Much pride he had, 'twas love of fame,  
And slighted gold, to get a name;  
But fame herself prov'd greatest gain,  
For riches follow'd in her train.  
Much had he read, and much had thought,  
And yet, you see, he's come to naught;  
Or out of print, as he would say,  
To be revis'd some future day;  
Free from errata, with addition,  
A new, and a complete edition.

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Our readers will welcome the news that the Opening Address of the 1965-6 Session will be given on Saturday, October 16th, by one of our distinguished Vice-Presidents, Professor James Clifford of Columbia University, New York; Sir Sydney Roberts will take the Chair. The subject of the Address will be "Johnson during the 1750's."

Professor Lew Amundsen has been elected as President of the Societas Johnsoniana of Norway. We welcome him to this office and hope that the happy relations which have always existed between our Societies will continue and increase.

The Annual Lunch of this Society was held, as usual, in December. It was attended by our President, the Very Reverend the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, Dr. W.R. Matthews, K.C.V.O., and by Dr. Adam Fox and many distinguished members and visitors. A record number attended the lunch and we hope that this will be exceeded next December. The amenities of the Lunch were increased through the kindness of our member, Mr. Ross Wilson, on whose suggestion The International Distillers and Vinters Association made a generous gift of wine on the occasion; this was greatly appreciated.

## SUMMARY

of talk by W.W. Robson on 'T.S. Eliot as a critic of Dr. Johnson,' delivered to the Johnson Society of London, 20th. March, 1965.

The speaker began by calling attention to the excellence of the late T.S. Eliot's criticisms of Johnson's poems, particularly the earlier remarks published in 1930. He then examined some of the problems about London and The Vanity of Human Wishes raised by Eliot in the 1944 Ballard Matthews lectures. Mr. Robson accepted the view of Eliot and most other critics that London is inferior, but expressed dissatisfaction with the reasons generally offered for this valuation. Having dealt with the view of J.L. Clifford that the poem's interest is primarily political, Mr. Robson suggested that the study of Juvenal's 3rd poem alongside Johnson's 'imitation' is profitable because it brings to light some of the difficulties encountered by those who, like Johnson, Oldham and Boileau, have sought to bring Juvenal's poem on Rome 'up to date'; he laid stress on the peculiarities of this poem, and showed how differently it could strike modern readers by citing the contrasting interpretations of Gilbert Highet and H.A. Mason. He concurred in Mason's praise of one particular passage in London, bringing out its merits by reference to the parallel passages of Dryden and Oldham.

In turning to The Vanity of Human Wishes, Mr. Robson raised the question of the most profitable approach to the theme and content of the poem: how best can Eliot's criticism of it be supplemented? He mentioned the biographical emphasis of Clifford, and the considerations of moral psychology (Bate) and moral philosophy (Voitle) brought to it by other critics. Mr. Robson suggested that the poem from which Johnson took his cue, Juvenal's 10th poem, could be usefully studied beside The Vanity of Human Wishes, but, unlike the case of London, the point of the comparison is to bring out Johnson's independence, creativeness, and total difference from the Roman poet. Having again shown the lack of agreement among scholars about the significance of the 10th satire, Mr. Robson took particular loci from it (the opening; Sejanus Hannibal; mens sana) and showed what Johnson made of them; dwelling finally on two of the greatest passages (the 'young enthusiast' and 'pride and prudence') in which the relevance of 'parallels' with Juvenal most completely disappears. He ended by urging on Boswellians as well as Johnsonians more reading of Johnson's writings.

## REVIEWS

Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, edited with an introduction by John Carroll. Clarendon Press, 1964. Pp.350, with portrait. Price 38/- nett.

In making this selection Dr. Carroll's main purpose was to choose those Letters which had a bearing on the novels and their author's literary qualities and personality. In fact there were no topics which Richardson preferred to these. They recur with variations and the editor has not shrunk from repetitions in the interests of students of the novels. In this way one hundred and twenty eight letters have been selected of which fifty four have not been printed before. Unfortunately it is not easy to pick these out, in general the editor relies on Mrs. Barbauld's invaluable though unscholarly edition of Richardson's Correspondence (1804) with the Monthly Magazine and some other sources. In a lucid introduction he traces the history of the letters from Richardson's first projects for collecting them down to John Foster's acquisition of the bulk of them, which are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Although the novels and himself are Richardson's chief and perennial interest the editor concludes that these letters are but incomplete guides to understanding the novels since in them the moralist, the man of feeling, and the bourgeois printer stands between the novelist and his correspondents. This may be so, but the general reason gains by the breadth of interests and one may mention that the valuable autobiographical letter of June 1753 to Johannes Stinistra is included. This is our chief and almost only authority for Richardson's early life. There is some evidence that occasionally correspondents tried to draw their friend out on topics other than himself. Several letters from Lady Bradshaigh must have contained challenging remarks about Cicero and in one of his replies Richardson seems about to discuss Conyers Middleton's Life of Cicero, and Colley Cibber's Essay. But, alas, after remarking with unconscious irony that 'Tully is wholly concerned with the fame of Cicero,' Richardson turns back on himself. Letters revealing enmity towards Fielding and disagreement, disparagement of Pope, and some very strange criticism of Homer and Vergil are all part of both the breadth and the narrowness of Richardson's interests.

The volume has a good index and is well annotated except that one

could wish for more biographical details of the various correspondents. But when the editor remarks that no eighteenth century English novelist has been better served by modern scholarship, we can add to those services the present very useful and entertaining volume.

D.M. Low.

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Shakespeare's Proverb Lore by Charles G. Smith, London. Oxford University Press for Harvard University Press. Price 32/- nett.

Students of Johnson's critical appraisal of Shakespeare's plays will welcome this examination of some of the sources to which attention has not been drawn before.

This is a book which should earn the gratitude of everyone who is interested in the elements which resulted in the achievement of our greatest dramatist. The author has found three hundred and forty-six aphorisms in the plays and poems each of which can be definitely related to proverbs and maxims in the writings of the poets and philosophers of the classical world. Most of these are contained in two collections available to students in Elizabethan days and used as school books. The SENTENTIAE of Publilius Syrus published in the time of Julius Caesar, and SENTENTIAE PURILES compiled by Leonard Culman, a German who died in 1652. There are however many echoes of classical writers not included in the two compilers. These range from Homer to Cato and extend to Erasmus and Bacon, even including a few from the New Testament.

The patient research which has enabled the author to carry out his work is worthy of the highest praise. There is a feeling of integrity throughout the book. Not the least valuable portion is the index which gives the distribution of the quotations among the plays. Possibly some indication of the state of Shakespeare's mind as he wrote each drama can be gathered from this. It is interesting to note that there are twice as many quotations in HAMLET as in any other play, while THE TAMING OF THE SHREW is last on the list with only one. The reader will notice that TWO NOBLE KINSMEN is included with six extracts.

In the introduction there is a quotation from a book by an American scholar J.Q. Adams published in 1923. This suggests that on leaving school the young Shakespeare taught for a short time in another school

in the neighbourhood, and that by doing so he impressed on his own mind the sententiae which he had himself learned at school where they were used as text books.

Frederick Nixon.

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Dr. Charles Burney: A Literary Biography by Roger Lonsdale, Oxford, Clarendon Press 1965. 527pp. 6 plates. 50/-

Those who were present at the Society's meeting in March of last year will remember with pleasure Dr. Lonsdale's paper on "Johnson and Dr. Burney." The sympathetic understanding which he brought to his subject on that occasion and the dextrous presentation of his material are qualities equally evident in the present work which will be read with no less enjoyment.

Since Dr. Scholes's The Great Dr. Burney (1948), some new hoards of Burneyana have come to light. This new material - including a correspondence of approximately 1,500 letters between Burney and his relations and friends, notebooks which he used while working on his History of Music and other books, and fragments of his autobiography hitherto thought to have been destroyed by his daughter, Madame d'Arblay - has been explored by Dr. Lonsdale who now provides us with what he terms "a new biographical framework." As the title suggests, the biography portrays Burney primarily as an author, and his writings are treated at length. Whilst no radical reappraisal of Burney's musical achievement is attempted, we are offered a new approach to his personality and to the nature of his career as a whole.

The biographical method employed in using the new material is to allow Burney to speak for himself whenever possible - with the assistance of his friends and "the minimum of interference from his daughter." Johnson's observation that "Dr. Burney is a man for all the world to love; it is but natural to love him" may not accord with the more ruthless and intensely ambitious Burney of this biography. If a less attractive side to his character emerges, it does not demolish the celebrated charm of the man.

Burney's long span of years (1726-1814) covers his childhood in a Shropshire village; the sensitive, ambitious choirboy at Chester Free School; his servitude as an apprentice to Thomas Arne in London - "an



avaricious, selfish, sordid, and tyrannical master"; his efforts in establishing himself as a prominent performer and teacher, and early aspirations as a composer; ill-health and the move to Kings Lynn when his career in the capital was set fair for success; his return to London some years later and his musical travels; life in society and at the court; and his last years of withdrawal from society and death at Chelsea. For Johnsonians, interest will centre round the years 1776-84 described in the chapter on "Burney in the Johnsonian Circle" - though he was to outlive Johnson by some thirty years - and the chapter on "Burney and Sir John Hawkins."

Not long after he undertook to write his monumental History of Music, Burney learned that Hawkins had been engaged on a similar task for some years. Much of the material relevant to this rivalry was deliberately destroyed by his daughter, but, as Dr. Lonsdale tells us, enough survives to document "an episode in Burney's career which simultaneously reveals some of the least impressive aspects of his character and the determination with which he pursued his climb to fame."

Burney's admiration for Johnson is evident as early as his first correspondence with him concerning the Dictionary - a work which inspired his own labours in writing the History of Music. Johnson encouraged and assisted him. The mutual friendship of the two men is illustrated in such episodes as Johnson's last words to Burney, "Do all the good you can" and the life-long influence they were to have on him, or Johnson's own wish, some six months before he died, to be taught the scale of music by his friend. Burney's introduction to Streatham shortly after Baretti had departed after his quarrel with Mrs. Thrale provided a replacement for the household and good talk for Johnson. For his part, Burney idolised Johnson.

Burney is remembered as an eminent pioneer of musical history, an intimate friend of the great literary figures of his time and the proud father of a distinguished family of talented children. An intensely ambitious man, rising from humble beginnings through his own efforts and making his way in the world by restless energy, he won recognition by a combination of intelligence and charm. Dr. Lonsdale sees him as an impressive man, if not a great one, unique in his range of friendships and a personality in his own right. Motivated possibly by a search for security, affection and admiration as some compensation for the insecurity of his childhood, he made the conscious transition from musician to man of letters and elevated his earlier profession by his

acceptance into polite society. That he achieved success is evident; whether his frantically busy life allowed him to enjoy his success in serenity is more doubtful. He helped Malone by providing additional notes to his edition of Boswell's Life of Johnson but regrettably was far too busy to write his own biography although he compiled his own collection of Johnsoniana jottings.

We are indebted to Dr. Lonsdale for this new assessment of Dr. Burney not only for his scholarly presentation of new material relating to a friend of Dr. Johnson but also for a vastly entertaining account of the Eighteenth Century social scene.

J.H. Leicester.

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#### Notes

In a recent article in the Times, Miss Mary Lascelles comments on Johnson as a critic; she quotes an observation of Mr. T. S. Eliot, 'Of Johnson's influence there is nothing to say' and asks, 'What was Johnson's critical standing in his lifetime, and for the interval between his death and the projection by Boswell of his gigantic shadow across the future field of vision.' Miss Lascelles continues, 'This wholesomeness and flexibility of Johnson's critical approach explains also why it was that men whose interests diverged widely from his found intellectual stimulus in his writings and talk, for example, Burney, and Reynolds, both of whom had reason to think poorly of his judgment in respect of their own arts. On this Sir Joshua commented, 'He qualified my mind to think justly.'

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The Johnsonian News Letter has been in correspondence with workers on eighteenth century literature in Japan. Yoshizo Migazaki, of Kobe, commented on the great value of more frequent contact between people of different national cultures; he observes that it is particularly difficult for Japanese readers to appreciate the political implications which often lie just under the surface of many English masterpieces. At a time when the Journal of The Johnson Society of London is steadily increasing its circulation all over the world this is a useful indication of the wide interest in Johnsonian literature which exists today.

# THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

## Accounts for the year ending 31st December, 1964.

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Programmes	84	16	3	By: Subscriptions	79	9
Meetings	7	10	0	Add Subs. in Arrears	1	10
Stationery and Postage	16	17	9	Less Subs. in Advance	80	19
Miscellaneous	4	0	11		17	0
	1	5	4			

Sales of New Rambler	63	19	5
" Back Numbers	29	11	5
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Interest on Deposit A/C.	7	4	6
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	10	5	7

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## BALANCE SHEET as at 31st December, 1964.

Capital Account b/f from 1963	248	5	8	Life Membership Fund	161	0	0
Life Membership Subs. 1964	21	0	0	on deposit L.T.S.B.	50	0	0
Donations Received 1964	4	0	0	Deposit Account L.T.S.B.	70	5	1
Sale of Books	1	5	0	Bank Balance			
	274	10	8				

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J.H.L. January, 1965.

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