

SAMUEL JOHNSON AFTER A CENTURY AND A HALF¹

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BY one of those strange quirks of fortune which the philosopher accepts with a fine nonchalance, it has come to pass that the original painting of the mighty Cham of Eighteenth-Century Letters, Dr. Samuel Johnson, executed from life by his friend and fellow club member, Sir Joshua Reynolds, is now in the possession of an American, Mr. A. Edward Newton. Shades of the illustrious dead! What would the invincible Doctor say, could he speak? Of the Americans, as early as 1769, he had thundered in conversation: "Sir, they are a race of convicts, and ought to be grateful for anything we allow them short of hanging." If, however, the ghost of Dr. Johnson is with us now, it will be appeased when it learns that the erstwhile "race of convicts" has already produced some noted Johnsonians, including not only Mr. Newton, but Professor Chauncey Brewster Tinkler of Yale, and, most notably, Mr. R. B. Adam of Buffalo, a Yale graduate and the foremost Johnsonian of America, if not of the world. I have an idea that the author of *Taxation no Tyranny, an Answer to the Resolutions and Address of the American Congress*, would find it difficult to maintain his original thesis with any show of enthusiasm. In any case, the American-owned portrait is a speaking likeness of the man—square of breadth, the neck pulled down between the shoulders leaves the head without any visible means of support, as if it had been stuck on the body; the face is thick-set with a strong and heavy chin, full lips, a nose longer and larger than ordinary, eyes half-way between a question and a frown—at once sharply serious and whimsically humorous; while over all rises a squat, wrinkled forehead. The net impression is that of a man combining in his person the qualities of clear judgment, intellectual poise, and ready vigour housed in an uncouth exterior,—in brief, a fair representative of the superior type of middle-class Englishman.

Though of bourgeois extraction, the boy Samuel had at least two points in his favour; he grew up in a bookshop, and he passed his impressionable years in one of the loveliest old towns of rural England. Thus he early became a voracious reader, dipping into

1. Johnson died in 1784, and this article was prompted by the retrospect.

many books and exhausting none. "He told me", reports Boswell, "that from his earliest years he loved to read poetry, but hardly ever read any poem to an end; that he read Shakespeare at a period so early that the speech of the Ghost in Hamlet terrified him when he was alone; that Horace's *Odes* were the compositions in which he took most delight, and it was long before he liked his *Epistles* and *Satires*." One interesting incident recorded by his biographer is so significant in this connection that I must give it in Boswell's words:—

He used to mention one curious instance of his casual reading, when but a boy. Having imagined that his brother had hid some apples behind a large folio upon an upper shelf in his father's shop, he climbed up to search for them. There were no apples; but the large folio proved to be Petrarch, whom he had seen mentioned, in some preface, as one of the restorers of learning. His curiosity having thus been excited, he sat down with avidity, and read a great part of the book. What he read . . . he told me, was not works of mere amusement, "Not voyages and travels, but all literature, Sir, all ancient writers, all manly, though but little Greek; but in this irregular manner, "added he," I had looked into a great many books, which were not commonly known at the Universities, where they seldom read any books, but what were put into their hands by their tutors. So that when I came to Oxford, Dr. Adams, now master of Pembroke College, told me I was the best qualified for the University that he had ever known come there".

What more potent argument for reading widely, if not too well, could one ask for? Johnson's early exposure to books proved most salutary; for aside from an indifferent elementary schooling received chiefly at Stourbridge and something more than three poverty-ridden years passed at Oxford, this self-administered education became the foundation—the best for fame that can ever be laid—upon which he rose through bitter struggle to the kingship of English letterdom. And the immortal Sam was likewise happy in his birthplace where, to-day, his statue stands in the self-same market-place in which on market days this renowned son of a poor man displayed his bookish wares before the curious eyes of the country louts of Staffordshire. Across from the market-place is the house in which he was born, which recalls in its every detail memories of its famous son. Verily, Lichfield must have entered into the youth's sensitive nature, with the Cathedral in its midst, the only one in England to boast three spires, each richly beflowered—as is the exquisitely beautiful west front. Here, 118 miles from London, all is peaceful,—level turf, quiet water, sedate old houses, dreamy thirteenth-century Cathedral.

And if ever a man needed steadying influences, it was Samuel Johnson. An inspiration to all who aspire, his life was one continuing triumph over circumstances. From his youth up he struggled with constitutional disease that weakened his eyes and indelibly seamed his face; he was subject to fits of melancholia that "kept him mad half his life". The sudden death of his father, when Johnson had just turned twenty-one, left him penniless and degreeless, the road to literary recognition barred by apparently insuperable obstacles. There is not time to tell the story in all of its details, but a thrilling narrative it is, and a striking illustration of the great fact that often truth is stranger than fiction. First, he takes a hand at school teaching, a *role* for which he was temperamentally unfit; next, he is in Birmingham doing translation for a bookseller; then, marrying a Mrs. Porter, the widow of a dry goods merchant with whose £800 he essays to start a school of his own near his native Lichfield, a school in which he proposes to teach pupils "in a method somewhat more rational than those commonly practised". It turned out a dismal failure; although he did enroll one pupil, a fresh-coloured, good-natured little fellow named David Garrick, later, to become the noted manager of Drury Lane Theatre. Indeed, the careers of master and pupil got under way simultaneously, when the dapper young Davy and the big hulking Samuel decided to strike out for London together, Garrick ostensibly to study law at Lincoln's Inn, and Johnson to begin his perilous climb to literary eminence.

For a full twenty-six years after his arrival in the English metropolis, he plied his pen feverishly by day and night. Beginning as a hack-writer for Cave, the bookseller, he contributed various and sundry articles to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, including the reports of parliamentary debates, until the Government passed a resolution forbidding the printing of their discussions; whereupon Samuel retaliated by originating what he styled "The Senate of Magna Lilliputia", whose deliberations bore such a striking resemblance to the actual proceedings of parliament that many subscribers were under the impression that these pseudo-debates were the real thing. It was his publication of the satirical poem, *London*, that first made him known outside of Grubstreet circles. Pope was favourably impressed; the booksellers thought they saw a new author in the making and, *mirabile dictu*, the poem brought ten guineas—a small fortune in the estimation of the half-starved Johnson, who, according to Macaulay, had been in the habit of dining in smelly subterranean ordinaries and wiping his hands off on the back of a Newfoundland dog. Perhaps the famous essayist

was a bit too colorful, but he was not far from the deadly truth; for during those early years the future dictator of letters almost succeeded in solving the problem of how to live on nothing in a great city. I rather suppose that he made good use of the coffee-house where threepence would mean a stimulating drink and good company; since a cup of coffee meant an all-day stay. In fact, he tells us that he could dine at the "Pineapple" for 8d expended as follows: a cut of meat, 6d.; bread 1d.; waiter's tip, 1d. Wine at 1s was quite beyond his means. Life with prosperous writers was another matter; they wore modish clothes, sipped costly vintages, played the games in fashion, tapped their snuff-boxes, and ignited their long clay pipes at the slender wax tapers that burned on the tables in the exclusive drawing-rooms of Covent Garden and Soho Square. I have in mind the days of Johnson's literary apprenticeship, when he belonged to the great company of unknown would-be authors who were glad to turn their pens to any kind of task; compiling indexes and almanacs; striking off fulsome reviews of other people's books; annotating classic authors; translating works from French, Italian, Latin, and Greek; manufacturing prefaces and prologues; carrying on a never-ending battle for a crust and a garrett. It is little wonder that Maculay in one of his Essays is moved to say:

All that is squalid and miserable might now be summed up in the word Poet... Even the poorest pities him. And they might well pity him. For if their condition was equally abject, their aspirings were not equally high, nor their sense of insult equally acute... All the vices of the gambler and of the beggar were blended with those of the author... If good fortune came, it came in such a manner that it was almost certain to be abused... Sometimes blazing in gold-laced hats and waistcoats; sometimes lying in bed because their coats had gone to pieces, or wearing paper cravats because their linen was in pawn; sometimes drinking Champagne and Tokay; sometimes standing at the window of an eating-house in Porridge Island to snuff up the scent of what they could not afford to taste; they knew luxury; they knew beggary, but they never knew comfort. These men were irreclaimable... If a sum was bestowed on a wretched adventurer... it was instantly spent on strange freaks of sensuality, and, before forty-eight hours had elapsed, the poet was again pestering all his acquaintances for two-pence to get a plate of shin of beef at a subterranean cook-shop.

Occasionally, a giant emerged unscathed from this *University of Hard Knocks* to become a mighty force among his fellows, and of such the greatest of them all was Samuel Johnson. Fittingly enough, his poem, *London*, was followed by a *Life of Savage*, one

of those Grubstreeters who with all his native brilliance fought a losing fight with bitterness and want. Five years later came another verse satire, *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, done after the manner of Juvenal, to whose satires I was exposed in college days. By this time Garrick, who had given up the law for the stage, had achieved an enviable reputation; to him Johnson went with his play, *Irene*, the manuscript of which he had carried with him as he trudged with his pupil Londonwards. In 1749, through Garrick's influence, it was produced at Drury Lane with the great actor in the principal rôle, but the play was a notable failure, and with it faded Johnson's dramatic ambitions.

Actually, these early gestures had proved that Johnson was neither a poet nor a dramatist. And it was, perhaps, just as well, for it was an age of prose—an age that produced Gibbon, whose *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is still unequalled; an age that produced Sir William Blackstone, whose *Commentaries on the Laws of England* is still regarded as a standard work on that subject; an age that produced Adam Smith, whose brilliant treatise, *The Wealth of Nations*, laid the foundation for the science of Political Economy. It is as a prose writer that Johnson attained whatever of literary excellence he possessed; although his personality has with the passage of time so far overshadowed his prose works that posterity has almost forgotten the triumphs of his pen in the greater triumphs of his tongue. I mean to say that his monument is his personality—a second-class writer who is immortal forever. He himself once admitted that "Composition is, for the most part, an effort to slow diligence and steady perseverance to which the mind is dragged by necessity or resolution". Surely, in the main, the great man's prose shows every sign of conscious effort. Even *The Rambler* and *The Idler*, periodicals of the *Spectator* class, scarcely live up to their names; the lightness of touch that still makes the *Spectator* and the *Tatler* papers the pleasantest kind of pleasant talk is distinguished by its absence. It was the *Rambler* that introduced the English public to a new type of writing which came to be known as Johnsonese, a style of a Brobdingnagian kind—bulky and elephantine in phrase. Goldsmith hit him home when in a courageous moment he said, "If you were to write a fable about little fishes, Doctor, you would make the little fishes talk like whales". When the man wrote, he seemed to become the victim of writers' complex. For instance, in a letter, which is simply a form of crystallized conversation, Johnson reports an incident connected with his trip to the Hebrides as follows: "When we were taken upstairs, a dirty fellow bounced out of the bed on which one

of us was to lie". In his book, called *Journey to the Hebrides*, he says, "Out of one of the beds, on which we were to repose, started up, at our entrance, a man black as a Cyclops from the forge". In conversation, he declared of *The Rehearsal*—"It has not wit enough to keep it sweet". Then, after a pause, in his best prose manner, "It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction". Most people who write have a tendency to use "sesquipedalian" words, but Johnson's style is truly Gargantuan. The historian, Taine, in a passage which, in style, is reminiscent of the Dictator himself, says:

His phraseology rolls ever in solemn and majestic periods, in which every substantive marches ceremoniously, accompanied by its epithet; grand, pompous words peal like an organ; every proposition is set forth balanced by a proposition of equal length, thought is developed with the compassed regularity and official splendor of a procession.¹

I own I like not Johnson's turgid style,
That gives an inch the importance of a mile,

Uplifts the club of Hercules—for what?
To crush a butterfly or brain a gnat;
Creates a whirlwind from the earth to draw
A goose's feather, or exalt a straw;
Sets wheels on wheels in motion—such a clatter
To force up one poor nipperkin of water;
Bids ocean labor with tremendous roar
To heave a cockle-shell upon the shore;
Alike in every theme his pompous art,
Heaven's awful thunder or a rumbling cart.²

The criticisms are, in general, justifiable; the pompous Doctor, however, has moments when he turns off prose as limpid as sunlight; as, for example, the preface to his edition of Shakespeare, and the ever-famous letter to Lord Chesterfield, dashed off in a proud and indignant mood to spurn the proffered patronage of the courtly nobleman. Although few read Johnson these days, I like to turn over the pages of the doughty old moralist who so often smothers his ideas in Latin polysyllables, just to get the effect of the long resounding march of his language. Even idling with the *Idler* is not play. Take this extract:

I considered that wit was sarcastic, and magnanimity imperious; that avarice was economical, and ignorance obsequious; and having estimated the good and evil of every quality, employed by my

1. Taine, H. A., trans. by H. van Laun: *History of English Literature*.
2. Wolcott, Dr. J.: *Peter Pindar*.

own diligence and that of my friends to find the lady in whom nature and reason had reached that happy mediocrity which is equally remote from exuberance and deficiency

And the *Rambler*, explaining what he is attempting to do, writes as follows:

I have labored to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations. Something, perhaps, I have added to the elegance of its construction, and something to the harmony of its cadence.

Johnsonese is in evidence even in *Rasselas*, a novelette written under pressure during the evenings of a single week to pay his mother's funeral expenses. As a tale it is not unpleasing, but the language weights it down mightily. A brief bit will suffice:

From the mountains on every side, rivulets descended that filled the valleys with verdure and fertility, and formed a lake in the middle, inhabited by fish of every species, and frequented by every fowl whom nature had taught to dip the wing in water.

While Johnson's edition of Shakespeare's plays is still of some value for its sensible comments and, above all else, for its notable preface, it has long since ceased to exert any special influence. His *Lives of the Poets*, a series of biographic studies of the poets of his time, is scarcely a dependable source to which to go for a knowledge of the poets he discusses. As has been so well remarked, "Some of his dwarfs are giants; many of his giants have dwindled into dwarfs". Even these, the greatest of his prose works, are to-day looked upon largely in the light of curiosities.

The same remark, however, fails to apply to Dr. Johnson's *magnum opus*, his *Dictionary of the English Language*. It is his memorable work. For seven years prior to undertaking the Herculean task, he had been steeping himself in words; the work which he had calculated would take him three years actually consumed seven, and for his arduous labors he received the comparatively small sum of £1,575. There had been dictionaries before Johnson's, but they were naive and altogether amusing books explaining difficult words—of the order of glossaries. In Shakespeare's time such a list had been brought out "for ladies, gentlemen, and other unskilful persons". A dictionary of 1616 contained 5,080 entries, and was thought quite adequate. It defined a "heretic" as a person "who maketh his own choice what he will be or will

not be". In 1623, one Cochran published a dictionary resembling Johnson's, in which he advised using hard words; for instance, "dirunculate" for "weeding". Other such dictionaries followed in 1656 and 1700. In 1721, Nathan Daley put a larger work on the market which ran through twenty-seven editions, only to be supplanted by Johnson who used it as the basis for his dictionary of 1755. Elated by the prospect of what seemed to him so much money, he forthwith took a house in Gough Square in the heart of London, in what was in Dr. Johnson's day a very select neighborhood. I have visited the house several times; its location is not easy to find. If you are looking for it, your best method is to take a motor bus on the Strand, explaining that you want to get off at the *Cheshire Cheese*, located just beyond Temple Bar, at which point the Strand becomes Fleet Street; here, if you are in no hurry, you may pause at the famous old eating-house to enjoy a snack of cheese and to sit for a moment in Dr. Johnson's favorite seat in the right-hand inglenook of the picturesque chop room. Coming out of the "Cheese", make your way along Wine Office Court as far as you can; now, make a sharp turn to the left, and in a moment you will find yourself in the tiny square looking directly at Number 17, the magnet that annually draws countless thousands of the old philosopher's friends from every nook and corner of the world, including an ever-increasing number from the far-off Plantations—as Dr. Johnson called America. Thanks to the generosity of the well-known English publisher, Cecil Harmsworth, the house was purchased in April, 1911, and restored without any important sacrifice of original features. It was in the attic of this building, which he fitted up like a lawyer's office, that the great lexicographer, assisted by several copyists paid out of his own pocket, turned out the *Dictionary* with which his name will ever be associated. I shall not soon forget the thrill I received as I passed for the first time up the staircase which had so many times creaked to his footstep; and as I looked about the Dictionary attic, I fancied I could hear the echoes of his elephantine laughter as he roared appreciatively at one of his own witty sallies.

There are dictionaries and dictionaries. Johnson's is just different,—that's all. According to the contract with the booksellers, the words were to be not only "deduced from their originals" but "illustrated in their different significations by examples from the best writers". Much of the charm of the work lies in this special feature. In addition, there is the Preface, by general agreement one of the author's finest performances. I can only quote bits—enough to give one the taste. He gave, he says,

to this book "the labor of years, to the honor of my country, that we may no longer yield the palm of philology to the nations of the continent." "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors; whether I shall add anything to my own writings to the glory of English literature, must be left to time". He also wants it to be understood that his Dictionary was "written with little assistance of the learned and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, nor under the shelter of academic bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and in sorrow" . . . "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; I therefore dismiss it with frigid tranquillity, having little to fear or hope from censure or from praise." In any event, his dear Tetty, as he affectionately called his wife, had "sunk into the grave" three years before the completion of the two great volumes in folio. I find it difficult to read this part of the Preface without crying, and I am not a tearful person. Thomas Carlyle, the arch-dyspeptic, says:

Had Johnson written nothing but his *Dictionary*, one might have traced there a great intellect, a genuine man. Looking to its clearness of definition, its general solidity, honesty, insight and successful method, it may be called the best of all Dictionaries.

Of course, Johnson's work has long since been superseded by works that, etymologically, are infinitely superior, but as one critic admirably sums up the matter:

Its undertaking was sublime and its fulfilment noble. Nothing like it, nothing within measurable distance of it, had hitherto appeared in the English language. We should all bow down before such a monument of industry and talent.

But I have said that this dictionary was different. It is, because it is not merely the work of a scholar; it is also the work of a great wit, as some of its famous definitions will prove. If they do not stir your risibilities, you are not risible. I defy you to find any other dictionary with definitions that can match the following:

BLISTER—"A postule formed by raising the cuticle from cutis and filled with serous blood."

CAMELOPARD—"An Abyssinian animal taller than an elephant, but not so thick. He is so named because he has a neck and head like a camel; he is spotted like a pard" (a pard is a leopard). "But his spots are white upon a red ground. The Italians call him *giaraffa*."

- CHICKEN—"Among other things, 'a term for a young girl'."
- COUGH—"A convulsion of the lungs vellicated by some shard serosity."
- FLIRTATION—"A cant word among women."
- JOB—"A low word now much in use, of which I cannot tell the etymology."
- LEXICOGRAPHER—"A harmless drudge that busies himself in tracing the original and detailing the signification of words."
- NETWORK—"Anything reticulated or decussated with interstices between the intersections."
- OATS—"A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people."
- PENSION—"An allowance made to anyone without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country."
- POETESS—"A she poet."

When on a May day in 1762 the news was brought to Johnson that the king had bestowed on him a pension of £300, he must suddenly have bethought himself of his definition of the word "pension", for at first he demurred. However, upon receiving the assurance that acceptance of his Sovereign's bounty would in no way bind him as to his future conduct, he acquiesced. From that moment he wrote less and talked more; in fact, talked continuously. The Johnson of 1762—1784 is known to the world as intimately as the President of the United States during his stay in the White House. At last, the great man had time to sit down and have his talk out, secure in the knowledge that his needs would be provided for, since £450 was considered a good budget in the eighteenth century; indeed a gentleman of fashion could maintain a carriage and servants and educate his children on that sum. His prestige was further enhanced by the degree of LL.D., in 1765, an honor conferred by the University of Dublin, and later confirmed by his own Oxford.

But the greatest piece of luck to come his way was his meeting with James Boswell, Esquire, in 1763; although at the time his Literary Highness did not realize what that acquaintanceship was to mean. Boswell was a Scottish lawyer of shallow brain and imperturbable conceit, who conceived such an admiration for the learned Doctor that he made it his chief business in life to note down every word that fell from the lips of his idol; out of these notes came in due season his memorable *Life of Johnson*, justly regarded as the outstanding biography in our language. The meeting took

place on the sixteenth of May in Davies's bookshop. Says Bozzy, as Johnson appeared in the doorway, "I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds soon after he had published his Dictionary, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation. . . . 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" . . . 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". The importance of Boswell's "anecdotic-biographic" work can scarcely be exaggerated; because through its vivid pages we have a photograph far more minutely accurate than it would be possible for Reynolds—or an even greater artist—to confide to canvas. As listeners at these private conversations, we learn all sorts of things:—we know that he puffed, and grunted, and contradicted all comers, setting down as fools and blockheads all who dared to take exception to his conclusions. We pry into all his curious habits,—such as keeping secret stores of orange peel and touching every post on his way to and from his house; we learn that he carried with him all through life the marks of scrofula; that he kept a regular human menagerie in his house,—a peevish old doctor, a blind old lady, and a negro. We have recorded his opinions on a multitude of matters. Supping with Boswell at the Turk's Head coffee-house of an evening, he talks of his liking for young people, of the means of overcoming a tendency to melancholy, of the duty of maintaining subordination of rank, and winds up by insisting that a boy's school days constitute the happiest time of his life. Then, in a burst of confidence, he confides to Bozzy: "There are few people whom I take so much to as you". Returning to his topic, he makes a charming confession:

Sir, I love the acquaintance of young people because, in the first place, I don't like to think myself growing old. In the next place, young acquaintances must last longest, if they do last. . . . I love the young dogs of this age, they have more wit and humor and knowledge of life than we had; but then the dogs are not such good scholars. Sir, in my early years I read very hard. It is a sad reflection but a true one, that I knew almost as much at eighteen as I do now. My judgment, to be sure, was not so good;

but I had all the facts. I remember very well, when I was at Oxford, an old gentleman said to me, "Young man, ply your book diligently now, and acquire a stock of knowledge; for when years come upon you, you will find that poring upon books will be but an irksome task."

Boswell's notetaking was made easier when in 1764 Johnson and his friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, conceived the idea of forming a literary club. With an annual income of £300 and nothing in particular to do, the sage of Bolt Court saw an ideal opportunity to talk away the balance of his life, with the most talented men of England for an audience. It was a happy inspiration; for while Johnson the writer is dead, Johnson the conversationalist is decidedly alive. Burke, Fox, Goldsmith, Garrick, Gibbon, Sheridan, and many other brilliant men were members of this distinguished group, but over them all the genial Doctor maintained his supremacy. Macaulay says that "the verdicts pronounced by this conclave on new books were speedily known all over London, and were sufficient to sell off a whole edition in a day, or to condemn the sheet to the service of the trunk-maker and the pastry cook". It is the Johnson of this charmed circle that has survived, "the famous lexicographer enthroned in a tavern, pontificating upon the affairs of the universe, browbeating his opponents, and revelling in his victories". And had it not been for Boswell, all this would have been lost to us, nor was it easy for him to play his self-assigned rôle. In one of his best essays, Carlyle describes delightfully the relation between master and disciple:

Bozzy, even among Johnson's friends and special admirers, seems rather to have been laughed at than envied; his officious whisking, consequential ways, the daily reproofs and rebuffs he underwent, could gain from the world no golden but only leaden opinion. His devout discipleship seemed nothing more than a mean spanielship, in the general eye. His mighty "constellation", or sun, round whom he, as satellite, observantly gyrated, was, for the mass of men, but a huge ill-snuffed tallow light, and he a weak night-moth, circling foolishly, dangerously about it, not knowing what he wanted. Had nothing better than vanity been there, Johnson and Boswell had never come together, or had soon and finally separated again. Thus does poor Bozzy stand out to us as an ill-assorted, glaring mixture of the highest and the lowest.

Of this biography, Carlyle has this to say:

As for the book itself, we have rated it beyond any other product of the eighteenth century; all Johnson's own writings stand on a quite inferior level to it. . . Now this book of Boswell's,

this is precisely a revocation of the edict of destiny; so that Time shall not utterly, not so soon by several centuries, have dominion over us. A little row of naphtha-lamps, with its line of naphtha-light, burns clear and holy through the dead light of the past; they who are gone are still here; though hidden, they are revealed; though dead, they yet speak. There it shines, that little miraculous lamplit pathway, shedding its feebler and feebler twilight into the boundless dark oblivion,—for all that Johnson *touched* has become illuminated for us; on that miraculous little pathway we can still travel, and see wonders.

Thus does one Scotchman speak of another.

When Johnston got to talking, he never knew when to stop; when I get to talking of Johnson, I find myself in a similar predicament. One must read Boswell's *Life* for one's self; there is no other way by which one can know Johnson. Here are a few sparks struck from the Johnsonian anvil:

I never take a nap after dinner but when I have had a bad night, and then the nap takes me.

No, Sir, when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.

The writer of an epitaph should not be considered as saying nothing but what is strictly true.

There is now less flogging in our great schools than formerly, but then less is learned there.

I hate by-roads in education.

Nay, sure, Sir, it is better to *live* rich, than to *die* rich.

For my part, now, I consider supper as a turn-pike through which one must pass, in order to get to bed.

Of a new poem which had just come out

JOHNSON. "Sir, it has no power. Were it not for the well-known names with which it is filled, it would be nothing; the names carry the poet, not the poet the names."

MUSGRAVE. "A temporary poem always entertains us."

JOHNSON. "So does an account of criminals hanged yesterday entertain us."

A gentleman who introduced his brother to Dr. Johnson, was earnest to recommend him to the Doctor's notice, which he did by saying: "When we have sat together sometime, you'll find my brother very entertaining."—"Sir," (said Johnson), "I can wait."

One evening when the company was larger than ordinary, the talked turned to Dominicetti and his system of medicated baths. Said Johnson, "There is nothing in all this boasted system. No, Sir, medicated baths can be no better than warm water; their only effect can be that of tepid moisture". One of the company took exception, pointing out very clearly their superiority over ordinary baths. Although Johnson realized that the explanation was quite

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satisfactory, he would not admit it. He was talking for victory. As Goldsmith once said, "There is no arguing with Johnson; for when his pistol misses fire, he knocks you down with the butt end of it". Turning to the gentleman, he roared, "Well, Sir, go to Dominicetti, and get thyself fumigated; but be sure that the steam be directed to thy *head*, for *that* is the *peccant part*". A gale of laughter followed the remark, and Johnson had scored again.

One who understands whereof he speaks has said: "London is a city of ghosts; the people one sees are not important; they merely serve to clutter up the streets—they have no existence for us". You might look for Dr. Johnson's ghost in Westminster Abbey, where they buried him in December, 1784; you might seek his shade in the famous old church of St. Clement Danes, where he regularly attended divine service and at the east end of which stands a squat bronze statue of the needle-witted philosopher; but if you are possessed of a fraction of his sense, you will sally forth of an evening to the parlor of the "Cheshire Cheese" where you may have the great good luck to see his bulky ghost clad as of old—"in brown coat, black worsted stockings, and gray wig with scorched foretop"—taking its ease in the favorite seat by the fireplace, gorging itself on fish-sauce and veal-pie with plums, and just beginning on its nineteenth cup of tea.