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DOCTOR JOHNSON

by S. G. ROBERTS

Great Lives

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CHAPTER I

Birth at Lichfield - touched by Queen Anne - schooldays - Pembroke College, Oxford.

ON September 18, 1709, there was born to Sarah, the wife of Michael Johnson, a bookseller of Lichfield, a son who was given the name of Samuel.

" My mother," wrote Johnson in his *Annals,* " had a very difficult and dangerous labour, and was assisted by George Hector, a man midwife of great reputation. I was born almost dead and could not cry for some time. When he had me in his arms, he said, ' Here is a brave boy.' "

Michael Johnson was a proud father. On the day following the birth of his son, he was due, as Sheriff of Lichfield, to ride the circuit of the county. He invited all the town to the celebration, and feasted the citizens with uncommon magnificence. Samuel was " put to one Marclew," the servant, or wife of a servant, of his father to be nursed ; his mother visited him every day, choosing a variety of routes " that her assiduity might not expose her to ridicule and often left her fan or glove behind her, that she might have a pretence to come back unexpected."

Signs of the " scrofulous sores " which were to disfigure Johnson throughout his life appeared very quickly, and in ten weeks he was taken home

" a poor diseased infant, almost blind." Dr. Swinfen, his godfather, said that he never knew any child reared with so much difficulty. According to their son's account, Michael and Sarah Johnson " had not much happiness from each other." Mrs. Johnson was unacquainted with books and her husband was unwilling to talk of the commercial side of his business :

> " Neither of them ever tried to calculate the profits of trade, or the expenses of living. My mother concluded that we were poor, because we lost by some of our trades ; but the truth was, that my father, having in the early part of his life contracted debts, never had trade sufficient to enable him to pay them and maintain his family ; he got something, but not enough."

One of the earliest events in his life which Johnson could remember was his visit to London in 1712, when he was touched by Queen Anne for the king's evil - perhaps the last time that the ceremony was performed. The journey to London, which then occupied nearly three days, was made in the stage-coach, and in the course of it Samuel coughed violently and was sick. Of two women amongst the passengers, one fondled him and the other was disgusted. On their arrival, he and his mother lodged with Nicholson, the bookseller, in Little Britain. Of the ceremony

itself Johnson retained " a confused, but somehow a sort of solemn recollection of a lady in diamonds, and a long black hood." An amulet in the form of a gold angel, with St. Michael on one side and a ship under full sail on the other, was hung round his neck, where it remained until his death.

In London Mrs. Johnson bought her son a silver cup and spoon, which were marked SAM. I. to distinguish them from her own. Years afterwards, the cup was one of the last pieces to be sold, at a time of distress, by Johnson's wife. The journey back to Lichfield was made in a waggon, ostensibly to avoid disturbance of fellow-passengers but actually to save a few shillings. Mrs. Johnson had sewed two guineas in her petticoat for fear of robbers.

The expedition had been undertaken on the advice of a notable physician, Sir John Floyer, supplemented, no doubt, by Michael Johnson's belief in the royal power. The " traditional story of the infant Hercules of Toryism " associated with Dr. Sacheverel's visit to Lichfield is less well authenticated. Sacheverel visited Lichfield in 1710. Johnson may well have been carried in his father's arms to the cathedral, but even he could hardly have caught " the publick spirit and zeal " for Sacheverel at the age of nine months.

Johnson's first teachers in English were Dame Oliver, who said he was the best scholar she ever had and gave him a present of gingerbread when

he went up to Oxford, and Tom Brown, a shoemaker, who compiled a spelling-book and dedicated it to the Universe. Latin was begun at the age of seven with Humphrey Hawkins, under-master of the Grammar School at Lichfield, and Johnson recalled his two years under Hawkins with special satisfaction :

> " On Thursday night a small portion of iEsop was learned by heart, and on Friday morning the lessons in *Msop* were repeated. . . . On Friday afternoon we learned *Qua Genus.* . . . To learn *Qua Genus* was to me always pleasing ; and *As in Prasenti* was, I know not why, always disgusting. . . . On Saturday, as on Thursday, we were examined. . . . The progress of examination was this. When we learned *Propria qua Maribus,* we were examined in the Accidence ; particularly we formed Verbs, that is, went through the same person in all the Moods and Tenses."

This Johnson found very difficult, but, with encouragement from his mother, who was proud to have " a boy who was forming verbs," contrived to do better. These " little memorials," as Johnson calls them, soothed his mind in later years, and Edmund Hector, one of his schoolfellows, left the following record of Samuel Johnson as a schoolboy :

> " As his uncommon abilities for learning far exceeded us, we endeavoured by every boyish

piece of flattery to gain his assistance, and three of us, by turns, used to call on him in a morning, on one of whose backs, supported by the other two, he rode triumphantly to school. He never associated with us in any of our diversions, except in the winter when the ice was firm, to be drawn along by a boy bare-footed. His ambition to excel was great, though his application to books, as far as it appeared, was very trifling. . . . Verses or themes he would dictate to his favourites, but he would never be at the trouble of writing them. His dislike to business was so great, that he would procrastinate his exercises to the last hour."

At Whitsuntide, 1719, Johnson and his brother Nathaniel, who was three years his junior, were sent to Birmingham to stay with relations, Mrs. Johnson believing that much improvement was to be had by a change in the mode of life. Mrs. Johnson was a daughter of Cornelius Ford, a yeoman of Warwickshire. One of her brothers, Joseph, was a well-known physician; another, Cornelius, was a powerful athlete, and Johnson told Mrs. Piozzi in later years how, when he once chanced upon an inscription in honour of a man who had accomplished a certain leap, "Why, now," says my uncle, "I could leap it in my boots"; and he did leap it in his boots. But the "uncle Ford" with whom Johnson stayed in 1719 was either Nathaniel or Samuel. The boys

were " much caressed " by their easy-going aunt, and Samuel " ate so much of a boiled leg of mutton, that she used to talk of it." Part of the holiday was spent with John Harrison, a saddler, who had married one of Mrs. Johnson's sisters. By this time he was a widower and his house was kept by Sally Ford, probably the daughter of Cornelius. Johnson did not care for Harrison, but eulogised Sally's sweet temper. On his return to Lichfield, Johnson found himself moved to the upper school and came under the direction of John Hunter, a scholar and a tyrant. Johnson in later years condemned not his severity, but his wrong-headedness ; he thrashed his boys as much for ignorance as for neglect. Brutality apart, he was a good teacher, and Johnson was never squeamish about corporal punishment : " My master whipt me very well. Without that, Sir, I should have done nothing. . . ."

Hunter had some distinguished pupils. The two most intimate with Johnson were Edmund Hector, who became a surgeon in Birmingham, and John Taylor, afterwards Rector of Market Bos worth and " King " of Ashbourne. With both of these Johnson remained on intimate terms throughout his life. There was also Isaac Hawkins Browne the elder, and Robert James, afterwards to become famous for his medicinal powders. In the autumn of 1725 Johnson was invited to stay at Pedmore, near Stourbridge, with his cousin, Cornelius Ford. This Cornelius, the best-known

member of Mrs. Johnson's family, was the son of Joseph Ford, and has been commonly, though not certainly, identified with the parson who sits next to the bowl in Hogarth's " Modern Midnight Conversation." Johnson always spoke of him with tenderness in later years, and said that " his abilities, instead of furnishing convivial merriment to the voluptuous and dissolute, might have enabled him to excel among the virtuous and the wise." At Pedmore in 1725 there was no doubt some measure of convivial merriment. Cornelius Ford had been a Fellow of Peterhouse, but was not yet ordained. He formed a very favourable impression of his cousin, and, finding that he was " possessed of uncommon parts," arranged to keep him for a time at Pedmore and to instruct him in the classics.

One piece of advice given by Cornelius Ford to his cousin seems to have been peculiarly fruitful :

> " Obtain some general principles of every science ; he who can talk only on one subject, or act only in one department, is seldom wanted and perhaps never wished for ; while the man of general knowledge can often benefit, and always please."

No man surely, as Mrs. Piozzi says, ever followed this advice more exactly than did Samuel Johnson.

The prolongation of Johnson's stay with his cousin brought him into trouble with his Lichfield

schoolmaster ; for when he returned home at the Whitsuntide of 1726 Hunter would not take him back, and he was accordingly sent to Stourbridge School to be taught by the Reverend John Wentworth and to assist in the teaching of the younger boys. Here, according to Bishop Percy, his genius was " so distinguished that, although little better than a schoolboy, he was admitted into the best company of the place and had no common attention paid to his conversation ; of which remarkable instances were long remembered there."

Johnson's stay at Stourbridge cannot have been longer than a year, since he spent about two years at home with his father before going up to Oxford. Almost certainly it was intended that he should follow the trade of bookselling. Certainly in later years he claimed to have been bred a bookseller and to have learned how to bind a book. But of his way of life during these two years little is known save that he spent more time in the reading than in the selling of his father's books. Probably his refusal to attend his father to Uttoxeter market belongs to this period, and on other occasions he was rebuked for his " want of steady application." What distracted Johnson from bookselling was the books themselves. " To supersede the pleasures of reading by the attentions of traffic was a task he never could master." It was in these two years that Johnson rambled along his father's shelves from one book to another,

" not voyages and travels, but all literature, Sir, all ancient writers, all manly." By the time he reached Oxford his equipment was very different from that of the ordinary freshman. He had read desultorily but widely, and was familiar with many works unknown at the Universities, where, he said, " they seldom read any books but what are put into their hands by their tutors."

On October 31, 1728, Samuel Johnson was entered as a commoner of Pembroke College, Oxford. There has been much speculation concerning the means whereby Michael Johnson, who had fared badly in trade, was able to send his son to the University. Boswell shrank from pressing the question, but was informed by Taylor that a certain " gentleman of Shropshire, one of his schoolfellows," had come to his assistance. This was Andrew Corbet, who in fact matriculated from Pembroke in 1727 and went down from the University just as Johnson entered it. Still, it seems probable that Johnson obtained help of some kind from Corbet or from his father. Certainly Corbet subscribed for two copies of the *Miscellany* in which Johnson's first published work appeared. It is possible, also, that a legacy of forty pounds received by Johnson's mother early in 1728 may have been used for his college expenses.

In any event, Johnson was conducted to Pembroke by his father, who introduced him as a good scholar, a poet, and a Latin verse-writer.

Samuel was silent for the greater part of the interview, but suddenly broke in with a quotation from Macrobius. His first tutor was William Jorden, whom Johnson loved for the goodness of his nature and despised for the meanness of his abilities. " Sir," Johnson said to him once, " you have sconced me two-pence for non-attendance at a lecture not worth a penny." Very soon after his arrival in Oxford he failed to attend upon Mr. Jorden for several days. Being asked for a reason, he stated nonchalantly that he had been sliding on Christ Church meadow. " That, Sir," said Boswell when he heard the story, " was great fortitude of mind." " No, Sir," replied Johnson, " stark insensibility."

Jorden had at least sufficient discernment to note Johnson's particular skill in Latin verse, and it was as a vacation exercise, imposed as a punishment for absence from early prayers, that Johnson's first published work was written. This holiday task consisted in translating Pope's *Messiah* into Latin, and Pope, when he read it, declared : " The writer of this poem will leave it a question for posterity, whether his or mine be the original." It was included in a *Miscellany* edited by the Rev. John Husbands, of Pembroke College, and published in Oxford in 1731.

But the man who meant most to Johnson among the Fellows of Pembroke was William Adams, who afterwards became Master of the college. Adams told Boswell that Johnson was

" a gay and frolicksome fellow " and beloved by his contemporaries. Certainly Johnson remembered some of his Pembroke friends with affection - honest Jack Meeke, whose superiority at classical construe Johnson could not bear, sitting as far away from him in Hall as he could ; Phil Jones, who loved beer and did not get very forward in the Church ; John Fludyer, who turned out a scoundrel, a Whig, and said he was ashamed of having been bred at Oxford.

Johnson's scheme of study at Oxford was grandiose. He prepared a note-book in six folio volumes throughout which the subject headings of knowledge were " copiously branched " ; but there were far more blank than written leaves. As always, Johnson read by fits and starts ; " neither did he regard the hours of study farther than the discipline of the college compelled him."

His poverty, coupled with pride and intermittent melancholy, weighed hardly upon him. Boswell records his " spirited refusal of an eleemosynary supply of shoes " with awe, and Johnson confessed that it was bitterness that drove him to disregard authority and fight his way by his literature and his wit. That he fought with some success is shown by Adams's remark to Boswell : " He was above my mark." " That," exclaimed Johnson, " was liberal and noble."

The length of Johnson's residence at Oxford was long a subject of controversy, but it has now / been established both by documentary anct other

evidence that he left Pembroke for good in December 1729. Ill health, as well as poverty, probably accounted for his departure. In the summer of 1729 he was attacked by "an horrible hypochondria" which brought with it "dejection, gloom, and despair." It was an evil with which Johnson had to contend intermittently throughout his life. Nevertheless, he looked back always to his Oxford days with recollections of pleasure. It was at Oxford that, after taking up Law's *Serious Call,* he first began to think in earnest about religion, and he rejoiced to refer to his college as "a society which, for half a century, has been eminent for English poetry and elegant literature"; it was, he said, a nest of singing-birds.

CHAPTER II

Market Bosworth - Birmingham - marriage - school at Edial - London — *The Gentleman's Magazine* — London — *Plan for a Dictionary* - *Irene* - *The Vanity of Human Wishes.*

FOR some time after he left Oxford, Johnson was unemployed. He made an unsuccessful application for an ushership at Stourbridge, and at the end of 1731 his father died. In the spring of the following year he accepted a post as under-master in the Grammar School at Market Bosworth. Here he was very unhappy : he did not know whether it was more disagreeable for him to teach, or the boys to learn, the grammar rules ; further, he was infuriated by the treatment he received at the hands of Sir Wolstan Dixie, in whose house he lived. In July, Johnson had received twenty pounds from his father's estate, and he shook the dust of Market Bosworth off his feet. His next journey was to his old friend Edmund Hector, now settled as a surgeon at Birmingham. Hector was lodging with Thomas Warren, printer, bookseller, and proprietor of the *Birmingham Journal,* and it was Warren who printed a translation, by Johnson, of Le Grand's French version of *A Voyage to Abyssinia* by Jerome Lobo, a Portuguese Jesuit. In the preface - the first of many - the authentic Johnson may be recognised :

> " The reader will here find no regions cursed with irremediable barrenness, or blest with spontaneous fecundity ; no perpetual gloom or unceasing sunshine ; nor are the nations here described either devoid of all sense of humanity, or consummate in all private and social virtues : here are no Hottentots without religion, polity, or articulate language ; no Chinese perfectly polite, and completely skilled in all sciences : he will discover what will always be discovered by a diligent and impartial inquirer, that wherever human nature is to be found, there is a mixture of vice and virtue, a contest of passion and reason ; and that the Creator doth not appear partial in his distributions, but has balanced in most countries their particular inconveniences by particular favours."

It was at Birmingham, too, that Johnson met the lady who was to become his wife, " a widow, the relict of Mr. Porter a mercer, who dying, left her, if not well jointured, so provided for, as made a match with her to a man in Johnson's circumstances desirable."

> " Mr. Johnson has told me " [writes Mrs. Piozzi] " that her hair was eminently beautiful, quite *blonde* like that of a baby ; but that she fretted about the colour, and was always desirous to dye it black, which he very judiciously hindered her from doing. His

account of their wedding we used to think ludicrous enough - 'I was riding to church (says Johnson), and she following on another single horse : she hung back however, and I turned about to see whether she could get her steed along, or what was the matter. I had however soon occasion to see it was only coquetry, and *that I despised,* so quickening my pace a little, she mended hers : but I believe there was a tear or two - pretty dear creature ! ' "

The fortune which Mrs. Porter brought with her amounted to about £800, and Johnson, encouraged by his friend Gilbert Walmsley, Registrar of the Ecclesiastical Court of the Bishop of Lichfield, determined to set up at Edial, near Lichfield, an academy of his own where young gentlemen could be " boarded and taught the Latin and Greek languages." But only eight young gentlemen, at the most, availed themselves of this opportunity, and of these the only one whose name is remembered is David Garrick. Johnson prepared an elaborate classical curriculum for his three classes, but the school failed and Johnson again turned to the profession of writing, a way of life which, in the view of his biographer, Hawkins, required some apology :

" It evidently appears that he [Johnson] had entertained a resolution ... to become an author by profession ; an occupation, which, though

> it may, in some views of it, be deemed mercenary, as adapting itself to particular occasions and conjunctures, nay, to the interests, passions and prejudices, and even humours of mankind, has yet some illustrious examples, at least in our times, to justify it. It is true, that many persons distinguish between those writings which are the effect of a natural impulse of genius, and those other that owe their existence to interested motives . . . but Johnson knew of no such distinction, and would never acquiesce in it when made by others : on the contrary I have, more than once, heard him assert, that he knew of no genuine motive for writing, other than necessity."

In this belief, expressed in a variety of terse forms, Johnson never wavered.

Already, in 1734, Johnson had written to Edward Cave, founder and editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine,* offering him " short literary dissertations in Latin or English, critical remarks on authors ancient or modern, forgotten poems that deserve revival,'' and suggesting that such contributions might be preferable to " low jests, aukward buffoonery, or the dull scurrilities of either party." Whether anything came of this offer is uncertain, but, after the closing of the Edial Academy, Johnson turned his face towards London. Thither he and David Garrick went together on horseback in March 1737.

> "Two such candidates for fame" [writes Arthur Murphy] "perhaps never, before that day, entered the metropolis together. Their stock of money was soon exhausted. In his visionary project of an academy Johnson had probably wasted his wife's substance; and Garrick's father had little more than his half-pay. The two fellow-travellers had the world before them, and each was to chuse his road to fortune and to fame. They brought with them genius, and powers of mind, peculiarly formed by nature for the different vocations to which each of them felt himself inclined. They acted from the impulse of young minds, even then meditating great things, and with courage anticipating success. . . . In three or four years afterwards Garrick came forth with talents that astonished the publick. . . . Johnson was left to toil in the humble walks of literature."

In these walks, whether humble or distinguished, Johnson was destined to toil for many years. Cave drew him into a close intimacy, and much of his time was spent in the society of the correspondents of *The Gentleman's Magazine* at St. John's Gate. Cave, who "had no great relish for mirth, but could bear it," had collected round him a curious company. Moses Browne, his chief contributor, had originally been a pen-cutter.

He fed the magazine with " many a nourishing morsel," and, himself an editor of Izaak Walton, excelled in piscatory eclogues.

Other contributors were Foster Webb, who specialised in poetical enigmas ; John Canton, who contributed philosophical and mathematical papers and was afterwards made a fellow of the Royal Society ; William Rider (" Philargyrus "), who became sur-master of St. Paul's School ; Adam Calamy, the Nonconformist writer who signed himself always " A consistent protestant."

Cave felt that he was doing Johnson a great honour in admitting him to the company of such a distinguished staff. According to Hawkins (of whom, however, it must be remembered that he quarrelled with Cave) :

> " He [Cave] was so incompetent a judge of Johnson's abilities, that, meaning at one time to dazzle him with the splendour of some of those luminaries in literature who favoured him with their correspondence, he told him that, if he would, in the evening, be at a certain alehouse in the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell, he might have a chance of seeing Mr. Browne and another or two of the persons mentioned. . . . Johnson accepted the invitation ; and being introduced by Cave, dressed in a loose horseman's coat, and such a great bushy uncombed wig as he constantly wore, to the sight of Mr. Browne, whom he found sitting at the upper

> end of a long table, in a cloud of tobacco-smoke, had his curiosity gratified."

A more intimate friend of Johnson at this period was Richard Savage. It was an odd friendship. Savage claimed to be the son of Earl Rivers and the Countess of Macclesfield and had been both actor and playwright. He was condemned to death for killing a gentleman in a tavern brawl in 1727, but pardoned in the next year. Unsuccessful in his application for the poet-laureatcship, he had at least one bond that linked him to Johnson - the bond of poverty. Johnson told Hawkins :

> " that whole nights have been spent by him and Savage in conversations . . . not under the hospitable roof of a tavern, where warmth might have invigorated their spirits, and wine dispelled their care ; but in a perambulation round the squares of Westminster, St. James's in particular, when all the money they could both raise was less than sufficient to purchase for them the shelter and sordid comforts of a night cellar."

A review of Johnson's literary work published in 1738 indicates well enough that he was writing with the one motive which he regarded as genuine. There appeared, for instance, in the pages of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, an ode " Ad Urbanum " (that is, to Edward Gave) ; another " Ad

Ricardum Savage " ; English verses to Eliza, and other trifles.

Johnson was also employed by Cave in another capacity. Cave, by virtue of his office of Inspector of Franks in the Post Office, was in close touch with the officers of the Houses of Parliament. Always eager to satisfy a public demand, he used, on the occasion of an important debate, to make his way into the gallery of the House of Commons and to take notes. These notes were amplified by William Guthrie and reports of debates appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* from 1732 onwards. They formed a very popular section of the journal, and Johnson assisted in their revision. Cave, however, was shortly informed that " the Speaker was offended with this freedom, which he regarded in the light of a breach of privilege and would subject Cave, unless he desisted, to parliamentary censure or perhaps imprisonment."

But Cave was too good a journalist to be easily daunted. In the *Magazine* for June 1738 he announced to his readers that, as a result of official prohibition, he was obliged to give them instead an account of the " Debates in the Senate of Magna Lilliputia," and in this account the names of British politicians appeared in such anagrammatic forms as *Walelop* for Walpole and *Ptit* for Pitt. This clumsy artifice was entirely successful and no steps were taken by Parliament to suppress the reports in their new form.

From November 1740 to February 1743 these

reports were entirely written by Johnson. They fill two volumes of the *Collected Works,* and Hawkins's description of the atmosphere in which they were written is convincing :

> " The debates penned by Johnson were not only more methodical and better connected than those of Guthrie, but in all the ornaments of stile superior : they were written at those seasons when he was able to raise his imagination to such a pitch of fervour as bordered upon enthusiasm, which, that he might the better do, his practice was to shut himself up in a room assigned him at St. John's gate, to which he would not suffer any one to approach, except the compositor or Cave's boy for matter, which, as fast as he composed it, he tumbled out at the door."

Not unnaturally, Johnson had some twinges of conscience. Many readers regarded the reports as authentic and Johnson was at pains to undeceive them when he could. He warned Smollett, for instance, to be on his guard in quoting from them in his *History of England* - a warning which appears to have been disregarded ; and six days before his death Johnson solemnly declared to John Nichols :

> " that the only part of his writings which then gave him any compunction was his account of the Debates in *The Gentleman's Magazine ;* but

that, at the time he wrote them, he did not think he was imposing on the world."

Many members of Parliament considered themselves " much obliged for the printed accounts of debates of both Houses, because they are made to speak better than they do in the Senate." In particular, one speech on the Bill for the Encouragement and Increase of Seamen put into the mouth of Pitt was " much talked of and considered as genuine." It is the speech beginning :

" Sir, the atrocious crime of being a young man, which the honourable gentleman has with such spirit and decency charged upon me, I shall neither attempt to palliate nor deny, but content myself with wishing that I may be one of those whose follies may cease with their youth, and not of that number, who are ignorant in spite of experience."

Many years afterwards this debate was being discussed at a party at which Johnson was present.

" During the ardour of conversation " [writes Murphy] " Johnson remained silent. As soon as the warmth of praise subsided, he opened with these words : ' That speech I wrote in a garret in Exeter street.' The company was struck with astonishment. After staring at each other in silent amaze, Dr. Francis asked ' How that speech could be written by him ? ' ' Sir,'

said Johnson, 'I wrote it in Exeter street. I never had been in the gallery of the House of Commons but once. Cave had interest with the door-keepers. He, and the persons employed under him, gained admittance : they brought away the subject of discussion, the names of the speakers, the side they took, and the order in which they rose, together with notes of the arguments advanced in the course of the debate. The whole was afterwards communicated to me, and I composed the speeches in the form which they now have in the Parliamentary debates. ... I saved appearances tolerably well ; but I took care that the WHIG DOGS should not have the best of it.' "

The first English poem of any importance written by Samuel Johnson was published in 1738. This was *London: A Poem in Imitation of the Third Satire of Juvenal.* The writing of it was perhaps connected with the impending departure of Richard Savage, for whom a subscription was being raised with a view to sending him to " a place so far distant from the metropolis as to be out of the reach of its temptations."

The poem, written in Exeter Street, where Johnson was lodging with one Norris, a staymaker, was first offered to Cave in a letter in which Johnson concealed the author's identity :

" Having the inclosed poem in my hands to dispose of for the benefit of the author ... I

believe I could not procure more advantageous terms from any person than from you. . . . I do not doubt but you will look over this poem with another eye, and reward it in a different manner from a mercenary book-seller, who counts the lines he is to purchase and considers nothing but the bulk. . . ."

The poem was eventually printed by Cave and anonymously published by Dodsley at Tully's Head in Pall Mall. It quickly reached a second edition and Pope declared that the author could not long remain unknown. Whether or no the early lines :

I praise the hermit, but regret the friend,
Who now resolves, from vice and LONDON far,
To breathe in distant fields a purer air,
And, fix'd on Cambria's solitary shore,
Give to St. David one true Briton more,

refer to Savage, the interest of *London* lies in its exhibition of Johnson's " power of versification " in the manner of Mr. Pope and of the fervent nationalism which made him the enemy of Walpole's policy of peace.

The cheated nation's happy favorites, see !
Mark whom the great caress, who frown on me !
LONDON ! the needy villain's general home,
The common shore of Paris, and of Rome ;
With eager thirst, by folly or by fate,
Sucks in the dregs of each corrupted state.

Forgive my transports on a theme like this,
I cannot bear a French metropolis.

To the eighteenth-century reader who knew his Juvenal, the last line, for all its bathos, must have conveyed an additional relish as an adaptation of:

Non possum ferre, Quirites
Gracam urbem.

Similarly, the description of

incendia, lapsus
Tectorum assiduos, et mille pericula saevae
Urbis et Augusto recitantes mense poetas

is freely, but vividly, rendered :

Here malice, rapine, accident conspire
And now a rabble rages, now afire ;
Their ambush lure relentless ruffians lay,
And here the fell attorney prowls for prey ;
Here falling houses thunder on your head,
And here a female atheist talks you dead.

London brought Johnson fame, but no patronage. He therefore applied for the mastership of Appleby School, in Leicestershire, and to strengthen his claim secured a letter from Lord Gower to Dean Swift recommending him for a Mastership of Arts of Trinity College, Dublin. But nothing came of the application, and Johnson remained in Grub Street, writing short biographies (of Blake, Sir Francis Drake, Barretier,

and others), essays, and prose satires. Of these last, one *(Marmor Norfolciense)* was described by *The Monthly Review* as "a bloody Jacobitical pamphlet" and, according to one account, a warrant having been issued for Johnson's arrest, the guilty author concealed himself and his wife in an obscure lodging in Lambeth Marsh ; the other was an ironical attack upon the Licensers of the Stage for their suppression of Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa,* a play hostile to Sir Robert Walpole and his policy.

Larger pieces of hack work were the translation of Crousaz's *Commentary on Mr. Pope's Principles of Morality* (1742) and the *Catalogue of the Harleian Library,* compiled for Thomas Osborne, the bookseller who had purchased the Earl of Oxford's library of printed books. This catalogue was published in live volumes between 1743 and 1745, and Johnson also edited, under the title *The Harleian Miscellany,* a collection of the "small tracts and fugitive pieces " contained in the library.

> " Osborne " [writes Hawkins] " was an opulent tradesman . . . he was used to boast that he was worth forty thousand pounds, but of booksellers he was one of the most ignorant : of title-pages or editions he had no knowledge or remembrance, but in all the tricks and arts of his trade he was most expert. . . . Seeing Johnson one day deeply engaged in perusing a book, and the work being for the instant at a

> stand, he reproached him with inattention and delay, in such coarse language as few men would use, and still fewer could brook : the other in his justification asserted somewhat, which Osborne answered by giving him the lie ; Johnson's anger at so foul a charge was not so great as to make him forget that he had weapons at hand : he seized a folio that lay near him, and with it felled his adversary to the ground, with some exclamation, which, as it is differently related, I will not venture to repeat."

Hawkins's squeamishness as to the variants of Johnson's exclamation is to be regretted.

Mrs. Thrale did her best to get at the truth :

> " And how was that affair, in earnest ? do tell me, Mr. Johnson ? "
>
> " There is nothing to tell, dearest Lady, but that he was insolent and I beat him, and that he was a blockhead and told of it, which I should never have done ; so the blows have been multiplying, and the wonder thickening for all these years, as Thomas was never a favourite with the Public. I have beat many a fellow, but the rest had the wit to hold their tongues."

From the drudgery of cataloguing Johnson turned to a biography of his friend Richard Savage. This work, the first in that *genre* which was to be the most fruitful source of Johnson's success as a

prose-writer, was written hastily, but *con amore.* One short piece of characterisation may be quoted :

> " Some time after he had obtained his liberty, he met in the street the woman that had sworn with so much malignity against him. She informed him, that she was in distress, and, with a degree of confidence not easily attainable, desired him to relieve her. He, instead of insulting her misery, and taking pleasure in the calamities of one who had brought his life into danger, reproved her gently for her perjury ; and changing the only guinea that he had, divided it equally between her and himself. This is an action which, in some ages, would have made a saint, and, perhaps, in others, a hero, and which, without any hyperbolical encomiums, must be allowed to be an instance of uncommon generosity, an act of complicated virtue ; by which he at once relieved the poor, corrected the vitious, and forgave an enemy ; by which he at once admitted the strongest provocations, and exercised the most ardent charity."

The *Life* of Savage, published in 1744, won high praise from Henry Fielding, who wrote :

> " A more just or pleasant, a more engaging or a more improving treatise on the excellencies and defects of human nature, is scarce to be found in our own or perhaps in any other language."

In the following year, the year in which it has been attempted to show that Johnson was serving with the forces of the Young Pretender, his first work on Shakespeare - *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth* - appeared. It opened with a characteristic discourse upon witchcraft, with quotations from Olympiodorus, Chrysostom, and James I, and received high praise, at a time when Johnson valued praise, from William Warburton.

In the meantime Johnson's old pupil, David Garrick, had quickly become famous. He had made his mark on the London stage at Goodman's Fields Theatre in 1741, and by 1747 had become j'oint patentee of Drury Lane. For the opening night, September 20, Johnson wrote a prologue to be spoken by Garrick. First he reviews the history of English drama from Shakespeare onwards :

When Learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes
First rear'd the stage, immortal Shakespeare *rose ;*
Each change of many-colour'd life he drew,
Exhausted worlds, and then imagin'd new :
Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
And panting time toiVd after him in vain.
His powerful strokes presiding truth impress'd,
And unresisted passion storm'd the breast. . . .

Passing from Ben Jonson to the Restoration dramatists who

pleas'd their age, and did not aim to mend,

he writes sorrowfully of the time when

> *. . . crush?d by rules and weakened as refirfd,*
> *For years the pow'r of Tragedy declined.*

Finally, he pleads for the actor :

> *Hard is his lot that here by fortune placed,*
> *Must watch the wild vicissitudes of taste ;*
> *With every meteor of caprice must play',*
> *And chase the new-blown bubbles of the day.*
> *Ah ! let not censure term our fate our choice,*
> *The stage but echoes back the public voice ;*
> *The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give,*
> *For we that live to please, must please to live. . . .*

About the same time Johnson put forward a plan for what was to be the greatest work of his life. His name was by now well known to the booksellers, and a company of them proposed to Johnson that he should undertake the compilation of a dictionary of the English language. Johnson set to work, and his *Plan* appeared in 1747 ; he entered on the province of lexicography, he says, " with the pleasing hope that, as it was low, it likewise would be safe."

> " I was drawn forward with the prospect of employment, which, though not splendid, would be useful ; and which, though it could not make my life envied, would keep it innocent ; which would awaken no passion, engage me in no contention, nor throw in my way any

> temptation to disturb the quiet of others by censure, or my own by flattery."

In the *Plan* Johnson proceeds to review such questions as the admission of foreign words, orthography, pronunciation, etymology, analogy, inflection, explanation, and classification. Before the end he seems almost staggered by his own temerity :

> " When I survey the Plan which I have laid before you, I cannot . . . but confess, that I am frighted at its extent, and, like the soldiers of Caesar, look on Britain as a new world, which it is almost madness to invade. But I hope, that though I should not complete the Conquest, I shall, at least, discover the coast, civilize part of the inhabitants, and make it easy for some other adventurer to proceed further, to reduce them wholly to subjection, and settle them under laws."

Having heard that Lord Chesterfield was interested in his scheme, Johnson addressed the *Plan* to him, and, having waited on his Lordship in person,

> " was (according to Hawkins) honoured by him with conversations on the subject of literature, in which he found him so deficient as gave him occasion to repent the choice he had made, and to say, that the labour he had bestowed in his address to Lord Chesterfield resembled that of

> gilding a rotten post, that he was a wit among lords and a lord among wits, and that his accomplishments were only those of a dancing-master."

Nevertheless, some of the changes proposed by Lord Chesterfield in the draft of the *Plan* were in fact adopted by Johnson.

The *Dictionary,* large enterprise as it was, did not wholly absorb Johnson in the years between 1747, the date of the *Plan,* and 1755, the year of the publication of the *Dictionary* itself. Johnson, indeed, made light of the task to Mrs. Thrale in later years. He did not, he said, consider it a great performance ; "he might have done it easily in two years, had not his health received several shocks during the time."

Meanwhile Johnson was busy in other fields. Years before, while living at Edial, he had written a tragedy. Having found entertainment in Knolles's voluminous *History of the Turks,* he took for his subject the beautiful Greek captive, Irene, for whose sake Mahomet the Great neglected his empire for two years. Gilbert Walmsley, under whose eye the tragedy was planned, declared that Johnson was " likely to become a fine tragedy-writer."

Walmsley's expectation was not fulfilled ; but by 1749 Garrick was in a commanding position on the London stage, and, with Garrick's assistance, *Irene* was revised and produced at Drury

Lane. It has more than once been pointed out that *Irene* is an admirable illustration of how, in Johnson's own words,

> *declamation roar'd whilst passion slept.*

Occasionally, however, passion is awakened, as when Demetrius cries :

> *To-morrow's action ! Can that hoary wisdom,*
> *Borne down with years, still dote upon to-morrow ?*
> *That fatal mistress of the young, the lazy,*
> *The coward, and the fool, condemned to lose*
> *An useless life, in waiting for to-morrow,*
> *To gaze with longing eyes upon to-morrow,*
> *Till interposing death destroys the prospect !*
> *Strange ! that this general fraud, from day to day,*
> *Should fill the world with wretches undetected.*
> *The soldier, laboring through a winter's march,*
> *Still sees to-morrow drest in robes of triumph ;*
> *Still to the lover's long-expecting arms*
> *To-morrow brings the visionary bride.*
> *But thou, too old to bear another cheat,*
> *Learn, that the present hour alone is man's.*

In the end, Mahomet finds himself in the same sad plight as Othello :

> *Robb'd of the maid, with whom I wish'd to triumph,*
> *No more I burn for fame, or for dominion ;*
> *Success and conquest now are empty sounds . . .*

lines of which the chief interest lies in their resemblance to the last paragraph of the Preface

which Johnson was to write a few years later to the *Dictionary* :

> " I have protracted my work till most of those, whom I wished to please, have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds."

Garrick made heroic efforts to produce *Irene* successfully. The dresses and scenery were magnificent ; the principal parts were allotted to Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Pritchard, Barry, and Garrick himself; Johnson, feeling that the occasion demanded some display of personal magnificence, appeared behind the scenes in a gold-laced waistcoat.

> " Never " [says Hawkins] " was there such a display of eastern magnificence as this spectacle exhibited, nor ever were fine moral sentiments more strongly enforced by correct and energetic utterance and just action."

The critics allowed that the play contained " fine sentiments and elegant language," and that " the moral held up the cause of truth and virtue." Johnson was perhaps fortunate to see his tragedy played for nine nights and to see three editions of it published in his lifetime. Subsequently it was " laid upon the Prompter's shelf, where it has remained to this day." Some thirty years after its production Fanny Burney shut herself up in a " sweet cool summer-house "

in order to read *Irene,* She found it to be not a good play, but a beautiful poem.

More successful was the publication of Johnson's second poem in the manner of Juvenal. This was *The Vanity of Human Wishes,* published, shortly before *Irene,* in 1749, and the first of Johnson's works to bear the author's name on the title-page. Though the poem was to some extent a topical one, some of its lines have become as familiar a part of the heritage of English literature as have Johnson's conversational retorts.

Perhaps the warning to the " young enthusiast " for literary fame strikes the deepest personal note :

When first the college rolls receive his name,
The young enthusiast quits his ease for fame ;
Through all his veins the fever of renown
Spreads from the strong contagion of the gown ;
O'er Bodley's dome his future labours spread,
And Bacon's mansion trembles o'er his head.
Are these thy views ? Proceed, illustrious youth,
And virtue guard thee to the throne of truth !
Tet, should thy soul indulge the gen'rous heat
Till captive science yields her last retreat;
Should reason guide thee with her brightest ray,
And pour on misty doubt resistless day ;
Should no false kindness lure to loose delight,
Nor praise relax, nor difficulty fright ;
Should tempting novelty thy cell refrain,
And sloth effuse her opiate fumes in vain ;
Should beauty blunt on fops her fatal dart,

Nor claim the triumph of a lettered heart;
Should no disease thy torpid veins invade,
Nor melancholy's phantoms haunt thy shade ;
Tet hope not life from grief or danger free,
Nor think the doom of man reversed for thee :
Deign on the passing world to turn thine eyes.
And pause awhile from letters, to be wise ;
There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the gaol.
See nations, slowly wise and meanly just,
To buried merit raise the tardy bust.
If dreams yet fatter, once again attend,
Hear Lydiafs life, and Galileo's end.

Mrs. Piozzi records that " when Johnson read his own Satire, in which the life of a scholar is painted, with the obstructions thrown in his way to fortune and to fame, he burst into a passion of tears." Sir Walter Scott declared that " its deep and pathetic morality has often extracted tears from those whose eyes wander dry over pages professedly sentimental."

CHAPTER III

Ivy Lane Club - *The Rambler* - death of wife - publication of *Dictionary* - *The Idler* - death of mother - *Rasselas.*

THOUGH melancholy clouded Johnson's mental health, though the " harmless drudgery" of lexicography filled his working days, and though he had from time to time a demand for more money than he had by him, one great delight was left to him - conversation ; and his craving for mental intercourse led him, in the winter of 1749, to found his first club, a society which met at the King's Head, a famous beef-steak house, in Ivy Lane, near St. Paul's, every Tuesday evening. " Thither he constantly resorted, and, with a disposition to please and be pleased, would pass those hours in a free and unrestrained interchange of sentiments, which otherwise had been spent at home in painful reflection." There were ten members, including Sir John Hawkins and Johnson himself. Of the remaining eight, Samuel Salter was a Cambridge divine, sometime Archdeacon of Norfolk, " a man of general reading, but no deep scholar." As he " enlivened conversation by the relation of a variety of curious facts," it is easy to appreciate the appeal that he would make to Johnson's voracity for knowledge. Mrs. Piozzi maintains that Johnson had Salter in mind when, in *Rambler* No. 188, he described

one of his fellow-clubmen as being given to " yelping like a hound and calling to the drawers to drive out the dog."

Dr. John Hawkesworth was for many years an intimate friend of Johnson. He afterwards edited *The Adventurer* and died in 1773. John Ryland, a West India merchant and a brother-in-law of Hawkesworth, was one of the few friends of Johnson's early life who lived to attend his funeral. " To have a friend,[55] wrote Johnson to him in the last month before he died, " and a friend like you, may be numbered amongst the first felicities of life."

John Payne was at the time of the founding of the Ivy Lane Club a bookseller who carried on business in Paternoster Row. A few years later he published *The Rambler,* but afterwards he left the chances and fluctuations of publishing for the more solid post of accountant-general of the Bank of England. Samuel Dyer was a scholar and natural philosopher who had unexpectedly abstained from taking holy orders and grew " indifferent to the strict practice of religion.[55] Johnson, however, loved to argue with him on moral and metaphysical topics.

Richard Bathurst was a physician whom Johnson loved better than any human creature; hating fools, rogues, and Whigs, he was, in Johnson's view, " a very good hater.[55] Two other physicians, William McGhie and Edmund Barker, completed the party. Hawkins himself lived to

be Johnson's editor and biographer. It was for him that Johnson coined the word " unclubable."

To the Ivy Lane Club Johnson came " with both a corporal and mental appetite." Conversation was preceded by a supper of sufficient solidity to be regarded as a dinner, and with " no other incentive to hilarity than lemonade." Johnson became a new creature, at once anecdotal and didactic, talking for victory, unafraid of occasional inconsistency, the born story-teller and the born symposiarch.

The conception of Johnson as a " majestic teacher of moral and religious wisdom" is probably derived in the main from *The Rambler,* upon which he embarked in the spring of 1750. It was a twopenny paper, published twice a week ; each number consisted of a single anonymous essay, and, of the 208 essays that appeared in the course of two years, all except five were written by Johnson himself. The work was begun with the highest of motives ; it was undertaken *ad maiorem dei gloriam* and Johnson stuck to his task of answering " the stated calls of the press " twice a week ; for each essay he received two guineas. It was an exacting task even for an experienced journalist. The essays were written hurriedly and went to the printer without being read over. Under such circumstances a certain monotony of style is not to be wondered at, and the world was not widely appreciative of the essays when they first appeared. Johnson was not, as he realised, much

of a favourite with the public. Later, however, when *The Rambler* appeared in collected form, it went through many editions, both in Johnson's life-time and also after his death. More than any other work, perhaps, *The Rambler* has given colour to the view popularised by Macaulay that " when [Johnson] wrote for publication, he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese.[55] Certainly *The Rambler* has little of that lightness and ease for which the reader normally looks in a periodical essay. Hazlitt said of Addison that he talked on paper. In a limited sense this was true of Johnson. In *The Rambler* he frequently discusses the same kind of ethical or social problem which he would argue late into the night from his tavern chair. But he had a clear view of the difference between good writing and good talk. In *The Rambler* No. 14 he wrote :

> " The graces of writing and conversation are of different kinds ; and though he who excels in *ont* might have been, with opportunities and application, equally successful in the other, yet as many please by extemporary talk, though utterly unacquainted with the more accurate method, and more laboured beauties, which composition requires ; so it is very possible that men, wholly accustomed to works of study, may be without that readiness of conception, and affluence of language, always necessary to colloquial entertainment.[55]

It is the " more accurate method and more laboured beauties " that have discouraged readers of Bos well from proceeding to a study of *The Rambler.* At the same time it may be observed that while long words and laboured phrases may well be a source of weariness or irritation in a familiar essay, they may nevertheless provide entertainment in conversation. If Johnson had referred in *The Rambler* to a reluctance to sit for a portrait as " among the anfractuosities of the human mind," or had criticised *The Beggar's Opera* as containing " such a labefactation of all principles, as may be injurious to morality," the phrases would have been quoted as illustrating the verbal elaboration of Johnson's literary style. As it is, they are typical of the kind of sentence that readers of Boswell delight to quote. In *The Rambler,* indeed, Johnson was striving not to entertain, but to instruct, and to provide subjects for instruction twice a week was no light task.

> " I sat yesterday morning " [he wrote in No. 134] " employed in deliberating on which among the various subjects that occurred to my imagination, I should bestow the paper of to-day. After a short effort of meditation by which nothing was determined, I grew every moment more irresolute, my ideas wandered from the first intention, and I rather wished to think, than thought, upon any settled subject ; till at last I was awakened from this dream of

study by a summons from the press : the time was come for which I had been thus negligently purposing to provide, and, however dubious or sluggish, I was now necessitated to write."

So, with the printer clamouring for "copy," Johnson proceeded to supply him with an essay on "idleness." Like many other *Rambler* papers, it turned out to be an ethical tract :

"Thus life is languished away in the gloom of anxiety and consumed in collecting resolutions which the next morning dissipates. . . . The certainty that life cannot be long, and the probability that it will be much shorter than nature allows, ought to awaken every man to the active prosecution of whatever he is desirous to perform. . . ."

But in conversation Johnson could take a different view of idleness :

"BOSWELL : But, Sir, the mind must be employed and we grow weary when idle.

"JOHNSON : That is, Sir, because, others being busy, we want company ; but if we were all idle, there would be no growing weary ; we should all entertain one another."

The principal design of *The Rambler* was "to inculcate wisdom or piety" ; Johnson would not write, as he so frequently talked, for victory.

Meanwhile work on the *Dictionary* was going

forward, though not as fast as the printers would have liked. Johnson was liable to be less punctual with his " copy " than the publishers were with their " copy-money," and more than once in 1751 he was under the necessity of borrowing a guinea from the publisher John Newbery, " the patron of more distressed authors than any man of his time."

Nevertheless there were occasional evenings of gaiety. At the Ivy Lane Club Johnson proposed the celebration of the publication of Mrs. Charlotte Lennox's first book by " a whole night spent in festivity." A hot apple-pie, adorned with bay-leaves, formed part of the elegant supper, and Johnson placed a crown of laurel on the authoress's brow. About five o'clock his face shone with meridian splendour, though he had drunk nothing stronger than lemonade. Hawkins did not enjoy the evening. He grew uncomfortable at the thought of how nearly the party had resembled a debauch.

On March 17, 1752, three days after the appearance of the last number of *The Rambler,* Johnson's wife died. In spite of " the little disagreements which sometimes troubled his married state," there can be no doubt of the sincerity of Johnson's devotion to his wife's memory. " My distress is great," he wrote to Dr. Taylor. " Remember me in your prayers, for vain is the help of man," and would Mrs. Taylor inform him what mourning he should buy for his mother and for his

step-daughter, Lucy Porter? A year later he remembered his dear Tetty with prayer and tears in the morning; in the evening he "prayed for her conditionally if it were lawful," and year after year he commemorated her in his private meditations: "When I recollect," he recorded in 1770, "the time in which we lived together, my grief for her departure is not abated, and I have less pleasure in any good that befalls me, because she does not partake it." Little, unfortunately, is known of Johnson's day-to-day married life. Certainly they went through hard times together, and Mrs. Johnson's "particular reverence for cleanliness" led to a certain measure of domestic discord. But she could appreciate her husband's work; after seeing the first few numbers of *The Rambler* she told him: "I thought very well of you before; but I did not imagine you could have written anything equal to this." *Formosa, culta, ingeniosa, pia,* were the epithets which Johnson chose for her tombstone; in lapidary inscriptions, as he said, a man is not upon oath, but to Johnson each epithet meant something. The first of them, though irreconcilable with Garrick's famous description, is certainly justified by the only portrait of Elizabeth Johnson that survives.

Gradually Johnson's work on the *Dictionary* was coming to an end, and Lord Chesterfield sought to make amends for his earlier neglect of Johnson's labours. In two papers in *The World* he glorified Johnson as the dictator of the English

language, and surrendered all his rights and privileges in the language to Johnson during the period of his dictatorship. Lord Chesterfield's overture provoked one of the most celebrated of Johnson's letters :

> " Seven years, my Lord, have now past, since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door ; during which time I have been pushing on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it, at last, to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before. . . . Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help ? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind ; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it ; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it ; till I am known, and do not want it. . . ."

It is noteworthy that this letter, in the composition of which Johnson probably exercised more than ordinary care and deliberation, contains little trace of what is commonly known as " Johnsonese." It has indeed been well remarked that the indictment is in a crescendo of simplicity

- " till I am known, and do not want it." At Oxford, which he visited in 1754, Johnson was disappointed at not receiving an order for the *Dictionary* from the Master of his old college. " *There* lives a man," he exclaimed in scorn to Tom Warton as they left the Lodgings, " who lives by the revenues of literature, and will not move a finger to support it." Two of the Fellows of the college, however, were more hospitable, and what gave Johnson even greater gratification was a suggestion that the degree of Master of Arts might be conferred upon him in time for him to inscribe the letters A.M. after his name on the title-page of the *Dictionary.* By the good offices of Tom Warton, fellow of Trinity, and Francis Wise, Radclivian Librarian, Johnson duly received his diploma in the spring of 1755. The letter of recommendation written by the Chancellor to the University describes Johnson as " having very eminently distinguished himself by the publication of a series of essays, excellently calculated to form the manners of the people, and in which the cause of religion and morality is every where maintained by the strongest powers of argument and language." A reference to the projected *Dictionary* follows, but the letter is a further reminder that Johnson was the Great Moralist before he was the Great Lexicographer.

At length the great work was finished. Andrew Millar, who had taken the greater part of the publisher's responsibility and had waited long

after the prescribed date for the delivery of the last sheet for press, thanked God that he had done with Johnson. Johnson appreciated the sense of relief which provoked this outburst. Millar was to him "the Maecenas of the Age"; though there were occasional wrangles, author and publisher understood one another.

In his Preface, Johnson reviewed his nine years' work as lexicographer. At first he had resolved "to leave neither words nor things unexamined," and had looked forward to hours spent in the feasts of literature and the treasures of learning; he had hoped to trace each word to its original source and then to examine fully the nature of the thing signified. Such, he says, were the dreams of a poet doomed at last to wake a lexicographer. Johnson realised that, if he set himself too high a standard, his work would never be completed; his publishers, no doubt, pressed the argument home.

To-day it is inevitable that Johnson's *Dictionary* should be regarded chiefly as an interesting mile-stone in the history of lexicography. But as an individual achievement it remains. As such it must be judged by comparison, not with the co-ordinated work of modern scholarship, but with the English dictionaries that preceded it. Nathan Bailey's work, first published in 1721, was an established book of reference in the early part of the eighteenth century. It professed to be no more than a word-book, and to glance at Bailey and Johnson side by side is sufficient to show in

what measure Johnson was a pioneer. Of the word " Of,," for instance, Bailey gives the simple definition " belonging to " ; Johnson distinguishes twenty-three senses of the preposition, with appropriate illustrations of each.

Johnson himself foresaw that " a few wild blunders and risible absurdities " might " furnish folly with laughter and harden ignorance into contempt." To-day it is the risible absurdities which are most often quoted. Every reader of Boswell knows that Johnson was in error about *Leeward* and *Pastern* and that he had his little jokes about *Oats* and *Lexicographer.* But the *Dictionary* is much more than a repository of linguistic curiosities. The definition, for instance, of the word *Enthusiast* shows at once why " enthusiasm " was suspect in the eighteenth century :

" 1. One who vainly imagines a private revelation ; one who has a vain confidence of his intercourse with God.

" 2. One of a hot imagination, or violent passions.

" 3. One of elevated fancy, or exalted ideas."

Or, again, the deterioration of verbal significance is well illustrated by the definitions of *Nervous* :

" 1. Well strung ; strong ; vigorous.

" 2. Relating to the nerves ; having the seat in the nerves.

" 3. [In medical cant] Having weak or diseased nerves."

Johnson dismissed his *Dictionary,* in the famous words of his Preface, " with frigid tranquility, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise." Perhaps the Preface was a little too candid. Later, Johnson complained that with two exceptions his friends endeavoured to depress him " with threats of censure from the publick, or with objections learned from those who had learned them from [his] own Preface." However, the *Dictionary* attained an immediate success ; and an abridged edition was published in 1756. But pecuniary troubles still weighed heavily upon Johnson. Early in 1756 he was under arrest for a debt of five pounds eighteen shillings. Neither Strahan nor Millar, to whom he would most naturally have turned, was at hand ; it was Samuel Richardson who rescued him. For some years more Johnson was destined to write for a living. For Christopher Smart's *Universal Visiter* he wrote a number of essays, and for the *Literary Magazine,* which was inaugurated in 1756, he reviewed books of a richly diversified character ; among them was Hanway's *Essay on Tea,* which provoked Johnson's famous description of himself as " a hardened and shameless tea-drinker, who has, for twenty years, diluted his meals with only the infusion of this fascinating **plant**; whose kettle has scarcely time to cool ; who with tea amuses the evening, with tea solaces the midnight, and, with tea, welcomes the morning.' ' More important were the *Proposals for*

Printing, by Subscription, the Dramatick Works of William Shakespeare, though Johnson was at pains to assure his friends that his motive in editing Shakespeare and in compiling the *Dictionary* were the same - want of money, the only motive to writing that he recognised. With an optimism not uncommon amongst Shakespearean editors, Johnson announced his edition for the end of 1757. A certain number of the plays were printed by the spring of 1758, as Burney found when he visited Johnson in Gough Square and noted that the furniture of the top-floor room, where Johnson worked, consisted of five or six Greek folios, a deal writing-desk, and a chair and a half. At that time Johnson hoped to publish the complete work in the summer. Meanwhile he engaged himself upon a new series of essays which, under the title *The Idler,* served as the principal contribution for two years (1758-60) to *The Universal Chronicle.* *The Idler* appeared only once a week, and this, perhaps, is one of the reasons why it has more lightness and variety than its predecessor. Boswell, of course, is concerned to show that the Great Moralist was still at work, and selects certain essays in which " profundity of thought " and " labour of language " are still in evidence. Actually it is in the essays which Boswell neglects that some of the best of Johnson's familiar prose is to be found. There is a freshness in them which may bring some surprise to those who have been brought up in the tradition that " everybody

reads Bos well, nobody reads Johnson." Here, for instance, is a note on news-writers in wartime :

> " In a time of war . . . the task of news-writers is easy : they have nothing to do but to tell that a battle is expected, and afterwards that a battle has been fought, in which we and our friends, whether conquering or conquered, did all, and our enemies did nothing. . . . A peace will equally leave the warrior and relater 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/'

Or what better characterisation of the bargain-hunter can be wanted than this ?

> " I am the unfortunate husband of a *buyer of bargains*.. . whatever she thinks cheap, she holds it the duty of an economist to buy; in consequence of this maxim, we are encumbered on every side with useless lumber. The servants can scarcely creep to their beds through the chests and boxes that surround them. The carpenter is employed once a week in building closets, fixing cup-boards and fastening shelves. . . . She knows the loss of buying in small quantities, we have, therefore, whole hogs and quarters of oxen. Part of our meat is tainted before it is eaten, and

part is thrown away because it is spoiled ; but she persists in her system and will never buy anything by single pennyworths."

Or of the author with his manuscript :

" I then condescended to step into shops and mentioned my work to the masters. Some never dealt with authors; others had their hands full; some never had known such a dead time; others had lost by all that they had published for the last twelvemonth. One offered to print my work, if I could procure subscriptions for five hundred. . . ."

Or, finally, for an unaffected piece of self-portraiture :

" Mr. Sober's chief pleasure is conversation ; there is no end of his talk or his attention ; to speak or to hear is equally pleasing ; for he still fancies that he is teaching or learning something, and is free for the time from his own reproaches.

" But there is one time at night when he must go home, that his friends may sleep ; and another time in the morning, when all the world agrees to shut out interruption. These are the moments of which poor Sober trembles at the thought.[5]'

While *The Idler* was still in progress, Johnson was distressed to hear of the illness of his mother, now ninety years of age, at Lichfield. Hastily, on

January 13, 1759, he collected twelve guineas - some of them borrowed - and sent them to his step-daughter, Lucy Porter. A week later he wrote : " You have been the best mother, and I believe the best woman in the world. I thank you for your indulgence to me and beg forgiveness of all that I have done ill, and all that I have omitted to do well." Johnson had hoped to make the journey to Lichfield and to take with him a further twenty pounds, but the end came quickly and Johnson did not go. Instead, he set about raising money on a new book, a story with the title *The Choice of Life, or The History of . . . Prince of Abissinia.* " I shall have occasion," he wrote to Strahan on the same day that he wrote his last letter to his mother, " for thirty pounds on Monday night, when I shall deliver the book."

The book, written in the evenings of a week, was *Rasselas,* the one work of Johnson's which attained a wide popularity in the author's lifetime. Again Johnson came before the public as the Great Moralist, this time in a fantastic setting. The vanity of human wishes and, in particular, the vanity of the search for happiness is illustrated in a narrative of which almost every sentence could furnish Boswell with a subject of long meditation. " Sir," said Johnson, " if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the

sentiment." Much the same might be said of *Rasselas.* The reader of romance is not likely to be deeply stirred by the adventures of the prince and his sister in their unavailing search for terrestrial felicity. The pleasure derived from *Rasselas* is indeed of the same kind as that derived from *Ecclesiastes,* and its popularity illustrates the love of the eighteenth century for the moral tale :

> *Impressive truth, in splendid fiction drest,*
> *Cheches the vain wish, and calms the troubled breast ;*
> *O'er the dark mind a light celestial throws,*
> *And sooths the angry passions to repose.*

Addressed to those who " listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope," *Rasselas* is the story of a prince of Abyssinia and his sister who determined to leave their happy valley, where they knew only " the soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose," in order to see all the conditions of humanity and so make their choice of life. Young men of gaiety, sages, ethical philosophers, hermits, shepherds, poets, are visited and consulted, but the secret of happiness is still elusive, and in the conclusion of the tale nothing is concluded. *Rasselas* has been called an expanded essay, and the public that had been lukewarm about *The Rambler* rejoiced in the expansion which enabled Johnson to be both discursive and personal. Amongst the digressions in *Rasselas* perhaps the best known is the " Dissertation on the Art of Flying." Johnson,

realising that the world had seen " but a small part of what the mechanic sciences can perform," and that man might use " the swifter migration of wings," foresaw with remarkable clarity the potentialities of destructive aircraft :

> " What would be the security of the good, if the bad could at pleasure invade them from the sky ? Against an army sailing through the clouds, neither walls, nor mountains, nor seas could afford any security. A flight of northern savages might hover in the wind, and light at once with irresistible violence upon the capital of a fruitful region that was rolling under them."

Though Johnson's Grub Street days were days of poverty and struggle, he had by the time of the publication of the *Dictionary* made a notable circle of friends. With Garrick, of course, he had been in touch ever since they travelled to London together in 1737, and for long before. Johnson could never wholly forget that Garrick was his old pupil, and his swift success on the stage may have given Johnson certain twinges of jealousy. Johnson loved, in conversation, to put Davy in his place or to pour scorn on the actor's profession. (" What, Sir, a fellow who claps a hump on his back and a lump on his leg, and cries ' I *am Richard the Third'* ") But if anyone else attacked Garrick, Johnson was up in arms at once. Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose admiration for Johnson

was first aroused by the *Life of Savage,* came to live in London in 1752, and quickly came to enjoy Johnson's talk as much as his writings. Bennet Langton came to London as a young man in the hope of being introduced to the author of *The Rambler.* A little surprised to find a " huge uncouth figure, with a little dark wig which scarcely covered his head and his clothes hanging loose about him," he delighted in the richness and the force of the Rambler's conversation. When Johnson visited Oxford in 1759, he met Langton's friend, Topham Beauclerk, and shortly " the moral, pious Johnson and the gay, dissipated Beauclerk, were companions." But not all Johnson's friends belonged to the gay world. He could dine one day with the fascinating Lady Craven and the next day with Mrs. Gardiner, a tallow-chandler, or with Jack Ellis, a money-scrivener behind the Royal Exchange. The great business of life, he said, was to escape from himself.

CHAPTER IV

Grant of pension — meeting with Boswell - foundation of The Club - edition of Shakespeare - meeting with Thrales - interview with George III — political pamphlets-journey to Scotland.

DURING his early years in London, Johnson had a variety of habitations, several of them in or near the Strand. In 1749 or earlier he entered No. 17 Gough Square, where he lived for ten years. Here the *Dictionary* was compiled, the top floor being divided into compartments for the convenience of Johnson's amanuenses. Here *The Rambler* and *Rasselas* were written, and here his wife died. Here, after his wife's death, he made a home for Anna Williams, " daughter of a very ingenious Welsh physician and a woman of more than ordinary talents and literature." She was blind and her temper was uncertain, but she remained Johnson's companion for thirty years, and Johnson rejoiced in the inexhaustibility of her varied knowledge.

In 1759 Johnson moved to Staple Inn, and from there, after a few months, to Gray's Inn ; in the summer of the next year he went to No. 1 Inner Temple Lane, and there for a time lived uneventfully. One week and one year were very like another ; Johnson rose and lay down and talked and mused ; he went to the theatre for distraction. In the winter of 1761 he paid a

visit to Lichfield, to find his playfellows grown old and his step-daughter's beauty faded. But early in 1762 there came a turning-point in Johnson's life. He was notified of His Majesty's gracious intention to confer on him a pension of three hundred pounds a year. With his definition of *pension* (" pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country ") in his mind, he called upon Reynolds. Could the offer be in decency accepted ? Reassured by Reynolds and also by Lord Bute, who told him that the pension was not for anything he might do, but for what he had already done, he wrote to his lordship :

> " You have conferred your favours on a man who has neither alliance nor interest, who has not merited them by services, nor courted them by officiousness; you have spared him the shame of solicitation and the anxiety of suspense."

Johnson wrote from the heart. At the age of fifty-three he was for the first time relieved of the necessity of writing for bread. With Sir Joshua Reynolds he enjoyed a trip to Devonshire. At Plymouth he was treated as a visitor of distinction, the Commissioner of the Dockyard ordering a yacht to take him to the Eddystone Lighthouse. Walking in the garden of a country house, Johnson was asked whether he was a botanist. " No, Sir," he replied ; " should I wish to become a botanist, I must first turn myself into a reptile." It was on this visit, too, that he surprised a lady

who questioned him about an erroneous definition in the *Dictionary* with the abrupt " Ignorance, Madam, pure ignorance."

Like its predecessor, the year 1763 was a fateful one in Johnson's life : it was the year in which he met James Boswell. The eldest son of Lord Auchinleck, a Scottish judge, Boswell had studied law at Edinburgh and Glasgow, where he had sat under Adam Smith. Having " an almost enthusiastic notion of the felicity of London," he had paid his visit to the capital in 1760. He was not disappointed. The society which he found in London gave him full opportunity to cultivate the two ruling ambitions of his life - literary fame and the friendship of the great. Before his meeting with Johnson he had already published a number of poems, including *An Ode to Tragedy,* which he dedicated to himself, and *The Cub at Newmarket;* the result of an expedition to the Newmarket spring meeting under the guidance of the Earl of Eglinton. In some still earlier doggerel he had produced an authentic self-portrait :

Boswell is pleasant and gay,
For frolic by nature designed ;
He heedlessly rattles away
When the company is to his mind,
" This maxim," he says, "you may see,
We never can have corn without chaff" ;
So not a bent sixpence cares he,
Whether with *him or* at *him you laugh.*

Fortified with a good humour which made him willing to risk all manner of snubs, Boswell contrived on his second visit to London to meet Samuel Johnson. The scene was the back parlour of the bookshop kept by Tom Davies in Russell Street, Govent Garden. Boswell was drinking tea with Davies and his wife, when Johnson walked unexpectedly into the shop. It was one of the great meetings of history, and is best described in BoswelPs words :

> " Mr Davies mentioned my name and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated ; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies,' Don't tell where I come from.' ' From Scotland,' cried Davies roguishly. ' Mr Johnson, (said I) I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it.' I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to sooth and conciliate him, and not as an humiliating abasement at the expence of my country. But however that might be, this speech was somewhat unlucky ; for with that quickness of wit for which he was so remarkable he seized the expression ' come from Scotland,' which I used in the sense of being of that country ; and, as if I had said that I had come away from it, or left it, retorted, ' That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help.' This stroke stunned me a good deal. ... "

Boswell was to be stunned again almost immediately, but he remained upon the field, " not wholly discomfited," and Tom Davies was not paying an idle compliment when he assured Boswell that Johnson liked him very well. Sufficiently encouraged, he called in the following week upon Johnson at Inner Temple Lane. Johnson's manners were as gracious as his appearance was slovenly - rusty-brown clothes, disordered wig, ill-fitting stockings, unfastened shoes and breeches. " I am obliged," he said in reply to Boswell's apology, " to any man who visits me" - a doubtful compliment, perhaps, but a pathetically sincere confession. Boswell got something better than compliments out of his visit ; he got Johnson to himself and a " short minute " of his talk was duly recorded. When Boswell for the second time rose to go, he was pressed to stay ; when he eventually left, Johnson promised to return the visit. Thus were the foundations laid of the companionship from which the major part of our knowledge of Johnson's character is derived. Boswell's sensibility and industry were such that the record of the last twenty years of Johnson's life is in large measure the record of his conversations, his correspondence, and his journeyings with James Boswell. " Who *is* this Scotch cur at Johnson's heels ? " asked someone. " He is not a cur," answered Goldsmith ; " you are too severe. He is only a bur. Tom Davies flung him at Johnson in sport, and he has the faculty

of sticking." Yet BoswelPs opportunities were limited. Except for the year of the tour to the Hebrides, he was seldom in Johnson's company for a continuous period of any length.

Less than three months after their first meeting Boswell was due to start upon a Continental tour, and Johnson gave further proof of his liking for his new friend by escorting him to Harwich. It is clear that, even after a few months' acquaintance, Boswell's company had become a source of delight to Johnson. Boswell's good humour induced a gaiety in Johnson which was his best protection against his lurking melancholy. Boswell was no fool, but he was a perfect target for affectionate raillery. At an inn where they dined on the way to Harwich, Johnson enjoyed exhibiting Boswell to an elderly gentlewoman as an incorrigible idler. At supper he impressed upon Boswell the importance of taking food seriously - " he who does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else." Certainly Johnson was one of the great guests of history. Records of his entertainment of friends under his own roof are rare, though it is but fair to recall that when Boswell was invited to a meal at Johnson's Court the standard of elegance surprised him. But it was as a guest that Johnson was pre-eminently desirable and as a guest he developed a highly critical faculty. He claimed to be a more exquisite judge of cookery than the man who had a tolerable cook and mostly stayed at home, and if he was invited

out to dinner he rightly expected something more than the normal menu - " This was a good dinner enough, to be sure ; but it was not a dinner to *ask* a man to."

At Harwich, Boswell received a variety of good advice, Johnson bidding him kneel in the church and commend himself to his Creator and Redeemer ; it was after they had left the church that Johnson dealt briefly with Berkeley's theory of the non-existence of matter. Boswell felt that it was as impossible to refute it as to believe it. Not so Johnson. " Striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, ' I refute it *thus'* " On the beach they embraced with tenderness, and Boswell, looking back from the ship, kept his eyes upon the rolling motion of his friend's majestic frame until Johnson turned back to walk into the town.

On his return to London Johnson was occupied in giving epistolary advice to his friend Taylor, whose domestic life had undergone " a strange revolution." His wife had left him. Johnson's counsel was a characteristic compound of hortatory ethics and common sense. " The happiness of conjugal life," he wrote, as he might have written in *The Rambler,* " cannot be ascertained or secured either by sense or by virtue and therefore its miseries may be numbered among those evils which we cannot prevent and must only labour to endure with patience and palliate with judgement." Accordingly he advised Taylor to

forbear all pursuit and to wear an appearance of complete indifference.

The most famous of Johnson's clubs, which still preserves its dignified anonymity, " The Club," was founded in 1764. Sir Joshua Reynolds first proposed its formation to Johnson, and the original members included Burke, Beauclerk, Langton, Goldsmith and Hawkins. Hawkins soon retired owing to the late hours kept by the company. Garrick heard of The Club from Reynolds, and expressed his willingness to join. Johnson was very properly indignant : " He'll be of us, how does he know we will *permit* him ? The first Duke in England has no right to hold such language." When, however, Garrick came up for formal election, Johnson supported his candidature with warmth.

On Good Friday Johnson deplored that he had spent fifty-five years in resolving ; he had always been forming schemes of a better life and had done nothing - his indolence had sunk into grosser sluggishness, his dissipation had spread into wilder negligence. Was he thinking, in particular, of his Shakespeare ? He had issued his *Proposals* in 1756 and had promised the edition for the end of 1757 ; in 1762 Charles Churchill had written :

> *He for subscribers baits his hook*
> *And takes your cash ; but where's the book ?*

A year later Johnson confessed that he had two good reasons for not printing a list of subscribers

-he had lost the names and spent the money.

At length, in October 1765, the edition appeared. Late as were the fruits of his work, Johnson had had Shakespeare in mind for twenty years, and in his *Proposals* had declared his intention of purging the text of corruptions by a careful collation of the oldest copies of the plays, of resisting the temptation of specious emendation, and of elucidating obscure passages by an endeavour to read the books which Shakespeare read. On the philological side Johnson wrote with greater confidence ; " having had more motives to consider the whole extent of our language than any other man from its first formation," he looked forward to the disentanglement of Shakespeare's intricacies, and his Preface, after a period of depreciation in the nineteenth century, is to-day regarded by Shakespearean scholars as of permanent importance. Mohnson grew warm in Shakespeare's praise, but was not afraid to display his faults " without envious malignity or superstitious veneration." Two characteristic points may be noted here. The first defect which Johnson notes in Shakespeare has nothing to do with the technicalities of literary or dramatic criticism :> " [Shakespeare] sacrifices virtue to convenience and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose ... he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked ; he carries his

persons indifferently through right and wrong and at the close dismisses them without further care. . . . This fault the barbarity of the age cannot extenuate ; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better. . . . " It is the Rambler, the majestic exponent of ethical wisdom, who writes. Accuracy of expression, elegance of diction, meant much to the compiler of the *English Dictionary,* but the fundamental distinction between virtue and vice meant more, and the distinction must hold good for playwrights as well as for preachers.

But for the critics who deplored Shakespeare's disregard of dramatic illusion Johnson was ready with a stout defence :

> " Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation ; if the spectator can be once persuaded that his old acquaintance are Alexander and Caesar, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of Pharsalia, or the bank of Granicus, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumscriptions of terrestrial nature. The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players."

Earlier in 1765 Johnson had received a " spontaneous compliment" from Trinity College,

Dublin, which conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Laws, *ob egregiam scriptorum elegantiam et utilitatem,* and it is a fact not often remembered that Johnson first became " Doctor Johnson " by virtue of this Irish honour. Oxford made him a D.C.L. ten years later. It was in this year, too, that Johnson was introduced to the Thrale family, and for twenty years the Thrales provided him with social delights such as he had not known before. It was Arthur Murphy who first brought the lexicographer to dine at Streatham. Johnson conceived a warm affection both for Henry Thrale and his wife ; he soon became a regular diner, and in the summer of 1766 was installed for a period of three months in the comfort of the Streatham house ; later he travelled with the family in France and Wales, stayed with them in Brighton, and took a very serious interest in Thrale's brewery.

Of the happiness which Mrs. Thrale brought into Johnson's life there can be no doubt. The story of their relations is recorded in a long series of letters and in the *Anecdotes.* The attraction which Henry Thrale exercised over Johnson is less easy to understand. According to Boswell, Johnson esteemed Thrale as a man of excellent principles, a good scholar, well skilled in trade, and of a sound understanding. Mrs. Thrale herself described her husband as exceedingly comfortable to live with and yet as obliging to nobody. Prohably Johnson liked Thrale primarily because

he was a man of business rather than a man of letters. Trade, and success in trade, fascinated Johnson. Henry Thrale embodied the stability of ordered life which Johnson himself had never enjoyed ; he won Johnson's respect as a man who could combine certain literary interests with the absorbing duties of citizenship and commerce:

Domi inter milk mercatum negotia
Literarum elegantiam minime neglexit.

Johnson became proud not only to call the Thrales' house his home, but also to regard himself as a consultant in the business of brewing. (" We are not far," he wrote in 1777, " from the great year of a hundred thousand barrels, which, if three shillings be gained upon each barrel, will bring us fifteen thousand pounds a year.") On the domestic side, Streatham provided the social amenities which Johnson loved best - a good library, pretty women, late hours, careful cookery, fruit, conversation.

Meanwhile, in 1766, Boswell had returned from his Continental tour to find Johnson in Johnson's Court, Fleet Street ; Anna Williams occupied an apartment on the ground floor ; on the top floor was Robert Levett, an obscure practiser of physic, who, after an unsuccessful marriage, lived as inmate of Johnson's house for many years and made tea for Johnson all the morning ; in general attendance was Francis Barber, a negro who had

been brought to England in 1750 and had been given to Johnson by Richard Bathurst. Johnson did not think highly of some of the company Boswell had kept on his travels. Did Johnson really think Rousseau a bad man, Boswell asked ? " Sir," was the reply, " I think him one of the worst of men ; a rascal who ought to be hunted out of society." Boswell could not believe that Rousseau's intention was bad. " Sir, that will not do. We cannot prove any man's intention to be bad. You may shoot a man through the head, and say you intended to miss him ; but the Judge will order you to be hanged." Johnson was at this time a water-drinker, but was very willing to sit with Boswell and Goldsmith, who, with a bottle of port between them, urged him to write more. " I wonder, Sir," said Boswell, " you have not more pleasure in writing than in not writing." " Sir," said Johnson, " you *may* wonder." Nevertheless he told Bennet Langton with conscious pride that he was getting up regularly at eight o'clock in the morning and that he hoped that something might come of his reading - which is one of the many indications that Johnson, while pretending in ordinary conversation that he was entitled to the leisure of a veteran, was in fact continually tormented by a conscience that told him that solid literary labour was required of him. Soon afterwards he was to discuss this topic in high places. King George III, learning that Johnson was in the habit of

consulting the royal library at Buckingham House, signified his desire to give him an audience. Johnson was presented by Barnard, the librarian, and the conversation ranged over a number of literary subjects. Was Dr. Johnson writing anything ? the King enquired. No, said Johnson, he thought he had already done his part. " I should have thought so too," said the King, " if you had not written so well." This was, for Johnson, decisive. It was not for him to bandy civilities with his sovereign ; the King was the finest gentleman he had ever seen.

In 1767 Johnson spent three months in his native city. While he was there he took leave of Catharine Chambers, who had entered his mother's service about 1724. Johnson said a short prayer with her. " We kissed and parted," he wrote in his *Meditations,* " I humbly hope to meet again and to part no more."

Mentally perturbed and distracted, Johnson wrote little in 1768 but a prologue to Goldsmith's *Good-Natufd Man,* which he praised very highly. When Boswell came to London flushed with the success of his recently published *Account of Corsica,* he found that Johnson had gone to Oxford, and followed him there. Hospitable entertainment was provided by Robert Chambers, Johnson's friend, and Boswell rejoiced in Johnson's promise to visit the Hebrides. On his return to London, one of Johnson's first cares was to provide his faithful Francis Barber with a course of schooling,

sending him to a school at Bishop Stortford, where he appears to have stayed about four years. " Let me know what English books you read for your entertainment," he wrote. " You can never be wise unless you love reading." The summer of 1769 was spent at Oxford, Lichfield, and Brighton. At Lichfield he found that Lucy Porter had kept her best gooseberries for him, and he was neither too proud nor too wise to gather them. From Brighton he wrote to Boswell congratulating him, with discernment, upon his book : " Your History is like other histories, but your journal is in a very high degree curious and delightful . . . your history was copied from books ; your journal rose out of your own experience."

A little later Boswell was admitted to Mrs. Thrale's circle, and took care to show her that he was as good a Johnsonian as herself. Another meeting that gave Boswell great pleasure was that which he contrived between Johnson and his other hero, General Paoli, the Corsican patriot, himself feeling like " an isthmus which joins two great continents." Afterwards, as they drank tea till late in the night, Boswell endeavoured to lure Johnson into a discussion of fate and free-will. But Johnson was not to be drawn. " Sir, we *know* our will is free and there's an end on t.

Conversations with Johnson were now becoming a regular feature of BoswelPs visits to London. The topics were varied :

" BOSWELL : Suppose now, Sir, that one of your intimate friends were apprehended for an offence for which he might be hanged.

"JOHNSON : I should do what I could to bail him, and give him any other assistance ; but if he were once fairly hanged, I should not suffer.

" BOSWELL : Would you eat your dinner that day, Sir ?

"JOHNSON : Yes, Sir; and eat it as if he were eating with me."

No man was more dependent upon his friends than Johnson, but he was not prepared to grow sentimental about them for BoswelPs benefit. Boswell turned to other matters :

" BOSWELL : So, Sir, you are no great enemy to the Roman Catholic religion ?

"JOHNSON : No more, Sir, than to the Presbyterian religion.

" BOSWELL : You are joking.

"JOHNSON : No, Sir, I really think so. Nay, Sir, of the two, I prefer the Popish.

" BOSWELL : How so, Sir ?

"JOHNSON : Why, Sir, the Presbyterians have no church, no apostolical ordination."

Gradually Boswell would steer the talk to the great realities. " May we not fortify our minds," he asked, " for the approach of death ? " " No, Sir, let it alone. It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives."

Johnson's favourite newspaper was the *London Chronicle,* and Boswell would sometimes read it aloud to him. But Johnson would not let him read the accounts of petitions. Petitioning, he said, was a new mode of distressing Government, and a mighty easy one. In 1770 he gave more elaborate expression to his views of petitions in general and of John Wilkes in particular, in a pamphlet entitled *The False Alarm* :

> " All wrong ought to be rectified. If Mr. Wilkes is deprived of a lawful seat, both he and his electors have reason to complain ; but it will not be easily found, why, among the innumerable wrongs of which a great part of mankind arc hourly complaining, the whole care of the public should be transferred to Mr. Wilkes and the freeholders of Middlesex."

Petitions gave Johnson a happy opportunity for rhetoric :

> " Names are easily collected. One man signs because he hates the papists ; another because he has vowed destruction to the turnpikes ; one because it will vex the parson ; another because he owes his landlord nothing ; one because he is rich ; another because he is poor ; one to shew that he is not afraid, and another to shew that he can write."

It was characteristic of Johnson, perhaps, that he thought more of the subtlety of *The False Alarm*

than of the fire of the pamphlet which he produced in the following year, entitled *Thoughts on the late Transactions respecting Falkland's Islands.* The occasion of the pamphlet is now forgotten except by historians, but the pertinence of Johnson's protest against the futility of war is not limited to the year 1771 :

> " The wars of civilized nations make very slow changes in the system of empire. The publick perceives scarcely any alteration, but an increase of debt; and the few individuals who are benefited are not supposed to have the dearest right to their advantages. If he that shared the danger enjoyed the profit, and, after bleeding in the battle, grew rich by the victory, he might show his gains without envy. But, at the conclusion of a ten years' war, how are we recompensed for the death of multitudes, and the expense of millions, but by contemplating the sudden glories of paymasters and agents, contractors and commissaries, whose equipages shine like meteors, and whose palaces rise like exhalations."

About this time William Strahan, the printer, suggested that a seat might well be found for Johnson in Parliament, urging that he would be a lamb to the King's friends and a lion to his enemies. But nothing came of it, and the opinion attributed to Lord North that Johnson, like the elephant in the battle, was quite as likely to

trample down his friends as his foes, was probably justified.

In the spring of 1772 Boswell found Francis Barber returned from his schooling, and was delighted to drink tea between midnight and one o'clock with Miss Williams. A dinner at Paoli's was followed by a visit to the Pantheon in Oxford Street. Boswell thought there was not half a guinea's worth of pleasure in seeing the place. " But, Sir," replied Johnson, " there is half a guinea's worth of inferiority to other people in not having seen it." Sir Adam Ferguson suggested that the Pantheon would encourage luxury, and that luxury destroyed the spirit of liberty. But Johnson would have none of this Whiggish argument. Public amusements kept people from vice, and as for liberty, he would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another.

It was in the following year that Boswell, after sharing Johnson's tea and cross-buns on Good Friday, was surprised by an invitation to dine at Johnson's house on Easter Day with Miss Williams and another lady. Soup, a boiled leg of lamb and spinach, veal pie, and rice pudding were the components of a menu which came as a further surprise to Boswell. But before the end of the year Boswell had still greater cause for gratification. He prevailed upon Johnson to " relinquish the felicity of a London life " and to join him in a tour of the Hebrides. The record

of this tour can be studied in BoswelPs *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides,* in Johnson's *Journey to the Western Islands,* and in Johnson's letters to Mrs. Thrale. For the majority of readers BoswelPs, of course, is the most entertaining account. " Let me not be censured," he wrote in the introduction to his main narrative, " for mentioning . . . minute particulars." It is precisely because Boswell was so conscientious a diarist, and was not afraid to set down the most trifling detail of dress, or manner, or, above all, of conversation that his story remains as engaging as when it was written ; it is enjoyed not so much as a record of travel as a record of Johnsonian adventure and conversation. Johnson, on the other hand, was concerned on the whole, with the description of a country and a society that were new to him. He had desired for longer than he could remember to visit the Western Islands, and his primary object in writing an account of his journey was to record the appearance of the places he visited, the manners and customs of the inhabitants, and the ideas induced in his own mind :

> cc It is easy to sit at home and conceive rocks and heath and waterfalls . . . it is true that of far the greater part of things, we must content ourselves with such knowledge as description may exhibit and analogy supply ; but it is true likewise, that these ideas are always incomplete, and that at least, till we have compared them

with realities, we do not know them to be just. As we see more, we become possessed of more certainties, and consequently gain more principles of reasoning, and found a wider basis of analogy."

So, seated on the bank, with a clear rivulet at his feet, high hills on either side, and all " rudeness, silence, and solitude," Johnson first conceived the thought of his *Journey.* Johnson, in fact, set out upon his travel with the object of learning something about the daily life, religion, language, education, agriculture of a society with which, as a townsman, he was wholly unfamiliar ; to Boswell, on the other hand, the central glory of the journey was the fact that he had Johnson by his side for thirteen continuous weeks.

Setting out from Edinburgh on August i8, the travellers followed the coast road through St. Andrews, Dundee, and Montrose to Aberdeen. Johnson, " from an erroneous apprehension of violence," had provided himself with a pair of pistols, gunpowder, and bullets, but was persuaded by Boswell to leave them behind at Edinburgh. At Aberdeen Johnson was made a freeman of the city, and paid Scotland just praise in noting that there was no petty officer bowing for a fee. Further north he was awed by the Buller of Buchan. " Round us was a perpendicular rock, above us the distant sky, and below an unknown profundity of water. If I had any

malice against a walking spirit . . . I would condemn him to reside in the Buller of Buchan." At Elgin, Johnson examined the cathedral with patient attention in the rain, and at Fort George he dined with the governor, Sir Eyre Coote. The regimental band of the 37th Foot played in the square ; Bos well fancied himself quite a military man ; Johnson talked learnedly about the manufacture of gunpowder. After Inverness the post-chaise was necessarily abandoned and horses procured. By the side of Loch Ness Johnson saw a Highland hut for the first time, with an old woman, who could speak but little English, boiling goat's flesh in a kettle ; the travellers gave her a shilling, but it was snuff that she wanted most. Boswell tasted her whiskey. It was at a house called Anoch, kept by a M'Queen, in Glenmorison, that the travellers were uncertain whether to sleep in their clothes or not. Johnson was " like one hesitating whether to go into the cold bath," but finally both took the risk. It was here, too, that Johnson presented the daughter of the house with a copy of Cocker's *Arithmetic,*

The island of Skye was reached on September 2, and Johnson was free to investigate Highland manners and customs at first hand - bagpipes, brogues, plaids, aroused his keenest interest. To the Scottish breakfast he paid a high tribute : " if an epicure could remove, by a wish, in quest of sensual gratifications, wherever he had supped he would breakfast in Scotland " ; he disliked,

however, the piling of large slices of Cheshire cheese on the tea-table. The voyage to Raasay was made in an open boat directed by Malcolm Macleod, who sang an Erse song with a chorus while Johnson sat high on the stern, " like a magnificent Triton." On their arrival at Raasay the travellers were entertained at a substantial dinner. Afterwards a fiddler appeared and a little ball began. Raasay himself joined in the dance, and Malcolm " bounded like a roe." Johnson was delighted. This was the patriarchal life that he had come to see. Several places in Skye were visited : at Kingsburgh, Boswell was highly gratified to see the great champion of the English Tories salute Miss Flora Macdonald and afterwards to see him lying in the bed once occupied by the Young Pretender ; at Dunvegan, Johnson " tasted lotus," and was in danger of forgetting that he was ever to depart. Macleod offered him a little island on condition that he would reside there for one month in the year. Johnson was highly pleased with the fancy.

From Skye the travellers set out for Mull, but were driven into Col by a heavy sea. Johnson was seasick and lay down ; Boswell, fussing on deck, was given a rope to hold to keep him out of the way of those who were working the vessel ; eventually Maclean of Col piloted them safe into his own harbour. In Col, Johnson again glowed with Highland ardour, strutting about with a

broad-sword and target, and Boswell was emboldened to put a large blue bonnet on his head. But when the Laird of Lochbuy bawled the question, " Are you of the Johnstons of Glencro, or of Ardnamurchan ? " it was too much. Johnson gave a significant look, but had no reply ready.

At Iona, Johnson was deeply moved, and Boswell quotes with aweful sincerity the impression which the venerable scene made upon his " great and pious friend " :

> " We were now treading that illustrious Island " [wrote Johnson] " which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge, and the blessings of religion. . . . Far from me, and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy as may conduct us indifferent and unmoved over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. That man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of *Marathon,* or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of *Iona."*

On October 28, Johnson rejoiced, at the Saracen's Head at Glasgow, that he was an Englishman sitting by a *coal* fire, and a few days later a visit was paid to Boswell's home at Auchinleck. Lord Auchinleck was a Whig and a Presbyterian and Johnson had undertaken to eschew awkward

topics. But, inevitably, politics entered into the conversation, and "Whiggism and Presbyterianism, Toryism and Episcopacy, were terribly buffeted." Boswell was much upset, but, later, when he published his *Journal,* he was able to reflect that both his father and his friend were in another, and a higher, state of existence. He trusted, moreover, that, as being both worthy Christian men, they had met in happiness.

Edinburgh was reached on November 9, and, after a fortnight's stay there, Johnson returned to London. The journey had been the pleasantest he had ever made. Would Boswcll, he asked, lose the recollection of it for five hundred pounds? Certainly Boswcll would not; and so won Johnson's approval for setting a proper value on an accession of new images in his mind.

CHAPTER V

Death of Goldsmith — tour in North Wales — *Taxation no Tyranny* — *Journey to the Western Islands* — tour in France - meeting with Wilkes - epitaph for Goldsmith.

AT Talisker, in Skye, Johnson had reflected upon the passing of his sixty-fourth birthday. He had made little use, he felt, of the preceding year. He had meant to learn Dutch, but had been interrupted by an inflammation of the eye. Even while he enjoyed the pleasures of travel, his mind was not free from perturbation, and his failure to make his life methodical still haunted him. Death might overtake his body before he had completed his design for living. In the summer of 1774 Johnson was saddened by the death of Oliver Goldsmith. The friendship had begun in 1761. Johnson had been one of the first to praise Goldsmith's writings, and Goldsmith had quickly appreciated Johnson's fundamental goodness of heart. Bos well once expressed his surprise at Johnson's kindness to a man of bad character. "He is now become miserable," replied Goldsmith, " and that insures the protection of Johnson." Johnson was intimately associated with the production of Goldsmith's most famous works : he got sixty guineas from a bookseller for the manuscript of *The Vicar of Wakefield* while the author, arrested by his landlady for his rent, sat

with a bottle of Madeira before him ; he wrote some couplets which appear in *The Traveller,* including the characteristic

> *How small of all that human hearts endure*
> *That part which kings or laws can cause or cure.*

She Stoops to Conquer was dedicated to Johnson, and Goldsmith wrote simply and sincerely of what he owed to his friend :

> " It may do me some honour to inform the public that I have lived many years in intimacy with you. It may serve the interests of mankind also to inform them that the greatest wit may be found in a character without impairing the most unaffected piety."

Devoted as he was to Johnson, Goldsmith was liable to be irritated by Boswell's hero-worship, and complained that he was making a monarchy of what should be a republic. Frequently, too, he resented being knocked down by the butt-end when Johnson's conversational pistol misfired. But a frank apology from Johnson would quickly restore Goldsmith's good humour, and Johnson never had any doubts about his greatness : " Let not his frailties be remembered," he wrote to Bennet Langton ; " he was a very great man.",

Later in the year Johnson accompanied the Thrales on a tour to North Wales. On the way Johnson introduced Mrs. Thrale to his friends at Lichfield, though not before he had insisted upon her changing her travelling-dress. From Lichfield

they went to Chatsworth, which Johnson had seen and admired on a previous visit. Of all the Duke's possessions, he liked Atlas the racehorse best. Dovedale also won Johnson's admiration. " He that has seen Dovedale," he wrote, " has no need to visit the Highlands." In Wales some time was spent in the Vale of Clwyd, the home of Mrs. Thrale's ancestors. " Except the woods of Bach y Graig," asked Johnson of Mrs. Thrale some years later, " what is there in Wales that can fill the hunger of ignorance or quench the thirst of curiosity ? "

Nevertheless Johnson admired the magnitude and strength of the castles, noted that Methodists were very prevalent, was shocked by the openness of the bath at Holywell, and was keenly interested in the working of copper and iron. Similarly at Birmingham he enjoyed visits to a *papier mdchi* factory and to Boulton's " enginery," where twelve dozen of buttons were sold for three shillings. Johnson's diary of this journey is not much more than a series of notes ; but they are sufficient to show that for him the primary purpose of travel was not the contemplation of the picturesque, but the enlargement of his notions.

The Patriot, which appeared late in 1774, was called for by Johnson's political friends on a Friday in November and written on Saturday. Its occasion was " the saturnalian season when the freemen of Great Britain may please themselves with the choice of their representatives," and

Johnson hurled rhetorical scorn at those " patriots " who supported the claims of Wilkes and justified " the ridiculous claims of American usurpation." This last was a topic which even Boswcll hesitated to discuss with Johnson, and when a further pamphlet by Johnson, entitled *Taxation no Tyranny ; an Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress,* was published, Boswell deplored its violence, " so unsuitable to the mildness of a Christian philosopher." In Johnson's view a colonist was one who had voluntarily resigned his share in government by leaving the country, and, in return for the protection of that country, must be prepared to do as he is told. " By his own choice he has left a country where he had a vote and little property, for another, where he has great property, but no vote. . . . The colonists are the descendants of men, who either had no vote in elections, or who voluntarily resigned them for something, in their opinion, of more estimation ; they have, therefore, exactly what their ancestors left them, not a vote in making laws, or in constituting legislators, but the happiness of being protected by law, and the duty of obeying it."

It was a burning question in 1775, and many counter-attacks appeared. Others besides Boswell deplored that the author of *The Rambler* (" so moral, so elegant, and so valuable a work ") should support the administration in the severe measures taken against the colonists.

Early in 1775 Johnson had written a letter the terms of which have been remembered longer than the "sarcastical severity" of *Taxation no Tyranny.* In his *Journey to the Western Islands* he had made clear his view that the volumes of ancient epic poetry produced by James Macpherson and purporting to be the work of Ossian were forgeries. There was some talk of manuscripts being produced, but this, so Johnson told Boswell, would be but "another proof of Scotch conspiracy in national falsehood." Whatever James Macpherson wrote to Johnson, there could be no mistaking the purport of what he received in reply.

> "I received your foolish and impudent note. Whatever insult is offered me I will do my best to repel, and what I cannot do for myself the law shall do for me. I will not desist from detecting what I think a cheat from any fear of the menaces of a ruffian."

Boswell was by now a member of The Club. Burke and some others were doubtful about voting for him, but afterwards agreed that his imperturbable good humour outweighed their objections. Johnson told Boswell frankly how he had intimidated the other members : "Sir, they knew that if they refused you, they'd probably never have got in another. Fd have kept them all out." In the spring of 1775 Boswell was busy in London with his note-book. Johnson's *Journey* was much talked of, and Boswell found the author in good

spirits at The Club, at Mrs. Thrale's, Mr. Dilly's, General Oglethorpe's, and many other centres of hospitality. The contrast between the record of Johnson's lively talk and the despondencies of his private meditation is characteristic. On April 13 (Maundy Thursday) he wrote :

> " Of the use of time or of my commendation of myself, I thought no more ; but lost life in restless nights and broken days, till this week awakened my intention."

The year, he felt, had brought him no improvement, perhaps even a diminution of knowledge. Much remained to be done - he must get up at eight, or sooner.

On Good Friday Johnson fasted strictly, went twice to St. Clement's Church with Boswell, and gave Francis Barber instructions for his Easter communion.

In the early summer Johnson set out upon " his annual ramble into the middle counties " ; this meant agreeable entertainment by the ladies of Stowhill at Lichfield, by Dr. Taylor at Ashbourne, and by Dr. Wetherell, Master of University College, at Oxford, and it is noticeable how faithfully he reported his doings and his movements to Mrs. Thrale. Never before, he reflected, had he been such a writer. Letter followed letter at a few days' interval, and Johnson liked to regard them as the records of a pure and blameless friendship. Later in the year he travelled to

France with the Thrales. As usual, he paid more attention to people than to places. " The sight of palaces and other great buildings," he wrote, " leaves no very distinct images, unless to those who talk of them." Paris he found less fertile of novelty than the Hebrides, but he took a minute and characteristic interest in the manufacture of looking-glasses and in Sanstcrre's brewery ; he was hospitably entertained by the English Benedictines, and admired the cathedrals of Noyon and Cambrai. Throughout the tour Johnson insisted on speaking in Latin to the Frenchmen ; he could read French easily enough, but would not let himself down by speaking it imperfectly. His shrewdest comments were those on the state of French society : they had no laws for the maintenance of the poor ; the great lived very magnificently and the rest very miserably ; there was no happy middle class, no sociable tavern life. The details of a trade always made a special appeal to Johnson, and in 1776 he addressed a letter of remarkable perspicacity to the Master of University College concerning the marketing of books issued by the Clarendon Press. Johnson had been bred a bookseller, and for years had depended upon booksellers for his livelihood. He understood their point of view, and, in particular, that they had " need of stronger inducements to circulate academical publications than those of another." " It is, perhaps, not considered," he continued, " through how many hands a book often passes,

before it comes into those of the reader," and his conclusion is that the " primary agent " of distribution should purchase a twenty-shilling book at something less than fourteen shillings. Johnson knew more than most authors of the truth about publishing.

In March, Boswell found Johnson removed to Bolt Court and felt a " foolish regret " that he had left the Court which bore his name. Actually he was at Thrale's in the Borough, and there Mrs. Thrale and Boswell rejoiced together in the glow of conversation. In this year Boswell accompanied Johnson on his Midland ramble. At Oxford they waited first upon Dr. Wetherell of University College and then upon Johnson's old friend, Dr. Adams, now Master of Pembroke. Adams remarked that in some colleges the students had been excluded from intercourse with the fellows in the common-room. Johnson approved ; there could be no real conversation, no fair exertion of mind, if the young men were by. Conversation was to Johnson a serious exercise, and no man, he thought, would risk humiliation in the presence of the young. Magdalen, Christ Church, and Trinity were visited, and then a post-chaise was hired and the ramble was pursued through Blenheim Park. Life had not many better things to offer Johnson than a ride in a post-chaise, and it was on this journey that he pronounced his famous eulogy upon the English tavern :

> "You are sure you are welcome : and the more noise you make, the more trouble you give, the more good things you call for, the welcomer you are. No servants will attend you with the alacrity which waiters do, who are incited by the prospect of an immediate reward in proportion as they please. No, Sir ; there is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn."

At Birmingham they met Johnson's old schoolfellow Hector, and also Hector's sister, Mrs. Carless, whom Johnson described as his first love. " If I had married her," he mused, " it might have been as happy for me." Were there not fifty women in the world, asked Boswell, with any one of whom a man might be happy ? " Ay, Sir, fifty thousand," was Johnson's reply. Having come within the focus of the Lichfield lamps, Boswell felt all his Toryism glow as he indulged in libations of Staffordshire ale. Johnson's attitude towards Lichfield when he had Boswell with him was very different from the rather querulous tone which he usually adopted in writing to his friends about the petty affairs of a provincial town. With Boswell at his side, he was full of local pride and patriotism, commending the Lichfield people as the soberest, genteelest, and purest spoken in England ; Lichfield, he said, was a city of philosophers who worked with their

heads while the boobies of Birmingham worked for them with their hands. Boswell was presented to Lucy Porter, to Peter Garrick, to Miss Aston, and to Mrs. Gastrel. Together they went to a dramatic performance at the Town Hall, and Boswell was gratified to see Johnson " sitting in a conspicuous part of the pit and receiving affectionate homage from all his acquaintance." At the Three Crowns they kept late hours, but Johnson's enjoyment was marred by the news that Mrs. Thrale had lost her only surviving son. Johnson declared that he would have gone to the extremity of the earth to save the boy, though in honesty he confessed to Boswell that it was affectation to pretend to feel the distress of others as much as they do themselves.

From Lichfield Johnson took his friend to Ashbourne in Taylor's " large roomy post-chaise, drawn by four stout plump horses and driven by two steady jolly postillions." Boswell found Taylor's establishment perfectly corresponding with his equipage. Everything was good and there was no scantiness ; Taylor himself was the hearty English squire, with the parson superinduced ; " his upper servant, Mr. Peters, was a decent grave man, in purple clothes, and a large white wig, like the butler or *major domo* of a Bishop."

The ramble ended in March, and Boswell was happy to be in attendance upon Johnson at Easter and later to follow him to Bath, where he was

staying with the Thrales ; but BoswelPs proudest achievement in 1776-one of the proudest, indeed, in the whole course of his association with Johnson - was his success in contriving an amicable meeting between Samuel Johnson and John Wilkes.

The plot was carefully hatched. Edward Dilly, the bookseller in the Poultry, had invited Boswell to meet Wilkes at dinner, but was horrified at the notion of asking Johnson. But Boswell accepted responsibility and conveyed the invitation. Johnson readily agreed. Boswell hinted that the company might not be wholly to his liking. Johnson was furious. What kind of a social ignoramus did Boswell take him for ? If Wilkes should be there, what was that to him ? Overjoyed, Boswcll went back to Dilly to tell him the good news. The next hitch was unforeseen, even by Boswell. When he called for Johnson on the appointed day about half an hour before dinner, he found him buffeting his books and covered with dust. The dinner-party had gone out of his head, and he had arranged to dine at home with Miss Williams. All BoswelPs blandishments were required to soothe Miss Williams, but eventually he succeeded, whereupon Johnson roared, " Frank, a clean shirt," and the pair were soon in a hackney coach. As they entered Dilly's drawing-room, even Johnson, who reckoned himself a very polite man, restrained himself with difficulty. First of all there was Arthur Lee, who was " not only a

patriot but an American," and then Wilkes himself, who was placed next to Johnson at the dinner-table. Primed, no doubt, by Boswell, Wilkes played his part well, and some fine veal gave him his chance :

> " Pray give me leave, Sir : - It is better here - A little of the brown - Some fat, Sir - A little of the stuffing - Some gravy - Let me have the pleasure of giving you some butter - Allow me to recommend a squeeze of this orange ; - or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest."

What could Johnson do but murmur, " Sir, Sir, I am obliged to you " ?

As the evening wore on, Johnson and Wilkes, after being skilfully steered by Boswell through rather a dangerous discussion of Garrick, talked easily about a disputed passage in Horace and discovered at least one form of enjoyment which they shared - twitting Boswell about Scotland and the Scotch.

> " You must know, Sir " [said Johnson] " I lately took my friend Boswell and shewed him genuine civilised life in an English provincial town. I turned him loose at Lichfield, my native city, that he might see for once real civility : for you know he lives among savages in Scotland, and among rakes in London.

> " WILKES : Except when he is with grave, sober, decent people like you and me.

"JOHNSON (smiling) : And we ashamed of him."

So, with himself as the butt of this frank and easy conversation, Boswell tasted the sweets of social victory. He had fought against heavy odds, and deserved his triumph. There was nothing to equal it, said Burke, in the whole history of the *Corps Diplo?natique.*

Later in the summer Johnson wrote an epitaph for Goldsmith and requested Reynolds to submit it to The Club. Very deferentially the members present (including Reynolds, Burke, Barnard, Sheridan, Gibbon, and Jos. Warton) addressed a " round robin " suggesting certain amendments and asking for an epitaph in English rather than in Latin. To which Johnson replied that he would make any alterations they pleased *but he would never consent to disgrace the walls of Westminster Abbey with an English inscription* ; in effect, one phrase of the epitaph has passed into the English language :

Qui nullum fere scribendi genus
Non teligit
Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit

Meanwhile the Thrales had gone away, and Johnson dutifully wrote reports upon the two young children left at Kensington. Though Johnson once declared that he never wished to have a child of his own, it is clear that, among the many attractions which the Streatham household held for him, the children were not the least. His

letters to Queeney Thrale in particular are the record of a charming friendship, and among the varied pictures that go to make up the whole Johnson the picture of him visiting Sophy and Lucy Thrale, and spreading out sugar animals for them on the table, must not be forgotten. Nor did he omit to call upon Mr. Perkins, the manager of the brewery, in the Borough. Business was flourishing ; great stores of the best brown malt were being laid in at thirty and sixpence. Notwithstanding the gout which troubled him at this time, Johnson took an intimate and genuine delight in attending either upon the nursery or the business of his friends. He was one of the family, and proud of it.

CHAPTER VI

Lives of the Poets - Dr. Dodd - Dr. Taylor - Mrs. Knowles - Oliver Edwards - Gordon Riots - death of Thrale - Brighton - Mrs. Thrale's second marriage - death.

IN 1777 a number of London booksellers agreed to undertake an elegant and uniform edition of the English Poets. Three of them - Davies, Strahan, and Cadell - were deputed to wait upon Johnson and invite him to contribute a life of each of the poets whose works were to be included in the collection. It was the kind of writing that Johnson liked best, and he readily agreed. He was further invited to name his own terms, and modestly proposed two hundred guineas. Originally he intended only to write a short account of each poet, with a few dates and a general character ; but " by the honest desire of giving useful [1] pleasure " he was led to write more than he intended, and the booksellers eventually gave him two further " compliments " of one hundred guineas each. Johnson's view of booksellers as a " generous set of men " was confirmed. " The fact is," he said, " not that they have paid me too little, but that I have written too much." It was an unusual view for an author to take, but in this case the booksellers had every reason to be content, and more than content, with their bargain.

The choice of the poets was not Johnson's, except that he recommended the inclusion of Blackmore, Watts, Pomfret, Yalden, and James Thomson. He was, indeed, indignant at *Johnson's Poets* being stamped on the backs of books which he had neither recommended nor revised. Would he write a Preface and a Life for any dunce's works ? asked Boswell. " Yes, Sir ; and *say* he was a dunce," was the reply.

The first four volumes of the series, containing twenty-two lives, were published in 1779 ; the remaining six, with thirty lives, in 1781. In the latter years the *Lives* were also separately issued in four volumes. Johnson wrote the *Lives* " dilatorily and hastily, unwilling to work and working with vigour and haste." To-day the *Lives of the Poets* are the best known, or at any rate the least neglected, of Johnson's works. Johnson felt himself free to say just what he knew and just what he thought about each poet in turn, and the result is a happy blending of fact and prejudice, anecdote and criticism. Johnson was little concerned with poetry in the abstract, still less with the distinctive character of " pure " poetry, or " poetic " poetry ; poetry to him was " the art of uniting pleasure with truth by calling imagination to the help of reason," and he was concerned with presenting a series of portraits of a number of Englishmen who had practised this art. He made no attempt to separate the man from his work, and, if he did not like what he knew of the man,

his view of the work was frankly coloured by this dislike. The most flagrant instances of this are seen in the lives of Milton, Gray, and Lyttelton. From Johnson's point of view, Milton's rebellion against authority was one of the major vices : he was " an acrimonious and surly republican " who " hated monarchs in the state and prelates in the church ; for he hated all whom he was required to obey." In *Lycidas,* Milton was calling imagination to the help, not of reason, but of grief; Johnson, perversely refusing to recognise either sincerity of feeling or beauty of expression in the poem, gave full rein to his prejudice both against Milton and against pastoral poetry, which was to him " easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting." Against Gray Johnson was similarly, but less bitterly, prejudiced. As Milton enraged, so Gray irritated him. With the fastidious scholar who asked for leisure to be good beneath the shelter of academick bowers Johnson found it difficult to be patient, and his impatience was intensified by what he regarded as Gray's affectation in the use of epithets borrowed from the old romance-writers and in his tricks of inversion. To *Paradise Lost,* however, and to the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* Johnson paid tributes of honest admiration, and an occasional outburst of frankly prejudiced opinion does not destroy the value or the charm of *The Lives of the Poets.* Several friends helped by supplying biographical material, and the help given by Johnson's old friend Gilbert

Walmsley in the *Life* of Edmund Smith gave Johnson an opportunity to display his power of character-writing at its best : Gilbert Walmsley, he wrote :

> " was a Whig, with all the virulence and malevolence of his party ; yet difference of opinion did not keep us apart. I honoured him, and he endured me.
>
> He had mingled with the gay world, without exemption from its vices or its follies, but had never neglected the cultivation of his mind ; his belief of Revelation was unshaken ; his learning preserved his principles ; he grew first regular, and then pious. . . . His acquaintance with books was great ; and what he did not immediately know, he could at least tell where to find. Such was his amplitude of learning, and such his copiousness of communication, that it may be doubted whether a day now passes in which I have not some advantage from his friendship. . . . "

The *Lives* abound in vignettes of characterisation which reveal something of Johnson as well as of his subject. How Johnsonian, for instance, is this sentence about Dr. Watts :

> " Happy will be that reader whose mind is disposed by his verses, or his prose, to imitate him in all but his non-conformity, to copy his benevolence to man, and his reverence to God."

Or this on Thomson's *Liberty* :

> " When it first appeared, I tried to read, and soon desisted. I have never tried again, and therefore will not hazard either praise or censure."

" To what use," asked Johnson at the end of the *Life* of Akenside, " can the work be criticised that will not be read ? " There are many of " Johnson's Poets " that are not read to-day. Yet the *Lives* remain - abounding in *loci critici* which no serious student of literature can neglect, and at the same time providing entertainment for those readers uncorruptcd with literary prejudices who, in Johnson's view, must finally decide all claims to poetical honours.

To 1777 belongs another series of Johnson's writings - the letters and petitions composed on behalf of Dr. William Dodd, a popular preacher who, in spite of Johnson's efforts, was hanged at Tyburn for forging a bond on his patron, Lord Chesterfield. Amongst the many pieces written by Johnson was Dodd's *Last Solemn Declaration* :

> " Vanity and pleasure required expence disproportionate to my income. Expence brought distress upon me, and distress impelled me to fraud.
>
> " For this fraud I am to die ; and I die declaring that however I have deviated from my own precepts, I have taught others to the

> best of my knowledge the true way to eternal happiness. My life has been hypocritical, but my ministry has been sincere."

Johnson had known Dodd very little, but Dodd had indeed become miserable, and that, as Goldsmith had said, was enough to insure Johnson's protection. Johnson approved also of Dodd's refusal to accept the consolation offered by his pious friends that he would be leaving a wretched world. " No, no," Dodd protested, " it has been a very agreeable world to me." Johnson respected any clearance of cant.

In the autumn of this year Boswell hoped to induce Johnson to meet him somewhere in the north and accompany him to Carlisle. But Johnson's money was not holding out very well, and he planned his usual tour to Oxford, Lichfield, and Ashbourne. Before he left London he arranged for Anna Williams to stay in the country; she was ill and peevish, and Johnson had to bribe the maid to stay with her by a " secret stipulation " of an extra half a crown a week. Boswell joined Johnson at Ashbourne in September, and was present at some violent bellowings on the part of the two friends. Taylor was a stout Whig and led Johnson to expressions of violently Jacobitical sentiment. They disagreed also on the subject of bleeding. Taylor did not like to take an emetic, he said, for fear of breaking some small vessels. " Poh," replied Johnson, " if you

have so many things that will break, you had better break your neck at once, and there's an end on't."

Johnson loved his old friend and wrote sermons for him, but he could never really approve of his way of life. Taylor's habits were not, in Johnson's view, sufficiently clerical, and his talk was of bullocks. Taylor cannot, indeed, have derived great pleasure from Johnson's visits. " No man," as Johnson said, " likes to live under the eye of perpetual disapprobation," and even when Taylor indulged in a little boasting about the fine points of his bulldog, Johnson was ready to argue with him at once : " No, Sir, he is *not* well shaped ; for there is not the quick transition from the thickness of the fore-part, to the *tenuity* - the thin part - behind, which a bulldog ought to have." It is doubtful whether Johnson had ever examined a bulldog before, but he was prompt in snubbing Taylor's pride of possession. However, Johnson was happy enough at Ashbourne ; he even asked for a tune on the fiddle to be repeated, though he had neither ear nor feeling for music. Boswell explained that he himself could be moved by music either to the depth of dejection or to the height of daring. " Sir," said Johnson, " I should never hear it, if it made me such a fool."

In October, Johnson left Ashbourne for Lichfield, regularly reporting his moods and his movements to Mrs. Thrale ; he enjoyed " the pleasure of corresponding with a friend, where doubt and

distrust have no place and everything is said as it is thought."

At Lichfield he was not well, and, on his return to London, was persuaded to spend a few days with the Thrales at Brighton. Again, in the spring of 1778, he spent a long time at Streatham, coming back occasionally to Bolt Court, where the bounds of his charity were further enlarged. In addition to Anna Williams, there were Mrs. Desmoulins, the widowed daughter of Johnson's godfather, and a Miss Garmichael, immortalised as " Poll," who quarrelled with Anna Williams while Johnson encouraged her with " At her again, Poll " ; " Never flinch, Poll." But Poll was a disappointment. At first Johnson had some hopes of her conversation - " but when I talked to her tightly and closely, I could make nothing of her ; she was wiggle waggle."

Johnson was in his seventieth year, but was determined that torpidity should not overtake his mind. Was it not a happy thing, suggested Boswell, that a measure of insensibility should come upon an old man ? " No, Sir," replied Johnson, " I should never be happy by being less rational." Nor would he have been happy had he been forced to dine out less. But in this, the keenest of Johnson's pleasures, there was happily no diminution. Johnson, moreover, would still make Boswell go home with him after the party and talk to Anna Williams. At Dilly's on the 15th of April, Johnson encountered the ingenious

Quaker lady, Mrs. Knowles. He would not, of course, accept her complaint that men had more liberty allowed to them than women, and the lady was forced to be content with the hope that in another world the sexes would be equal. But Mrs. Knowles was far from being "wiggle waggle," and at one point Johnson's eyes sparkled benignantly as he commended her with a "Very well, indeed, Madam. You have said very well." Unfortunately, the talk turned upon America. "I am willing to love all mankind," roared Johnson, "*except an American*" and it seemed to Boswell that the roar must be heard across the Atlantic.

On Good Friday, Johnson remorsefully reflected that he had dined out every night in Passion Week. He rose early - about nine o'clock - and Boswell called for him to go to church. As usual, they fell to talking, and did not enter St. Clement's until the second lesson was being read. It was on the way back from this service that Johnson met his old friend, Oliver Edwards. Forty-nine years before, they had been at Pembroke together. Boswell successfully fanned the flame of conversation and lured Edwards back to Bolt Court. Edwards, as a Chancery solicitor, had made money, but much of it had gone to poor relations; he would not die rich, he said. "Nay, sure, Sir, it is better to *live* rich than to *die* rich," replied Johnson. Nor would Johnson concur in Edwards's wish that he had been a parson instead

of a lawyer. " I would rather," he said, " have Chancery suits upon my hands than the cure of souls." Then Johnson recalled their having drunk together at an ale-house near Pembroke gate and having quoted fine lines of Latin verse to each other. Whereupon Edwards delivered himself of his immortal sentence : " You are a philosopher, Dr. Johnson. I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher ; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in." Edwards was sixty-five and had been twice a widower, but he still enjoyed the pleasures of the table - he liked regular meals and a glass of wine with them. He was a man, as Johnson thought, who had passed through life without experience, the kind of man that did not enable Johnson to enlarge his notions. But he won Johnson's approval by his readiness to talk.

After Easter the round of dinner-parties was continued. At Sir Joshua Reynolds's Johnson protested against being asked to give his opinion of a work in manuscript : "A man who is asked by an authour what he thinks of his work is put to the torture and is not obliged to speak the truth." A few days later, at Adam Ramsay's, he was discussing the over-production of books ; on the whole he defended it : " It has been maintained that this superfcetation, this teeming of the press in modern times, is prejudicial to good literature, because it obliges us to read so much of what is of inferiour value, in order to be in the

fashion ; so that better works are neglected for want of time, because a man will have more gratification of his vanity in conversation, from having read modern books, than from having read the best works of antiquity. But it must be confessed that we have now more knowledge generally diffused ; all our ladies read now, which is a great extension." Perhaps the geniality of this attitude owed something to Ramsay's excellences as a host. It had been a splendid dinner, and the conversation had been instructive, informing, and elegant. Johnson flattered himself that he talked like a man of twenty-eight rather than of sixty-eight. In the summer he gave further evidence of a youthful spirit. He stayed for a week with Bennet Langton in the Lincolnshire militia camp at Warley. A camp was to him one of the great scenes of human life, and it gave him keen satisfaction to go the rounds of the sentries, to sit through a court martial, and to attend musketry drill. " Gamps," he wrote to Mrs. Thrale, " are the habitations of those who conquer Kingdoms or defend them."

At the beginning of 1779 Johnson was saddened by the death of Garrick. His most famous tribute is preserved in the *Life* of Edmund Smith, but his note to Mrs. Garrick is superb both in its feeling and in its economy :

" Dr. Johnson sends most respectful condolence to Mrs. Garrick and wishes that any

endeavour of his could enable her [to] support a loss which the world cannot repair."

In March Boswell found Johnson subjected to what he had previously described as torture - an author was pressing him for an opinion of a manuscript translation of Horace. " Sir," said Johnson, skilfully combining politeness with truth, " I do not say that it may not be made a very good translation."

Meanwhile Johnson's own *Lives* were coming out, and a set was sent to the King. " If the King is a Whig," he wrote, " he will not like them ; but is any King a Whig ? " Not that Johnson was afraid of criticism. He preferred to be attacked rather than to be unnoticed ; he realised that the worst thing that you can do to an author is to be silent about him. At Easter Johnson, as usual, reviewed the year that had passed and, as usual, deplored his unfulfilled intentions. He could find little goodness " except a little charity," little industry except the writing of the *Lives,* written, he hoped, in such a manner as might tend to the promotion of piety. He was nearly seventy and had little time to lose ; but he was not yet without hope that he might amend his way of life ; he said prayers with Francis Barber and talked to him about the Sacrament.

It was on the Wednesday after Easter that he pronounced one of his most famous judgments on

drink : " Sir, claret is the liquor for boys ; port, for men ; but he who aspires to be a hero *[smiling]* must drink brandy." Boswell delightedly seized the opportunity to recall the early days of their friendship, when Johnson was a wine-drinker and Boswell himself used to go to bed with a headache. " Nay, Sir," cried Johnson, " it was not the *wine* that made your head ache, but the *sense* that I put into it." In May, Boswell left for Scotland with a letter of introduction from Johnson to John Wesley in his pocket, Johnson expressing the view that worthy and religious men should be acquainted with each other.

In the summer of the following year Johnson was a witness of some of the damage done in the Gordon Riots. He went to look at Newgate, where he found the fire still glowing in the ruins and later saw the sky lit up with the flames of the Fleet and King's Bench prisons. It was a week without parallel in Johnson's experience, and he rejoiced to tell Mrs. Thrale that the King was the first to recover from panic ; he also gave credit to Jack Wilkes, " who was always zealous for law and order." Throughout the summer Johnson stayed in Bolt Court, " thinking to write the *Lives,* and a great part of the time only thinking." Shortly before his seventy-first birthday he wrote an election address for Henry Thrale - but to no purpose. Thrale had had a stroke earlier in the year, and Johnson had pressed upon him the need of a drastic dietary reduction ("If Mr.

Thrale eats but half his usual quantity, he can hardly eat too much. . . . If Mr. Thrale at all remits his vigilance, let the Doctor loose upon him ") ; Thrale's recovery was only partial and the Southwark seat was lost. Worse was to follow. In April 1781 he had another, and fatal, stroke. Johnson felt the last flutter of his pulse and looked for the last time upon the face that for fifteen years had never been turned upon him but with respect or benignity. No death since that of his wife, he wrote to Mrs. Thrale, had so much oppressed him, and he felt like a man beginning a new course of life. One element of novelty lay in his duties as one of Thrale's executors. Johnson, as Mrs. Thrale said, desired above all other the accumulation of new ideas, and it gave him intense and unprecedented delight to bustle about the brewery and to proclaim that he was dealing, not with a parcel of boilers and vats, but with the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Johnson was at first unwilling to sell the brewery, but Mrs. Thrale did not conceal her relief when " God Almighty sent a knot of rich Quakers " to pay £135,000 for it. For some time after Thrale's death Johnson continued to regard Streatham as his home, and in August he retired to the summer-house there in order to plan a life of greater diligence ; in particular, he resolved to devote himself seriously to a six weeks' course of study of the Italian language.

Early in 1782 Johnson was saddened by the

sudden death of his " very useful and very blameless " friend, Robert Levett :

Well try'd through many a varying year,
See LEVETT to the grave descend ;
Officious, innocent, sincere,
Of every friendless name the friend.

He was also saddened by illness, but by June he was well enough to dine on skate, pudding, goose, and asparagus, and afterwards to visit his old friend Dr. Adams at Oxford, where he took pleasure in showing Hannah More his old rooms at Pembroke. In August, Mrs. Thrale told Johnson that she had decided to give up the Streatham house, though very naturally she did not inform him of her growing affection for Piozzi. Johnson thought well of Mrs. Thrale's project of going to Italy, and when in October he made his " parting use " of the Streatham library he prayed God that he might with humble and sincere thankfulness remember the comforts and conveniences which he had enjoyed there. He accompanied Mrs. Thrale to Brighton a little later, but was much less happy than he had been at Streatham. Fanny Burney noted with sadness that he was so violent and unamiable in conversation that hostesses shrank from sending him invitations. He went to a ball once ; " it cannot," he said, " be worse than being alone." Later, when he returned to London, things went better, and in December he was once more " environed with listeners " at a

gay assembly at Miss Monckton's. In the early months of 1783 he laboured under " very great disorder of Body and distress of Mind " ; he was nevertheless vigorous enough to deplore the dangers inherent in the proposals brought forward by the younger Pitt for parliamentary reform ; he was also vigorous enough to admire the originality and elegance of Crabbe's poem, *The Village,* and to make many suggestions for its improvement. In the spring Boswell found him a little fretful, though very willing to talk, but in June a paralytic stroke temporarily deprived him of the power of speech. Fervently he prayed to God that, however his body might be afflicted, his understanding might be spared, and, to test his faculties, he composed his prayer in Latin verse. His recovery, however, was rapid ; in about a fortnight he was again dining with The Club, and in July visited Bennet Langton at Rochester. Coming back by water (the twenty-mile journey cost him a shilling), he landed at Billingsgate, and walked with his portmanteau to Cornhill before he could get a coach. In August he went to stay with William Bowles at Heale, near Salisbury, and, while he was there, learnt of the death of his friend and companion, Anna Williams. " Her acquisitions," wrote Johnson, " were many and her curiosity universal ; so that she partook of every conversation." Johnson could ill spare such a companion. Levett was dead and Mrs. Desmoulins had left him some time before, and " to

sit, and eat, or fast alone " was a dreary prospect for him. Accordingly he arranged a little dinner-party on his birthday, discussed Stonehenge with Burke, received a visit from Mrs. Siddons, wrote regularly to Mrs. Thrale, and suggested to Hawkins that the survivors of the old Ivy Lane Club should meet and dine together. Three such dinners were held, and were attended by four of the old members-Johnson, Hawkins, Ryland, and Payne. The meetings were as cheerful as ever, though Johnson " could not make quite so much noise." Furthermore, at the age of seventy-four Johnson drafted an elaborate set of rules for a new club of twenty-four members which was to meet three times a week at the Essex Head, a house kept by an old servant of Henry Thrale. Thus did Johnson continue his life-long battle against loneliness. It was a hard battle, and made harder at the end of 1783 by severe attacks of asthma. From the middle of December onwards he was confined to the house for four months, but on April 21, 1784, he returned thanks to God in St. Clement's Church for his recovery both from asthma and dropsy, and, to his tailor's astonishment, ordered some new clothes for the Academy dinner. Shortly afterwards he found himself dining out every night of the week, and in June conceived a keen desire to go to Oxford. Boswell accompanied him, and found him well enough to be exceedingly critical of the roast mutton at the inn where they stopped on the way :

" It is ill-fed, ill-killed, ill-kept, and ill-drest," was Johnson's comment to the waiter. But at Oxford there were no complaints. Johnson lived " without restraint and with superior elegance " in the Master's Lodgings at Pembroke ; he had good food and good company - dons for argument and the wives and daughters *of* dons for gallantry. Returning without undue fatigue " in the common vehicle," he dined at The Club on June 22, and exerted himself to be entertaining. But his friends were anxious, and discussed the possibility of arranging for him to winter in Italy. At the end of June a heavy and unexpected blow fell upon him in the form of Mrs. Thrale's announcement of her forthcoming marriage to Piozzi. Whether he had had any previous hint of the state of Mrs. Thrale's affairs of the heart or not, the news was for him almost too bad to be true - it seemed to him to mean the abandonment of her children, her fame, her religion, and her country. In fact, the marriage was a happy one, and Piozzi settled down to comfortable domesticity in the beautiful valley of the Clwyd in North Wales. But for the moment Johnson was stunned : Mrs. Thrale had been one of the pillars of his social happiness for twenty years, and the pillar had suddenly collapsed. A week later, however, he was able to write more calmly and more worthily :

> " I wish that God may grant you every blessing, that you may be happy in this world

for its short continuance and eternally happy in a better state ; and whatever I can contribute to your happiness I am very ready to repay, for that kindness which soothed twenty years of a life radically wretched."

Not much more of life was in store for Johnson. With characteristic dilatoriness he had omitted to erect a stone over his wife's grave at Bromley. He now ordered a stone, and composed a Latin inscription for it. With that duty tardily done, Johnson set out on his last journey to the Midlands. He finished the *Ciceronianus* of Erasmus in the coach as he came within sight of Lichfield ; but he could walk but little and so went on to Ashbourne. Asthma troubled him, but he retained at least one symptom of radical health - " a voracious delight in raw summer fruit " - and was well enough to make a visit to Chatsworth early in September. At Ashbourne he grew lonely, but had the luck to borrow the *Anecdotes of William Bowyer,* and spent much time in writing letters to his friends. Lichfield offered him less convenience but more society than Ashbourne (Dr. Taylor went to bed at nine) ; so with " all the tenderness of filial affection " he turned to his native city. There he found friends, and, though his breath was short and his limbs " wells of water," he rejoiced in an improved serenity of mind which enabled him still to hope for ease in this world and happiness in another ; meanwhile

he displayed a keen interest in Lunardi's ascent in an air-balloon. By way of Birmingham and Oxford, he returned to London on November 16, and his state grew worse. Friends and physicians surrounded him with affectionate solicitude. " I am afraid, Sir," said Burke, " such a number of us may be oppressive to you." " No, Sir," said Johnson, " it is not so ; and I must be in a wretched state, indeed, when your company would not be a delight to me." " My dear Sir," replied Burke, " you have always been too good to me."

Burke was not alone in this feeling. In spite of conversational bullyings, of didactic harshness, of violent prejudices violently expressed, there were many who were conscious, as Johnson's life ebbed, of the departure of a spirit that was *sui generis,* irreplaceable. The play of eighteenth-century conversation would go on, but the centre of the stage would be vacant.

On December 5, Johnson composed a prayer previous to his receiving the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for the last time :

> " Enforce and accept my imperfect repentance ; make this commemoration available to the confirmation of my faith, the establishment of my hope, and the enlargement of my charity ; and make the death of thy Son Jesus Christ effectual to my redemption."

On December 13 he died, and a week later he was buried in Westminster Abbey. One of the newspapers noted that among the mourners there was only one man of hereditary title ; but it added the shrewd and sufficient comment that " he who was followed to his last resting-place by Reynolds and Burke did not go unhonoured to the grave."

CHAPTER VII

RETROSPECT

> "JOHNSON : Why should the life of a literary man be less entertaining than the life of any other man ? As a *literary life* it may be very entertaining.
>
> "BOSWELL : But it must be better surely, when it is diversified with a little active variety - such as his having gone to Jamaica ; or - his having gone to the Hebrides."

Johnson, says Boswell, was not displeased at this last touch ; but Johnson's life, like those of many men of letters, does not abound in incidents which are in themselves of compelling interest. He settled in London at a comparatively early age, and, except for his journeys to Scotland, France, and Wales and for his annual Midland ramble, in London he remained. Except for an occasional political pamphlet, he took no direct part in public affairs. He was a private person enjoying a small pension from Government for services rendered to English scholarship.

Why does the story of this uneventful life remain the most fascinating of all biographies ? The obvious answer, of course, is that Johnson had his Boswell - Eclipse is first and the rest nowhere.

But it is also true that Boswell had his Johnson. Suppose Boswell had fastened upon Reynolds or Burke, what kind of a book would his *Life of Reynolds* or *Life of Burke* have been ? Readable, accurate, entertaining, no doubt ; but would either of them have become the most famous biography in the world ?

That Boswell knew what he was doing in his choice of subject and in his treatment of material is now abundantly clear. From his point of view Johnson was not only an outstanding individual figure ; hewas the centre of social scene. In the group round him Reynolds, Burke, Garrick, and others fell naturally into place. Is it possible to conceive of Johnson forming one of a group round Reynolds or Burke or anyone else ?

Boswell was a born interviewer and note-taker, but it is not the least of his merits that he was far from being content with a mere record of anecdote. He was at pains to record not only what Johnson said and did, but the motives that prompted any particular action, the context in which any particular remark was made, the principle which underlay any judgment that was delivered.

> *Quo Jit ut omnis*
> *Votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella*

Such was BoswelPs claim, and so well has he established it that for nearly a hundred and fifty

years the world has for the most part thought of Johnson in terms of Boswell's narrative. But even Boswcll could not comprehend the whole Johnson. There is the Johnson not only of Boswell's *Life,* but the Johnson exhibited by Hawkins, by Mrs. Piozzi, by Fanny Burney, and by many others ; there is the Johnson of the *Prayers and Meditations ;* there is the Johnson of the *Letters.* Boswell excelled as a chronicler of conversation, and it is the conversation in the *Life* that makes the most direct and vivid appeal. Boswell by no means neglects Johnson's other activities, but when he quotes a letter or a page of *Rasselas* or a paragraph from *The Rambler,* the extract seems dull in comparison with the thunder of the spoken word. It is what any biographer might have quoted ; it lacks the brilliant freshness of the talk.

The common reader, coming upon a piece either of Johnson's prose or of his verse, feels that the style is formal and archaic, belonging to a period which only professed students of the Augustan Age can properly appreciate ; when, on the other hand, he comes upon an account of an evening's talk, he is at once aware of something human and dramatic. Johnson becomes alive and intimate, and the old-fashioned formalities of address add a pleasant flavour of the antique. Moreover, there is never any doubt about Johnson's meaning. Whether he agrees with a particular pronouncement or not, the common reader will always be stimulated by its

clarity and its directness. Thus Johnson's moral judgments, as expressed in conversation, make an abiding appeal ; but ask the same common reader to study the same moral arguments as elaborated in *The Rambler* and he will be bored.

Hence arises the common distinction between Johnson the writer and Johnson the talker. It is a distinction very naturally made at the present day, but it was a distinction much less clearly marked in Johnson's lifetime. Those who listened to his talk were, in some degree at least, familiar with his writings, and Boswcll's view of the majestic exponent of ethical wisdom embraced the author of *The Rambler* as well as the tavern-chair talker. It was the same oracle that spoke ; it was only the medium that was different. The difference was accentuated by Johnson's passionate desire for the company of his fellow human-beings. Loneliness was the one condition that he dreaded. It was in loneliness that melancholy assailed him, and, as he wrote his moralising essays, cheerfulness seldom broke in. But as soon as he was in company, in a drawing-room or an inn, at a meeting of a club (" an assembly of good fellows meeting for a certain purpose"), the gloom would vanish and, however serious the topic of conversation might be, wit and gaiety would season the talk.

The lonely Johnson is revealed in the *Prayers and Meditations* and a picture drawn exclusively

from these confessions would be partial and distorted. Why is there so constant a strain of self-reproach, why so morbid and, apparently, so disproportionate an insistence upon his failure to do the things that he might and ought to have done ? Boswells summary at the end of the *Life* probably gives the right answer : " The solemn text ' of him to whom much is given, much will be required ' seems to have been ever present to his mind, in a rigorous sense, and to have made him dissatisfied with his labours and acts of goodness, however comparatively great ; so that the unavoidable consciousness of his superiority was, in that respect, a cause of disquiet. He suffered so much from this, and from the gloom which perpetually haunted him, and made solitude frightful, that it may be said of him, ' If in this life only he had hope, he was of all men most miserable.[5] " It was Johnson's conscience as a[scholar that troubled him. He had written aj number of books, to be sure, but he had written, them because the wolf was at the door. He had not pursued learning for its own sake, as he had meant to do. He had planned many schemes, but they had come to nothing. Why ? Because he had spent his time in pleasant, but unproductive, social intercourse. He had lain in bed half the morning ; then his friends had begun to visit him ; he had dined out, and afterwards talked till the small hours with Boswcll. At the beginning of each year he determined to rise

early and to establish some plan of regular study ; at the end of each year he looked back and found that his intentions were unfulfilled.

Johnson's melancholy was constitutional. At the age of twenty he passed through a period of deep depression and the fear of insanity remained as a lurking terror. " Melancholy, evil thoughts, broken resolutions, madness," is the mournful scries noted in a prayer composed in the last year of his life. It was a vicious circle : Johnson wisely sought escape from the terrors of loneliness and melancholy in convivial association with his fellow-men ; as a result, his serious works of scholarship were left undone ; and from this followed remorse for hours misspent. A passage in *Rasselas* reflects something of this :

> " Praise is to an old man an empty sound. I have neither mother to be delighted with the reputation of her son, nor wife to partake the honours of her husband. I have outlived my friends and my rivals. Nothing is now of much importance ; for I cannot extend my interest beyond myself. . . . My retrospect of life recalls to my view many opportunities of good neglected, much time squandered upon trifles, and more lost in idleness and vacancy. I leave many great designs unattempted, and many great attempts unfinished."

Johnson's fear of death was largely a fear that

death might overtake him before he had accomplished the work that he ought to do. " O God," he prayed, " make me to remember that *the night cometh when no man can work."*

Johnson was too honest to argue with himself that by dining out and frequenting clubs and routs he was giving pleasure to his fellows and thereby making a good use of his time. He knew that, in fact, he went for his own pleasure, and, when New Year's Day or Easter Day came round, a sense of guilt temporarily overwhelmed him - temporarily, because at the next opportunity of talk with a friend, his interest would be aroused and his spirit soothed. But he never really despaired. At the age of seventy-one he wrote :

> " I have corrected no external habits, nor have kept any of the resolutions made in the beginning of the year ; yet I hope still to be reformed, and not to lose my whole life in idle purposes."

Posterity cannot be expected to share Johnson's wish that he had spent more time at his desk and less in the company of his social friends. For Johnson did not go out to dinner merely to enjoy pleasant gossip and anecdote. Conversation was for him an occupation that required knowledge, command of words, imagination, and a resolution not to be overcome by failures. As his conversational fame spread, the crowd at a party waited

for him to talk as they might have waited for a musician to play or sing. Fanny Burney, when she first saw him at one of her father's parties in 1777, was chagrined when he made straight for the books and began to read ; she and her sisters " perfectly languished " to hear him talk. At a meeting of The Club or at some similar gathering Johnson was seen in the give-and-take of more formal argument. Inevitably he would take the centre of the stage ; a protagonist would engage him and the company would enjoy the dramatic qualities of the scene. People listened to Johnson's talk not only for the quickness of its verbal sword-play ; they listened also to the author of *The Rambler.* It was exciting to hear Johnson talking for victory ; but it was also satisfying to note how his argument was based upon some fundamental principle and was finally crystallised in some powerful, succinct, and unforgettable phrase. From early days conversation had been Johnson's chief recreation, and it was, in his view, an essential component of the sum of human happiness. When he declared that if he had no duties and no reference to futurity he would spend his life in driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman, he was careful to add that the woman must be one who could understand him and add something to the conversation.

Johnson has come down to history as a great Tory as well as a great talker and a great moralist. " He was a Tory," wrote Macaulay, " not from

rational conviction - for his serious opinion was that one form of government was just as good or just as bad as another - but from mere passion such as inflamed the Gapulets against the Montagues or the Blues of the Roman circus against the Greens." Perhaps it is true that Johnson's Toryism was based on passion, but not in the sentimental and traditional sense which Macaulay proceeds to elaborate. Johnson's passion was for order and for the ordered stability of the various grades of society. Any policy which threatened to disturb that stability was to be condemned. The first Whig was the Devil, for it was he who disturbed the order of heaven. In his youth the Jacobites seemed to Johnson to stand for the old order, whilst Walpole's foreign policy brought shame upon Britain's good name. But, as the Hanoverian dynasty gradually identified itself with the solidarity and continuity of governmental authority, Johnson quite legitimately and consistently gave it his support. Whig doctrine and Whig aspirations produced in him the same kind ofirritation which Gladstone was to provoke in his political opponents in the following century. Talk about Liberty in the abstract exasperated Johnson. Why should the Whigs be alarmed about the power of the Grown, provided that the Crown did not abuse its power ? Why all the talk about Liberty for the American colonists when those who yelped loudest for it were the owners of slaves ?

Johnson's respect for rank - for princes, dukes, archbishops, captains of industry - was based, not on snobbery, but on a profound conviction that the happiness of the mass of human beings in a civilised state depended on the maintenance of a properly ordered society. Such a society owed a primary duty to its least fortunate members ; it must in fact be judged by its provision for the poor. If it failed to fulfil this primary obligation, the breaking-point might be reached ; human nature provided an ultimate remedy against the tyranny of oppressive government in the cutting-olf of the tyrant's head. But any attempt to establish social equality was to be deplored, not so much because it was wrong in principle as because it would not work - it would lead to social chaos. Highland society appealed to Johnson particularly because it was small enough to illustrate the virtues of primitive chieftainship. He admired Henry Thrale's ordering of his household for a similar reason. Johnson lived before the Industrial Revolution, and it is dangerous to speculate how he would have faced the problems of the modern world. That he would have condemned equalitarianism is fairly clear, but it is legitimate to conjecture that he would have favoured some form of a planned society.

This fundamental conviction of the need of authoiity throughout the body politic coloured Johnson's ecclesiastical, as well as his political,

views. As a Christian, he believed in the redemption of humanity from sin by the merits of Jesus Christ ; as an Englishman, he was a " steady Church of England man." In the eighteenth-century sense he was " High Church," but he recognised no special prerogative of divine direction in any one Church. If he preferred the Roman Catholic to the Presbyterian Church, it was partly because the doctrine of Purgatory made a personal appeal to his religious consciousness and partly because of his respect for the authoritarian qualities of the Catholic system. Intolerant as he frequently was in the discussion of an ethical problem, he had a large measure of religious tolerance. As a matter of argument, he would maintain that in all matters of difference between the Church of England and the Church of Rome, the Church of England was right ; but if it were a question of charity (and ultimately charity mattered to Johnson even more than argument) he would take a larger view : " For my part, sir, I think all Christians, whether Papists or Protestants, agree in the essential articles, and that their differences arc trivial and rather political than religious."

Johnson's view of literature is similarly coloured by a profound reverence for tradition and order ; it was a desire to put the English language in order that made him a lexicographer. When he ranged over his father's book-shelves as a boy, it was " all ancient writers, Sir, all manly," that

he studied, and as to contemporary poetry, he naturally thought of it in terms of the writings of Alexander Pope :

> *Order is Heaven's first law ; and this confest*
> *Some are and must be mightier than the rest. . . .*
> *Oh sons of earth, attempt ye still to rise*
> *By mountains pil'd on mountains, to the skies ?*

Johnson was similarly conscious of the need of setting some limit to human endeavour. Imlac, in *Rasselas,* declared that knowledge of nature was only half the task of a poet, that he must be acquainted likewise with all the modes of life - the power of the passions, the influences of climate and custom ; that he must rise above the prejudices of his own age and country and take an abstract, transcendental view of right and wrong. The prince very naturally protested that no human being could ever reach such a standard. " To be a poet," Imlac admitted, " is indeed very difficult." It was a difficulty of which Johnson was always conscious. " The purpose of a writer is to be read," he wrote in reply to certain criticisms of Pope's Homer. " Pope wrote for his own age and his own nation." Pope, he maintained, had the three qualities that constitute genius - Invention, Imagination, Judgment ; he had also a " tremendous power of versification," and it was this power that came to be for Johnson the criterion of metrical excellence. In his two

most notorious attacks in the *Lives of the Poets* he censures both Milton and Gray for their " harshness " of diction. Disliking the form, he was immediately prejudiced against the sentiments and images that the poems contained. " The glittering accumulations of ungraceful ornaments" upset his notions of the ordered sequence of poetic expression.

" The only end of writing is to enable the reader better to enjoy life or better to endure it," and direct contact with human beings ultimately interested Johnson more than the knowledge of human nature to be gained through books. To explore the minds of men and women, and preferably of men and women with no literary pretensions, was to Johnson one of the truest pleasures that life afforded, and, if the exploration revealed a state of misery, Johnson's response was prompt and splendid. But Johnson was too honest to pretend that in making his house a refuge for the unfortunate he received no benefit himself. The one return that he expected his beneficiaries to make was that they should provide agreeable conversation. Furthermore, he was not always the Sage. Fun, as well as wit, flavoured his talk. Boswcll is invariably apologetic on this topic. He feels it unsuitable to have to record that Johnson toyed with a Highland beauty or that he rocked with senseless laughter in Fleet Street. But, over and above the kind of conversation that Boswell recorded with such skill and fidelity, Johnson

undoubtedly talked nonsense, and amusing nonsense. Of this the testimony of Fanny Burney and others leaves no doubt.

So, gradually, some of the qualities emerge which endear Johnson to the English-speaking race, and especially to those sections of it with which he was least in sympathy-Whigs, Americans, Scotchmen, agnostics. The Johnson that inspires this affection is clearly neither the Lexicographer, nor the Rambler, nor the Tory, but a personality which perhaps no biography, not even Bos well's, can wholly reveal. When Goldsmith once suggested that new members should be admitted to The Club as the existing members had already travelled over one another's minds, Johnson's reply was decisive : " Sir, you have not travelled over *my* mind, I promise you." It was a point that was fully appreciated by Johnson's friends. They were men pre-eminent in their own professions, but they were genuinely in awe of Johnson. They listened to him not merely because they enjoyed the readiness of his wit, but because they respected the width of his learning, the clearness of his judgment, and, above all, the fixity of his ethical standards. However strong his prejudice, or however violent his conversational expression of it might be, Johnson strove consistently, in one respect at least, to practise what he preached - he cleared his *mind* of cant. It was an essential condition of the search for truth, and, when

Johnson believed that he had got hold of some portion of the truth, he was not afraid either to explain the process of his reasoning or to dogmatise about his conclusions. The exploration of Johnson's mind is still worth making, and the modern seeker after truth will not return from the voyage empty-handed.

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