

THE NEW RAMBLER



JOURNAL OF  
THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

JANUARY 1970

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JOURNAL OF THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

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## The Johnson Society of London

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Hon. Treasurer: J. H. Leicester.

COMMEMORATIVE ADDRESS \*

James H. Leicester, M.A.

We meet today to honour the memory of Samuel Johnson, born at Lichfield 260 years ago and buried here in Westminster Abbey on this same day, 20th December, 1784.

It is fitting that our friends of the Johnson Society, Lichfield, celebrate Johnson's birthday in the city of his birth, whilst we of the Johnson Society of London hold our annual commemoration at this his last resting place. The journey of years from Lichfield to London sets finite limits of time and place on a figure from literary history; the memory of the man whom we remember today knows no such bounds.

Yet we may perhaps be forgiven for linking the name of Johnson in a personal way with the London he loved so well. "The happiness of London," he once remarked to Boswell, "is not to be conceived but by those who have been in it." And we know that for Johnson the full tide of human existence was at Charing Cross. This is not to say that he was unacquainted with the more sordid side of eighteenth-century London or was unmoved to practical acts of kindness and charity to the less fortunate souls to be found in the shadows of a bright metropolis.

Now, away from the bustle of the London scene, we meet in the quiet sanctuary of Poets' Corner; resplendent with its timeless memorials to the Poets and to the Muse whose art he assayed, whose lives he chronicled and whose merits he assessed for his age. From Pembroke's nest of singing birds, he rightly takes his place among the shades of the poets.

Yet Johnson needs no marmoreal bust or lapidary inscription to remind a modern age of his contribution to the republic of letters, or to delineate the character of his mind. As the great new Yale Edition of his Works proceeds, Johnson's towering achievements are again discovered and re-discovered for our own age. The closer the scholarly scrutiny, the greater the critical insight that is brought to bear on the Johnsonian canon, the more manifestly expansive becomes his contribution to the Literature of human experience.

\* Address delivered at the Annual Commemorative Service in Westminster Abbey on Saturday, 20 December, 1969; Conducted by the Archdeacon of Westminster, The Venerable E. F. Carpenter, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.

"The chief glory of every people," said Johnson, "arises from its authors." He recognised the power of words over the minds of men, but was ever mindful of the author's responsibility to mankind - and to himself. Literature, Life and Truth were to him inseparable. "He that communicates truth with success," said Johnson, "must be numbered among the first benefactors of mankind." Among such benefactors we number Samuel Johnson.

But the realm of letters sets too narrow a compass on the achievement of Johnson; perhaps his Works alone would not suffice to draw together and inspire, in quite the same way, generations of Johnsonians the world over. Large as the powers of his mind were, it was perhaps the greatness of his heart that makes the wider and more human appeal. The more so because there is no need to overlook the human blemishes and imperfections. His personal triumph over infirmities of the body, like his early struggles under the restraints of poverty, make his achievements the more remarkable.

It is for the qualities of Johnson the man as well as for Johnson the writer that we give thanks. Qualities of courage and endurance, humanity and compassion make relevant and significant the remembrance of Johnson in our modern age of scientific and technological advance; in a year which has seen the first men on the moon.

One can only speculate on what the great Lexicographer would have made of such contemporary events - and, for that matter, of such compounds as "blast-off", "count-down" and "moon-walk". Doubtless, had he written of extra terrestrial peregrinations and lunar perambulations he would have offered also some wise reflections on the modern dilemma of reconciling the advances of science with the destinies of humanity. He did, however, some two centuries ago, provide a prophetic though somewhat sceptical glimpse of things to come when he recorded the conversation between the artist and Rasselas in the Happy Valley:

"The labour of rising from the ground," said the artist, "will be great, as we see it in the heavier domestick fowls, but to mount higher, the earth's attraction, and the body's gravity, will be gradually diminished, till we shall arrive at a region where man will float in the air without any tendency to fall: no care will then be necessary but to move forwards, which the gentlest impulse



will effect. You, Sir, whose curiosity is so extensive, will easily conceive with what pleasure, a philosopher, furnished with wings, and hovering in the sky, would see the earth and all its inhabitants, rolling beneath him, and presenting to him successively, by its diurnal motion, all the countries within the same parallel." .  
(Rasselas, 1759.)

The chapter ends, you will remember, with the inventor furnished for flight leaping from his stand only to drop instantly and ignominiously into the lake.

In remembering Samuel Johnson today, let us recall the concluding words of James Boswell taken from the description of a Tour in a terrain somewhat less remote than the Sea of Tranquility - the Hebrides:

I have only to add, that I shall ever reflect with great pleasure on a Tour, which has been the means of preserving so much of the enlightened and instructive conversation of one whose virtues will, I hope, ever be an object of imitation, and whose powers of mind were so extraordinary, that ages may revolve before such a man shall again appear.

In the name of the Johnson Society of London, I lay this wreath to the memory of Dr. Samuel Johnson.

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The commemorative address for 1970 will be given by the Reverend F. M. Hodgess Roper on Saturday, 19th December.

THE CONTROVERSY OVER JOHNSON'S BURIAL

Dr. J. Carter Rowland  
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Dr. Samuel Johnson died on December 13, 1784, and was buried in Westminster Abbey on December 20, 1784. Biographers have generally glossed over the details of the funeral which caused a heated controversy in the public press for several days after the internment. Sir John Hawkins, who was responsible for the details of the burial, treats the burial casually with the suggestion that it was not lacking in decorum:

On Monday the 20th of December, his [Johnson's] funeral was celebrated and honoured by the numerous attendance of his friends ... The dean of Westminster upon my application would gladly have performed the ceremony of his internment, but, at the time, was much indisposed in his health; the office, therefore, devolved upon the senior prebendary, Dr. Taylor, who, performed it with becoming gravity and seriousness ...<sup>1</sup>

However the Abbey received a great deal of abuse in the newspapers, particularly in The Public Advertiser, The Morning Chronicle, The General Advertiser, The Whitehall Evening Post, and later in the Gentleman's Magazine, for what appeared to be a cheap, ineffectual burial service.

Two letters written by Dr. Charles Burney, who was not in attendance at the funeral, reflect the concern which he felt over the burial services. In a letter written to Dr. Samuel Park on December 21, 1784, Dr. Burney lays most of the blame on Sir John. He felt that Sir John "did not manage things well for there was no anthem, or choir service performed- no lesson - but merely what is read over every old woman that is buried by the parish."<sup>2</sup> Dr. Taylor, in charge of the service, performed, he observed, in only a "so-so" way.<sup>3</sup> In another letter to Rev. Thomas Twining four days later on Christmas day, Dr. Burney gives a more detailed account of Sir John's responsibility for the details of the funeral. He chides Hawkins for contracting for a cheap funeral. Burney maintained that Hawkins, in an effort to save money, ordered

a funeral which the general public thought unfitting a man of the stature of Johnson. He observes "that the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey lay all the blame on Sir John Hawkins for suffering Johnson to be so unworthily interred."<sup>4</sup> Hawkins, when inquiring at the Abbey concerning the funeral, was reputed to have asked "what would be the difference between a public and private funeral?" When informed the public funeral would cost a few pounds to pay the choir and buy ninety pairs of gloves for choir members and attendants, he chose to forego such a luxury because "Dr. Johnson had no music in him ..."<sup>5</sup> Dr. Burney conjectures that this information, obviously unknown to the newspapers, caused unwarranted adverse criticism to be levelled at both the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.

The official record of the fees for Dr. Johnson's burial in the "South Cross of Westminster Abbey" are recorded at the Abbey. Sir John paid for the funeral on December 18th. While the newspapers later assumed the bill to be in "excess of fifty pounds," in actuality the exact sum was £45. 6. 1d. with the cost distributed in the following manner:

	To the Fabrick	£10. 0. 0.
Buried by	To the Dean	2. 0. 0.
Dr. Taylor	To the Subdean	0. 13. 4.
Dec. 20,	To the 12 Prebendaries	6. 0. 0.
1784.	To the Minister Officiating	1. 0. 0.
No choir.	To the Chanters & Choir	8. 3. 4.
	To the Organ Blower	0. 5. 0.
	To the Receiver	1. 0. 0.
	To the Register	0. 10. 0.
	To the Mark of the Works	0. 13. 4.
	To the Grave Marker	0. 10. 0.
	To the Mason	0. 5. 0.
	To the two Sacrists	0. 13. 4.
	To the two Virgers	0. 13. 4.
	To the eight Bearers	1. 0. 0.
	To the four Bellringers	0. 13. 4.
	To the 12 Almsmen	1. 10. 0.
	To the two Porters	0. 12. 6.
	To the Beadle	0. 5. 0.
	For 66 of white Wax Candles & 3 dozen of Torches	2. 8. 0.
	For the Church Pall	0. 10. 0.
	Leaden Coffin	6. 0. 0.
	Register & Receipt Duty	0. 0. 7.
Dec. 18, 1784	Reced offsi J. Hawkins	45. 6. 1. 6

Public reaction in the newspapers to what was thought of as an inadequate service was reflected in the newspapers from Tuesday, December 21, 1784, until early January 1785. In most instances the Abbey and all those associated with it were charged with mutilating the burial service. Additional scorn was heaped upon those notables who failed to attend the service.

In the December 21st Public Advertiser, a letter signed by "Ogden" was particularly bitter in its attack on the Abbey and the absent notables. Citing the service as "ill performed" with "not a single bishop and only six curates in attendance," Ogden also observes that "not one titled individual of our county" was there and laments the lack of "disputations from the universities or the establishment of science." Noting the conspicuous absence of the Dean, Ogden questions the attendance of only "thirty mourners" and eulogizes Johnson as a man who had achieved "much more than any mere Man ever did for the Letters, the Morals, the Religion of his country." Finally Ogden, not knowing of the executor's arrangements, places the burden of blame on the Chapter of Westminster, holds it "accountable to the public" for not attending, and finds it incomprehensible that other "cathedral ceremonies were not duly paid."<sup>7</sup>

The next day in the Morning Chronicle a letter signed by "the indignant shade of O. Goldsmith" attacked the Chapter of Westminster and referred repeatedly to the "mutilated service." In particular the writer notes that Johnson's burial, "if a burial it could be called," was "without anthem," with "the common service mutilated" principally because the "corpse was not carried into the choir" and "the lesson of St. Paul not read over it."<sup>8</sup> The "indignant shade" further castigates the Chapter for failing "to attend the funeral of such a man as Samuel Johnson," finding it an imputation that "never can be got over."<sup>9</sup>

The controversy gathered momentum with the December 25th issue of the General Advertiser. Finding that "religion, virtue, and morality never had a more strenuous advocate than Dr. Johnson," the writer admonishes the Abbey for a lack of decorum in the service. Citing the absence of Archbishop, Bishop, and Prebendary at the ceremony, the Advertiser scolds those who actually participated as having "mumbled over" the service of the dead and "hummed through the spectacle squeezed probocis of a poor mechanical cushion thumper."<sup>10</sup> [Perhaps a

reference to Dr. Taylor.] Shakespeare's statue probably sighed, he concludes, with the comment, "I'd rather hear the town-crier read my verses."<sup>11</sup>

In a letter signed "the stones" in the Morning Chronicle for December 27th, the tone of the admonitions becomes more severe with the Chapter of Westminster again referred to in a disparaging way. The writer, obviously ill-informed about the actual cost of the funeral, observes the Johnson estate paid above "Fifty Pounds for six feet of earth, for an organ that played not a note - for lights which were not burned."<sup>12</sup> The next day the Advertiser satirizes the burial and alluding to the six feet of earth, queries "why shouldn't fifty pounds be paid for six feet of earth?"<sup>13</sup> On December 30th the Advertiser makes the astonishing charge that when Johnson's grave was opened there were "bones sticking out all over," an obvious suggestion that the "sacred ground" was contaminated before Johnson was laid to rest.<sup>14</sup>

While the criticism of the Dean and the Chapter varied in intensity, it continued unabated in the Advertiser. The conduct of the Chapter was considered abhorrent for not "respecting the ashes of a man whose writing are most scrupulously comfortable to the precepts of Christianity without accommodating to the licentiousness and levity of the present age."<sup>15</sup> A writer, the next day, instructs the executors of Dr. Johnson's estate to disburse "clipt guineas" to the Dean as an equivalent for a "mutilated service."<sup>16</sup> The same reporter claimed to have overheard a gentleman leaving the Abbey after the funeral service lamenting the treatment of Dr. Johnson with the comment, "I had rather burnt my belt wig and cassock ... than such a shameful neglect a man as Dr. Johnson, should have happened at Canterbury."

On December 30th the newspapers recorded the last significant outpouring of caustic criticism of the burial services. Referring to a correspondent "who was witness to the shameful neglect with which the remains of the great and pious man were treated,"<sup>17</sup> the writer in the Advertiser lists the names of the Dean, the Bishop of Rochester, and fourteen others who were ostensibly responsible for the aborted services. These dignitaries, the writer laments, "dishonoured Johnson in a church he defended for the sake of putting more money in their pockets." The writer observes that "a fashionable strumpet," "a rapacious attorney," and a "corrupt statesman" received much better treatment at the hands of the Chapter.<sup>18</sup>

A letter signed J. H. in the same issue of the newspaper notes matter of factly that "the Dean and Chapter for their part of the neglect [of the funeral] have not apologized to the Public," particularly for not lighting candles and playing the organ which, according to the writer, were "paid for but not used."<sup>19</sup>

While the newspapers, as might be expected, were particularly incensed about the possible indignities accorded Dr. Johnson, the Gentleman's Magazine in a milder tone finds fault with the burial service and is unable to explain the omission of the cathedral service. After noting that the Rev. Mr. Taylor performed the burial service, the writer regrets that the cathedral service was withheld from its "invariable friend" and cites this omission as "truly offensive" to the "audience at large."<sup>20</sup> Unable to account for it, the writer questions the executors but blames the Dean and the Chapter for the lapse noting that "Sir Evermond who died renouncing the Christian Religion was buried 'gratis' in the Abbey despite the fact he left an estate of £800."<sup>21</sup> The Gentleman, in conclusion, lists the principal mourners.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously the arrangements which the executors made with Westminster Abbey were not generally known to the newspapers and the public. Despite this, however, the Abbey was thought to be at fault for allowing a "mutilated" service to be performed for such an august figure as Dr. Johnson. What is equally strange, however, is the lack of critical comment by Johnson's friends on the quality of the service. Reynolds, for example, mentions only that he attended the funeral. William Mason, no friend of Johnson's, in a letter to George Harcourt on December 26, 1784, cites his impatience with the burial details with the comment "God be thanked, the papers tell me enough of Johnson's will and funeral."<sup>23</sup>

While it is somewhat puzzling that few of Johnson's friends saw fit to criticize the decorum of the burial service, their silence could be attributed to a knowledge that Sir John might have promulgated the details of the burial to some of them beforehand. Conceivably he may have decided on a less sophisticated ceremony after conferring with those who had been close to Johnson during his lifetime. However, Thomas Tyers, whose sketch of Dr. Johnson first appeared in the December, 1784, Gentleman's Magazine, cited the controversial nature of the burial which the newspapers obviously felt was demeaning to the memory of Johnson. He assumed, after

alluding to the newspaper controversy, that the executors "did not think themselves justified in doing more than they did," and cited the high price of a cathedral service as the reason for its omission. He conjectures that, as it was, the funeral expenses "amounted to more than two hundred pounds."<sup>24</sup> He too was ill-informed concerning the financial arrangement.

Obviously the information disseminated relative to Dr. Johnson's burial was poorly articulated by the Abbey, the executors of Johnson's estate, and the newspapers. While the newspapers were guilty of some poor reporting, they also reflect the anguish which the public felt over the burial services. The controversy only tends to heighten the notion that Dr. Johnson, at the time of his death, was held in high public esteem.

#### Documentation

1. Sir John Hawkins. Life of Samuel Johnson, 1st edition, 1787, J. Buckland, pp.590-91.
2. John Johnstone. The Works of Dr. Samuel Parr, I, J. Buckland, 1834, pp.535-36.
3. Ibid.
4. Thomas Twining, Recreations and Studies of a Country Clergyman in the XVIII Century, J. Rivington, p.129.
5. Ibid., p.129.
6. By Courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster.
7. Public Advertiser, December 21, 1784.
8. Morning Chronicle, December 22, 1784.
9. Ibid.
10. General Advertiser, December 25, 1784.
11. Ibid.
12. Morning Chronicle, December 27, 1784.
13. Ibid. 14. Ibid.
15. General Advertiser, December 28, 1784.
16. Ibid.
17. Public Advertiser, December 30, 1784.
18. Ibid. 19. Ibid.
20. Gentleman's Magazine, LIV, December, 1784, p.884.
21. Ibid.
22. Those principal mourners who attended, according to the Gentleman's Magazine, were Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mr. Edmund Burke, Sir John Hawkins, Mr. Colman, Dr. Priestly, Dr. Horsley, Mr. Malone, Mr. Hook, General Paoli, Mr. Stevens, Rev. Mr. Strahan, and Mr. Nichols.
23. Harcourt Papers, J. Livingston, VII, p.101.
24. Thomas Tyers, "A Biographical Sketch of Dr. Samuel Johnson," Gentleman's Magazine, LIV, December 1784, pp.909-11.

S A M U E L   J O H N S O N

He fought his weaknesses and found his strength,  
He triumphed in his wit and balanced prose.  
He smiled when Boswell questioned him at length  
On whims and fads and likes and loves and foes.  
He gave sane judgements, and he settled words,  
He rescued Shakespeare from despoiling hands,  
His Pembroke was a nest of singing birds,  
His London was the centre of all lands.  
He worshipped Christ with love beyond belief,  
He reckoned values for the works of men.  
His pity pleaded for the whore and thief,  
He sifted blame, and then employed his pen  
To leave us truths no fallacy can part,  
That rise like angels in the human heart.

Helen Forsyth



DR. JOHNSON AND JOHN WESLEY\*

The Rev. John C. Bowmer, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.

Archivist to the Methodist Church:  
Editor of the Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society.

John Wesley and Samuel Johnson are probably the two best remembered Englishmen of the eighteenth century. Contemporary figures on the London scene for several decades, in external appearance they presented marked contrasts, but in spirit they had much in common. Certainly in physical features they were strikingly different. Nothing more unlike Johnson's large, ungainly figure could be imagined than the lithe form of John Wesley, barely 5' 7" in height and as wiry and trim as a fighting cock. Temperamentally, too, they were opposites. Johnson, melancholy and morose by nature yet, withal, genial and fond of company; Wesley, by nature an academic with an inclination to solitude, was a born optimist for ever believing that he lived, moved and had his being under a special dispensation from the Almighty, so that the sun shone and the winds blew to further his appointed mission. Johnson was a littérateur who loved to sit and "have his talk out". Wesley was always on the move from one appointment to another. No wonder Johnson said of him, "His conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have his talk out as I do".<sup>1</sup>

Yet in spite of, perhaps because of, their incompatibilities, they greatly esteemed each other. In his Journal for December 13th, 1783, Wesley referred to Johnson as "that great man" - an entry to which we shall refer later. It is quite probable that they met more frequently than we know, and there is every reason to believe that the pair of them - two of the keenest intellects of the century - each appreciated and profited by the other's point of view.

One is tempted to believe that Johnson, man of letters and pro-establishment in his sympathies, would have little in common with Wesley and his tribe of travelling preachers as they hob-nobbed with the forgotten hordes of miners, small tradesmen, factory workers and farm labourers - that is, provided one's impression of Methodism does not go

\* A paper read to the Johnson Society of London on 15 November, 1969. Chairman: The Very Reverend W. R. Matthews, C.H., K.C.V.O., D.Litt., D.D., S.T.D., F.R.S.L.

beyond that image. There was, of course, more to Methodism than that - its orthodoxy, its roots in the Church of England and above all its deep spirituality - and it was these, in addition to the winsomeness of its Founder, that appealed to Samuel Johnson.

Boswell recounts that, on July 30th, 1763, he and Johnson took "a jaunt to Greenwich". En route, says Boswell, "I talked of preaching, and of the great success which those called Methodists have". Johnson replied:

Sir, it is owing to their expressing themselves in a plain and familiar manner, which is the only way to do good to the common people and which clergymen of genius and learning ought to do from a principle of duty.

To a Methodist this is a sound and shrewd comment. Johnson saw that it was just because the Methodists descended to the level of the common people, and gave them a faith to live by, that they succeeded. Wesley asserted over and over again that he was a man of plain speech and insisted that his preachers be the same. This, obviously, was what appealed to Johnson.

In November, 1773, at the end of the celebrated tour of the Hebrides, Johnson and Boswell were back in Boswell's house in Edinburgh. They were in conversation with "two very respected ministers of Edinburgh". Boswell says that the conversation turned on the Moravian Missions and the Methodists and that Johnson

owned that the Methodists had done good; had spread religious impressions among the vulgar part of mankind; but, said he, they had great bitterness against other Christians, and that he could never get a Methodist to explain in what he excelled others; that it always ended in the indispensable necessity of hearing one of their preachers.

It seems unfortunate that Johnson got the impression that Methodists were intolerant. This could hardly have come from Wesley, for one of his best-known sayings was "We are the friends of all and the enemies of none". One of his finest sermons, so ecumenical in tone, is the one bearing the title, "A Catholic Spirit". But perhaps there were individual Methodists who were as bigotted as Wesley was large-hearted, and it may have

been from these that Johnson gained this unfortunate impression. We can only hope that, on meeting Wesley face to face, he was able to revise his judgement.

Another reference to Methodism is found in Boswell's Life of Johnson for Monday, March 27th, 1775 when he and Johnson had breakfast with a certain Mr. Strahan. The topic of conversation was a play entitled, The Hypocrite - a title altered from "The Nonjuror" so as to satirise the Methodists. Johnson remarked, "I do not think the character of the Hypocrite justly applicable to the Methodists, but it is very applicable to the Nonjurors".

He also paid tribute to the sincerity of the Methodist preachers in a discussion on how a criminal might be brought to the love of God and his fellow-men. Johnson remarked, "Sir, one of our regular clergy will probably not impress their minds sufficiently. They should be attended by a Methodist Preacher or a Romish Priest". His admiration for Wesley's dedicated labours was genuine:

Whatever might be thought of some Methodist teachers (he said) he could scarcely doubt the sincerity of that man who travelled 900 miles in a month, and preached twelve times each week; for no adequate reward, merely temporal, could be given for such indefatigable labour.

Johnson preferred Wesley to Whitefield. In August, 1773, he remarked that he had been in college with George Whitefield (they were both Pembroke men) and that he knew him "before he began to be better than other people" (smiling), "that he believed he surely meant well, but had a mixture of politics and ostentation, whereas Wesley thought of religion only". He thought Whitefield's popularity was "chiefly owing to the peculiarity of his manner. He would be followed by crowds were he to wear a night-cap in the pulpit, or were he to preach from a tree".<sup>2</sup>

So much, however, for what Johnson thought of Wesley and the Methodists. What of Wesley's comments on Johnson? Unfortunately, the only direct reference to Johnson personally in Wesley's writings is the one already referred to, in which he refers to Johnson as "that great man". But this is surely sufficient in itself, amply compensating for lack of more. It clearly shows what Wesley thought of his famous contemporary. The editor of the Standard Edition of Wesley's Journal refers

to Johnson as "the venerable man for whose opinions Wesley entertained so high a regard".<sup>3</sup> In another place in his Journal Wesley comments on Johnson's Tour to the Western Isles<sup>4</sup> and liked it much better than another book on Scotland which (so he thought) was written in very bad English - "how amazingly different from Dr. Johnson's".<sup>5</sup>

The question which intrigues us all is whether Johnson and Wesley had met before that famous encounter in 1783, especially in their younger days. The possibility that they did meet is worth considering. In the spring of 1729, a little group of Oxford students, which included John and Charles Wesley, began meeting (as John expresses it) "to observe the method of study prescribed by the statutes of the University".<sup>6</sup> Their meticulous ordering of life by reading the Bible, taking the sacrament and so on, drew upon their heads many nicknames. Some called them "The Holy Club" and others "Methodists"; but the interesting point for us is that Johnson was at Oxford at the time and one cannot imagine that the activities of this earnest group would escape his notice. Johnson had entered as a commoner of Pembroke on October 31st, 1728, so he must have been at Oxford when the Holy Club was founded. Boswell tells us that he was at Pembroke until 1731, but Birkbeck Hill states that extreme poverty compelled him to leave on December 12th, 1729 and that he returned only for one week in March, 1730 and one in the following September. This leaves us with only two months in the summer and three weeks in the winter of 1729 when we can be sure that Wesley and Johnson were both in Oxford. Did they meet? The Rev. Harry Belshaw, writing in The London Quarterly Review for 1943, is of the opinion that "they probably never met". Dr. T. B. Shepherd, author of Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century agrees, but he rather surprisingly accepts Boswell's date that Johnson was in Oxford until 1731.

Another incident relates to a pair of shoes. Boswell tells of Johnson's penury attracting the notice of Christ Church men:

Mr. Bateman's lectures were so excellent, that Johnson used to come and get them second-hand from Taylor, till his poverty being so extreme, that his shoes were worn out, and his feet appeared through them, he saw that this humiliating circumstance was perceived by the Christ Church men, and he came no more.<sup>7</sup>

Someone took pity on Johnson, laid a new pair of shoes at his door; but, proud as he was (as Boswell says) "he threw them away in indignation". Were these Christ Church men members of the Holy Club, or perhaps of those who made the Holy Club the target of their derision?

Now we come to 1740. Wesley is back in London and the Methodist movement is just getting under way. The first Wesleyan Society was less than a year old. In his diary for October 7th, 1740, Wesley writes:

7.15 at the Baptist's Head: 8 the gentlemen met.

"The Baptist's Head" - or, to give it its full name, "John the Baptist's Head on a Charger" - was a tavern in St. John's Lane, Clerkenwell, where Edward Cave, publisher of The Gentleman's Magazine met his literary friends. Johnson was a regular contributor to this Magazine and it is anybody's guess that Wesley and he met in that old tavern. There may even be some significance in Wesley's reference to "the gentlemen" - a pun, maybe, on The Gentleman's Magazine?<sup>8</sup>

Other pointers that Wesley and Johnson met are, unfortunately, equally hypothetical, but they are worth mentioning. There is, for instance, reason to believe that Boswell and Johnson read and discussed Wesley's Journal as it was published. Wesley and Boswell were both interested in ghosts, and when Boswell read of Wesley's investigation into the story of a young woman who claimed to have seen a ghost,<sup>9</sup> he was intrigued. In fact, he reports the following conversation with Johnson:

Johnson: Wesley can talk well on any subject.

Boswell: Pray, sir, what has he made of the story of a Ghost?

Johnson: Why, sir, he believes it, but not on sufficient authority ... Charles Wesley, who is a more stationary man, does not believe the story. I am sorry that John did not take more pains to enquire into the evidence for it.<sup>10</sup>

The most significant outcome of the incident was that it made Boswell anxious to meet Wesley, so in 1779 Johnson wrote a note of introduction which Boswell presented to Wesley when they happened to be in Edinburgh together in May of that year. It read:

Sir,

Mr. Boswell, a gentleman who has long been known to me, is desirous of being known to you and has asked this recommendation, which I give him with great willingness because I think it much to be wished that worthy and religious men should be acquainted with each other.

I am, sir,

Your most humble servant,

SAMUEL JOHNSON.

Boswell says that he was received very politely by Wesley and that they discussed the story of the ghost, but he was still not convinced that it was genuine. However, the fact that Johnson could write this letter of introduction proves at least that he was not a stranger to Wesley. Had they not held each other in high esteem, Johnson would hardly have presumed to write a note of introduction for Boswell. That he should class Boswell with Wesley as "worthy and religious men" speaks for itself.

Another point of contact between Johnson and Wesley was through Wesley's sister, Mrs. Hall, affectionately known as "Patty". Mrs. Hall was one of Wesley's younger sisters, unhappily married but who, in later years, was befriended by Johnson. The Rev. John Telford, editor of the Standard Edition of Wesley's Letters, gives the impression that it was Mrs. Hall who introduced Wesley to Johnson in 1783,<sup>11</sup> but he gives no references to support this idea and, in any case, we feel sure the two men must have met before this late date. Johnson frequently dined with Mrs. Hall and Boswell once remarked on her close resemblance to her brother "both in figure and manner". In another context, he refers to "lean, lanky, preaching Mrs. Hall".<sup>12</sup> Birkbeck Hill reports a remark of John Hoole, "Johnson spoke of his design to invite Mrs. Hall to be with him and to offer her Mrs. Williams's room" - which looks as if he contemplated engaging Wesley's sister as his housekeeper.<sup>13</sup>

The best-known and the last meeting between Wesley and Johnson took place on December 18th, 1783. Wesley writes in his Journal:

I spent two hours with that great man, Dr. Johnson who is sinking into the grave by a gentle decay.

His personal diary confirms this. Johnson lived another twelve months after this, almost to the day; but we do wonder what they talked about during those two hours. We venture to presume that the time would not be wasted on trivialities.

Before we leave our consideration of the contacts between Johnson and Wesley, one important incident demands our attention. It is known as the "Taxation No Tyranny" affair. The situation was this. The XVIIIth century echoed to the cry of "Liberty" and open criticism of the Government in general and of the King in particular was the order of the day. Temperamentally and by heredity, Wesley was on the side of the Establishment.<sup>14</sup> "I am a High Churchman"<sup>15</sup> he wrote to Lord North when that phrase "High Churchman" had political as well as ecclesiastical undertones. He firmly believed that under the Georges, Englishmen enjoyed the best of all possible worlds.

Then there came the crisis over the American colonies and for a while Wesley, rather surprisingly, sympathised with the colonists. Perhaps it was because he had so many people and preachers involved in the shaping of the new world. In 1784 he thought it no bad thing that, "Our American colonies are now totally disentangled from both the State and from the English Hierarchy". "We dare not", he continued, "entangle them again either with the one or the other".<sup>16</sup> He clearly saw that force would be of no avail and prophesied to his brother, "If a blow is struck, I give America for lost".<sup>17</sup>

Then he came across Dr. Johnson's pamphlet, Taxation No Tyranny; and as a result, he completely changed his mind. He switched his sympathies from the colonists and sided with the home government. Now a man is perfectly entitled to change his mind and there was no reason why Wesley could not change his - and say so! But - and here is the strange thing - he took Johnson's pamphlet and re-published it as his own. He gave it a new title, A Calm Address to our American Colonies, but in the first edition there was not the slightest hint that it was borrowed from Johnson. Only in the Preface to a revised edition did he write:

I was of a different judgement on this head, till I read a tract intituled, "Taxation no Tyranny" ... but as soon as I received more light myself, I judged it my duty to impart it to others. I therefore extracted the chief arguments from that treatise, and added an application to those it most concerns. I was well aware of the treatment

this would bring upon myself; but let it be, so I may in any degree serve my King and country.

As Wesley himself foresaw, this switch of allegiance had many repercussions. In the main, it angered liberal opinion - both within and outside the Church of England. It produced a mass of pamphlets, few of which breathed much Christian charity. It gave much occasion to his old antagonist, Augustus Montague Toplady to rise to the heights (or sink to the depths) of vituperation. Toplady's infamous production, An Old Fox Tarr'd and Feather'd was described by Richard Green as "a really disgraceful performance".<sup>18</sup> Wesley was accused of fishing for honours.

Be that as it may, our concern is with Wesley's plagiarism. Why did he re-print Johnson's tract with not so much as a word of acknowledgement? Let us set down one or two considerations.

(a) In the first place, all Johnson's political pamphlets appeared anonymously; so if Wesley decided to reproduce any, he would hardly feel in a position to supply the author's name.

(b) Wesley was never very scrupulous about publishing the names of authors from whom he borrowed. He did a tremendous amount of summarising for himself and for his Preachers - as his Christian Library shows.

(c) On October 3rd, 1775, Wesley wrote to his brother, Charles, "I am just putting into the press a new edition of the Address corrected, in which my change is accounted for and two of the questions fully answered ... Dr. Johnson is in France". This last sentence may account for the borrowing - but as an excuse it is very weak!

(d) A month or so later, Wesley presented Johnson with a copy of his Notes on the New Testament. Johnson wrote back, thanked him for the book and acknowledged his support on the American question. Johnson's letter reads:

February 6th, 1776.

Sir,

When I received your commentary on the Bible, I durst not at first flatter myself that I was to keep it, having so little claim to so valuable a present; and when Mrs Hall informed me of your kindness, was hindered from



time to time from returning you those thanks which I now entreat you to accept.

I have thanks likewise to return you for your important suffrage to my argument on the American question. To have gained such a mind as yours may justly confirm me in my own opinion. The lecturer was surely right who, though he saw his audience slinking away, refused to quit the chair while Plato stayed.

I am, etc...

Certainly whoever resented Wesley's plagiarism, it was not Samuel Johnson!

Biographers vary in their judgements. Tyerman says that for Wesley it was "an injudicious and unwarranted act, except on the supposition that there was some secret understanding between him and Johnson".<sup>19</sup> T. B. Shepherd in his book, Methodism and the Literature of the Eighteenth Century, says that Johnson's letter "clears Wesley from any blame in Johnson's eyes".<sup>20</sup> In our judgement, Wesley was too guileless (sometime to the point of naivety!) to be guilty of an ulterior motive in all this. He was quite accustomed to re-publishing other people's material without worrying about libel or copyright. We can hardly believe that he was guilty of open plagiarism in the baser sense of that term; and to plagiarise Johnson - of all people - was a risky business. The borrowed work of so famous a person was bound to be spotted - as, indeed, it was! Furthermore, we cannot think that Johnson would have allowed such borrowing to pass unchallenged unless he had previously in some way concurred.

The conclusion to which, I think, one is driven is that there must have been some degree of amicable understanding between the two men. Perhaps Johnson felt that Wesley's name would carry weight in the colonies. Wesley, on the other hand, probably did it all in good faith. But let him speak for himself:

Need anyone ask from what motive this [the Calm Address] was wrote? Let him look round. England is in a flame! - a flame of malice and rage against the King, and almost all that are in authority under him. I labour to put out this flame. Ought not every true patriot to do the same? If hireling writers on every side judge me by themselves, that I cannot help.<sup>21</sup>

So on the principle that the end justifies the means, we must leave the matter.

Now we turn to our last item for consideration - personal religion. Birkbeck Hill has said, "In his personal religion Johnson was, in the best sense, a Methodist"; and Boswell once remarked, "Johnson himself was, in a dignified manner a Methodist".<sup>22</sup> What importance can be attached to these two statements? In what sense was Johnson a Methodist - Hill says, "in the best sense" but what does that mean? We need, of course, both a definition of Methodism as well as a knowledge of Dr. Johnson. The former will emerge as we proceed, but first we must have a close look at Johnson's religious life noting anything that he had in common with Wesley.

In a sense, they both began at the same place. They had the same Father-in-God, William Law. Boswell reported a conversation in which Johnson told him that in his early days he developed a marked indifference to religion, and that this persisted until he went up to Oxford:

I then became a sort of lax talker against religion, for I did not much think against it; and this lasted till I went to Oxford, where it would not be suffered. When at Oxford, I took up Law's Serious Call to a Holy Life expecting to find it a dull book ... and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me....<sup>23</sup>

About this time, however, another person at Oxford, a Junior Fellow of Lincoln, also read Law's Serious Call - this was John Wesley. He found much to criticise in Law - and told him so! - but he confessed that it was Law who "convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God".

However, while Johnson and Wesley began at the same place, Wesley found the way ahead when he met Peter Bohler and the Moravians. They led him to that experience which we call his Evangelical Conversion. Johnson did not find this secret, at least in his early days. With Wesley, religion became vibrant and urgent, full of confidence and joy, "the faith of a son" as he called it. With Johnson, religion remained a matter of resolutions which he failed to keep - what Wesley would describe as "the faith of a servant".<sup>24</sup>

There is little doubt that Johnson took religion very seriously, and if the methodical ways of the Methodists led Boswell to regard Methodism as "regulated piety", then Johnson was "in the best sense" a Methodist. But there was more to Methodism than regulated piety; and it was just that "more" that Johnson did not experience. If one defines Methodism (as Wesley did) as one who "has the love of God shed abroad in his heart", so that "perfect love casts out fear", it could be said that with Johnson, fear had not yet been cast out by love.

If we assume, as well we may, that the friendship between Johnson and Wesley "flowered late",<sup>25</sup> certainly it seems to have been well advanced by 1775; but can we trace anything in Johnson's religion that would lead us to conclude that the friendship had borne fruit in a deeper faith? The Rev. Harry Belshaw, writing in the London Quarterly Review, thinks there is - that, in the closing years Johnson showed signs of that deeper faith and that Wesley may have helped him towards it.

On Easter Day, 1766, he reads Rotherham on Faith, and seven years later, we find him reading Clarke's sermon on Faith. Only thus slowly does he appreciate the Methodist emphasis on saving faith, but his feet are now on the way.<sup>26</sup>

A more tender note was creeping into his meditations. At his annual Communion in 1776, referring to the words in the Gloria, "Thou that takest away the sin of the world", he says:

I was so mollified by the concluding address to our Saviour that I could not utter it.

Two years later, again at Communion, he prays:

Make the memorial of His death profitable to my salvation, by strengthening my faith in His merits ...  
Make me to love all men.

Belshaw comments, "The way continues to grow clear".

It was not that the old severity of judgement had left him. He was still prepared to believe in the everlasting punishment of Hell, but even then, he spoke of my Redeemer.<sup>27</sup>

He died, as we know, in calm assurance of faith:

For some time before his death, all his fears were calmed and absorbed by the prevalence of his faith, and his trust in the merits and propitiation of Jesus Christ. He talked to me often of the necessity of faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, as necessary, beyond all good works whatever, for the salvation of mankind. He pressed me to study Dr. Clarke and to read his sermons. I asked him why he pressed Dr. Clarke, an Arian. "Because" he said, "he is fullest on the propitiatory sacrifice".<sup>28</sup>

One of his last prayers, made at the sacrament only a week before he died, ran:

Grant, O God, that my whole hope and confidence may be in his merits and thy mercy.<sup>29</sup>

Belshaw is no doubt right when he says, "The Evangelical Revival had not passed him by. Perhaps we ought to put it that John Wesley had not failed his friend".

So we take our leave of Dr. Johnson and John Wesley. Perhaps we have gone too far. Perhaps Johnson's deepening personalisation of religion owed less to Wesley than we have estimated. Perhaps it was just Johnson's own maturing spirit, his temperamental fear of death and his natural anxiety to prepare for it. Be that as it may, I am quite sure, knowing Wesley as I do, that when he and Johnson dined together on December 18th, 1783, they would not confine their conversation to politics and literature. A heart to heart talk on the deep things of faith would be more characteristic of these two serious men.

Samuel Johnson and John Wesley had more in common than, perhaps, we have hitherto imagined.

#### Documentation

1. Quoted by the Rev. Harry Belshaw in an article entitled, "The Influence of John Wesley on Dr. Johnson's Religion" in The London Quarterly and Holborn Review, 1943, p227 - hereafter referred to as "Belshaw".
2. Boswell's Life of Johnson (Globe Edition), p.200.
3. Journal, Standard Edition, vi. 466.
4. Ibid., vi. 106.
5. Ibid., vi. 322.

6. Wesley's Works (Jackson's 1831 edition), viii. 348.
7. Boswell, p.20.
8. See The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, xiii. 51.
9. Journal, v. 265ff.                      10. Boswell, p.470.
11. The Letters of John Wesley (Standard Edition), iii. 128 - though Telford cites 1784.
12. Boswell, p.562.
13. Johnsonian Miscellanies, Ed. G. Birkbeck Hill, ii. 147.
14. Wesley believed that the colonists were being exploited by left-wing liberals in this country. He argued that the colonists had all the liberty they needed, "both civil and religious", but "what they contend for is the illegal privilege of being exempt from parliamentary taxation". He points out that they had never hitherto claimed this privilege "and probably they would not have claimed it now, had they not been incited thereto by letters from England" - see a letter to Lloyd's Evening Post (Standard Letters, vi. 192-3) written to answer "From what motives did you publish your Calm Address?".
15. Letters, vi. 161.                      16. Ibid., vii. 239.
17. Ibid., vi. 152.
18. Green, R: Anti-Methodist Bibliography, p.125.
19. Life of John Wesley, iii. 186.
20. Op. cit., p.234.                      21. Journal, vi. 82.
22. Quoted by Belshaw, to whose article I am indebted for much of this section.
23. Boswell, p.17.
24. A good example of this is the entry in Prayers and Meditations for Easter, 1761. See also 1762, 1764, 1766, 1770 and 1773.
25. Belshaw, p.233.                      26. Ibid., p.233
27. Boswell, p.640.                      28. Ibid., p.686.
29. Prayers and Meditations, p.216.

Facing Page:

- (1) Wesley's diary for October 7th, 1740, showing reference to the Baptist's Head.
- (2) Diary for December 18th, 1783, showing reference to Dr. Johnson.

With acknowledgment to The Methodist Archives and Research Centre, London.

The shorthand used is that of Dr. John Byrom. The Wesley brothers used this shorthand extensively when writing to each other, especially for confidential correspondence.

← (1)

← (2)

The Eighteenth Century Pulpit: A Study of the Sermons of  
of Butler, Berkeley, Secker, Sterne, Whitefield and Wesley  
by James Downey. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press,  
1969. iii = 254 pp. 50/- (£2.50p.)

"Eighteenth-century sermons, unlike those of the age of Andrewes, Donne and Tillotson, have been generally neglected by literary scholars," writes Mr. Downey from Ottawa, and his book is welcome as a partial remedy of that neglect. Disclaiming any attempt to define the place of the sermon in the literary history of the eighteenth century, he draws only guardedly generalised conclusions; he glances back to Latimer and forward to Simeon, but makes no cross-references to secular oratory. His modest aim is to show that the sermons of some of the notable preachers of the period are worthy of revaluation. Commendably, he fulfils his declared intention to let his six chosen exemplars speak for themselves, which they do most eloquently, and he usefully indicates their distinctive qualities of thought and style.

There is no chapter on Swift - on the valid ground that Landa's appraisal leaves little to be added - but the Dean serves as an obvious foil to Bishop Berkeley, and is called as evidence elsewhere, though the study too readily assumes (despite Landa's caution) that Swift was indifferent to his own sermons and pessimistic about the efficacy of preaching in general. The suaver irony of Addison equally eludes Mr. Downey, who responds more sympathetically to the Shandean sincerity of Parson Yorick and to the combination of intellectual power and evangelistic warmth that is shown in (unexpectedly) Berkeley as well as Wesley. Johnson's writing of sermons (but not their preservation) is merely noted; most of his famous dicta on the genre are included, without adding much to our understanding of them or of him.

In the introductory "general view" of pulpit oratory, a pastiche of standard works on the literary and religious background, many issues are clouded rather than clarified. Sermon piracy by unscrupulous booksellers is misleadingly associated with the accepted practice of plagiarism by other preachers, but not with the demands of a hungry reading public. Important terms like "Augustan" and "Latitudinarian" are applied without adequate definition. Even the key word "Reason" is used so loosely throughout that one is hardly surprised that the writer finds Tillotson "precise" and his message merely "prudent morality", or that there is no reference

to the Cambridge Platonists. Again, it is true that the Church of England played a major role in the chastening of pulpit oratory, even before the Interregnum, but the evidence lies in the work of men like Herbert, Ussher and Sanderson, not in a pronouncement of the presbyterian Westminster Assembly. The pervasive influence of Wilkins often passes unrecognised. Mr. Downey confounds the traditional "fustian rhetoric" with the features of Puritan preaching, and so blunts both edges of South's fierce sword. Within the eighteenth century, however, he moves more surely, and the survey ends with a judicious and alluring tribute to Atterbury.

The chapter on Butler surveys and explains the declining reputation of his Analogy and the growing approval earned by his sermons, whose scrupulously honest "rhetoric of restraint" can evidently still stimulate the resolute and thoughtful reader. Memorable too are Butler's nocturnal meditations on the uncertain continuance of human reason, in communities as well as individuals. The discussion of Berkeley is significant in being based mostly on manuscript sermons published only in recent years. Our impressions of eighteenth-century preaching have perhaps inevitably been coloured by what is available in print, which was originally determined by considerations such as the bookseller in Joseph Andrews put to Parson Adams. The apparent predominance of ethical and polemical preaching, noted earlier by Mr. Downey, may simply reflect the saleability of that kind of matter. Berkeley, here presented as a "proleptic" preacher, in that his devotional and evangelistic tone anticipates Wesley, is more probably a rediscovered link in a long chain of preachers whose appeal was often equally emotional. Archbishop Secker's "discreet warmth", however, now seems merely tepid, and he emerges here as representative of the Anglicanism of Johnson's time rather than as a writer worth re-discovering. Sterne, on the other hand, is shown to be full of delightful surprises. The interest of the following chapter lies chiefly in the anecdotes about Whitefield's "enthusiastic" performances and the reactions of contemporary auditors and men of letters; they may be thought to justify, more than Mr. Downey seems willing to allow, Johnson's comment that Whitefield did good, but that "when familiarity and noise claim the praise due to knowledge, art and elegance, we must beat down such pretensions."

John Wesley's claim to praise cannot be beaten down. Predictably, the chapter on "The Heart's and Mind's Delight" is the peak of this study, bringing out the range, the balance



and the depth of Wesley's mind, and the truly scholarly precision that underlies his evangelical power. One may note that Wesley, pressed for an answer to the question "What is it that constitutes a good style?", formulated his reply in the conventional post-Tillotsonian terms: "perspicuity and purity, propriety, strength and easiness, joined together." This combination is indeed exemplified in his sermons; but their characteristic strength derives partly from the conciseness that Wesley said had become natural to him, and partly from the inner energy that animated his conversation, as Johnson found, but kept him "never at leisure". Mr. Downey's case for reading Wesley now need not invoke the fact that his Standard Sermons still have a captive audience in the theological colleges of one Protestant denomination. He belongs to Christendom, and his prose can be acknowledged and enjoyed as part of the Christian literary heritage.

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Fanny Burney and Her Friends: Select Passages from Her Diary and Other Writings. Edited by L. B. Seeley. London: Seeley & Co., 1890. xii + 331 pages. Analytical table of contents; Illustrations. Re-published by Gale Research Company, Book Tower, Detroit, Michigan 48226, 1969. L.C. 75-76135. \$9.80.

This record of the fascinating life of Fanny Burney is made up of excerpts from her diary, writings, letters, and comments by contemporaries. L. B. Seeley selected and arranged the most pertinent matter and provided information on his subject's early life as well as background details which connect and elucidate the extracts.

Accounts of Fanny's experiences with prominent persons all over Europe reflect the tempo of the times and provide an insider's history of great events.

The book is now available as part of Gale's  
LIBRARY OF LIVES AND LETTERS.

LORD MONBODDO\*

E. M. Bonner

James Burnett was born at Monboddo in 1714, the son of a small Scottish laird. He was first educated at home, his tutor inculcating the taste for ancient literature - especially Greek - and Philosophy which, as we shall see, he retained throughout his life. His tutor, Dr. Skene, obtained a professorship at Aberdeen University and it was probably due to him that young Burnett continued his education there, widening and deepening his knowledge of and affection for the literature and philosophy of the Greeks. Already, at this early stage, he regarded Roman literature as a mere copy of the Greek and the study of physical laws as quite inferior to the study of Mind - opinions which he maintained and defended with vigour throughout his life.

Obtaining his M.A. at Aberdeen, he went via Edinburgh to Gronigen where he spent three years studying law. Returning to Edinburgh he was admitted a member of the Faculty of Advocates in February 1737 at the age of 22. During the '45 rebellion, Burnett went to London, prudence and preference inclining him to the conversation and company of the literary friends he had made there, and returned when peace was restored. About 1760, he married a Miss Farquharson by whom he had a son and two daughters.

He first rose to prominence by his participation in the celebrated Douglas case. Although the issue was so complicated, Johnsonians will recall its importance, especially in the life of Boswell. Burnett was the chief pleader on the Douglas side and his advocacy before the House of Lords Appeal was successful in obtaining a reversal of a previously unfavourable decision. In 1764 he was made sheriff of his native county of Kincardineshire and in 1767 he was made a Lord of Session under the title of Lord Monboddo. One gets the impression that love of literature and, above all, of philosophical speculation increasingly absorbed his time.

He had perhaps need of philosophy, as fate struck him some cruel domestic blows. His wife, who was renowned for her beauty, died at the birth of their second daughter. This daughter herself was considered one of the loveliest women of the age. She had been greatly admired by Burns who,

\* A paper read to the Johnson Society of London on 20 April, 1968. Chairman: The Revd. Canon A. R. Winnett, B.D., Ph.D.

after his meeting her, was asked by a friend: "Well, and did you admire the young lady?" Burns replied: "I admired God Almighty more than ever. Miss Burnet is the most heavenly of all His works." In 1786 Burns wrote to a friend:

Fair B- is heavenly Miss Burnet, daughter to Lord Monboddo, at whose house I have had the honour to be more than once. There has not been anything nearly like her in all the combinations of beauty, grace, and goodness the great Creator has formed since Milton's Eve, on the first day of her existence.

His daughter's death was a great blow to Monboddo. Sad to relate, a contemporary, Charles Hope (later Lord Granton) suggested that Monboddo's wilfulness and obstinacy may have contributed to her early death. He wrote:

I have no doubt that her Father hastened her fate, by his folly in attempting to make her too hardy, by accompanying him, on all his Journeys (except to London) on Horseback - As a specimen of his Absurdity in his treatment of her - I was at a Ball & Supper given by Mrs. Dundas at Arniston, in the Xmas Holidays, 1784-5 or 85-6 I forget which - Miss B danced a good deal, & the room was crowded & hot - We went to supper about 12 o Clock - When Miss B was missing - On which Mrs. Dundas exclaimed - So I went & I actually found Her Father and She in the Stable Yard, mounting their Horses to ride back to Edinr - so I took forcible possession of his Daughter, & brought her back to a warm Supper & Bed, leaving Mono - to prosecute his ride if He chose - & I have no doubt, that this prolonged her life; for heated as She was, that ride must have killed her.

His only son, Arthur, also died prematurely. It might be relevant here to quote Boswell's writing on 16th June, 1774:

He talked of the severe stroke of his son's death but I saw he bore it with philosophical composure. His conversation was manly and while he discussed his favourite subject of language I felt my own inferiority to him in knowledge and precision of ideas.

Despite these premature deaths, Monboddo himself died in 1799 at the age of 85.

So much for the bare curriculum vitae. As to Monboddos character and personality, he was undoubtedly a genuine eccentric. From about 1780 he made an annual journey to London and he continued until he was upwards of 80 years of age. Carriages being unknown to the ancients, he scorned to ride in what he termed a box dragged at the tail of a horse. He therefore always rode on horseback whatever the weather attended by a single servant, travelling to and from London in this manner until he was 80. George III, on asking Monboddos and a soldier respectively how they had come to town, commented: "Very odd, very odd - my judges gallop to town on horseback - my cavalry officers travel singly in the mail coach."

In the country he dressed in the style of a plain farmer, living among his tenants with the utmost familiarity. His rent roll was very small, never yielding more than £300 per annum, but he never raised a rent or gave a tenant notice for the sake of a larger sum offered. You will recall his receiving Johnson and Boswell "dressed in a rustic suit with a little round hat" in the character of "Farmer Burnett" which Johnson considered undignified. He walked much and took a cold bath in all seasons, rising regularly at about 6 o'clock. Before retiring he was accustomed to taking an air bath and then anointing himself in admiration of classical practice. As to the air bath, he appears to have been in the habit of taking another during the night. Boswell writing in his Journal says:

I told him [Johnson] to-night [Sept. '77] that Lord M. awakened every morning at 4 and then for his health got up and walked through his room naked with the window open, which he called taking an air-bath, after which he went to bed and slept two hours more. I suppose, Sir said Dr. J., he awakens at 4 and cannot sleep till he chills himself and makes the warmth of the bed a grateful sensation.

The oil used is said not to have been the oil of the ancients but a saponaceous liquid composed of rose water, olive oil, saline, aromatic spirit and Venice soap which when well mixed resembled cream.

Although a Lord of Session, he always refused to sit on the bench with his fellow judges, choosing instead a seat beneath it with the clerks. Several ingenious explanations have been given for this; I prefer to attribute it to his

innate preference for simplicity and dislike of ostentation. Once when he was a guest of the London judges and was seated on the King's Bench, part of the floor gave way and all the English judges hurried to the door. Monboddo remained seated, explaining that he thought an annual ceremony was taking place with which, as an alien to their laws, he had nothing to do.

Monboddo shared with Johnson a love of "clubbability" and controversy. He was an original and very prominent member of the "Select Society" founded in 1754 by the painter, Alan Ramsay. The Society met weekly for literary and philosophical discussions. Monboddo is described as having "the peculiar talent of supporting his tenets by an inexhaustible fund of humour and argument". When he became a judge he took a house in St. John's Street, Edinburgh, and soon became famous for his hospitality. He entertained what Scott calls "the best society - whether in respect of rank or literary distinction" to an evening meal, at which the wine went round in flasks garlanded with roses, which were also strewn on the table after the manner of Horace. "The conversation of the excellent old man," says Scott, "his high gentlemanlike, chivalrous spirit, the learning and wit with which he defended his fanciful paradoxes, the kind and liberal spirit of his hospitality, must render these noctes caenae-que dear to all who, like the author (though then young), had the honour of sitting at his board."

I cannot resist another quotation from Lord Granton:

Whether Lord M was himself a good Judge of Wine, I do not know - But this I know, that his Wine was always excellent especially his Claret - This He treated in a peculiar way - He always bought it in the Cask - & then cased, & put it into a Hot House - where it ripened in a few months more than it would have done in as many Years in Bottles. Sometimes He used to have a Magnum of Claret brought in with a Chaplet of Flowers round the Neck of it - He always mixed a few drops of Seltzer Water with His Claret, as He said it was a Mark of Debauchery among the Ancients to drink their wine unmixed with Water - Nay he insisted that they used to mix Sea Water with it - This He grounded on a passage in one of the poets (I forget which) who speaks of Vinum Expers Maris - We endeavoured to persuade Him that this only meant Vin de paix, which had not been imported by Sea

from abroad - But he would not be convinced, but said He did not approve of Sea Water, & preferred Seltzer.

Another intimate acquaintance asserted that his Lordship could not tell port from claret.

So much for some of his eccentricities of behaviour - perhaps merely rational and consistent with his opinions. His reputation for eccentricity rests or rested more on his writings and views, to which I now turn. His Magna Opera are On the Origin and Progress of Language 6 vols. 1773-92 and Ancient Metaphysics, likewise 6 vols. 1779-99. However, his most sincere admirer could not claim that conciseness was a striking feature of his style. He himself abjured fine writing: "the rhetorical and poetical style fashionable among readers of the present day". Boswell wrote (1780): "Lord Monboddo's Ancient Metaphysics helps me to revere Greek. But he is not an agreeable writer. His conversation is full of learning but by large too odd and positive and acharné against modern manners."

Although I deprecate rhetorical generalisations such as "Who today reads Johnson?" I think perhaps one may fairly claim that Monboddo is largely unread and perhaps indeed almost unreadable. For this reason I propose to let him speak for himself from his correspondence, rather than quoting from his somewhat indigestible and voluminous works.

Two main ideas may be distinguished in his thought. The first is the theory of what has come to be known as evolution. Although perhaps not a seminal thinker, Monboddo was far in advance of his time in his views on man's origin and anticipated many subsequent beliefs and theories. He maintained that man was a "speaking animal" and stoutly held that the Crang-Outang was of the human species and that in the Bay of Bengal there existed human creatures with tails, discovered some 130 years before by a Swedish skipper. He believed that man by nature is neither social, political nor even rational - reason, reflection, and a sense of right and wrong being inculcated rather than innate. He affirmed that men were originally quadrupeds and did not acquire speech until they could walk erect. He tirelessly and persistently sought evidence to confirm his views. At one time he even considered acquiring an Crang-Outang for £50 (which he could ill afford) and educating him (or it). However, were he to prove human, Monboddo might be open to the charge of slave-

ownership; if inhuman, the £50 would have been wasted. He decided against the experiment. We find him enquiring about the existence of men with tails of Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society, who had sailed with Cook on his first circumnavigation. Johnson wrote to Mrs. Thrale 21st August 1773:

Lord Monboddo ... the Scotch judge, who has lately written a strange book about the origin of language, in which he traces monkeys up to man, and says that in some countries the human species have tails like other beasts. He enquired for these long-tailed men of Banks, and was not well pleased that they had not been found in all his peregrination.

He also corresponded with Banks about "Peter, the Wild Boy of Hanover", writing in 1782 that he had visited the Wild Boy at a farm in Hertfordshire. Peter came from Hanover running on all fours. Monboddo considered this a greater phenomenon than the discovery of a new planet and asked Banks' help regarding more confirmation. He later wrote to Banks that he had obtained medical opinion that Peter subsisted on the bark and leaves of trees, and quoted Captain Cook as having related that the natives of New Caledonia ate the bark of a certain tree.

As with most discoveries, the idea of evolution evolved gradually. Darwin himself acknowledged that Alfred Russell Wallace had virtually hit on the same idea simultaneously with himself. Many thinkers had long speculated on man's origin and on what differentiated him from the animals. It is one of the basic questions, the other being perhaps the meaning of the symbolism contained in the story of Adam and Eve, the Serpent and the Apple.

For example, in 1753 we find Maupertuis the friend savant writing to Frederick of Prussia: "It is in the cities of the South Seas that travellers say they have seen savage hairy men with tails." He would rather have an hour's conversation with the missing link than with the greatest genius in Europe. When we consider the furore and passion aroused by Darwin's views, we can readily appreciate how Monboddo's opinions were derided and ridiculed in his day having been born a century before him. However, he was certainly not ignored and some 50 years later we find Dickens refers, in the introduction to Martin Chuzzlewit (1843), to

the "Monboddoo Doctrine" touching the probability of the human race having once been monkeys. A more recent reference appeared in Punch for the 12th July 1961 "Epitaph for Mr. Jiggs", an Orang-Outang who died at the zoo aged 13:

Monboddoo believed the orang-outang was human,  
Had a sense of ethics, was able to play the flute  
And differed from civilized man in his fine decorum  
And in being mute.

Incidentally, the subject of the origin of language is a perennial one. Only the other day I came across a review of Professor Wilson's The Miraculous Birth of Language in which the reviewer states that he knows of only two attempts to solve the riddle of language, Monboddoo not being one of them. I am not competent to assess his influence on the study of primitive language. I understand that he had virtually no influence in this country because of his reputation for eccentricity but that he may have influenced some of the great Scandinavian and German philologists such as Rask, Herder, and Grimm.

The second of Monboddoo's basic ideas was his conviction of the superiority of the ancients, especially the Greeks. He viewed man's subsequent "progress" as a gradual decline. He had an intimate knowledge of Greek philosophers and particularly admired Aristotle. He despised everyone who presumed to think he was a philosopher, if he was a mere modern and ignorant of the ancient masters. As we have seen, he based some of his habits on an imitation of the Greek mode of life. As I have mentioned, he carried on a voluminous correspondence, a few extracts from which may serve in amplification.

In a letter to John Hope, Professor of Botany, 29th April 1779 he wrote as follows:

In the most ancient Books, sacred as well as profane, the memory is preserved of a certain time when men lived upon the natural fruits of the Earth, not prepared by fire; and these writers agree that it was a life infinitely happier than the life we now lead, subsisting upon the fruits of the Earth, raised by much art and labour, and prepared often with no less art, and strangely mixed and compounded before they are thought proper to be food for us. According to Hesiod, we were deprived of



the happiness of this life, in punishment of Prometheus' theft of the fire from Heaven. But, according to Moses, we forfeited it by eating of the tree of Knowledge. If we are to understand both these accounts as allegorical, I think Moses' allegory is by far the best; for it is undoubtedly the improvement that men have made in Knowledge, by the invention of Arts, that has been the cause of all their misery.

On 2nd October 1782 Monboddo wrote to a Sir George Baker:

I believe I told you that I have been collecting observations for a History and Philosophy of Man, in which I have now been engaged during twenty years. The quantity of materials I have collected is so great that I have spent the chief part of the time that I have been in the country - since the middle of August - in reading them over, and taking notes of them. If I live to execute my plan - and if it be well executed - it will be the greatest work of history, philosophy, and learning that has been published in this country. The moral of it will be that nothing can save us, and indeed I think all Europe, from absolute destruction and annihilation, but the study of ancient Men and ancient Manners by those who govern us.

On 4th January 1792 writing to Lord Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor, Monboddo says:

I think it may be said that Aristotle has likewise answered the question - which Pilate the Roman Governor put to our Saviour - asking him What Truth was; which I think shows that though Aristotle's books were not much studied in Rome at that time, Pilate must have read his Analytics. Otherwise I do not think it would have come into his head to have asked such a question. This work of Aristotle is so complete, that - as I remember your Lordship told me - you had looked into several modern books upon the subject of Logic, but found none of them comparable to Aristotle. There is only one modern treatise that I have read upon the subject, namely Locke's Essay upon Human Understanding, which is a most miserable work, compared with Aristotle's.

Among Monboddo's manuscripts in the possession of the family the largest is entitled "The Degeneracy of Man in

a state of Society". It consists of 80 closely-written folio pages, and it is evidently the rough draft of a projected treatise upon this subject. The manuscript, which illustrates the scope of his mind and the variety of his interests, contains several blank spaces, left for the incorporation of additional material. It is divided into ten chapters, but these are not numbered, and the contents of several are little more than notes consisting of only a few lines.

The first chapter is a general Introduction, recapitulating views expressed elsewhere upon social degeneracy. The second proposes to deal with Health and Longevity, Populousness and its causes, and Depopulation and its causes. The third introduces the subject of degeneracy due to Commerce, and the fourth continues the discussion with reference to foreign wars. The fifth supports the thesis by citation of authorities, e.g. (a) Homer and Hesiod amongst the poets, (b) facts from Ancient History, (c) recent events in France and England. A long digression follows on Monboddo's favourite topic of the decreasing stature of man, and he returns to the support of his original thesis by quoting the views of such philosophers as Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and Epicureans. The remaining chapters are replies to various objections, in the course of which the Law of Nations, Family Life, Feudal Government, and the depopulation caused by trade, are discussed.

I now propose briefly to deal with Monboddo's relations firstly with Johnson and then with Boswell. If I dwell at slightly greater length on the latter, it is because of the light they throw on Monboddo. His relations with Johnson were not on the whole cordial. Indeed the late Lord Brain entitled an essay "Lord Monboddo: Evolutionist and Anti-Johnsonian". The two men were perhaps fundamentally too alike, both being opinionated, strongly individualistic and disputatious, and also sometimes almost perversely wrong-headed. Johnsonians will recall examples of this in Johnson and I have perhaps said sufficient to show that Monboddo had this quality in good measure. The actor, Foote, said that Monboddo was an *elzevir* edition of Johnson - in other words a diminutive or pocket edition. I refrain from quoting from the celebrated encounter during the tour to the Hebrides but it says a good deal for Boswell's tact and stage management (one recalls the confrontation with Wilkes) that an explosion was averted. In his Origin and Progress of Language Monboddo speaks bitterly of Johnson whose labours as a lexicographer

he despised. In the 5th volume of Ancient Metaphysics he attacks Johnson's criticism of Milton's Latin:

Before I read this criticism, though I knew the Doctor was no Greek scholar, I believed he had understood Latin as much at least as any man can understand a learned language, who understood not the science of language nor any other science. But I am now in doubt whether he was even a complete Latin scholar in the common sense of the word, though he had not only learned it as other men do but taught it ... But though I were able to praise Dr. Johnson as ably as Dr. Beattie has done, I am not at all disposed to display my panegyric talents in that way: so far from that, I hold that the praise and admiration, which so many of the English nation (not the whole, nor the men of learning and taste among them) have bestowed upon Dr. Johnson, both alive and dead, is one of the greatest disgraces that ever befel them, considered as a nation of learning and taste, and the most adverse to their national character: for Dr. Johnson was the most invidious and malignant man I have ever known, who praised no author or book that other people praised, and in private conversation was ready to cavil at and contradict everything that was said, and could not with any patience hear any other person draw the attention of the company for ever so short a time.

Boswell confirms this in his diary entry for 11th April 1788:

Monboddo said nothing against Johnson but whispered to Langton (in London) that our nation had disgraced themselves by allowing genius to Johnson.

Johnson in his turn ridiculed Monboddo's notions; on one occasion he wrote:

If there are men with tails, catch an homo caudatus. It is a pity to see Lord Monboddo publish such notions as he has done; a man of sense and so much elegant learning. There would be little in a fool doing it; we should only laugh; but when a wise man does it, we are sorry. Other people have strange notions; but they conceal them. If they have tails, they hide them; but Monboddo is as jealous of his tail as a squirrel.

Some of Johnson's remarks were recounted by Boswell to Monboddo

who never forgave Johnson.

The two men never became friends and when after the meeting in Scotland they subsequently met in London, Boswell was sorry to see that Monboddo avoided any communication with Johnson.

Now let us examine Boswell's relations with Monboddo. Their respective fathers had been close friends and Boswell was frequently in Monboddo's company or found him "amongst those present". They ate and drank together several times a week for years. Thus we find Boswell writing in his diary for 20th June 1779: "Dined with Lord Monboddo, to whose invitation I had answered that I seldom dined abroad on Sunday, but that I considered him a Sacerdos, by whose conversation my mind was improved."

Always impressed by firmness and strength of character, he was much influenced at one time by Monboddo before he fell completely under Johnson's sway. Thus on 2nd March 1778 we find him recording:

He told me that during his last dangerous illness he felt no uneasiness at going into the World of Spirits and that a man's life must be very miserable who is afraid of death. He said he believed that according to the state of a man's mind so would be his happiness in the World of Spirits, that a man habituated to spiritual employments would be happy. He talked with such confidence as communicated it to me for a time. I thought I could die easily in company with him.

Boswell consulted Monboddo about his marriage to Margaret Montgomerie and Monboddo acted as a mediator between Boswell and his Father. In anyone else all this would have formed the basis of a lasting and firm friendship. Boswell's volatile nature being what it was, the more he was drawn into Johnson's orbit, the more he gradually turned from Monboddo. In 1785 after Johnson's death, he brought out a pamphlet "A Letter to the People of Scotland" in which he described an unnamed Judge, clearly Monboddo, as "one grotesque philosopher, whom ludicrous fable represents as going about avowing his hunger and wagging his tail, fain to become cannibal, and eat his deceased brethren."

After this, although moving in much the same circles,

they appear to have met only three times. The first time Monboddo cut Boswell, who records on 12th January 1786: "Lord Monboddo came into the (Advocate's) Library. I bowed to him, but he did not speak to me. I did not care. I considered that it would make him fair game in Johnson's Life." On the two subsequent occasions, Monboddo was only distantly polite. His resentment probably provoked his comment on Boswell after he had begun to publish on Johnson: "Before I read his book, I thought he was a gentleman who had the misfortune to be mad; I now think he is a mad man who has the misfortune not to be a gentleman."

Perhaps if it were now possible for Boswell to give his opinion of Monboddo, he would prefer to have his cruel attack forgotten and for some of his more generous judgments to stand in its stead. He had at one time written of him as: "one not unworthy of comparison with Johnson, for learning, clearness of head, precision of speech and a love of research on many subjects which people in general do not investigate."

In conclusion I should like to quote three other tributes. First, Thomas Jefferson Hogg in The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1851):

The bright lights of Scottish Jurisprudence are not lightly to be contemned. There have been some truly great men in their College of Justice. We cannot boast such names in England among our Judges; by no means. Lord Monboddo - some whimsical fancies, such as spring up in inventive minds, like weeds in a rich soil, alone excepted - was a star of the first magnitude. So profound a scholar as James Burnett - a genius, so original, so splendid: a man so learned, so liberal-minded - our English Bench could never show.

Second, an epitaph which appeared in a London newspaper:

If wisdom, learning, worth, demand a tear  
Weep o'er the dust of great Monboddo here;  
A Judge upright, to mercy still inclined;  
A generous friend, a father fond and kind;  
His country's pride, for skill in Grecian lore,  
And all Antiquity's invaluable store.

And finally, another posthumous tribute by Lord Neaves, a

fellow Senator of the Court of Session:

To the Memory of Monboddo

'Tis strange how men and things revive  
Though laid beneath the sod, O!  
I sometimes think I see alive  
Our good old friend Monboddo!  
His views, when forth at first they came,  
Appeared a little odd, O!  
But now we've notions much the same;  
We're back to old Monboddo.

Alas! the good lord little knew,  
As this strange ground he trod, O!  
That others would his path pursue,  
And never name Monboddo!  
Such folk should have their tails restored,  
And thereon feel the rod, O!  
For having thus the fame ignored  
That's due to old Monboddo.

Though Darwin now proclaims the law,  
And spreads it far abroad, O!  
The man that first the secret saw  
Was honest old Monboddo.  
The architect precedence takes  
Of him that bears the hod, O!  
So up and at them Land o' Cakes,  
We'll vindicate Monboddo.

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THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

The deaths of a respected member of our committee and two distinguished Vice-Presidents within so short a space of time leaves the Society with a heavy sense of loss.

VICTOR M. HALSTED was a very active member of the Society and an enthusiastic committee man. He took a keen interest in the affairs of the Society which he served so well. We shall miss his helpful counsel and loyal support.

R. W. KETTON-CREMER, M.A., F.S.A., F.R.S.L., one of our own Vice-Presidents, was also a Past President of The Johnson Society, Lichfield. His writings on Norfolk, and Felbrigg: The Story of a House (1962), are widely known; for Johnsonians, he will be remembered in particular for his works on Thomas Gray, Matthew Prior and Horace Walpole. On the many occasions when he read papers to the Society, his subjects were always absorbing and his delivery felicitous. In 1956 his subject was "Samuel Johnson and Thomas Gray", and a year later he spoke on "Matthew Prior", enchanting his audience with a beautiful reading of "Jinny the Just". In 1963 he introduced us to "William Cole, Friend of Walpole and Gray". His last paper was given in 1967 when he chose as his theme "Johnson and the Antiquarian World", which he concluded with a reading of one of Warton's sonnets. The last two lines, perhaps, must surely echo his own feelings as an antiquarian towards his chosen study:

Nor rough, nor barren, are the winding ways  
Of hoar Antiquity, but strown with flowers.

Professor GEOFFREY TILLOTSON, M.A., B.Litt., F.B.A., also a Vice-President of our Society, will be greatly missed both at home and abroad. As Professor of English Literature in the University of London and head of the English Department of Birkbeck College, he provided a valuable link between the Society and the University. More widely, he also established many links across the Atlantic and introduced American scholars to the Society. His Eighteenth-Century studies, particularly his works on Pope, and in recent years his work in the Nineteenth-Century, are themselves his own memorial. The manuscript of his first volume for the Oxford History of English Literature was completed before his illness.

Whether as speaker or chairman at our Meetings, his appearances were always occasions memorable for his urbane scholarship and wit.

In addition to the papers he gave on Rasselas, members will recall the opening of our 1967/68 session when Professor Tillotson presented "Readings from Pope's Poems". As each nuance of the poems came through the spoken word - interspersed with the occasional gloss on a word or comments of critical insight - we found ourselves transported to the immediacy of the Eighteenth Century. A memory to be treasured. Whilst the world of letters mourns the loss of a major figure, old Birkbeckians among our members will feel a personal sense of indebtedness for his inspiration as a teacher, and constant encouragement.

At the Memorial Service, the Society was represented by our President, Dr. L. F. Powell; The Secretary, Mr. A. G. Dowdeswell; and Mrs. Dowdeswell.

J. H. L.

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*W. J. Bate is Lowell Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University and Editor of Selected Essays from the "Rambler", "Adventurer", and "Idler" (1968). Albrecht B. Strauss is Associate Professor of English at the University of North Carolina.*

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