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Date
THE PERIODICAL ESSAYS
OF DR. JOHNSON

by

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(B.A., 1930)

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# The Periodical Essays of Dr. Johnson

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The periodical essays make up over a third of the bulk of Johnson's writings, and yet in comparison with his later work they are very little known. The fact that they do not rank with his later writings in quality is not alone sufficient to account for the neglect with which they have been treated. The true reason for the comparative obscurity of these essays lies not so much in the essays themselves as in the fact that they labour under the handicap of a literary form which had already been so perfected that any falling away was sure to bring with it neglect. Johnson complains several times that the public expect him to follow in the footsteps of Addison and Steele and complain if his subject matter and technique show any variation from theirs, while he fails to see why Addison and Steele should be allowed to prescribe the nature of the periodical essay for all time. This is fair enough, but the retort is found in another of his own essays -- to the effect that authors who deviate from the beaten track because they think they see a greener path must be willing to suffer neglect and even harsh criticism as the price of their originality. ¹ Certainly Johnson had as much cause to thank his predecessors for the excessive popularity of the essay as a literary form as he had to resent their having fixed in the minds of the public the exact type of essay they desired. Only the impetus supplied by this popularity could have made it worth his while to write five volumes of essays, for valuable as they

¹. Adv. #131.
are in some respects, it is hard to conceive of them as being popular as periodical literature in any age. His interests would not permit a suitable selection of subject matter, and even had this not been the case his particular powers never included the lightness of touch which made the earlier works what they were. This becomes patent in the papers which he designed to add frivolity and gaiety to the collection. Judged by the Spectator, which is, and will no doubt continue to be, our standard of the periodical essay, these are inferior, but taken on their own merits, which after all is the only reasonable way to estimate literary work, they are quite the reverse. The reader who goes to them expecting to be bored is pleasantly surprised. They are not meant to be read straight ahead by the volume, but a judicious selection will draw forth an echo of the compliment which so pleased their author — "I thought very well of you before; but I did not imagine you could have written any thing equal to this."¹

A few facts with regard to the essays may conveniently be included before proceeding to an examination of their subject matter.

The Rambler was published twice a week from March 20, 1750, to March 17, 1752. Johnson received two guineas a paper for it, which in his straitened circumstances was sufficient to encourage persistence in the face often of considerable weariness and distaste. Only five of the two hundred and seven numbers were contributed by friends. When one considers the effort involved in

¹ Boswell. (The Life of Samuel Johnson).
producing two papers a week on subjects as varied as possible the uniform quality of these essays becomes a matter of considerable surprise. Indeed, several of the essays themselves deal with the sorrows of their author, his difficulty in fixing on a subject being increased rather than lessened by the fact that he has the whole universe to choose from.

The type of essay is quite varied. Moral and philosophical dissertations are most common. Next come essays on the various aspects of literature, the author, the critic, literary forms, and so on. Allegories on moral and literary subjects occur quite frequently, and also Eastern tales with plenty of local colour supplied by Oriental names. For the more light-minded of his readers there are numbers of essays, for the most part in the form of letters, on marriage, courtship, and other popular subjects. The great difference between the Rambler and the Spectator is the apparent indifference of the former to social conditions. The Spectator saw a great deal, and when he perceived an abuse, he made some effort to end it. To be sure, his observations were confined to the more polite walks of society, and many of his complaints might seem trivial to us, but there can be no doubt that he was a definite power for good. The Rambler, on the other hand, scorned trivial manifestations of man's evil nature, and wanting to reform him from the bottom up, he wrote philosophical essays on the origin and power of sin. For this reason we miss in the Rambler the interesting sidelights on London life which fill the Spectator.

The Adventurer was not undertaken by Johnson himself, but by a Dr. Hawkesworth. Johnson assisted him from March 1753 to
March 1754, contributing about thirty numbers. These essays resemble the Ramblers in subject matter and style too closely to require any particular comment.

The Idler appeared weekly during 1758, and 1760. The numbers are far shorter, and the subject matter much less gloomy than is often the case with the Rambler. The style is less ponderous, and far more effective for this type of work. The essays do not lack thought, but the labouring of the author's mind is not so apparent as in the earlier efforts. The ability to write with humour has developed greatly since the Adventurer.

It would be remarkable if several hundred essays on subjects as varied as creation, by a man as great as Johnson, did not contain much that was worth our notice. In this essay an attempt is made to bring forward the more important theories and facts they contain by a classification and discussion of the subject matter.
CHAPTER II

Social Reform

Johnson was not a reformer. He was too great a Tory for that. Hence readers must not expect to find in his essays echoes of Swift, of Defoe, or of Addison and Steele. The venom of the Dean, the outspoken criticism of the journalist, the light but subtle mockery of the Spectator, are qualities foreign to the Rambler, the Adventurer and the Idler. These gentlemen all believe their rather jaunty titles by displaying a greater predilection for philosophic reflection and literary comment than for the social comment which their names might suggest. Occasionally Johnson does emulate the mildly ironic tone of the Spectator, but he lacks the lightness of that observer, and is not happy in this style. Yet in some respects Johnson may be shown to have had the good of society nearer his heart than had his famous forerunners. Addison and Steele seldom touched on any real social problems, confining themselves to the foibles and failings of their particular section of society, whereas Johnson became aware of an abuse, he treated it as effectively as he was able. Addison and Steele could not have published a series of essays on debtors' prisons -- their genteel subscribers would have been disgusted -- but Johnson had very few subscribers to consider, and those probably less easily shocked. Hence we near a great deal about this extraordinary abuse, and something, although not a great deal, about other conditions which warranted censure. Certainly the nature of the Doctor's capabilities and the trend of his tastes are very clearly indicated by the fact

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1. Several papers by Steele are marked exceptions to this general rule.
that, in an age which should have been a happy hunting ground for a social reformer, only about two dozen out of over three hundred essays may be regarded as social comment.

All the periodical essays were written prior to 1762, the year in which Johnson received his pension, and was raised from the fear of poverty. Thus the six papers which he devotes to imprisonment for debt were probably prompted by the realization that many who suffered under the laws on this subject were just such men as himself -- honest, law-abiding people who might in a moment of extreme necessity be prevailed upon to accept credit, an indiscretion which they were given plenty of leisure to regret.

The abuse was a very real one.\(^1\) At this time goals were not run by the government, but were leased out to private individuals, apparently without specifications as to the treatment or the prisoners. Thus the one idea of the goaler was to make as much as possible out of each person committed to his charge. Everyone had to pay fees for food and those who could not, the majority of the inmates, lived in a state of starvation, sometimes partial and often complete. Hence it was considered quite reasonable in Savage, to reply, when asked why he had evaded justice, that he had always intended to appear for trial, but wished to avoid "the expenses and severities of a prison."\(^2\) All prisoners were fettered, and as the following passage from The Beggars' Opera points out, there was only one way to be sure of comfortable chains.

1. See Traill, Social England, Volume V.
2. Johnson, Life of Savage.
Lockit: ... We have them all prices, from one guinea to ten, and 'tis fitting every gentleman should please himself.

MacHeath: I understand you, sir. The fees here are so many and so exorbitant, that few fortunes can bear the expense of getting off handsomely, or of dying like a gentleman."

The result of this state of affairs was that the majority of the prisoners were reduced to begging and thieving from anyone who had anything worth stealing. Sanitation was unknown, and the toll taken by disease in the filthy crowded prisons was tremendous. All this would have been bad enough had all those who suffered been criminals (as we regard them to-day,) thus affording some semblance of justice to harsh treatment, but the condemned and the untried were confined together, both paying goal fees, and worse even than this, over fifty percent of the inhabitants of the goals were there for debt, and not necessarily members of the criminal classes at all.

Johnson deals with this abuse first by four letters, each forming a number of the *Adventurer*, from Mysargyrus, whose indiscretions have led to confinement for debt. Johnson does not make his readers' flesh creep by recounting any of the unpleasant details which surround the subject. He is, as usual, rather concerned with the principle of the thing than with the suffering of the individual. Prison reform did not interest him so much as the fact that here was a class of men undergoing the rigours of confinement who had not in his opinion qualified for such treatment.

"... conceive, if possible, the horrors of imprisonment attended with reproach and ignominy, of involuntary association with the refuse of mankind, with wretches who were before too abandoned for society, but now freed from shame or fear are hourly improving their vices by consorting with each other." (Adv. 41).
Mysargyrus, in the course of his story, gives interesting
character studies of his associates, the series of papers closing
with this very appropriate moral:

"I know not, Sir, whether among this fraternity
of sorrow you will think any much to be pitied;
nor indeed do many of them appear to solicity
compassion, for they generally applaud their
own conduct, and despise those whom want of
taste or spirit suffers to grow rich. It were
happy if the prisons of the kingdom were filled
only with characters like these, men whom pros-
perity could not make useful, and whom ruin cannot
make wise: but there are among us many who raise
different sensations, many that owe their present
misery to the seductions of treachery, the
strokes of casualty, or the tenderness of pity;
many whose sufferings disgrace society, and whose
virtues would adorn it."

Five years later Johnson wrote two numbers of the Idler
on the same subject. Here he abandons the screen of the
correspondent, and writes in his own person, and very forcibly.
He points out that no possible good end is served by the con-
finement of a man who is insolvent, while the mere fact that
it can be done is a negation of the whole purpose of law-pro-
tection for the individual from the individual. In many
cases he believes the complainant was at great pains to put
the prisoner in his debt through desire for gain, and imprisons
him in spite at his disappointment. Johnson can conceive of
several reasons for the apparently ridiculous custom of holding
a debtor for several years, thus rendering him quite incapable
of paying what he owes:

1. Adv. 53.
"If those, who thus rigorously exercise the power which the law has put into their hands, be asked, why they continue to imprison those whom they know to be unable to pay them? one will answer, that his debtor once lived better than himself; another, that his wife looked above her neighbours, and his children went in silk clothes to the dancing-school; and another, that he pretended to be a joker and a wit. Some will reply, that if they were in debt, they should meet with the same treatment; some, that they owe no more than they can pay, and need therefore give no account of their actions. Some will confess their resolution, that their debtors shall rot in jail; and some will discover, that they hope, by cruelty, to wring payment from their friends."

If further proof were needed of the slowness of society to recognize an abuse in something it is used to, it would be found in the fact that in spite of the *Adventurer*, the *Idler*, *Amelia*, and many other works dealing with imprisonment for debt, it was a sufficiently crying abuse eighty years later to engage Dickens' attention to the extent of about a quarter of *Pickwick Papers*. It was not finally abolished until 1869.

Conservative as he was, Johnson had very advanced ideas on some subjects. Hanging was not reserved as a punishment for murder and high treason until 1838, but Johnson in 1751 argued very forcefully for this step.

"To equal robbery with murder is to reduce murder to robbery, to confound in common minds the gradations of iniquity, and incite the commission of a greater crime to prevent the detection of a less. If only murder were punished with death, very few robbers would stain their hands in blood;"
but when, by the last act of cruelty, no new danger is incurred, and greater security may be obtained, upon what principle shall we bid them forbear?"[4]

"If those whom the wisdom of our laws has condemned to die, had been detected in their rudiments of robbery, they might, by proper discipline and useful labour, have been disentangled from their habits, they might have escaped all the temptation to subsequent crimes, and passed their days in reparation and penitence, and detected they might all have been, had the prosecutors been certain that their lives would have been spared. I believe, every thief will confess, that he has been more than once seized and dismissed; and that he has sometimes ventured upon capital crimes, because he knew, that those whom he injured would rather connive at his escape, than cloud their minds with the horror of his death."(2)

Interest is lent to these passages by the knowledge that at this time it was customary to hang mere children for pilfering when in a state of starvation. The execution is recorded of a boy of nine for this offence. The victims were usually orphans for whom no parish would assume the responsibility.

The only major social problem to receive serious treatment from The Spectator was prostitution. On this subject Steele wrote several papers couched in such strong terms as to be out of keeping with the general tone of the paper. Johnson does not notice it to any great extent. We find one letter -- about a third of a number -- and two whole numbers devoted to the subject. The line taken is sensible and broadminded. Johnson deplores the fact that aversion and scorn are the lot of

1. R. 114
2. Ibid.
the prostitute rather than pity and assistance:

"Nor will they long groan in their present afflictions, if none were to refuse them relief, but those that owe their exemption from the same distress only to their wisdom and their virtue." (1)

Here, as in his treatment of debtors' prisons, we notice in Johnson a certain even-handed justice. It is not the dreadful state of the prisons that pains him so much as the fact that people other than acknowledged criminals have to suffer in them. Nor is it the misery of prostitution which he deprecates so much as the fact that many who suffer in it are not, in his opinion, had enough to merit their punishment, having fallen by mischance and being unable to recover their reputation once it is lost.

"It cannot be doubted but that numbers follow this dreadful course of life with shame, horror and regret:" (2)

Misella says:

"... others are precluded only by infamy from reformation, and would gladly be delivered on any terms from the necessity of guilt and the tyranny of chance." (3)

Johnson makes no suggestion for a solution to the problem. This could hardly be expected of him. He merely asks for a more just estimation of the actual responsibility of the individual victim. His attitude recalls the conclusion of his Life of Savage:

"... nor will any wise man presume to say 'Had I been in Savage's condition, I should have lived or written better than Savage.'"

1. R. 107
2. Ib.
3. R. 171
Johnson ignores the trials of apprentices, though apprenticeship and its abuses formed a very live topic at this time. He devotes four papers to servants, but only one aspect of the servant problem appears to appeal to him. He is very much exercised by the difficulty with which a refined and educated member of the servant classes either secures or retains a position, and writes himself letters about what a trial the power to read and write have been to one unfortunate girl, and others about the difficulty of selecting the right type of garment in which to make application for work. She who dressed too finely was told that "I am resolved to be the head person in this house," and applying in a linen gown she was accused of having come "to steal a better." These papers are not of particular interest. They do not give the reader the feeling that Johnson had given any great thought to the matter. If he had he would, no doubt, have found more serious flaws in the system upon which to comment.

There is a very powerful condemnation of vivisection. This practice appears to have roused Johnson most effectively. He questions whether it is of any scientific value, preferring to believe that those who make use of it do so for fun; and then points out that even should it lead to some unimportant knowledge, "he surely buys knowledge dear, who learns the use of the lanceals at the expence of his humanity." (1)

1. Idler, 17.
The prevalent and dangerous vice of gaming Johnson treats in a number of letters from its legendary victims. Some of his correspondents are merely onlookers who are disgusted at the impossibility of rational conversation and friendly intercourse in a society where cards are popular. Others are more seriously affected, having by means of card playing or lottery tickets dissipated their fortunes beyond hope of recovery. Johnson mocks those who indulge in a passion for card-playing, but it is the gambling involved which he regards as really serious:

"There are ... few minds sufficiently firm to be trusted in the hands of chance." (1)

On the whole Johnson devotes very little attention to social reform, and he cares even less for the removal of those minor follies of society of which Addison and Steele so loved to write. What examples there are of lighter social comment are all to be found in the more frivolous *Idler*, if the term frivolous may be considered applicable to any of Johnson's work.

The newspapers of the day come in for a fair share of censure. It was not to be expected that Johnson's passion for exact truth would suffer the contemporary news-writing in silence. There was of course no rapid communication, and news, especially from the continent, was delayed and often unreliable when it came. Following in the wake of the resourceful Defoe, the newspaper decided what should have happened and told the public that it had happened. It must have been very difficult for the more imaginative members of the profession to refrain from giving

R. 181.
the public its money's worth, for after all once started on the downward path the size of the lies told would probably not make very much difference. Writing in 1758, Johnson says:

"No species of literary men has lately been so much multiplied as writers of news. Not many years ago the nation was content with one gazette; but now we have not only in the metropolis papers for every morning and every evening, but almost every large town has its weekly historian, who regularly circulates his periodical intelligence and fills the villages of his district with conjectures on the events of war, and with debates on the true interest of Europe." (1)

Johnson parodies the well-known definition of an ambassador as a virtuous man who lies abroad for the benefit of his country; a newswriter, he says, is

"is a man without virtue, who writes lies at home for his own profit. To these compositions is required neither genius nor knowledge, neither industry nor sprightliness; but contempt of shame and indifference to truth are absolutely necessary. He who by a long familiarity with infamy has obtained these qualities, may confidently tell to-day what he intends to contradict tomorrow; he may affirm fearlessly what he knows that he shall be obliged to retract, and may write letters from Amsterdam or Dresden to himself." (2)

The conclusion of these essays is in many cases the best part. Johnson was adept at finishing a paper with a flourish:

"Among the calamities of war may he justly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsenoods which interest dictates, and credulity encourages. A peace will equally leave the warrior and relator of wars destitute of employment; and I know not whether more is to be dreaded from streets filled with soldiers accustomed to plunder, or from garrets filled with scribblers accustomed to lie." (3)
Johnson felt the enormity of false news too strongly to write joosely about it, but over the 18th century equivalent of our "social page" he unbends. The accounts which attract his attention are those of marriages. Today we generally confine ourselves to remarking, whether or not it is true, that the bride looked lovely, or girlish, or charming, as our fancy dictates, and mentioning the fabric of which her dress was made. In Johnson's time not only was the wedding attire thoroughly reviewed, but the characters and accomplishments of both parties were commented upon:

"Many an eye, ranging over the paper with eager curiosity in quest of statesmen and heroes, is stopped by a marriage celebrated between Mr. Buckram, an eminent salesman in Threadneedle street, and Miss Dolly Jumper, the only daughter of an eminent distiller, of the parish of St. Giles's in the Fields, a young lady adorned with every accomplishment that can give happiness to the married state.

It was said of the family of Lucas, that it was noble, for all the brothers were valiant, and all the sisters were virtuous. What would a stranger say of the English nation, in which on the day of marriage all the men are eminent, and all the women beautiful, accomplished, and rich?" (1)

Here again the conclusion of the paper is very effective.

"My friend purposes to open an office in the Fleet for matrimonial panegyrics, and will accommodate all with praise who think their own powers of expression inadequate to their merit. He will sell any man or woman the virtue or qualification which is most fashionable or most desired; but desires his customers to remember, that he sells beauty at the highest price, and riches at the next, and if he be well paid, throws in virtue for nothing." (2)

1. I. 12. 2. Ib.
It is rather a surprise to discover that high-power advertising is not a twentieth century invention. In fact, Johnson says "The trade of advertising is now so near to perfection, that it is not easy to propose any improvement." (1) He points out that the first advertisements were a very good idea and were quite effective, but where one bright spirit had shown the way, everyone else could follow, and soon an advertisement had to stand out from its fellows to bring any results. "Promise, large promise," he says, "is the soul of an advertisement." He gives examples:

"And there are now to be sold, 'for ready money only, some duvets for bed-coverings, of down, beyond comparison superior to what is called otter-down,' and indeed such, that its many excellencies cannot be here set forth. 'With one excellence we are made acquainted—'it is warmer than four or five blankets, and lighter than one.'" (2)

He warns advertisers not to overreach themselves and promise too much. One gentleman, apparently the owner of a circus, advertises a genuine Mohawk Indian with all his regalia, "a sight worthy the curiosity of every true Briton!" Johnson comments:

"An Indian, dressed as he goes to war, may bring company together; but if he carries the scalping knife and tom-ax, there are many true Britons that will never be persuaded to see him but through a grate!" (3)

The superlatives he encounters worry him for a very characteristic reason. He wonders how posterity will ever determine who was telling the truth!

1. I. 40  2 & 3, lb.
The Idler affords us one more instance in support of the statement that there is nothing new under the sun. The United States did not invent the Marathon unless she can establish the fact that they were being held prior to 1758. In that year a lady undertook to ride on one horse a thousand miles in a thousand hours, and completed the distance in about two-thirds the stipulated time. "Acclamation shouted before her, and all the flowers of the spring were scattered in her way." Johnson feels that flowers as a reward for such an exploit are obsolete and inadequate. Had this lady lived in the golden age a wreath of bays would no doubt have been an ample reward.

"But fate has reserved her for a more enlightened age, which has discovered leaves and flowers to be transitory things."

He suggests that it would have been more suitable to strew a portion of the last mile with guineas. To be sure the country is at war, and pressed for money,

"But common rules are made only for common life, and some deviation from general policy may be allowed in favour of a lady that rode a thousand miles in a thousand hours." (1)

This irony is somewhat prophetic.

While social criticism does not bulk large in the essays, what there is is forceful and to the point. Johnson's preference for other topics probably led him to write serious condemnations only when his conscience insisted, and light social comment only when short of his favourite material and presented with a particularly flagrant piece of folly.

CHAPTER III

Poverty and Wealth

Dr. Johnson was probably as well fitted as any great author has ever been to write feelingly of poverty. He was very poor for a great part of his life; he was never really rich. Yet he avoids the subject of extreme poverty with great care, and writes paper after paper on the pros and cons of wealth. He may have refrained from treating indigence because his own experiences had been too painful to be recalled with any equanimity. Certainly his recollections were sufficiently vivid and painful to make him compassionate almost to a fault to the end of his days, when distress was brought to his notice.

Another possible reason for this omission is found in his odd belief that poverty, that is indigence, was unnecessary. That Johnson was a poor economist is proved by a number of statements found in the essays, all presenting the same idea as this quotation:

"... we know with certainty, that there is scarcely any individual entering the world, who, by prudent parsimony, may not reasonably promise himself a cheerful competence in the decline of life." (1)

We know now that those who entertained this belief were enjoying a fools' paradise, and that many hundreds who entered the world, far from being able to promise themselves even bare subsistence, were reasonably sure of starvation. Again, Johnson had a false idea of the industrial system if he really believed that there was always work enough to go round:

1. R. 57.
"When I look round upon those who are thus variously exerting their qualifications, I cannot but admire the secret concatenation of society that links together the great and the mean, the illustrious and the obscure; and consider with benevolent satisfaction, that no man, unless his body or mind be totally disabled, has need to suffer the mortification of seeing himself useless or burthensome to the community: he that will diligently labour, in whatever occupation, will deserve the sustenance he obtains, and the protection which he enjoys; and may lie down every night with the pleasing consciousness, of having contributed something to the happiness of life."

Anyone who was really persuaded that even under contemporary conditions no one need be without a cheerful competence but through his own fault could hardly be expected to devote pages to lamenting the sorrows of the poor and enjoining redistribution of wealth, and Johnson for the most part ignores the fertile subject of indigence.

In discussing the relative merits of wealth and poverty Johnson is careful to define his terms. He heaps scorn on the philosophers who, like the lady who didn't want to be rich, but wished she needn't look at every guinea, talk of the joys of poverty on £500 a year. "No man can, with any propriety, be termed poor, who does not see the greater part of mankind richer than himself." He would admit at once that real poverty, not Cowley's ideal poverty of £500 a year, is a hindrance, not only to happiness, but to virtue. He quotes Hooker as having said that destitution was "such an impediment to virtue, as, till it be removed, suffereth not the mind of man to admit any other care." Johnson is chiefly interested in determining whether one is happier with a modest competence or with the

wealth which is so eagerly sought after by everyone.

The essays are full of testimonies to the power of wealth. The fact that some of them are rather bitter, leads one to believe that in writing them Johnson was recalling some of the snubs and humiliations which he had suffered himself. Indeed the Ramblers on this subject were written when his finances were in a very unstable condition.

There are many papers on the power of wealth to bring attention to the old from potential legatees, and the moral drawn is that legacy hunting is a sport bad both temporally and spiritually. Probably the commonest theme in all the essays is the power of wealth to attract companions and respect. Melissa believes her popularity due to good temper and sprightly wit, but loses her fortune and finds her mistake.\(^1\) Serotiniius believes that Flavilla truly loves him, but his uncle leaves the estate to a younger brother and he finds out his mistake.\(^2\) Savage, Johnson says, found "how much is added to the lustre of genius by the ornaments of wealth."\(^3\)

It is interesting to note, however, that the testimonies to the fickleness of mankind where money or the lack of it are concerned are almost all letters from imaginary correspondents; not serious discussions, but simply satirical illustrations of a fact to which Johnson seems to have been exceptionally alive. His serious discussions all tend to the conclusion that

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1. R. 75
2. R. 192
3. Life of Savage
though wealth may bring power, it cannot bestow happiness -- a conclusion which may be considered trite and commonplace, but which is put before us by Johnson with such force and conviction that we do not mind hearing his decision several times in different words. There are also many letters testifying to the fact that riches, while they do mean power, do not mean felicity.

"The world, in its best state, is nothing more than a larger assembly of beings, combining to counterfeit happiness which they do not feel, employing every art and contrivance to embellish life and to hide their real condition from the eyes of one another." (1)

Wealth assists in this masquerade. Melissa says:

"It is impossible for those that have only known affluence and prosperity, to judge rightly of themselves or others. The rich and the powerful live in a perpetual masquerade, in which all about them wear borrowed characters; and we only discover in what estimation we are held, when we can no longer give hopes or fears." (2)

.....

"Whosoever shall look heedfully upon those who are eminent for their riches, will not think their condition such as that he should hazard his quiet, and must less his virtue, to obtain it. For all that great wealth generally gives above a moderate fortune, is more room for freaks of caprice, and more privilege for ignorance and vice, a quicker succession of flatteries, and a larger circle of voluptuousness." (3)

If indigence and wealth are alike to be dreaded as prejudicial to virtue and contentment, only a medium state remains in which happiness may be sought. Johnson believes that it will be found here and nowhere else.

1. Adv. 120
2. R. 75
3. R. 38.
"When therefore the desire of wealth is taking hold of the heart, let us look round and see how it operates upon those whose industry or fortune has obtained it. When we find them oppressed with their own abundance, luxurious without pleasure, idle without ease, impatient and querulous in themselves, and despised or hated by the rest of mankind, we shall soon be convinced that if the real wants of our condition are satisfied, there remains little to be sought with solicitude, or desired with eagerness." (1)

Many people who have never been rich and never expect to be after experiencing a day or two of enforced idleness can subscribe to the sound common sense of Johnson's dictum:

"And, surely, to far the greater number it is highly expedient, that they should by some settled scheme of duties be rescued from the tyranny of caprice, that they should be driven on by necessity through the paths of life with their attention confined to a stated task, that they may be less at leisure to deviate into mischief at the call of folly.

That kind of life is most happy which affords us most opportunities of gaining our own esteem; and what can any man infer in his own favour from a condition to which, however prosperous, he contributed nothing, and which the vilest and weakest of the species would have obtained by the same right, had he happened to be the son of the same father." (2)

It is amusing to find Johnson introducing one of his earlier papers on the love of money with the remark that no topic has received more attention from philosophers and moralists than this, and no vice has been combatted with less success. This is only the first of a series of additions to the philosophy of the subject; but we are loath to breathe the

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1. R. 58
suspicion of Johnson which he himself felt concerning the authors referred to, that they were themselves by no means free from the fault they deplored. His remarks ring true in all these papers, and we feel that he is genuinely convinced that the consequence bestowed by wealth is not happiness. There is no paragraph in the essays which bears the stamp of sincerity more clearly than this:

"Gold will turn the intellectual balance when weighed against reputation, but will be light and ineffectige when the opposite scale is charged with justice, veracity, piety."

With this conviction of the man's sincerity it is amusing to come to Boswell and find what he had to say on the subject a decade later on:

"Rousseau's treatise on the inequality of mankind was at this time a fashionable topic. It gave rise to an observation by Mr. Dempster, that the advantages of fortune and rank were nothing to a wise man, who ought to value only merit. Johnson. 'If man were a savage, living in the woods by himself, this might be true; but in civilized society we all depend upon each other, and our happiness is very much owing to the good opinion of mankind. Now, Sir, in civilized society, external advantages make us more respected. A man with a good coat upon his back meets with a better reception than he who has a bad one. ... In civilized society, personal merit will not serve you so much as money will. Sir, you may make the experiment. Go into the street, and give one man a lecture on morality, and another a shilling, and see which will respect you most. If you wish only to support nature, Sir William Petty fixes your allowance at three pounds a year; but as times are much altered, let us call it six pounds. This sum will fill your belly, shelter you from the weather, and even get you a strong, lasting coat, supposing it to be made of good bull's hide. Now, Sir, all beyond this is artificial, and is desired in order to
obtain a greater degree of respect from our fellow-creatures. And, Sir, if six hundred pounds a year procure a man more consequence, and, of course, more happiness than six pounds a year, the same proportion will hold as to six thousand, and so on, as far as opulence can be carried. Perhaps he who has a large fortune may not be so happy as he who has a small one, but that must proceed from other causes than from his having the large fortune: for, caeteris paribus, he who is rich in a civilized society, must be happier than he who is poor, as riches, if properly used (and it is a man's own fault if they are not,) must be productive of the highest advantages." (1)

At the first glance this seems almost directly contradictory to the extracts from the essays which appear above, but such is not in reality the case. Johnson was obviously arguing, as he often did, simply to make a point, and if pressed to reconcile these words with his previously expressed opinion that wealth was not conducive to happiness, he would undoubtedly have pointed out the saving sentence - "Perhaps he who has a large fortune may not be so happy as he who has a small one ... " and shown that "other causes" such as discontent and idleness, were inseparable from affluence.

Johnson's oriental tales are by no means all successful, but Rambler #120, in which he deals with the problem in question, ranks with the best numbers. Almamoulin has been brought up by a frugal father, upon whose death he discovers himself to be fabulously wealthy. He believes happiness to be his for the taking, but is gradually disillusioned, and finally seeks advice

1. Boswell (The Life of Samuel Johnson)
of the philosopher who never fails to appear at the conclusion of such a tale. In this case the sage sums up Johnson's theory of the utility of wealth in this manner:

"... thou hast suffered thy reason to be deluded by idle hopes, and fallacious appearances. Having long looked with desire upon riches, thou hast taught thyself to think them more valuable than nature designed them, and to expect from them, what experience has now taught thee, they cannot give. That they do not confer wisdom, thou mayest be convinced, by considering at how dear a price they tempted thee, upon thy first entrance into the world, to purchase the empty sound of vulgar acclamation. That they cannot bestow fortitude or magnanimity, that man may be certain, who stood trembling at Astracan, before a being not naturally superior to himself. That they will not supply unexhausted pleasure, the recollection of forsaken palaces, hollow and neglected gardens, will easily inform thee. That they rarely purchase friends, thou didst soon discover, when thou wert left to stand thy trial uncountenanced and alone. Yet think not riches useless; there are purposes to which a wise man may be delighted to apply them; they may, by a, rational distribution to those who want them, ease the pains of helpless disease, still the throbs of restless anxiety, relieve innocence from oppression, and raise imbecility to cheerfulness and vigour. This they will enable thee to perform, and this will afford the only happiness ordained for our present state, the confidence of divine favour, and the hope of future rewards." (1)
CHAPTER IV

Marriage

If it were possible to conceive of a country where the institution of marriage was totally unknown, and where the population was kept up to standard by an occasional gentle rain from heaven, it would be a most fascinating experiment to set before its inhabitants our literature dealing with marriage, inquiring just what they thought of the institution. There would be ample material for their examination, from the unfortunate record of the married life of Socrates to the modern problem novel on the married woman in business. The verdict would almost certainly be one of extreme thankfulness that such a curse had been spared the race. We have extraordinarily little literature in praise of the holy estate. This scarcity might be accounted for by the fact that no one capable of writing for posterity ever found it good. It is more probable, however, that the capable writer, having found it good, realized that he was harbouring a heresy, and moreover an unpopular heresy, and very wisely kept his own counsel. In short, it is conventional to appear to doubt the advantages of the married state, and happy marriages have no news value. For this reason Johnson's essays need not be taken as a complete index of his attitude towards marriage. Indeed, if taken too seriously they would cast an uncomplimentary light on his Tetty, which was certainly never intended.

Johnson points out in the first paper which deals with this subject that

"those who enter into that state can seldom forbear to express their repentance, and
their envy of those whom either chance or caution hath withheld from it." (1)

This he admits later to be rather exaggerated, but in the particular essay the exaggeration is necessary to the logic. Men have wielded the pen in the past with more success than women; hence the blame for this failure to find happiness in union has almost invariably been thrown upon the latter. However, the ladies possess in their charms far more powerful weapons for this fray than the men in their pens. Johnson is impervious to the one and cannot be deceived by the most plausible false philosophy of the other group, and he will judge the case. He admits that

"the general accumulation of the charge shows that married persons are not very often advanced in felicity;" and therefore (he concludes) "it may be proper to examine at what avenues so many evils have made their way into the world." (2)

The general conclusion at which Johnson arrives in all his essays on this subject is that while marriage is no doubt greatly overrated by those who have never tried it, it is quite unjustly maligned by people who suffer from misery not inherent in the state, but the logical result of their own behaviour on entering it. The chief reason for disappointment in marriage, according to these essays, is faulty selection of a partner, either from carelessness or from wrong motives. We are given a long list of examples. Prudentius was, as his name implies, of a cautious nature where money was concerned, and the only qualification he required in his wife was the possession of £10,000. With this

1. R. 18
2. Ib.
he was forced to take the encumbrance Furia, who was all that her name implies, and he found that the bargain had been a hard one.

Florentius happened to see Zephyretta in a chariot at a horserace, danced with her at night, was confirmed in his first ardour, and the affair was settled. Florentius was not punished as severely as Fredentius, as was fitting, since he had been guilty of folly rather than vice. Zephyretta was not a shrew, but merely afflicted with "childish insipidity," and a taste for flirtation. Prosapius married his housekeeper to maintain the line, and didn't find her socially desirable. Avaro married a woman of bad reputation in order to secure his uncle's fortune, and found the fortune dear at the price. Marriages forced upon daughters with no thought but the fortune of the suitor cannot be expected to prove anything but miserable. Johnson sums up the fruitful cause of unhappy marriage, careless selection, thus:

"The same reflection arises in my mind, upon observation of the manner in which marriage is frequently contracted. When I see the avaricious and crafty, taking companions to their tables and their beds without any inquiry, but after farms and money; or the giddy and thoughtless uniting themselves for life to those whom they have only seen by the light of tapers at a ball; when parents make articles for their children, without inquiring after their consent; when some marry for heirs to disappoint their brothers, and others throw themselves into the arms of those whom they do not love, because they have found themselves rejected where they were most solicitous to please; when some marry because their servants cheat them, some because they squander their own money, some because their houses are pestered with company, some because they will live like other people, and some only because they are sick of themselves, I am not so much inclined to
wonder that marriage is sometimes unhappy, as that it appears so little loaded with calamity; and cannot but conclude that society has something in itself eminently agreeable to human nature, when I find its pleasures so great, that even the ill choice of a companion can hardly overbalance them." (1)

To offset these rash and careless ones we have several most exemplary characters described by way of example. The first of these is an eminently sensible young man who, having been pressed by relatives to pay court to Anthea, took her among other friends for a day's picnic in order to observe her very closely. Anthea was certainly a most unreasonable young lady, as one extract from several pages devoted to her idiosyncrasies will prove:

"At last we got into the smooth road, and began to think our difficulties at an end, when, on a sudden, Anthea saw a brook before us, which she could not venture to pass. We were, therefore, obliged to alight, that we might walk over the bridge; but when we came to it, we found it so narrow, that Anthea durst not set her foot upon it, and was content, after long consultation, to call the coach back, and with innumerable precautions, terrours, and lamentations, crossed the brook." (2)

The prudent youth concludes his letter:

"I suppose, Sir, I need not inquire of you what deductions may be made from this narrative, nor what happiness can arise from the society of that woman who mistakes cowardice for elegance, and imagines allying delicacy to consist in refusing to be pleased." (3)

This gentleman retires after describing one lucky escape, but Hymenaeus refrains from writing until he is past the first bloom of youth, and recounts a whole series of disappointments.

1. R. 45
2. R. 34
3. Ib.
He was apparently a very select soul. We are told of fourteen different ladies to whom he paid his court, only to find that they failed to come up to standard in fourteen different ways. He was, however, a cautious soul, and having preserved a conscience void of offence, he very much resents his reputation as a jilt, which has resulted from the number and variety of his affairs of the heart:

"I never yet professed love to a woman without sincere intentions of marriage; that I have never continued an appearance of intimacy from the hour that my inclination changed, but to preserve her whom I was leaving from the shock of abruptness, or the ignominy of contempt; that I always endeavoured to give the ladies an opportunity of seeming to discard me; and that I never forsook a mistress for a larger fortune, or brighter beauty, but because I discovered some irregularity in her conduct, or some depravity in her mind; not because I was charmed by another, but because I was offended by herself." (1)

The unfortunate fact that fourteen ladies at first apparently suitable ladies failed to pass muster when subjected to a prolonged probation gives rise to the conviction that marriage for many men is probably very much like getting into a cold swimming pool - it must be done without undue consideration, or it will never be done at all. Occasionally the select individual will find the fifteenth woman "nobly planned" in every detail, but more often he will conclude that no such woman exists, which is probably fortunate for one member of the sex at least. However, Hymenaeus remained on the lookout for the perfect woman even after fourteen disappointments.

We proceed to Hymenaeus' feminine counterpart, Tranquilla. At first we are inclined to be sorry for this lady, when she

1. R.113.
announces herself as "subject for many years to all the hardships of antiquated virginity." In spite of the indignities of her position, she has, she says, preserved her temper uncorrupted, and has never railed against marriage. Then we come to the reason for her calm acceptance of what one might have supposed an entirely intolerable position. If she is single, it is not from necessity, but from choice. Fairly determined choice, too, it transpires, for we read (and here the last vestige of pity gives place to awe) of no less than thirty-four rejected lovers, a score more than Hymenaeus had had time to deal with. We hear of four in great detail, but the remaining thirty are pushed together in a most inadequate fashion:

"Many other lovers, or pretended lovers, I have had the honour to lead a while in triumph. But two of them I drove from me, by discovering that they had no taste or knowledge in musick; three I dismissed, because they were drunkards; two, because they paid their addresses at the same time to other ladies; and six, because they attempted to influence my choice by bribing my maid. Two more I discarded at the second visit for obscene allusions; and five for drollery on religion. In the latter part of my reign, I sentenced two to perpetual exile, for offering me settlements, by which the children of a former marriage would have been injured; four, for representing falsely the value of their estates; three for concealing their debts; and one, for raising the rent of a decrepit tenant." (1)

Tranquilla, however, could never have written Locksley Hall. That bereaved youth judged the whole sex by Amy. Tranquilla has thirty-four times the evidence against men, but like Hymenaeus, she is not downhearted.

"It is necessary to expose faults, that their

1. R. 119.
deformity may be seen; but the reproach ought not to be extended beyond the crime; nor either sex to be contemned, because some women, or men, are indelicate or dishonest." (1)

She only submits her story so that the ladies may have something to oppose to the tale of Hymenaeus.

Would that all women who take it upon themselves to champion their sex were as fully rewarded. What could be more natural than that Hymenaeus, a steady reader of the Rambler, should see in the author of number one hundred and nineteen the fifteenth woman? On making himself known, how could she fail to recognize him at once as the thirty-fifth man? So we have in Rambler number sixty-seven a joint letter announcing their approaching union. They have every expectation of happiness, and their chief reason for being sure of contentment is that experience has taught them not to expect too much:

"There is at least this reason why we should be less deceived in our connubial hopes than many who enter into the same state, that we have allowed our minds to form no unreasonable expectations, nor vitiated our fancies, in the soft hours of courtship, with visions of felicity which human power cannot bestow, or of perfection which human virtue cannot attain. That impartiality with which we endeavour to inspect the manners of all whom we have known was never so much overpowered by our passion, but that we discovered some faults and weaknesses in each other; and joined our hands in conviction, that as there are advantages to be enjoyed in marriage, there are inconveniences likewise to be endured; and that, together with confederate intellects and auxiliar virtues, we must find different opinions and opposite inclinations." (2)

1. R. 119.
2. R. 167.
The letter concludes with the statement that if, after all, they find that they are doomed to disappointment, they need not blame themselves, since they took every precaution, a claim the justice of which one feels must be granted.

Careful selection is the warning which runs through all Johnson's essays on this subject, and after all we have added very little to his theories since. After a long series of warning examples, he says:

"... all whom I have mentioned failed to obtain happiness, for want of considering that marriage is the strictest tie of perpetual friendship; that there can be no friendship without confidence, and no confidence without integrity; and that he must expect to be wretched, who pays to beauty, riches, or politeness, that regard which only virtue and piety can claim." (1)

Having insisted on the parties to the contract knowing what they are getting, and having shown that they can never know this surely where principle does not lend some stability, Johnson has no advice to offer as to the actual qualifications of the perfect husband or wife. However, in conclusion, we may quote an amusing passage from Boswell which gives some guidance on the selection of a wife, if one is prepared to ignore Boswell's dissent, in this case quite characteristic, from the Doctor's opinions:

"Although I had promised myself a great deal of instructive conversation with him on the conduct of the married state, of which I had then a near prospect, he did not say much upon that topick. Mr. Seward heard him once say, that 'a man has a very bad chance for happiness in that state, unless he marries a woman of very strong and fixed principles of religion.' He maintained to me contrary to the common notion, that a woman..."
would not be the worse wife for being learned; in which, from all that I have observed of Artemisia, I humbly differed from him. That a woman should be sensible and well informed, I allow to be a great advantage; and think that Sir Thomas Overbury, in his rude versification, has very judiciously pointed out that degree of intelligence which is to be desired in a female companion:

"Give me, next good, an understanding wife,
By Nature wise, not learned by much art;
Some knowledge on her side will all my life
More scope of conversation impart;
Besides, her inborne virtue fortifie;
They are most firmly good, who best know why." (1)

1. Boswell (The Life of Dr. Johnson)
"With all its drawbacks", says Leslie Stephen, "the moralizing is the best part of the Rambler." While venturing to disagree with the critic in his rather disparaging estimate of the periodical essays as a whole, one cannot deny the truth of this statement. It would be strange if it were otherwise. Johnson's unfettered taste for moralizing is betrayed by the fact that he devotes more papers to this pastime than to all his other subjects put together, and his range is as wide as creation. Thus even if it is not admitted that a man does best what he likes best to do, the amount of practice and experience gained would surely have made the later moral essays the best in the collection.

"Moral essays" is a phrase which may, and in the present case does, cover an infinity of subjects, from contemplation of death to the dangers of affectation. Moreover, the essays were for the most part, tossed off immediately before they were required, and the variety in subject matter is only equalled by the apparent variety in the moods of the author when he wrote. It is difficult to erect a system out of several hundred papers, all written at different times, and with no thought of the material being organized at a later date. There is repetition, and there are many apparent contradictions, but out of the mass of material one is able to select enough to see how Johnson thought the individual should live to himself, to others, and to his God. It seems convenient to deal with the regulation of individual life, internal and external, in this place, and to leave any interesting comments
on Johnson's religious beliefs for a later chapter. Johnson's religion was so very real and personal that it is difficult to deal with it in any connection save in the discussion of his character as we see it in these essays.

The system which Johnson sets up for the regulation of the inner life may not be brilliant or original (we have judgments from M. Taine, Sir Leslie Stephen, and others, to the effect that it is neither) but what use would it be if it were? The vital aspects of human behaviour and necessarily well worn by now, but are they necessarily trite because of that? The value of Johnson's theories lie in their sincerity, conviction, and the urgency with which they are recommended. Johnson did not claim originality for himself. He says, when dealing with that well-worn topic, the shortness of life, that hundreds of people have urged it before and hundreds will urge it again, and no one is apparently a whit more attentive to it for all these efforts, not even the philosophers themselves. This pessimistic conviction of the levity of his fellow-man made Johnson write at first like the man in Ezekiel, merely to save his soul alive, and in order to have something to write about, but his enthusiasm got the better of him, and it is doubtful whether anyone could read, seriously and attentively, a certain selection of his essays without a very definite, if temporary, mental readjustment. Thus, while we cannot expect anything revolutionary in the way of moral or philosophical teaching from these essays, we can and do find a good practical scheme for anyone who is interested in it, called so forcibly to the attention that many of his recommendations are unforgettable. Moreover, while Johnson's religion
would be regarded by many as painfully démodé, and his moral system as stiff, his ideas concerning happiness, or at least contentment, are surprisingly up to date in many respects, and it is in this department of his teaching that the majority of readers would find most to interest them.

If he had been writing for a 20th century audience with a knowledge of its tendencies and beliefs, Johnson would have had to modify his essays on the permanent well being of the individual considerably. In two discussions lately on the momentous questions of the futility of life and the respective merits of virtue and cleverness, the participants agreed to set immortality aside as illogical. If all reference to immortality were deleted from the periodical essays their moral teaching would be greatly reduced in bulk. Johnson was very conscious of his great task-master's eye, and he assumed that his readers, while they might be temporarily forgetful, were at heart quite as conscious of the claims of eternity as he. He does not endeavour to establish these claims, merely to display them.

The first essential to a well regulated life is a thorough knowledge of one's self. Johnson devotes a paper to inquiring:

"how far a nearer acquaintance with ourselves is necessary to our preservation from crimes as well as follies, and how much the attentive study of our own minds may contribute to secure to us the approbation of that Being, to whom we are accountable for our thoughts and actions, and whose favour must finally constitute our whole happiness." (1)

To know one's self is a difficult, and a well-nigh impossible task,

1. R. 28.
for we are so willing to be deceived with regard to our own vices and virtues, and to extenuate our own failings, that we set up a whole system of judgment which leads to the desired conclusion, that we are not so bad after all. In several essays Johnson deals with the main fallacies which we impose on ourselves and by which we endeavour to deceive others. We plume ourselves on virtues foreign to our nature by mistaking a single act, the impulse of the moment, for a habit. Thus the miser, who has once in a moment of generosity redeemed a friend from a debtors' prison, spends the rest of his life inveighing against the hard-heartedness of his close-fisted brethren. Inversely we persuade ourselves that habitual vices are really only occasional slips to which the best of us are liable. Then there are those who "confound the praise of goodness with its practice," and "forget how much more easily men may shew their virtue in their talk than in their actions." (1) It is also possible to deceive one's self by concentrating on the standard set by one's neighbour, instead of using the ideal set by religion by which to judge our moral worth. Concentration on the vices of others, if we select favourable specimens for study, makes our own seem mild, and a like judicious selection of acquaintances by whose attainments to judge our own progress towards positive virtue will keep us very well satisfied with ourselves. (2) No other individual can help us in this matter, for he will be prejudiced either in our favour or against us. The only way in which we may come to know our own limitations

1. R. 28
2. R. 76
is by careful self-examination, undertaken in solitude. Johnson would not be misunderstood in this matter of solitude, however. He heaps the greatest scorn on those romantics who exalt the pleasures of solitude over those of a cosmopolitan life. Upon Cowley announcing that he would like to bury himself in some "obscure retreat" in "some of our American plantations" Johnson inquired rather crushingly why he chose America if obscurity were all he desired - "he might have found, in his own country, innumerable coverts sufficiently dark to have concealed the genius of a Cowley." (1) Johnson recommends seasons of solitude and retirement in which to undertake self-examination because under no other conditions can we gain a true perspective from which to conduct our inquiries. His idea recurs throughout the essays. The whole of Rambler #7 is devoted to a discussion of retirement, and a paragraph may be quoted representative of Johnson's views on the subject:

"To facilitate this change of our affections, it is necessary that we weaken the temptations of the world, by retiring at certain seasons from it; for its influence arising only from its presence, is much lessened when it becomes the object of solitary meditation. A constant residence amidst noise and pleasure, inevitably obliterates the impressions of piety, and a frequent abstraction of ourselves into a state, where this life, like the next, operates only upon the reason, will reinstate religion in its just authority, even without those irradiations from above, the hope of which I have no intention to withdraw from the sincere and the diligent." (2)

1. R. 6
2. R. 7
To know our faults, Johnson feels, should be to mend them. Our character having been brought under observation and control, our thoughts must be reviewed. The importance of right thinking cannot be over-estimated:

"... by the natural frame of our bodies, and general combination of the world, we are so frequently condemned to inactivity, that as through all our time we are thinking, so for a great part of our time we can only think. Lest a power so restless should be either unprofitably or hurtfully employed, and the superfluities of intellect run to waste, it is no vain speculation to consider how we may govern our thoughts, restrain them from irregular motions, or confine them from boundless dissipation." (1)

Many people would exclaim at the theory that we can control our thoughts, but Johnson is perfectly sure that we can and should.

"He that would govern his actions by the laws of virtue, must regulate his thoughts by those of reason; he must keep guilt from the recesses of his heart." (2)

Johnson would not even have been satisfied with the scope of the famous apostolic injunction "Whatsoever things are lovely." He would have commended the sentiment but felt that it needed supplementing. He is even more selective than the apostle.

"But our ideas are more subjected to choice;" (than physical sensations) "we can call them before us, and command their stay, we can facilitate and promote their recurrence, we can either repress their intrusion or hasten their retreat. It is therefore the business of wisdom and virtue, to select among numberless objects striving for our notice, such as may enable us to exalt our reason, extend our views, and secure our happiness. But this choice is to be made with very little regard to rareness or frequency; for nothing is valuable merely because it is either rare or common, but because it is adapted to some useful purpose, and enables us to supply some deficiency of our nature." (3)
Being thus assured that we can and should control our thoughts, we examine the essays for some recommendation as to suitable subjects for meditation, and are rewarded with scores of essays enjoining concentration on the fleeting nature of life and the hour of death.

Johnson points out that we all know that life is short, and that the hour of death is steadily approaching us, but we none of us realize it. "Life is short" is an overworked aphorism, repeated by many who never think of regulating their behaviour upon it.

"... my readers ... will find it difficult to call a single man to remembrance, who appeared to know that life was short until he was about to lose it."

The advice of the bacchanalian writers, to make the most of the present hour, is good, only Johnson recommends employment of a slightly different nature. He points out that each day brings its peculiar task which if not performed then can never be performed.

"... it may be at least inculcated that pleasures are more safely postponed than virtues, and that greater loss is suffered by missing an opportunity of doing good than an hour of giddy frolic and noisy merriment." (1)

"Let him, who purposes his own happiness, reflect, that while he forms his purpose the day rolls on, and the night cometh when no man can work." (2)

In close relation to this advice are the repeated exhortations to meditate on death. Johnson speaks with considerable

1. R. 71
2. T. 43.
admiration of an oriental potentate who employed a domestic
whose sole duty was to stand in his chambers and cry out at
stated intervals "Remember, prince, that thou shalt die." He
says -

"A frequent and attentive prospect of the
moment, which must put a period to all our
schemes, and deprive us of all our acquisi-
tions, is indeed of the utmost efficacy to
the just and rational regulation of our lives;
nor would ever anything wicked, or often any-
thing absurd, be undertaken by him who should
begin every day with a serious reflection that
he is born to die." (1)

Johnson does not in this paper question the effectiveness of such
a method of keeping death before our eyes. However, there seems
little doubt that this sweet remembrancer would soon produce no
more shivers in his monarch than does the skull-and-crossbones
of a medical pennant in us. "Remember that thou shalt die" would
soon become just such another unrealized aphorism as "Life is
short." Elsewhere Johnson seems to realize the difficulty of
making men feel that they must one day die like everyone else:

"The only conviction that rushes upon the soul,
and takes away from our appetites and passions
the power of resistance, is to be found, where
I have received it, at the bed of a dying
friend. ...... He that desires to enter behind
the scene, which every heart has been employed
to decorate, and every passion labours to
illuminate, and wishes to see life, stripped
of those ornaments which make it glitter on
the stage, and exposed in its natural meanness,
impotence and nakedness, may find all the delusion
laid open in the chamber of disease: he will find
there vanity divested of her robes, power deprived
of her sceptre, and hypocrisy without her mask." (2)

Concentration on the hour of death cannot be considered a
particularly cheerful occupation, and the student of Johnson

might well ask what benefits one may expect to derive from it. Of course first and foremost Johnson would put preparation for an eternity. Mortals who realize that this is just a small part of their whole existence, and that their wellbeing throughout eternity depends upon the preparation made in this short space of time, should readily perceive that it is to their advantage to live with eternity always before them. However, even though this was Johnson's primary reason for bringing mortality before us, there are other desirable effects produced by a full consciousness of the fact that here we have no continuing city. By this means we may secure modification of all our passions. Johnson speaks of the radical readjustment effected in our ideas by the sudden approach of death.

"The extensive influence of greatness, the glitter of wealth, the praises of admirers, and the attendance of suppliants, have appeared vain and empty things, when the last hour seemed to be approaching, and the same appearance they would always have, if the same thought was always predominant. We should then find the absurdity of stretching out our arms incessantly to grasp that which we cannot keep, and wearing out our lives to add new turrets to the fabric of ambition when the foundations itself is shaking and the ground on which it stands mouldering away."

With lust of riches, power and eminence of all kinds gone, no room is left for envy of others who have achieved what we have ceased to desire. Even the passions which are more peculiar to the virtuous may be moderated in this way. Grief at the death of a friend must be lessened by the thought that one friend must always mourn for the other, and he is now spared the grief he must have felt at your death. Even fear is moderated by a clear realization of our mortality. According to Johnson death is the
worst fate that our enemies can devise for us, and as we must meet that fate soon in any case we should be able to face it calmly at any time. The moral he draws from this thought is that

"it cannot become a wise man to buy a reprieve at the expense of virtue, since he knows not how small a portion of time he can purchase."

These ideas about death strike one as being a trifle too academic. While we are all conscious of a sudden conviction of our mortality when death comes before us, we do not regard death with any more equanimity or pleasure than before, and while we may agree with Johnson that it is to our advantage to meditate upon it and prepare ourselves for it, we do not necessarily regard its immediate approach with any less aversion simply because we knew it must come eventually, and we are always ready to postpone it a little longer. In other words, we all feel a sneaking sympathy for the Irishman who ran from battle and explained afterwards that it was better to be a coward once than to be dead all the rest of your life. Johnson's theories are quite watertight if one believes as he believed that this life is a short pilgrimage, and when he wrote them he no doubt omitted to allow for the fact that future generations might not find eternity quite so real and important as he did, and this not from the carelessness which he hoped to lessen by his essays, but from reasoned scepticism. Johnson's essays on death are greatly affected by his personal character and beliefs, and we shall therefore have something to say of them in a later chapter.

Vital as Johnson considered preparation for eternity, he was too true to his age to slight the claims of this present life. The main topic dealt with here is naturally that of how to be
happy. We find essay after essay dealing with discontent and its causes, and suggesting remedies. To be happy it is essential to be on good terms with ourselves and with our fellowmen. In a former paragraph mention has been made of Johnson's discussions on the old recommendation "Know thyself", but there he referred to a knowledge of one's virtues and vices, that is, an estimate of one's worth from a moral standpoint. The command to know thyself is used again in the group of essays now under discussion, but here it refers to a correct estimate of one's ability with relation to one's fellowmen.

The question of what constitutes conceit is an age-old one, and almost as old is the problem of why it is that of two conceitedly and equally conceited people, one annoys and the other doesn't. It is useless to say that we are not annoyed by a person who has just grounds for a high opinion of himself, but only by one who is puffed up without reason, for we immediately recall countless examples of people whose gratification at their own achievements galled us far more because those achievements were too real to admit of contempt. Moreover, some members of the unduly self-satisfied class annoy us terribly and others merely amuse us. We are told by St. Paul not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, but to think soberly. Unfortunately it is often difficult to get our friends and acquaintances to agree exactly with our sober estimate of our own ability and attainments; so in this case the apostle's advice is not very helpful. Johnson has an explanation of the problem which may not be novel, but which one has not encountered before, and which seems to clear the
"The opinion which a man entertains of himself ought to be distinguished, in order to an accurate discussion of this question, as it relates to persons or to things. To think highly of ourselves in comparison with others, to assume by our own authority that precedence which none is willing to grant, must always be invidious and offensive; but to rate our powers high in proportion to things, and imagine ourselves equal to great undertakings, while we leave others in possession of the same abilities, cannot with equal justice provoke censure." (1)

Thus if we are careful never to introduce into our estimate the uncertain factor of another individual, but always to consider ourselves in relation to our positive achievements in the realm of things, we may escape censure for undue self satisfaction, and moreover, we have a fairly trustworthy guide as to what constitutes objectionable conceit in our neighbour. A just estimate of oneself is the first requisite to contentment.

In his essays on the search after happiness, Johnson does not condemn all dissatisfaction with our condition. He recognizes that there is a holy discontent. Some philosophers regard all happiness and unhappiness as entirely subjective, but Johnson is far too practical to take such a view. It is not always envy of another whose troubles we are ignorant that makes us miserable. We recognize vicissitudes in our own lives which lead us to believe that some states are happier than others; (1) but with a few reservations Johnson considers man as responsible for his state of mind -

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1. R. 63.
"No man can give to his own plantations the fragrance of the Indian groves; nor will any precepts of philosophy enable him to withdraw his attention from wounds or diseases. But that negative infelicity which proceeds, not from the pressure of sufferings, but the absence of enjoyments, will always yield to the remedies of reason." (1)

Thus he says of Cowley, who spoke of burying his sorrows on an American plantation:

"... he never suspected that the cause of his unhappiness was within, that his own passions were not sufficiently regulated, and that he was harassed by his own impatience, which could never be without something to awaken it, would accompany him over the sea, and find its way to his American Elysium. He would, upon the trial, have been soon convinced, that the fountain of content must spring up in the mind; and that he who has so little knowledge of human nature, as to seek happiness by changing any thing but his own dispositions, will waste his life in fruitless efforts, and multiply the griefs which he purposes to remove." (2)

Scattered throughout the essays we find suggested ways and means of combatting this "negative infelicity", and are warned against measures popularly employed which will only tend to make matters worse.

Probably the most common trick of the discontented, which adjective describes more or less accurately the great majority of mankind, is to live in the past or the future, anywhere but in the present:

"The time present is seldom able to fill desire or imagination with immediate enjoyment, and we are forced to supply its deficiencies by recollection or anticipation." (3)

1. Adv.
2. R. 6
3. R. 203
It is more usual to concentrate on the future because it is more "pliant and ductile" than the past -

"... the images which memory presents are of a stubborn and untractable nature, the objects of remembrance have already existed, and left their signature behind them impressed on the mind, so as to defy all attempts of rasure or of change." (1)

On the other hand, we can select what we think about in our future and can make everything turn out just as we wish. In the main this is a very bad habit indeed. If we must concentrate on the future, let our goal be a real castle in Spain which we never really hope to achieve, because then we will go on and work instead of sitting down and waiting for it (2). On the other hand some slight aim in the future is necessary and invigorating and makes for industry in the present, but the mean position of plans for the future too elaborate to be won by reasonable effort and yet just within the bounds of possibility stultify all endeavour. The danger of this indulgence is different with different dispositions:

"... to soothe the mind to tranquillity by hope, even when that hope is likely to deceive us, may be sometimes useful; but to lull our faculties in a lethargy is poor and despicable." (3)

In another essay (4) we find the effects of this habit discussed and a remedy suggested. When one has been forming the future to one's liking it is annoying to come back to reality and find everything just as it was before. The dreamer is

"called back to life by nature, or by custom, and enters peevish into society because he cannot model it to his own will." (5)

L. R. 41. 2. R. 5. 3. Adv. 69. 4. R. 89
(on this subject see also n. 5, 29, 71, I. 59.)
The only remedy for this disease is to be found in constant occupation:

"The great resolution to be formed, when happiness and virtue are formidably invaded, is, that no part of life be spent in a state of neutrality or indifference; but that some pleasure be found for every moment that is not devoted to labour; and that, whenever the necessary business of life grows irksome or disgusting, an immediate transition be made to diversion and gaiety." (1)

The present is, after all, all that we can call our own, and the time will come, however long our life, when we have no future. Then "virtue will be all that we can recollect with pleasure." (2) How better then, asks Johnson, can we spend the present than by storing up acts of virtue against that time?

Another "dorit" for those who would be content is an injunction to refrain from comparing ourselves with people apparently happier.

"Few are placed in a situation so gloomy and distressful as not to see every day beings yet more forlorn and miserable, from whom they may learn to rejoice in their own lot." (3)

It is dangerous also to plan pleasure. There are several papers warning against this. Seged of Ethipoea planned a week of perfect happiness, the record of which is given in Ramblers 204 and 205.

The story, says Johnson, was bequeathed to posterity by Seged

"that no man hereafter may presume to say, 'This day shall be a day of happiness.'"

The Idler tells us

"Pleasure is very seldom found where it is sought. Our brightest blazes of gladness are commonly kindled by unexpected sparks." (4)

1. R. 89
2. R. 41
3. R. 186
4. I. 58
Turning to positive measures which are recommended for fostering contentment we find one most reasonable piece of advice which all would endorse but which all have not the strength of mind to follow, and that is a recommendation to constant activity.

"The gloomy and resentful are always found among those who have nothing to do, or who do nothing." (1)

In one essay we find the germ of an idea which while possibly not particularly novel in any age, Carlyle thought it worth while to elaborate with some detail in Sartor Resartus when he propounded the theory of the numerator and the denominator of human happiness:

"Every man is rich or poor according to the proportion between his desires and enjoyments; any enlargement of wishes is therefore equally destructive to happiness with the diminution of possession; and he that teaches another to long for what he shall never obtain, is no less an enemy to his quiet, than if he had robbed him of part of his patrimony." (2)

While it is rather a counsel of perfection not to long for anything you cannot have, yet the principle of contraction of desire is one which could hardly be omitted from any discussion on the search for contentment.

The most practical piece of advice which Johnson has for the discontented, and indeed for everyone, discontented or otherwise, is that they cultivate internal resources which will make them as nearly as possible independent of their fellow men and of circumstance. It must not be inferred from this that Johnson despised

1. I. 72
2. R. 163
the pleasure which society could bring. There is such a weight
of evidence against this idea both in his writings and in his
life that it cannot be entertained for a moment. His idea is
simply that in the last analysis a man is dependent on himself
for entertainment and if he has never learned to enjoy his own
company, he will infallibly be miserable for a great part of his
life. Johnson had illustrations of this fact before him in the
members of the fashionable world who complained bitterly of the
dreariness of the summertime, unfortunates who were

"without any retreat, but to the gloom of
solitude, where they will yet find greater
inconveniences, and must learn, however un-
willingly, to endure themselves." (1)

(2) Euphelia is a fair representative of this unfortunate class. In
an evil hour she varied her usual programme of nine months in
town and three at Richmond, and having heard of the pleasures of
the country arranged to spend three months with an aunt in a
remote county. Two papers are devoted to her misery. If diagnosis
is the first step to recovery, Euphelia is not a hopeless case, for
she rather surprisingly knows almost at once what is the matter,
and announces her discovery in dignified Johnsonian language:

"The novelty of the objects about me pleased
me for a while, but after a few days they
were new no longer, and I soon began to
perceive that the country was not my element;
that shades, and flowers, and lawns, and
waters, had very soon exhausted all their
power of pleasing, and that I had not in
myself any fund of satisfaction, with
which I could supply the loss of my custom-
ary amusements."

This paper is only one of a large number, some, like it, of an
illustrative character, and others purely theoretical, urging the
the necessity of internal resources.

"The necessity of erecting ourselves to some degree of intellectual dignity, and of preserving resources of pleasure, which may not be wholly at the mercy of accident, is never more apparent than when we turn our eyes upon those whom fortune has let loose to their own conduct; who, not being chained down by their condition to a regular and stated allotment of their hours, are obliged to find themselves business or diversion, and having nothing within that can entertain or employ them, are compelled to try all the arts of destroying time." (1)

Many of Johnson's theories are quite familiar, and others seem to us a trifle unpractical, but to Johnson they were neither platitudes nor mere empirical fancies. These essays give us piecemeal the system which he had erected for himself, painfully and laboriously, and by which he lived. Their value for us is enhanced by Boswell's praise of Johnson's indifference to bodily discomfort when travelling - "It pleased me to see that the Rambler could practice so well his own lessons." (2)

Johnson did not devote nearly so much attention to man's relations with his fellows, and the regulation of external behaviour, as to the inner life. Unlike the Spectator, who looked about him and told what he saw, the Rambler turned his attention inwards and tried to explain what went on about him by analogy with his own experience. The result is the preponderance of theoretical and abstract papers already remarked. However, he has some advice for us here as well as in the regulation of the ingental life.

2. Boswell - Tour to the Western Islands of Scotland
It is not surprising that to Johnson the unpardonable sin in mixing with others should be affectation. After all, affection is a form of deception, and Johnson's ruling passion was a most scrupulous regard for the truth. There are more than half a dozen papers on this subject, some making out reasoned cases against affectation and others merely ridiculing it. Johnson was not at his best when writing in a humorous vein, but Adventurer #84, in which he describes a journey in a stage coach, is exceptionally good.

"In a stage coach the passengers are for the most part wholly unknown to one another, and without expectation of ever meeting again when their journey is at an end; one should therefore imagine, that it was of little importance to any of them, what conjectures the rest should form concerning him. Yet so it is, that as all think themselves free from detection, all assume that character of which they are most desirous, and on no occasion is the general ambition of superiority more apparently indulged."

On this particular journey there were four men and two women. They would not talk on the road, since each feared losing caste by conversation with social inferiors. However, when they arrived at the inn where they were to spend the night, they made up for their silence

"by innumerable questions and orders to the people that attended us."

At last, when seated round the same table, conversation became general, and each vied with the others in producing an impression of importance. One man told of his experience with my Lord Mumble and the Duke of Tinterden. A lady complained of the hardships of travel for one who was accustomed to sit at home
amid a bevy of attendants. The whole party was now on its metal. Another man called for the newspaper to look at the stocks and spoke of the twenty thousand pounds he had just sold and the thirty thousand he would buy next week. These revelations, instead of producing veneration, excited emulation, and the whole party rose rapidly in the social scale throughout a four days' journey, at the end of which it transpired that the three who have been given special notice were respectively a nobleman's butler, the proprietress of a cookshop, and a clerk on the exchange. By this behaviour these people hoped to secure respect and guard themselves against contempt, but the folly of expecting such a result is made apparent elsewhere:

"He that stands to contemplate the crowds that fill the streets of a populous city, will see many passengers whose air and motion it will be difficult to behold without contempt and laughter; but if he examines what are the appearances that thus powerfully excite his risibility, he will find among them neither poverty nor disease, nor any involuntary or painful defect. The disposition to derision and insult is awakened by the softness of roppery, the swell of insolence, the line-lieness of levity, or the solemnity or grandeur; by the sprightly trip, the stately stalk, the formal strut, and the lofty mien; by gestures intended to catch the eye, and by looks elaborately formed as evidences of importance." (1)

Immunity from contempt must be sought by other means than affectation if we do not wish to defeat our own ends:

"There is scarcely any man without some valuable and improveable qualities by which he may secure himself from contempt." (2)

1. R. 179
2. R. 20
The conclusion of the essay on the stage coach is effective and sums up the lesson which Johnson hopes to teach: who

"But, Mr. Adventurer, let not those laugh at me and my companions, think this folly confined to a stage coach. Every man in the journey of life takes the same advantage of the ignorance of his fellow travellers, disguises himself in counterfeit merit, and hears those praises with complacency which his conscience reproaches him for accepting. Every man deceives himself, while he thinks he is deceiving others; and forgets that the time is at hand when every illusion shall cease, when fictitious excellence shall be torn away, and all must be shown to all in their real estate."

An essay against eccentricity from Johnson seems to savour strongly of the proverbial quotation of a scripture from the Prince of Darkness; nevertheless we have in the hundred and thirty-first Adventurer a reasoned and interesting case against this quality. It should be noted that Johnson is dealing more with habits calculated to shock or annoy our friends than with such harmless oddities as tapping every lamp post passed with one's walking-stock. It might be argued, however, that unlovely eating, and unexpected confiscation of other peoples' shoes should come within the scope of the eccentricity which he heartily condemns.

There are many other interesting essays on the various phases of our relations with our fellowmen; these are not, however, sufficiently novel in character to repay detailed discussion. It is worth while to glance briefly at the topics which Johnson considered most worthy of attention in this connection. We find a strong condemnation of anger, whether it comes in sudden peevish outbursts or whether it is of the more
enduring malignant type. Conversely, we find in several essays strong recommendations towards unfailing good humour and vigilance against the dangerous habit of peevishness. Johnson has no sympathy with those who would mock at good manners:

"Wisdom and virtue are by no means sufficient, without the supplemental laws of good breeding, to secure freedom from degenerating into rudeness, or self esteem from swelling into insolence." (1)

In the periodical essays may be found straightforward discussions of problems of behaviour which are always with us, discussions which are not rendered unintelligible to nine-tenths of the reading public by the use of modern psychological jargon. The essays are not read very much nowadays, and they are no doubt considered out of date, but it may be questioned whether human nature itself has changed sufficiently to render many of Johnson's theories inapplicable. Indeed, many of his theories are far more à propos now than they were a hundred years ago, and may quite well see a new period of popularity in the years ahead as the literary wheel of fortune completes the revolution which has kept them partially obscured for so long.
CHAPTER VI

Johnson in the Periodical Essays

If Johnson had lived a hundred years later - fate could hardly have played him an unkind trick - and had he proved true to the trend of his age, a chapter on his character and circumstances as revealed in his works would be a lengthy and detailed affair. Many of the romantics were passionately interested in themselves, and saw no reason why the reading public should not share this taste. Thus whole books are written on the particular dates to which certain episodes in "The Prelude" must be assigned, while Johnson would have scorned to spend the best years of his life writing a poem about himself. However, it is true of all branches of art, that the worker must reveal himself to some extent whether he wishes to or not, and Johnson would have found it harder than most of his contemporaries to hide his light under a bushel, for it was a particularly conspicuous one.

It must be remembered when tracing Johnson's character through his works that almost ever one who reads anything by this author comes to him with a picture of Boswell's Johnson, gained either from reading Boswell himself or from the hearsay which always circulates in connection with a traditional character like Dr. Johnson. Thus when we come across a particularly shrewd bit of criticism and we say admiringly "How like Johnson!" we should remember that but for Boswell's completion of the picture showing the amiability that balanced the shrewdness, we should probably say, "The man may have been clever, but he must have had an ill-natured disposition." It is dangerous to read an author's character from
his work in much detail unless we can supplement and balance our findings by a reliable account written by someone who knew him. In this case we can make few complaints of the material at our disposal. It is usually, however, much safer to hazard guesses in connection with an author's circumstances, and his beliefs, at any rate his beliefs at the time of writing the passage under examination, we may assume to be put down with all the accuracy at his command.

The periodical essays are in many ways a poor choice to make from which to look for passages characteristic of their author as a man, because they represent some of his earliest work when he seems to have been extremely careful to hide himself from his readers. There were two good reasons why he would do so. First because he lacked confidence as an author, and his very self-consciousness would be the most effective barrier between him and his public; and second, because he was having a very hard time when most of these essays were written, living often from hand to mouth, and even had his pride not insisted on concealment, he no doubt felt that there was nothing in him that would aid in recommending his work to the public. The Rambler, however, is intentionally very fruitful of information as to his beliefs, and though it is by no means universally true that the beliefs make the character, it is certainly true that in Johnson's case they make a great part of it. When we come to the Idler there has been a great progression and we have fewer formal statements of the author's views, and more essays which reveal
unintentionally many glimpses of Boswell's Johnson. Probably Johnson did not write with absolute freedom and lack of a hampering self-consciousness until the later days of "The Lives of the Poets."

Something has been said in a previous chapter in reference to Johnson's religious beliefs as they affected the plan he laid down for others, but they were so important to him, and affected his character so profoundly, as to deserve some mention here. It is written that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many great, not many noble are called," and history seems to confirm this statement, particularly with regard to literary wisdom and greatness. A glance over the really great men of English literature would almost lead one to the theory that literary greatness, especially poetic genius, and religious fervour, were mutually exclusive, they have so seldom been combined in one individual. However, although in a decided minority, Johnson is in very good company in this respect, for if religious fervour did not interfere with Milton's poetry it would be hard if it hampered Johnson's prose.

The most remarkable thing about the essays on religion is their confident, not to say glib, tone. But for the tone of personal conviction which many of them possess, the reader would conclude that they were the work of an ordinary orthodox Anglican, whose conventional acquiescence to a popular creed made him feel that a large collection of essays owed some space to religious topics. This was far from the case.
John Bailey has a paragraph on this topic well worth quoting:

"He (Johnson) lived among good men, mainly, but men, for the most part, whose intellectual attitude towards the Christian faith was one of detachment, indifference, or conventional acquiescence. That could not be his attitude. He was the last man in the world to be content with anything nebulous. The active exercise of thinking was to him a pleasure in all matters, and in things important a duty as well. He was certain not to avoid it in the most important question of all. He might have been either Hume or Butler, either Wesley or Gibbon, but he was certain not to be, what the average cultivated man of his day was, a respectable but unenthusiastic and unconvincing conformer. Conventional acquiescence is easy provided a man does not choose to think or inquire; but, as Carlyle said, that would not do for Johnson: he always zealously recommended and practised inquiry. The result was what is well known. His mind settled definitely on the opposite side to Hume and Gibbon; the Christian religion became intensely real to him, sometimes, it almost seems, the nightmare of his life, often its comfort and strength, present, at any rate, audibly and visibly, in every company where he was; for no man was ever so little ashamed of his religion as Johnson." (1)

The beginning of a religious experience is usually a sense of sin and the inadequacy of the individual to cope with it.

A number of the Rambler is devoted to repentance. Part of the opening paragraph is enough to illustrate the highly confident tone of the religious essays:

"That to please the Lord and Father of the Universe, is the supreme interest of created and dependent beings, as it is easily proved, has been universally confessed; and, since all rational agents are conscious of having neglected or violated the duties prescribed to them, the fear of being rejected, or punished by God, has always burdened the human mind. The expiation of crimes, and renovation of the forfeited hopes of divine favour, therefore constitute a large part of every religion." (2)
Many people would find arguable propositions in some of the facts Johnson finds so easy of proof. Johnson proceeds to explain the nature of repentance -

"Repentance is the relinquishment of any practice, from the conviction that it has offended God."

Johnson draws a parallel between the remorse and fright we feel when we find we have committed an act which places our life or our welfare in jeopardy and that we should feel in endangering our immortal souls. The author's firm belief in eternal punishment for the unrepentant is expressed in many places. It is not supported or made a subject of argument but merely regarded as a fact:

"If, therefore, he whose crimes have deprived him of the favour of God, can reflect upon his conduct without disturbance, or can at will banish the reflection; if he who considers himself as suspended over the abyss of eternal perdition only by the thread of life, which must soon part by its own weakness, and which the wing of every minute may divide, can cast his eyes round him without shuddering with horror, or panting with security; what can he judge of himself, but that he is not yet awakened to sufficient conviction, since every loss is more lamented than the loss of the divine favour, and every danger more dreadful than the danger of final condemnation?" (1)

Once the individual is in a state of repentance toward God he must maintain his position by the solitary prayer, meditation and self-examination which we have already found recommended for the regulation of the inner life. Johnson is quite convinced of the superiority of his own (the Anglican) theological standards and ritual observances. The thirty-third Idler puts his views quite clearly:
"The academies, as they are presumptuously styled, are too low to be mentioned; and foreign seminaries are likely to prejudice the unwary mind with Calvinism. But English universities render their students virtuous, at least by excluding all opportunities of vice; and, by teaching them the principles of the Church of England, conform them in those of true Christianity."

On the other hand, although he would probably have allowed very little variation from the actual creeds and dogmas, held, the ninetieth Idler shows surprising tolerance as to the less essential matter of the way in which people regulate the externals of religious observance. The essay opens with a characteristic plea for propriety and dignity and a deprecation of the value of gesticulation when used to emphasize the spoken word -

"When the Frenchman waves his hands and writhes his body in recounting the revolutions of a game at cards, or the Neapolitan, who tells the hour of the day, shews upon his fingers the number which he mentions; I do not perceive that their manual exercise is of much use, or that they leave any image more deeply impressed by their bustle and vehemence of communication."

Johnson does not dismiss the subject with this, but admits that "The senses are more powerful as the reason is weaker," and hence suitable actions might aid in impressing facts on a stupid audience.

"It is perhaps the character of the English to despise trifles; and that art may surely be accounted a trifle which is at once useless and ostentatious, which can seldom be practised with propriety, and which, as the mind is more cultivated, is less powerful. Yet as all innocent means are to be used for the propagation of truth, I would not deter those who are employed in preaching
It is interesting to note that in the only essay Johnson writes in which he troubles to bring forth arguments for a future life (1), the point he raises is the necessity of equalization. We are so accustomed to thinking of Johnson as the cheerful conversationalist that we often forget that his was in reality a very unhappy life. Even had external circumstances conspired to make him happy, which was far from being the case, he would still have felt that he was owed some arrears of happiness because he was so tortured from within all his life long both by fear of death and fear of madness. Thus in another essay he speaks with confidence of the security and happiness of a future life:

"It is not therefore from this world, that any ray of comfort can proceed, to cheer the gloom of the last hour. But futurity has still its prospects; there is yet happiness in reserve, which, if we transfer our attention to it, will support us in the pains of disease, and the languor of decay. This happiness we may expect with confidence, because it is out of the power of chance, and may be attained by all that sincerely desire and earnestly pursue it. On this therefore every mind ought finally to rest. Hope is the chief blessing of man, and that hope only is rational, of which we are certain that it cannot deceive us."(1)

Johnson wrote very little in the essays about himself, but when the reader is already in possession of the facts with regard to his life, passages are often recognized as being
peculiarly full of meaning when coming from his pen. Representative of these are several paragraphs dealing with pain and ill health, of which he had far more than his fair share. The only recommendation he can make for the lightening of suffering is patience. Here indeed he says himself open to the charge of triteness, but a moment's consideration recalls the fact that while we all know that patience is a virtue and are acquainted with many writers who recommend it in glowing terms, few of us have had such occasion to prove its worth as Johnson, and probably none of us have been so consistently controlled by it. He admits that severe physical is the sharpest test of patient submission, and feels that more indulgence is due to those suffering in such a way than to the victims of any other kind of misfortune. Even here, however, self-control need never be despaired of:

"... lest we should think ourselves too soon entitled to the mournful privileges of irresistible misery, it is proper to reflect, that the utmost anguish which human wit can contrive, or human malice can inflict, has been borne with constancy; and that if the pains of disease be, as I believe they are, sometimes greater than those of artificial torture, they are therefore in their own nature shorter; the vital frame is quickly broken, or the union between soul and body is for a time suspended by insensibility, and we soon cease to feel our maladies when they once become too violent to be borne. I think there is some reason for questioning whether the body and mind are not so proportioned, that the one can bear all that can be inflicted on the other, whether virtue cannot stand its ground as long as life, and whether a soul well principled will not be separated sooner than subdued." (1)

Indeed, physical and even mental ills may be endured with

1. R. 32.
whatever equanimity the individual can summon, not only because this attitude mitigates the suffering, but because there is really something to be gained from the ordeal:

"That misery does not make all virtuous, experience too certainly informs us, but it is no less certain that of what virtue there is, misery produces far the greater part. Physical evil may be therefore endured with patience, since it is the cause of moral good; and patience itself is one virtue by which we are prepared for that state in which evil shall be no more." (1)

His enthusiastic praise of health could only come from one who had known what it was to do without it. Probably few passages in the essays are more strictly autobiographical than this:

"There are perhaps very few conditions more to be pitied than that of an active and elevated mind, labouring under the weight of a distempered body. The time of such a man is always spent in forming schemes, which a change of wind hinders him from executing, his powers fume away in projects and in hope, and the day of action never arrives. He lies down delighted with the thoughts of to-morrow, please his ambition with the fame he shall acquire, or his benevolence with the good he shall confer. But in the night the skies are overcast, the temper of the air is changed, he wakes in languir, impatience, and distraction, and has no longer any wish but for ease, nor any attention but to misery." (2)

His readers are counselled with all the feeling of a man who has known a great deal of sickness to protect their health as their most valuable possession.

It has been remarked that Johnson made very little use of his own personal experiences in his essays except as they con-

1. I. 89
2. R. 48
tributed to his general knowledge and ability to generalize on
the lives of others. However, there are two outstanding excep-
tions. One is an essay on friendship, suggested, we are told, by Garrick, and the other was written on the death of his mother.

The relationship existing between Johnson and Garrick might form the subject of a very lengthy discussion which would contain numerous expressions of Johnson's regard for Garrick, and also numerous instances of distinct dissatisfaction with the great actor. No doubt Johnson had some cause for complaint against his former pupil, but he had also a very sincere regard and respect for him, for he admitted Boswell's accusation, that he allowed no one to attack Garrick but himself.

The two hundredth Rambler bears Chalmers' footnote:

"The character of Prospero, it is universally acknowledged, was intended for Garrick, who, says Mr. Boswell, never 'entirely forgave its pointed satire.'"

One can hardly be surprised at Garrick's unforgiving attitude if Johnson really considered this essay in the light of a char-
acter sketch of his former friend and benefactor.

The essay is in the form of a letter from one Asper, who complains at the treatment he has received at the hands of a former friend now suddenly become rich. Having been urged to call, he does so, and is kept waiting for some time at the door. He is then shown up past numerous grand rooms of which the doors are left standing open, to a small apartment at the

1. In the 1806 edition.
back, in which Prospero says he always breakfasts when he has not great company. Prospero then displays some of his treasures to Asper with great affectation of superiority. Asper makes many efforts to retain a friendly tone in the conversation, and on praising the tea is told that another time he shall taste the finest sort, but at the moment there is only enough of it left for particular visitors. During the conversation Prospero often breaks off with some inquiry about tradesmen, and reminds the servant that if Lord Lofty calls he is to be shown into the best parlour. Asper leaves his friend determined never to see him again unless he is recalled to his understanding. Johnson makes the essay far more galling for its object by appending a page of cool and reasonable advice to his imaginary correspondent, telling him not to condemn Prospero so quickly -

"Such improprieties often proceed rather from stupidity than malice."

This essay is a puzzling one for many reasons. If it was admittedly an attack on Garrick, as Chalmers's footnote would have it, it seems odd that relations were no more strained than they were in the years that followed. Moreover, that the attack can have been a just one seems most doubtful, because the account of Garrick agrees so poorly with the known facts in connection with his treatment of Johnson. It must be recollected that the essay was written only a year or two after Garrick had at some trouble and risk produced Johnson's Irene at the Drury-lane theatre. A year or two after the publication of the essay he celebrated the Dictionary with a complimentary epigram commenting
on the fact that Johnson had done alone for English what it took forty Frenchmen to do for France.

The most plausible explanation of the puzzle seems to be that Johnson, who was abnormally sensitive about such things, imagined slights where none were intended. His complaints at Prospero's enthusiasm about his carpets and furniture and china might well have sprung from annoyance at perfectly harmless pleasure on the part of the rather buoyant actor. The feeling that he was slighted might easily be the result of a conviction on Garrick's side that his former teacher would not mix well with his London acquaintances and an effort on his part, out of consideration for Johnson as much as for the impression the encounter would have on his fashionable friends, to keep them separate. Certainly it is difficult to find in Boswell's pages any justification for the accusations found in the essay in question, nor do his pages contain any further accusations from Johnson of even remotely comparable severity. One can only conclude that the essay was written in a fit of pique after some unfortunate and probably accidental affront to Johnson's extremely sensitive pride, and that Garrick was willing to overlook its tone.

An essay which bears the unmistakable stamp of personal experience is the forty-first Idler, written the week of his mother's death. It is in the form of a letter from an imaginary correspondent because the Idler felt "no disposition to provide for this day any other entertainment." It is not remarkable except for the feeling with which it is written. Others suffering
from such losses are recommended to the consolations of religion.

There are many indications of Johnson's tastes and peculiarities to be found in the essays, and these are often more characteristic and revealing than formally expressed religious or theological theories. The most interesting example of this may be found in the frequency with which he published essays on the delights of conversation. In an early number of the Rambler he canvasses various means of employing spare time in the winter, and comes to the characteristic conclusion:

"It is scarcely possible to pass an hour in honest conversation, without being able, when we rise from it, to please ourselves with having given or received some advantages; but a man may shuffle cards, or rattle dice, from noon to midnight, without tracing any new idea in his mind, or being able to recollect the day by any other token than his gain or loss, and a confused remembrance of agitated passions, and clamorous altercations." (1)

There are several good essays on various types of conversationalists, with hints on how to make the conversation most acceptable. One feels, however, that conversationalists are born, not made, and while Johnson's classification is very neat and interesting, and his advice no doubt sound, it arouses no desire to hear a conversation conducted according to his rules. (2) The thirty-fourth Idler seems more what we expect from a conversationalist like Johnson, when he likens conversation to punch, of which he was extremely fond:

"The spirit, volatile and fiery, is the proper emblem of vivacity and wit; the acridity of the lemon will very aptly figure pungency of raillery, and the acrimony of censure; sugar is the natural representative of luscious adulation and gentle complaisance; and water
is the proper hieroglyphick of easy prattle, innocent and tasteless."

He proceeds to show how unpleasant each ingredient is alone, but how delightful is the combination.

"He only will please long, who, by tempering the acidity of satire with the sugar of civility, and allaying the heat of wit with the frigidity of humble chat, can make the true punch of conversation; and, as that punch can be drunk in the greatest quantity which has the largest proportion of water, so that companion will be oftenest welcome, whose talk flows out with inoffensive copiousness, and unenvied insipidity."

The closing sentence sounds rather as if Johnson had been forgetting himself for the sake of a good repartee, and was resolving to do better in future. In some reported conversations the impression received is that Johnson was inclined to contribute more than his fair share of lemon when conversational punch was brewed.

It is fortunate that we are so little dependent upon the essays for information about Johnson himself, for though they give many suggestions which may become interesting in the light of facts taken from other sources, they are decidedly barren of the sort of detail which enables us to form a picture of an author.
CHAPTER VII

The Author and The Patron

A large number of the essays deal with different aspects of authorship. They are not, however, the aspects we should at first expect Johnson to be interested in. Knowing how thorny a path he climbed before he reached the comparative affluence of a pension in 1762, we should expect some advice to those following after that might aid them in avoiding some of the more prickly spots, but we find nothing so material. Johnson's eye is no the moral and spiritual welfare of contemporary England and of posterity, on the integrity and self respect of the author, but never on his pocket book. We do not find the reason for this in a petty jealousy which forbade Johnson smoothing paths for others which had been rough for him. Nothing could have been less like him. The selection of subject matter in this case is almost certainly due to the same reason as that assigned for the lack of any strikingly personal material in the essays. When he wrote many of them his own hard time was not over, and his pride would not permit him to obtrude his personal condition on his readers. Moreover, he no doubt felt with some reason that until he was able to fill his own purse he had very little reason to write essays on how others might be more successful than he. He had no infallible scheme to offer by which an author might win fame, but he had what to do him justice was far more important to him throughout his career than the state of his private fortunes, and that was a strict code by which an author might preserve his integrity and self respect and contribute so far as his ability
permitted to the welfare of others. It is this code which he transmits piecemeal through certain numbers of all three collections of essays.

Johnson had very definite, not to say cut-and-dried, notions about the equipment of an author. He had no patience with people of Grey's temperament, who could write at one time and not at another. A disinclination which Grey would have attributed to the frown of his Muse, Johnson would account for by laziness or ignorance or both. In the eighty-fifth Adventurer he goes to Bacon for his text for a sermon on the preparation and equipment of the author - "reading maketh a full man, conversation a ready man, and writing an exact man." The arguments he puts forward for reading are not particularly novel. He remarks rather ingeniously, though the logic is not conclusive - "It will, I believe, be found invariably true, that learning was never decried by any learned man, and what credit can be given to those, who venture to condemn that which they do not know?" Exact and adequate knowledge having been attained the subject is properly grasped only by the use of two mutually corrective exercises, conversing and writing. Conversing, especially argument, almost always leads to inaccuracy and exaggeration for the sake of victory. Writing corrects this tendency - "

"in conversation we naturally diffuse our thoughts, and in writing we contract them; method is the excellence of writing and unconstraint the grace of conversation - To read, to write and converse in due proportions, is therefore, the business of a man of letters."
We have the qualifications of the writer treated in even more cut-and-dried fashion in another essay:

"The first qualification of a writer, is a perfect knowledge of the subject which he undertakes to treat; since we cannot teach what we do not know, nor can properly undertake to instruct others while we ourselves in want of instruction. The next requisite is, that he be master of the language in which he delivers his sentiments; if he treats of science and demonstration, that he has attained a style clear, pure, nervous, and expressive; if his topics be probable and persuasive, that he be able to recommend them by the superaddition of elegance and imagery, to display the colours of varied diction, and pour forth the musick of modulated periods." (1)

As to how an author is to be sure he has these qualifications, his path is plain before him; in fact, plain enough to be monotonous.

"If it be again inquired, upon what principles any man shall conclude that he wants these powers, it may readily be answered, that no end is attained but by the proper means; he only can rationally presume that he understands a subject, who has read and compared the writers that have hitherto discussed it, familiarized their arguments to himself by long meditation, consulted the foundations of different systems, and separated truth from error by a rigorous examination.

In like manner, he only has a right to suppose that he can express his thoughts, whatever they are, with perspicuity or elegance, who has carefully persuas the best authors, accurately noted their diversities of style, diligently selected the best modes of diction, and familiarized them by long habits of attentive practice."

This equipment seems to lack something which we are used to believe as necessary to the successful author, but it is all that Johnson allows for. He certainly does not promise immortality

1. A. 115
to all who have the courage to follow these two rather comprehensive pieces of advice, but he counsels them to write, and pay no attention to critics who clamour for originality. He does, however, warn them that imitation is not enough if an author wishes to be great:

"No man ever yet became great by imitation. Whatever hopes for the veneration of mankind must have invention in the design or the execution; either the effect must itself be new, or the means by which it is produced. Either truths hitherto unknown must be discovered, or those which are already known enforced by stronger evidence, facilitated by clearer method, or elucidated by brighter illustrations." (1)

Johnson's ideas on this subject will receive some attention in a later chapter when the criticism in the essays is discussed.

Having started the author on his career, Johnson interests himself in various essays in the ambitions which should be kept before him, and we have several discussions on the value of fame either temporary or lasting. No definite pronouncement can be made as to the moral suitability of the pursuit of fame. Some passions are universally condemned while others are universally praised, but between these two extremes

"are others about which the suffrages of the wise are divided, and of which it is doubted, whether they tend most to promote the happiness, or increase the miseries of mankind - of this ambiguous and disputable kind is the love of fame," (2)

To the majority it would appear that to desire fame when one is alive to enjoy it is not only justifiable but also eminently sensible. There are many things which fame can do to make life
more easy and pleasant. On the other hand, what possible use can an immortal name be to anybody? Those authors who desire immortality argue that their ambition is far more laudable than the mere selfish desire for temporary fame -

"That the desire of being praised by posterity implies a resolution to deserve their praises, and that the folly charged upon it is only a noble and disinterested generosity, which is not felt, and therefore not understood, by those who have been always accustomed to refer everything to themselves, and whose selfishness has contracted their understandings."

Johnson's pronouncement upon the merits of the arguments he has raised for each side of the question is very characteristic. He points out that fame may well be notoriety, and that if to be remembered is the goal, it may be achieved as well by vice as by virtue, whereas fame or no fame the final end of the author must be virtue for himself and for others.

The desire for fame has nevertheless its use:

"it may be usefully employed as an inferior and secondary motive, and will serve sometimes to revive our activity when we begin to lose sight of that more certain, more valuable and more durable reward, which ought always to be our first hope and our last."

The "durable reward" is thus described in a later paper:

"That we may not languish in our endeavours after excellence, it is necessary, that, as Africanus counsels his descendant, "we raise our eyes to higher prospects, and contemplate our future and eternal state, without giving up our hearts to the praise of crowds, or fixing our hopes on such rewards as human power can bestow."

For those who wish their names to remain before mankind, Johnson has little encouragement. Writers who deal successfully
with matters of intense contemporary interest must suffer an
oblivion darken for the very brightness of their first appearance.
Even the discoverer of some new and generally accepted truth often
suffers from the very universality with which the truth is accepted
and the sound of his name is drowned by the clamour raised over his
discovery. The conclusion is reasonable, but not particularly
helpful:

"There are, indeed, few kinds of composition
from which an author, however learned and
ingenious, can hope a long continuance of
fame. He who has carefully studied human
nature and can well describe it, may with
most reason flatter his ambition." (1)

The foregoing quotations show very plainly that an author's
chief end must be the propagation of virtue. If an author does
not consider himself capable of this he had better not write.

"Every man of genius has some arts of fixing the
attention peculiar to himself, by which, honestly
exerted, he may benefit mankind; for the arguments
for purity of life fail of their due influence,
not because they have been considered and con­
futed, but because they have been passed over
without consideration." (2)

Whether the author must live up to the standards he sets or
no is another question. Of course for his own sake he should, but
he is not necessarily to be branded a hypocrite because he does
not. In several different essays Johnson enforces the theory that
an author may do good by his writings even when he knows himself
entirely incapable of living up to the standards he sets for
others. When this is the case, however, it is best for him to
publish under an assumed name or to segregate himself as much as
possible from his readers. (3)

The attitude of the author to the public is important.
Extreme confidence and extreme diffidence are alike dangerous. There is a happy mean, but few are able to achieve this, and since one must err it is important to find which side of the line is the safer—

"to stray, if we must stray, towards those parts from whence we may quickly and easily return." (1)

Johnson concludes in this case that to err on the side of presumption is the safer error.

"Presumption will be easily corrected. Every experiment will teach caution, and miscarriages will hourly shew, that attempts are not always rewarded with success. The most precipitate ardour will, in time, be taught the necessity of methodical gradation and preparatory measures; and the most daring confidence be convinced that neither merit, nor abilities, can command events." (1)

"It is the advantage of vehemence and activity, that they are always hastening to their own reformation; because they incite us to try whether our expectations are well grounded, and therefore detect the deceits which they are apt to occasion. But timidity is a disease of the mind more obstinate and fatal; for a man once persuaded that any impediment is insuperable, has given it, with respect to himself, that strength and weight which it had not before."

The author's attitude to his public should, then, be one of confidence. The next question is his attitude to the critic. Johnson was more a writer than a critic when he wrote the essays discussing this question, and due allowance must be made for his point of view, but he does not seem to be unduly prejudiced. Has the author any claim to sympathy when attacked by the critic? Johnson feels that in most cases he has not.

1. R. 25.
"The diversion of baiting an author has the sanction of all ages and nations, and is more lawful than the sport of teasing other animals, because, for the most part, he comes voluntarily to the stake."

On the other hand, there are often writers who are prompted by no sense of vanity, but by duty or necessity. These deserve some consideration, and should know how best to withstand critical onslaughts. One counsel from a Latin author enjoins tame submission to all attacks. This advice Johnson considers good if the attack is made upon the request of the author, before publication; but when the book is past correction this attitude is too humble to suit Johnson:

"I know not whether a very different conduct should not be prescribed, and whether firmness and spirit may not sometimes be of use to over-power arrogance and repel brutality." (1)

This course is only recommended where the author has a conscience quite void of offence. There is a very characteristic essay giving Johnson's opinion of authors who refuse to admit an error: Dryden is his example of an author who obstinately defended manifestly indefensible lines in his work. Johnson was certainly true to his written principles in this respect, for we have the record of the reason he gives for a wrong definition in the Dictionary. "Ignorance, madam, sheer ignorance."

A discussion of actual methods to be followed by an author falls more naturally into a chapter on criticism, but there are a few general pieces of advice which may be mentioned here. True to his age, Johnson defies imitation. However, he cautions critics against being too ready to label all resemblances
as imitation, much less as plagiarism, for the human mind works similarly in many different individuals and ages, and instances may be found of two like passages produced quite independently of one another:

"As not every instance of similitude can be considered as a proof of imitation, so not every imitation ought to be stigmatized as plagiarism. The adoption of a noble sentiment, or the insertion of a borrowed ornament, may sometimes display so much judgment as will almost compensate for invention; and in inferior genius may, without any imputation of servility, pursue the path of the ancients, provided he declines to tread in their footsteps." (1)

In a late number of the Rambler Johnson counsels authors not to weary their public, but to follow his example and retire gracefully while there is still at least a faint interest in their labours:

"He that is himself weary will soon weary the publick. Let him therefore lay down his employment, whatever it be, who can no longer exert his former activity or attention; let him not endeavour to struggle with censure, or obstinately infest the stage till a general hiss commands him to depart." (2)

1. R. 143
2. R. 207
Patronage

The question of patronage is one which engaged many authors during the eighteenth century, and it was a matter of vital importance to them, for under existing circumstances it was only through some wealthy or noble sponsor that literary work, however meritorious, could receive recognition. Moreover, recognition then did not necessarily mean heavy royalties as it does now, and even after a degree of fame had been reached, the author often stood in need of financial assistance.

In the Spectator we find an essay (one in six hundred and thirty-five) on Patrons and their Clients. In the Rambler there six or seven out of two hundred and eight directly on this subject, and many other slanting references to it. Steel writes with considerable feeling on the subject:

"I must beg leave to say, that he who will take up another's time and fortune in his service, though he has no prospect of rewarding his merit towards him, is as unjust in his dealings as he who takes up goods of a tradesman without intention or ability to pay him .... I seldom see a man thoroughly discontented but I conclude he has had the favour of some great man."

Johnson's tone is even more severe than Steele's, which may be due either to the growing abuse of the system, or to the fact that Johnson suffered more by it than Steele. Johnson was not the type of man likely to be particularly acceptable to the patrons of literature at first sight, and he was certainly not the type to stoop to elaborate schemes by which to recommend himself to notice. Hence he carried on an independent struggle, and recommended this course to others with great energy.
There are three types of essay dealing with patronage, the plain theoretical discussion, the narrative, and the allegory. The ninety-first Rambler is one of the most successful allegorical essays, because it is so logically and reasonably worked out, but its very reasonableness robs it of some of the conviction carried by the unveiled and sweeping condemnations of the other essays. Johnson traces the history of patronage, and we find that her origin was half divine, half mortal. She was sent by the celestials to the assistance of the sciences. For some time after her arrival all went well. She had unerring judgment and was gifted with liberality toward all deserving clients. She was, however, half mortal, and liable to error. Moreover, her divine standards gradually lost their charm, and she was gradually seduced by Pride. The fruit of a union between Patronage and Pride was Flattery and Caprice. The hall of Patronage went from bad to worse, until it became apparent that it was no place for self-respecting votaries of the Sciences.

"The sciences, after a thousand indignities, retired from the palace of Patronage, and having long wandered over the world in grief and distress, were led at last to the cottage of Independence, the daughter of Fortitude; where they were taught by Prudence and Parsimony to support themselves in dignity and quiet." (1)

The story of Liberalis is typical of another method by which Johnson sought to display the evils of patronage. It is a harrowing tale of hope deferred. The patron Aurantius, feeling
the value of Liberalis' adulation, lured him on by unfulfilled promises until he was unable to secure anyone else's favour, and then offered him some small office with an undesirable wife thrown in:

"I was not so far depressed by calamities as to comply with this proposal; but, knowing that complaints and expostulations would but gratify his insolence, I turned away with that contempt with which I shall never want spirit to treat the wretch who can outgo the guilt of a robber without the temptation of his profit, and who lures the credulous and thoughtless to maintain the show of his levee, and the mirth of his table, at the expense of honour, happiness, and life." (1)

One of the most serious drawbacks to the system of patronage is the shocking effect it must have on the genius of the author. On the good old principle that he who pays the piper calls the tune it became quite common for patrons not only to demand praise from their clients, but to specify the exact form which the panegyrics were to take:

"It very often happens that the works of learning or of wit are performed at the direction of those by whom they are to be rewarded; the writer has not always the choice of his subject, but is compelled to accept any task which is thrown before him without much consideration of his own convenience, and without time to prepare himself by previous studies."

(2)

Johnson's most sarcastic treatment of patronage is to be found in a late number of the Rambler (3). He points out that by it

"the man of wealth may partake all the acquisitions of courage without hazard, and all the products of industry without fatigue." (4)

Authors need commendation and encouragement, but they are forced to bestow rather than receive it because they lack the wealth to command it. There are, however, some artless persons who repair the loss by praising themselves. Especially is this the trick of the writer of periodical essays, why may do so very tactfully through the medium of letters to himself. Johnson has himself considered this artifice, but concludes the essay with considerable point:

"My modesty was on the point of yielding, when reflecting that I was about to waste panegyricks on myself, which might be more profitably reserved for my patron, I locked it up for a better hour, in compliance with the farmer's principle, who never eats at home what he can carry to market."

While the essays contain much that is interesting and to the point on the subject of patronage, their influence must nevertheless have been paltry compared with that exerted by their author in other ways. The unaided publication of the Dictionary alone would have called in question the necessity of a patron; but advertisement was needed to call the attention of the public to this remarkable exploit. It was provided by the letter to Chesterfield, probably the best-known composition from Johnson's pen.
CHAPTER VIII

Literary Criticism.

In view of the trend which Johnson's work took in later years it is not surprising that a very large proportion of the periodical essays should deal with literary criticism in its various forms. There are essays on the theory of literature and the practice of certain literary forms, and again a number of critical essays dealing with specific productions.

Every critic must have "uttered or unexpressed" some idea as to the function of literature. Johnson's theory of the function of literature seems to be taken more or less for granted. We have seen something of it in relation to his ideas of the true aim of the author. In Johnson's day the controversy as to whether literature should instruct or please or both was no longer a very live one. This was not because Dryden's emphatic utterances on the subject had silenced all disagreement, for Johnson, in theory at least, was no disciple of Dryden in this matter. He was not contented merely to please or to be pleased. In theoretical papers he insists, like the great moralist he was, on the advancement of virtue as the chief end of literature, but in practical criticism he insists just as firmly on being pleased. However, no conflict between the two requirements is apparent, for unlike Dryden, Johnson was not pleased with anything which might hinder the growth of virtue, while he commends most highly works of questionable literary merit when he perceives in them the moral teaching of which he approves. A very early number of the Rambler (1) expresses his views clearly, and is particularly

interesting because of the authors who, though not mentioned by name, are patent the villains of the piece. Johnson was an enthusiastic admirer of Richardson. In fact, the most popular number of the *Rambler* was written by that author under an introduction which described him as one "who has enlarged the knowledge of human nature, and caused the passions to move at the command of virtue." It was not to be expected that the author of this piece of praise would appreciate very highly the work of such authors as Fielding and Smollett, and the fourth *Rambler* is devoted to a warning against the type of book they produced.

The paper opens with a little farewell to the old type of romance, where right was maintained by the assistance of giants and knights and elves, a farewell which is lent interest by the fact that in a few years *Otranto* was to appear, and in less than half a century Mrs. Anne Radcliff was to become one of the most popular writers in England. Johnson points out that the remote character of these romances robbed them of any power for evil, but nowadays, when the hero of a tale was just such another individual as many of its readers, it became very important what that hero's history was. The young reader fixes his attention on the hero, resolving to do likewise in like situations. For this reason a careful selection of objects and incidents must be made. The modern author must not invent, but he may select;

"...as a diamond, though it cannot be made, may be polished by art, and placed in such a situation, as to display that lustre which before was buried among common stones."

For fiction to be edifying, the selection of subject matter
must, then, be careful. It is certainly not the task of the novelist to portray life as he sees it. If it were, says Johnson, "

"I cannot see what use it can be to read the account: or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination ... the purpose of these writings is surely not only to show mankind, but to provide that they may be seen hereafter with less hazard."

The closing paragraph is so palpably an exaltation of Clarissa and Pamela at the expense of Tom Jones and Roderick Random as worthy objects for attention and emulation that it is worth quoting:

"In narratives where historical veracity has no place, I cannot discover why there should not be exhibited the most perfect idea of virtue; of virtue not angelical, nor above probability, for what we cannot credit, we shall never imitate, but the highest and purest that humanity can reach, which, exercised in such trials as the various revolutions of things shall bring upon it, may, by conquering some calamities, and enduring others, teach us what we may hope, and what we can perform. Vice, for vice is necessary to be shewn, should always disgust; nor should the graces of gaiety, or the dignity of courage, be so united with it, as to reconcile it to the mind. Wherever it appears, it should raise hatred by the malignity of its practices, and contempt by the meanness of its stratagems: for while it is supported by either parts or spirit, it will be seldom heartily abhorred. The Roman tyrant was content to be hated, if he was but feared; and there are thousands of readers of romances willing to be thought wicked, if they may be allowed to be wits. It is therefore to be steadily inculcated, that virtue is the highest proof of understanding, and the only solid basis of greatness; and that vice is the natural consequence of narrow thoughts; that it begins in mistake, and ends in ignominy."

While Johnson makes a good argument for his principle of selection, one cannot help being thankful that Fielding has
proved a more popular model than Richardson.

Johnson's theories on the subject of literary creation are many of them typical of the neo-classical school of criticism. One of his special bugbears was the idea entertained by some poets that genius would burn at one time and not at another. A number of the *Idler* is devoted to a condemnation of our dependence on the state of the weather, and even here Johnson manages to introduce a cutting reference to this superstition. The essay opens with discussion of our reliance on the weather for a topic of discussion. This is easily understood when it is remembered how dependant every Englishman is on the weather often not only for physical but for mental comfort. Johnson points out that it is very wrong for reasonable creatures to resign happiness to the control of anything so changeable as the weather. But some people profess to be even more seriously dependent on times and seasons than others:

"Yet even in this age if inquiry and knowledge, when superstition is driven away, and omens and prodigies have lost their terrors, we find this folly contenanced by frequent examples. Those that laugh at the portentous glare of a comet, and hear a crow with equal tranquillity from the right or left, will yet talk of times and situations proper for intellectual performances, will imagine the fancy exalted by vernal breezes, and the reason invigorated by a bright calm." (1)

Johnson never lost this prejudice, for in the *Lives of the Poets* one of the many things about Grey to which he takes exception is his subjection to this idea.

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1. I. 11.
Only slightly less foolish is the notion of special aptitude being required for special undertakings.

"But of all the bugbears by which the Infantes barbati, boys both young and old, have been hitherto frightened from digressing into new tracts of learning, none has been more mischievously efficacious than an opinion that every kind of knowledge requires a peculiar genius, or mental constitution, framed for the reception of some ideas, and the exclusion of others; and that to him whose genius is not adapted to the study which he prosecutes, all labour shall be vain and fruitless, vain as an endeavour to mingle oil and water, or, in the language of chemistry, to amalgamate bodies of heterogeneous principles." (1)

The positive attributes of the successful author have been discussed in some detail in a previous chapter. When we turn from the more broadly theoretical aspects of literary composition to more detailed points, we find that for Johnson far the most interesting aspect of the subject is the problem of language. This is not to be wondered at when we remember that the dictionary was in process of preparation during the entire life of the Rambler and Adventurer. It is more surprising at first sight to notice that with few exceptions all the essays on these subjects occur in the Idler which was not published until three years after the appearance of the Dictionary, but a moment's consideration will show that a taste for words might well be more than satisfied by work on the Dictionary, which was not to be had in 1858 when he was working with the Idler.

It is rather interesting to find an eighteenth century author condemning circumlocution -

1. R. 25.
"Every man speaks and writes with intent to be understood; and it can seldom happen but he that understands himself might convey his notions to another, if, content to be understood, he did not seek to be admired; but when once he begins to contrive how his sentiments may be received, not with most ease to his reader, but with most advantage to himself, he then transfers his consideration from words to sounds, from sentences to periods, and, as he grows more elegant, becomes less intelligible." (1)

Johnson sometimes carried his common sense rather too far, and was apt to make the mistake of believing that common sense, and more particularly his own particular brand of sense, could fathom everything, but there is no doubt that less nonsense and probably no less valuable material would be produced today if we were always careful to insist that obscurity is not necessarily cleverness. Condemnation of actual obscurity is, however, the largest concession Johnson will make to the vulgar herd. He scorns their complaints about "hard words" -

"words are only hard to those who do not understand them." (2)

He quotes a rather clever saying of Swift on the subject:

"Every man is more able to explain the subject of an art than its professors; a farmer will tell you, in two words, that he has broken his leg; but a surgeon, after a long discourse, shall leave you as ignorant as you were before."

only to show its untruth. "It could only have been said in gratification of malignity, or in ostentation of acuteness" - (Johnson did not love Swift). He points out with some justice that the language of the vulgar is not necessarily clear and

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1. I. 36
2. I. 70
unambiguous

"That the vulgar express their thoughts clearly is far from true; and what perspicuity can be found among them proceeds not from the easiness of their language, but from the shallowness of their thoughts. He that sees a building as a common spectator, contents himself with relating that it is great or little, mean or splendid, lofty or low; all these words are intelligible and common, but they convey no distinct or limited ideas; if he attempts, without the terms of architecture, to delineate the parts, or enumerate the ornaments, his narration at once becomes unintelligible. The terms, indeed, generally displease, because they are understood by few; but they are little understood only because few, that look upon an edifice, examine its parts, or analyse its columns into their members."

Another aspect of this idea of language is brought out in the paper on Macbeth where we find some rather unfortunate and ill-supported criticisms of the vocabulary. "Words become low," he says, "by the occasions to which they are applied, or the general character of them who use them; and the disgust which they produce, arises from the revival of those images with which they are commonly united." He quotes the passage

\[
\text{--- Come, thick night!} \\
\text{And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,} \\
\text{That my keen knife see not the wound it makes;} \\
\text{Nor heaven peen through the blanket of the dark,} \\
\text{To cry Hold, hold!}
\]

and commends its poetic force.

"Yet the efficacy of this invocation is destroyed by the insertion of an epithet now seldom heard but in the stable, and "dun" might may come and go without any other notice than contempt." (1)

... " we cannot surely but sympathise with the horrors of a wretch about to murder his master,
his friend, his benefactor, who suspects that the weapon will refuse its office, and start back from the breast which he is preparing to violate. Yet this sentiment is weakened by the name of an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest employments; we do not immediately conceive that any crime of importance is to be committed with a knife; or who does not, at last, from the long habit of connecting a knife with sordid offices, feel aversion rather than terror?

Macbeth proceeds to wish, in the madness of guilt, that the inspection of heaven may be intercepted, and that he may, in the involutions of infernal darkness, escape the eye of providence. This is the utmost extravagance of determined wickedness; yet this is so debased by two unfortunate words, that while I endeavour to impress on my reader the energy of the sentiment, I can scarce check my risibility, when the expression forces itself upon my mind; for who, without some relaxation of his gravity, can hear of the avengers of guilt peeping through a blanket?

It would, however, be unjust to leave the subject of language and diction without noticing what else Johnson has to say on the side of simplicity. In the Idler there is an excellent paper on "easy poetry" which almost contradicts the theories described above.

"Easy poetry is that in which natural thoughts are expressed without violence to the language. The discriminating character of ease consists principally in the diction; for all true poetry requires the sentiments to be natural. Language suffers violence by harsh or by daring figures, by transposition, by unusual acceptations of words, and by any licence, which would be avoided by a writer of prose. Where any artifice appears in the construction of the verse, that verse is no longer easy. Any epithet which can be ejected without diminution of the sense, any curious iteration of the same word, and all unusual, though not ungrammatical structure of speech, destroy the grace of easy poetry." (1)
"To require from any author many pieces of easy poetry, would be indeed to oppress him with too hard a task. It is less difficult to write a volume of lines swelled with epithets, brightened by figures, and stiffened by transpositions, than to produce a few couplets graced only by naked elegance and simple purity, which require so much care and skill, that I doubt whether any of our authors have yet been able, for twenty lines together, nicely to observe the true definition of easy poetry."

In spite of this concession to plain language, we feel that Johnson, who had so much to say about the vulgarity of Shakespeare's vocabulary, could have produced a most interesting essay on The Lyrical Ballads.

When we come to consider Johnson's theories on the subject of criticism, we find that they are more characteristic of his age than any other portion of his work. By this it is not meant that he was merely the echo of his age, but that he was part of his age. Saintsbury has a suggestive and interesting paragraph on this subject:

"There is no reason to doubt that Johnson's critical opinions were formed quite early in life, and by that mixture of natural bent and influence of environment which, as a rule, forms all such opinions. There has been a tendency to regard, as the highest mental attitude, that of considering everything as an open question, of being ready to reverse any opinion at a moment's notice. As a matter of fact, we have record of not many men who have proceeded in this way; and it may be doubted whether among them is a single person of first-rate genius or even talent. Generally speaking, the men whose genius or talent has a "stalk of carle hemp" in it find, in certain of the great primeval creeds of the world, political, ecclesiastical, literary, or other, something which suits their bent. The bent of their time may assist them in fastening on to this by attraction or repulsion--it really does not matter much
which it is. In either case they will insensibly, from an early period, choose their line and shape their course accordingly. They will give a certain independence to it; they will rarely be found merely "swallowing formulas." It is the other class which does this, with leave reserved to get rid of the said formulas by a mental emetic and swallow another set, which will very likely be subjected to the same fate. But the hero will be in the main qualis ab incepto." (1)

The critical atmosphere of the eighteenth century suited Johnson as no other could have done, but his genius is all the more apparent from the fact that throughout his work we encounter short passages and little suggestions quite out of keeping with the rest -- passages which prevent his criticism from being merely an originally worded exposition of the views of his day, and make it the production of an original critical genius.

It is significant that immediately following two introductory numbers, the third number of the Rambler is devoted to an allegory on the origin of criticism. In it the ideal function of Criticism is described. Criticism was the eldest daughter of labour and truth. She came to earth with the muses, and was entrusted with a wand, one end of which would confer immortality and the other oblivion on the literary work submitted to her for examination. She worked well for some time, but soon found that she was incapable of estimating the value of much that was brought forward, while the judgments of time were unerring. She then broke her sceptre and retired to paradise. The parts of the sceptre were picked up by Flattery and Malevolence, who used it as their wishes dictated, but without effect. It would seem from this that Johnson considered the original function of the critic to be pronouncement upon literary works. He takes

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criticism so much for granted that little care is taken to justify its existence. Elsewhere, however, we find him recommending one other task to the critic, which, while it may be more practical than those undertaken by the original inhabitant of paradise, is certainly more difficult. Ideas of beauty are changeable, and criticism must standardize them.

"It is the task of criticism to establish principles; to improve opinion into knowledge; and to distinguish those means of pleasing which depend upon known causes and rational deduction, from the nameless and inexplicable elegancies which appeal wholly to the fancy, from which we feel delight, but know not how they produce it, and which may well be termed the enchantresses of the soul. Criticism reduces those regions of literature under the dominion of science, which have hitherto known only the anarchy of ignorance, the caprices of fancy, and the tyranny of prescription." (1)

The reduction of literature under the dominion of science is an ambition which would hardly have been entertained by critics of the succeeding century.

Critical methods engage Johnson's attention in a number of essays. The most important papers on this subject have to do with the pros and cons of rules. This is not to be wondered at, for the view of the critic or the author of that day on the use and value of rules usually constitutes the most significant evidence we have regarding his general literary faith. Johnson is not very satisfactory in this respect, as his various essays on the subject do not seem to be in perfect agreement. No doubt their tenor depended to a large extent on the particular circumstances under which they were written.

1. R. 92.
There seems little doubt that Johnson believed, or thought he believed, in the importance of rules, but the trend of his writing on the subject proves to be definitely against them. In no less than three different essays he points out their very fallible nature:

"Precept has generally been posterior to performance. The art of composing works of genius has never been taught but by the example of those who performed it by natural vigor of imagination, and rectitude of judgment." (1)

"The rules hitherto received are seldom drawn from any settled principle or self-evident postulate, or adapted to the natural and invariable constitution of things; but will be found, upon examination, the arbitrary edicts of legislators, authorized only by themselves, who, out of various means by which the same end may be attained, selected such as happened to occur to their own reflection, and then, by a law which idleness and timidity were too willing to obey, prohibited new experiments of wit, restrained fancy from the indulgence of her innate inclination to hazard and adventure, and condemned all future flights of genius to pursue the path of the Meonian eagle."

"The authority may be more justly opposed, as it is apparently derived from them whom they endeavour to control; for we owe few of the rules of writing to the acuteness of critics, who have generally no other merit than that, having read the works of great authors with attention, they have observed the arrangement of their matter, or the graces of their expression, and then expected honour and reverence for precepts which they never could have invented: so that practice has introduced rules, rather than rules have directed practice." (2)

"Some (rules) are to be considered as fundamental and indispensable, others only as useful and convenient; some as dictated by reason and necessity, others as enacted by despotic antiquity; some as invincibly supported by their conformity to the order of nature and operations of the intellect; others as formed by accident, or instituted by example, and
therefore always liable to dispute and alteration." (1)

In his essay on tragicomedy, one of the best of the critical essays, Johnson points out how many formerly accepted rules have been ignored with success. Dealing with the number of actors on the stage at once being limited to three, he remarks:

"We now violate it without scruple, and, as experience proves, without inconvenience." (2)

With his customary common sense, he deals also with the unity of time:

"But since it will frequently happen that some delusion must be admitted, I know not where the limits of imagination can be fixed." (3)

Even tragicomedy, so severely condemned, has been proved capable of success by Shakespeare. At this point, however, Johnson feels that he has gone far enough, and makes rather a last minute defense of the rules he has been treating so harshly:

"I do not however think it safe to judge of works of genius merely by the event. The resistless vicissitudes of the heart, this alternate prevalence of merriment and solemnity, may sometimes be more properly ascribed to the vigour of the writer than the justness of the design: and, instead of vindicating tragi-comedy by the success of Shakespeare, we ought, perhaps to pay new honours to that transcendent and unbounded genius that could preside over the passions in sport; who, to actuate the affections, needed not the slow gradation of common means, but could still the heart with instantaneous jollity or sorrow, and vary our disposition as he changed his scenes. Perhaps the effects even of Shakespeare's poetry might have been yet greater, had he not counteracted himself; and we might have been more interested in the distresses of his heroes, had we not been so frequently diverted by the jokes of his buffoons." (4)
He proceeds to point out certain rules which no one may neglect with impunity, and his confidence in his ability to make this selection seems to the reader to neutralize all his partisanship, because if one fallible critic can make a selection, why may not another fallible critic make a different selection, until all rules have been branded as unessential? This desertion of the standard was probably unconscious, but the only essay in the *Idler* on this subject shows a far greater unorthodoxy in the matter:

"Prudence operates on life in the same manner as rules on composition: it produces vigilance rather than elevation, rather prevents loss than procures advantage; and often escapes miscarriages, but seldom reaches either power or honour. It quenches the ardour of enterprise, by which every thing is done that can claim praise or admiration; and represses that generous temerity which often fails and often succeeds. Rules may obviate faults, but can never confer beauties;" (1)

And this after surmising that Shakespeare might have been even greater if he had subjected himself to rules!

The *Idler* also contains the two Dick Minim papers (60 and 61) which are very successful humorous treatments of the cut-and-dried critical methods of many of Johnson's contemporaries.

Oddly enough the particular literary form with which Johnson is most concerned is the pastoral. He has some rather significant remarks on the subject:

"The range of pastoral is indeed narrow, for though nature itself, philosophically considered, be inexhaustible, yet its general effects on the eye and on the ear are uniform, and incapable of much variety of description --- However, as each age makes some discoveries, and those discoveries are by degrees generally known, as new plants or

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1. I. 57
modes of culture are introduced, and by little and little become common, pastoral might receive, from time to time, small augmentations, and exhibit once in a century, a scene somewhat varied." (1)

It would be hard to find a paragraph much more typical of Johnson's attitude to the outdoor world. His good sense is displayed with some effect when he deals with the custom of making shepherds talk in character (with "studied barbarity.") He points out the incongruity of making such men discuss the corruptions of the church of Rome (no doubt meant for Milton):

"Surely, at the same time a shepherd learns theology, he may gain some acquaintance with his native language." (2)

There are scattered through the essays treatises on essay-writing, epistolary writing, history, and translation, but none of them are of particular interest. A separate chapter is devoted to the papers on biography and travel.

Turning to essays dealing with specific works, we find that they are surprisingly few in number. Milton receives the almost exclusive attention of the author, providing subject-matter for five papers. The first three deal principally with the technicalities of his versification, the last two with Samson Agonistes. They are interesting as illustrations of Johnson's earlier critical methods, but not at all important. Johnson admires Milton, but tries him by various standards which the poet never had in mind and in many cases he naturally finds serious deficiencies.

It has been said that the moralizing is the best part of

1. R. 36
2. R. 37
the Rambler, but the criticism, though possibly not so valuable, is a close second in point of interest. Some of the essays are unreasonable and prejudiced, some wholly governed by 18th century standards, and some surprisingly independent of them; but all are written with an enthusiasm often lacking in treatments of subjects to which the author was more indifferent, and for this reason whether we agree or feel deeply outraged, we read the essays with genuine interest.
CHAPTER IX

Biography and Travel

Among the periodical essays there are three given entirely to a discussion of biography. Johnson exalts it above other forms of writing, because he says it is more applicable to our needs than any other. He works out a comparison with history and romance, concluding that the extensive nature of the one and the patently false character of the other hinder the imagination. In biography, he concludes, we have a form free from these drawbacks. It is true, and it is limited in scope exactly as the individual is limited who reads it. Because we know that the facts we read are true and because the facts are not so extensive as to paralyze our imagination, we receive great delight from this form of writing, and if it is properly executed, much instruction. Johnson gives many pieces of advice to the would-be biographer. It is always interesting to see how far a man's practice agrees with his precept, and in this case we have plenty of material from which to draw a conclusion.

When Johnson is referred to as a biographer the tendency is to think at once of The Lives of the Poets. These lives were the product of his old age and are by many critics considered his very best work, but it must be remembered that the Lives, many of them at least, are far more concerned with criticism than with biography, and the precepts which he laid down some thirty years before for the conduct of biographers can therefore hardly be considered applicable. We have, however, The Life of Richard Savage, which was published in 1744, six years before his first essay on biography, and having examined his theories, we
may turn to this to see how far it agrees with them. We may then find it interesting to appraise his theories, as they stand, apart from his performance, in order to see if rigid adherence to them would assist in the production of an ideal biography.

Despite his admiration for Dryden, Johnson held the highly orthodox view that literature should instruct by delighting. The life of the private individual may be quite as instructive as that of the statesman or warrior, and his experiences are far more applicable to the needs of the average reader. Moreover, even when the subject is a great public man, he is not necessarily of most interest and guidance to mankind in his public aspect —

"... the business of the biographer is often to pass lightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life, where exterior appendages are cast aside, and men excel each other only by prudence and by virtue." (1)

In the presentation of a true picture of a man, apparently trivial details may often serve far better than accounts of spectacular feats.

"... all the plans and enterprizes of De Witt," (says Johnson) "are now of less importance to the world, than that part of his personal character, which represents him as careful of his health, and negligent of his life."

It would seem to come as a natural conclusion from these remarks that a life cannot be written successfully by one who has not had some personal acquaintance with his hero, and Johnson seems to lean to this view in his censure of the habit of postponing biographies for fear of creating ill-feeling.

1. R. 60
"If a life be delayed until interest and envy are at an end, we may hope for impartiality, but must expect little intelligence, for the incidents which give excellence to biography are of a volatile and evanescent kind, such as soon escape the memory and are rarely transmitted by tradition." (1)

Johnson warns biographers specifically against "a formal and studied narrative, begun with his pedigree and ended with his funeral," pointing out that chatting with a man's servant for a few moments gives one a clearer idea of his character than a biography of him conceived on this plan.

The facts with regard to Johnson's connection with Savage are too well known to require more than a very brief reference. When Johnson came to London in 1737, he was very poor indeed, and as Savage was also a very poor author, they no doubt encountered one another in some of the haunts of the impecunious. Their friendship cannot have been a prolonged one, for Boswell says that the acquaintance was begun sometime before April 1738 (probably not long before), and Mr. Savage left London in July, 1739 at the earnest solicitation of all his friends. However, an intimate acquaintance of a year's duration should prove sufficient for the purpose of one not meditating a work of the gigantic proportions which characterize Johnson's own biography. Johnson's work is not long, only covering two hundred pages in the 1806 edition.

"He that writes the life of another, is either his friend or his enemy, and wishes either to exalt his praise or aggravate his infamy."

1. R. 60
2. I. 84
Johnson was most emphatically Savage's friend, and was more concerned with exalting his fame than with aggravating his infamy, yet the life seems very impartial. From other accounts and indeed from Johnson's reluctant admissions, despite his obvious partisanship, Savage appears to have been a clever but a thoroughly objectionable fellow, and most men when removed from the influence of his genius would have felt little compunction in letting the public know how objectionable he was, especially when the fact of his death precluded any possibility of hiding his feelings by plain speaking. Johnson was, however, very tender towards his friend's reputation. He seems to have feared that he might have been misunderstood by some, for he wrote this letter to Cave, editor of the Gentleman's Magazine:

"As your collections show how often you have owed the ornaments of your poetical pages to the correspondence of the unfortunate and ingenious Mr. Savage, I doubt not but you have so much regard to his memory as to encourage any design that may have a tendency to the preservation of it from insults or calumnies; and therefore, with some degree of assurance, intreat you to inform the publick, that his life will speedily be published by a person who was favoured with his confidence, and received from himself an account of most of the transactions which he proposes to mention, to the time of his retirement to Swansea in Wales.

"From that period, to his death in the prison of Bristol, the account will be continued from materials still less liable to objection; his own letters, and those of his friends, some of which will be inserted in the work, and abstracts of others subjoined in the margin.

"It may be reasonable imagined, that others may have the same design; but as it is not credible that they can obtain the same materials, it must be expected they will supply from invention the want
of intelligence; and that under the title of 'The Life of Savage', they will publish only a novel, filled with romantick adventures, and imaginary amours. You may therefore, perhaps, gratify the lovers of truth and wit, by giving me leave to inform them in your Magazine, that my account will be published in 8vo. by Mr. Roberts, in Warwick-lane."

The life which Mr. Roberts published was both a defense and an apology. He permits himself only an occasional paragraph of censure, and that not of a very harsh character. The following is one of the severest passages to be found in the Life:

"That Mr. Savage was too much elevated by any good fortune, is generally known; and some passages of his Introduction to The Author to be let sufficiently shew, that he did not wholly refrain from such satire, as he afterwards thought very unjust when he was exposed to it himself; for, when he was afterwards ridiculed in the character of a distressed poet, he very easily discovered, that distress was not a proper subject for merriment, nor topic of invective. He was then able to discern that if misery be the effect of virtue, it ought to be reverenced - "

However, Johnson does not condemn partiality in his essays on biography. He simply regards impartiality as impossible, and for this reason recommends autobiography. One rather suspects that, like Dryden, he was justifying himself after the event when he wrote in this vein, but we are forced to admit that he was not violating one of his principles when he took Savage's side so obstinately.

Johnson's theory of the selection of a hero is borne out by his choice of Savage. Savage was an unsuccessful man all his days, and never became famous; although his participation in a murder trial and in various other activities made him sufficiently infamous to attract a great deal of attention. Yet, if Johnson
had gone to the leading warriors and statesmen of the age for his subject he could have found no better warning example to accomplish the didactic purpose he deemed necessary than he found in Richard Savage. He is careful to conclude the Life with a well-turned moral:

"This relation will not be wholly without its use, if those, who languish under any part of his sufferings, shall be enabled to fortify their patience, by reflecting that they feel only those afflictions from which the abilities of Savage did not exempt him; or those, who, in confidence of superior capacities or attainments, disregarded the common maxims of life, shall be reminded, that nothing will supply the want of prudence; and that negligence and irregularity, long continued, will make knowledge useless, with ridiculous, and genius contemptible."

The all-important matter of selection of a subject accomplished, Johnson's main precept in the writing of biography is the presentation of traits and actions calculated to reveal vividly to succeeding generations the true character of the man whose life is recorded. The biography in question abounds in such touches. We learn that it was "in no time of Mr. Savage's life any part of his character to be the first of the company that desired to separate." Moreover "he contented himself with the applause of men of judgment, and was somewhat inexim disposed to exclude all those from the character of men of judgment who did not applaud him." "The reigning error of his life was, that he mistook the love for the practise of virtue, and was indeed not so much a good man as the friend of goodness."

Johnson had an odd idea about the moral value of literature. We should say today that a man who writes morally and lives licentiously probably does more harm than one who reverses this
procedure, by reason of bringing contempt on sound precepts which are yet obviously a farce to him. Johnson, on the other hand, believed that a man who made no attempt to live up to his profession might yet write very effectively in the cause of virtue.

Savage at one time proposed writing a moral pamphlet on *The Progress of a Free-thinker*, in atonement for a rather obscene performance *The Progress of a Divine*, which told a vivid story in the illustration of the theory that material advancement of the average divine was in inverse ratio to his progress in the attainment of moral virtue. Johnson feels sorry that the poem was not written:

"That he did not execute his design is a real loss to mankind; for he was too well acquainted with all the scenes of debauchery to have failed in his representations of them, and too zealous for virtue not to have represented them in such a manner as should expose them either to ridicule or detestation."

Our remark, "He should know," made in sarcasm of an offender who condemns his pet vice, was made by Johnson in all seriousness.

It has been said that the work is both a defense and an apology. Johnson denies many accusations, but is forced to allow many, and to admit that Savage's character left much to be desired. By way of apology, when he cannot defend, he makes the most of the unfortunate facts of Savage's origin, such as he believed them to be, and challenges his readers lest they presume to say "Had I been in Savage's condition, I should have lived or written better than Savage."

Johnson has certainly been true to his principles in this piece of work, and has, moreover, as far as we can judge, been
partially successful in doing what he believed impossible, that is, writing without bias. Does the finished product recommend the principles? I think we must admit that it does. This *Life* is an unambitious piece of work, but it is vivid and interesting from beginning to end. We are not now so concerned with the didactic value of works of art, but as has been pointed out, Savage makes a very fair warning example. Boswell tells how Reynolds received the book:

"... upon his return from Italy he met with it in Devonshire, knowing nothing of its author, and began to read it while he was standing with his arm leaning against a chimney-piece. It seized his attention so strongly, that, not being able to lay down the book till he had finished it, when he attempted to move, he found his arm totally benumbed."

One other interesting line of discussion suggests itself. Boswell heartily approved of this *Life of Savage*, and was certainly very familiar with the *Rambler*. Did he avail himself of Johnson's theories when he undertook the production of a biography? Brief consideration shows that he did, different as was the result of their application. When he selected his subject Johnson was not a man of excessive reputation. Moreover in his attitude and execution, Boswell has observed the most studied impartiality. He has out-Johnsoned Johnson in the preservation of characteristic doings and sayings. The result of his application of his master's theories is a work of far more outstanding genius than anything Johnson ever wrote -- not at all an unusual thing.
In 1760 Johnson wrote a number of the *Idler* on books of travel, criticizing the traveller of the day both for his mode of travel and for the type of report made on his experiences. He points out what the untravelled man wishes to know, a piece of information he was very well qualified to supply, never having taken a longer journey than that from Lichfield to London. He speaks with authority in detailing the various aspects of life which should engage the attention of the traveller in foreign countries, and occupy the largest place in any account he may choose to write on his return. In 1773 Johnson himself became a traveller, spending some three months with Boswell in touring the Hebrides. In 1774 he published an account of his travels, and so became liable to judgment by his own theoretical standards.

"One part of mankind," he says,

"is naturally curious to learn the sentiments, manners, and condition of the rest, and every mind that has leisure or power to extend its views, must be desirous of knowing in what proportion Providence has distributed the blessings of nature, or the advantages of art, among the several nations of the earth."

This useful information is usually lacking in books of travel, because the authors themselves never possessed it:

"He that enters a town at night, and surveys it in the morning, and then hastens away to another place, and guesses at the manners of the inhabitants by the entertainment which his inn afforded him, may please himself for a time with a hasty exchange of scenes, and a confused remembrance of palaces and churches; he may gratify his eye with a variety of landscapes, and regale his palate with a succession of vintages; but let him be contented to please himself without endeavouring to disturb others. Why should he record excursions by which nothing could be learned, or wish to make a shew of knowledge,
which, without some power of intuition unknown to other mortals, he never could attain?"

Johnson's chief aversion among travellers is the one who confines his attention to the face of the countryside, concentrating to the exclusion of all else on the geographical peculiarities of the particular portion of the earth's surface over which he happens to be passing. Only one degree less abandoned is he who:

"wanders through Italian palaces and amuses the gentle reader with catalogues of pictures."

The real import of the essay is conveyed very well in one of its sentences:

"He that would travel for the entertainment of others should remember that the great object of remark is human life."

We have remarked that when Johnson sat down to formulate precepts for the guidance of the biographer, either consciously or unconsciously he made them agree almost perfectly with his own performance of six years past. When the chronology was reversed and the precept came before the practise the agreement is not so perfect. Johnson's experience of travel was sufficiently broadening to show him that a traveller reporting his experiences cannot confine himself to human life. Human life may be the chief object, but it must have its background to show it up, and its background, particularly if one travels in regions like the Hebrides of 1773, is despised nature. If Johnson had been less great he might have stuck to his principles and written a bad book. As it was he forsook them, probably quite unconsciously, and wrote a very good book.
This is quite in accordance with Johnson's theories with regard to rules quoted elsewhere, that practice must come before precept, and that those who work by precept alone, however sound their theories may be, do not produce works of genius.

In view of the fact that the author of "A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland" announced firmly that his subjects were men, the book contains a surprising amount of very appreciative description of natural scenery. A very Johnsonian passage is encountered in the description of Slones Castle, which was built at the extreme edge of a cliff:

"To walk round the house seemed impracticable. From the windows the eye wanders over sea that separates Scotland from Norway, and when the winds beat with violence, must enjoy all the terrific grandeur of the tempestuous ocean. I would not for my amusement wish for a storm but as storms, whether wished or not, will sometimes happen, I may say, without violation of humanity, that I should willingly look out upon them from Slones Castle."

The traveller's route on several days is sketched with some detail in spite of Johnson's objection to the traveller who comes to a desert and tells you that it is sandy, and the description is very good. Only one instance need be given:

"Most of this day's journey was very pleasant. The day, though bright, was not hot; and the appearance of the country, if I had not seen the Peak, would have been wholly new. We went upon a surface so hard and level, that we had little care to hold the bridle, and were therefore at full leisure for contemplation. On the left were high and steepy rocks shaded with birch, the hardy native of the north, and covered with fern or heath. On the right the limpid waters of Lough Ness were beating their bank, and waving their surface by a gentle agitation. Beyond them were rocks sometimes
covered with verdure, and sometimes towering in horrid nakedness. Now and then we espied a little cornfield, which served to impress more strongly the general barrenness."

However, the *Journal* is not overloaded with description of this type. There is a great deal of description when the travellers are actually in the Hebrides, but this is contingent to his purpose of making the manners and customs of the people known to us. Indeed it must be observed in justice to Johnson that while experience has certainly modified his proposed method to a great extent and the scope of his subject to a lesser degree, his main object is still the same; that is to tell one part of mankind how another lives. He finds to his annoyance that to do this requires attention to details before conceived as far beneath his dignity as an author. Is it fitting for the "great lexicographer" to spend a long paragraph explaining to a civilized nation that the barbarous Scotch have no proper means of keeping their windows open -

"He that would have his window open must hold it with his hand, unless, what may be sometimes found among good contrivers, there be a nail which he may stick into a hole, to keep it from falling."

He cannot forbear to include this shocking piece of information, but apologizes for it:

"These diminutive observations seem to take away something from the dignity of writing, and therefore are never communicated but with hesitation, and a little fear of abasement and contempt. But it must be remembered, that life consists not of a series of illustrious actions, or elegant enjoyments; the greater part of our time passes in compliance with necessities, in the performance of daily duties, in the removal of small inconveniences, in the procurement of petty pleasures; and we are well or ill at ease, as the main stream of life glides on smoothly, or is ruffled by small obstacles and frequent interruption. The true state of every nation is the state of common life. The manners of a people are not to be found
in the schools of learning, or the palaces of greatness, where the national character is obscured or obliterated by travel or instruction, by philosophy or vanity; not is publick happiness to be estimated by the assemblies of the gay, or the banquets of the rich. The great mass of nations is neither rich nor gay; they whose aggregate constitutes the people, are found in the streets and the villages, in the shops and farms; and from them, collectively considered, must the measure of general prosperity be taken. As they approach to delicacy, a nation is refined; as their conveniences are multiplied, a nation, at least a commercial nation, must be denominated wealthy."

Johnson does not forget the "small obstacles" and "petty pleasures" in describing the Highland homes and families, and for this reason his book of travel is a success.

Besides being a success as a book of travel, *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* is a very pleasing addition to our knowledge of Johnson. We find many passages which are reminiscent of Boswell's Johnson. He presented a pretty Highland girl with a treatise on mathematics as a keepsake, "and should not be pleased to think that she forgets me." He was prodigiously amused at the sorrows of the proprietor of that Isle the inhabitants of which insisted in referring to as "Muck" when its owner preferred the pleasanter associations of "Monk", more particularly as custom decreed that the owner should bear the name of his patrimony. Johnson handsomely admits approval of the clergy of the Islands:

"for I saw not one in the islands whom I had reason to think either deficient in learning, or irregular in life, but found several with whom I could not converse without wishing, as my respect increased, that they had not been presbyterians."
It does not seem just to discuss the respective merits of
the accounts of this tour prepared by Boswell and by Johnson
without remembering that each author had a different end in
view. Johnson's account is essentially a book of travel, while
Boswell's is essentially an account of a tour with Dr. Johnson.
Compared as books of travel Johnson's is superior by far, for
Boswell does not give us a vivid idea of life, certainly not of
common life in the Hebrides. The most interesting passages of
his account could very well have been written without him ever
having undertaken the journey. Boswell dismisses briefly
incidents and places which Johnson has treated with care. The
reason for this is of course that Boswell's care on this tour
was to watch Dr. Johnson and to report on his reaction to his
surroundings rather than to describe his own; for this was
simply one of Boswell's experiments, on a rather larger scale
than usual. Thus Johnson has written a better book of travel
than Boswell, but if books of a totally different nature could
be valued comparatively, it might be a harder matter to prove
Johnson's the better book.
CHAPTER X

Conclusion

While the periodical essays of Dr. Johnson never enjoyed a popularity comparable to that of the Spectator papers, they had always an admiring audience, and contemporary critics of perception praised them highly. Boswell reinforces his own high opinion of the Rambler in particular with that of several others whose judgment he felt should carry weight. Times have changed, and with the change the essays have fallen out of popularity. Far from troubling to criticize or condemn them, critics of the nineteenth century simply ignore their existence. It is a matter of great interest that they seem to be attracting the attention of the twentieth century. Sir Walter Raleigh refers to the Rambler as "that splendid repository of wisdom and truth," and to one fresh from the essays, the expression does not seem at all extravagant. It would be a miracle if there was not much in such collections of mere contemporary and passing interest, and also much which we regard as padding, but in this case "wisdom and truth" and the predominant elements, and this fact may again bring the essays into repute.
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