

THE  
NEW RAMBLER

Journal of the Johnson Society of London

JUNE, 1964

THE NEW RAMBLER

JOURNAL OF THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

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DR. JOHNSON AND ISAAC WATTS

by

James H. Leicester, M.A.

When the triumvirate of booksellers went to Bolt Court on Easter Eve, 1777, they found Johnson preparing devoutly for the solemnity of the ensuing day. Their purpose was to solicit him to undertake the writing of little prefaces to their new edition of The English Poets. Thus the Lives of the Poets was born of a business transaction and a spirit of religious meditation. The story of how he exceeded the commitment allotted to him and the long and often tedious labour before the task was completed is well known. Whilst the world may forget the forty or so "most respectable booksellers of London" and their little delegation of Tom Davies, Straham and Cadell who called on Johnson, it will not forget the work which came forth from that propitious visit. The Lives of the Poets - described by Boswell as "the richest, most beautiful, and indeed most perfect production of Johnson's pen" - contain so much of the best of Johnson, so much of Johnson himself, that we rightly think of them as Johnson's Lives.

Yet we must remember that in no sense was Johnson the editor of the poets whose Lives he was commissioned to write. The choice of the individual poets and the selections from their works were likewise determined by the booksellers. Johnson himself held strong views on this distinction and was far from happy with the identification of his name with the volumes of poems for which he had supplied prefaces. His feelings can be gauged from the unequivocal and forthright terms of the note - penned on the receipt for £100 for revising the last edition of the Lives of the Poets - which he sent to the proprietors:

It is great impudence to put Johnson's Poets on the back of books which Johnson neither recommended nor revised.

He recommended only Blackmore on the Creation, and Watts.

How then are they Johnson's? This is indecent.

In fact, two other poets - Pomfret and Yalden - for whom he wrote very brief biographical prefaces were included in the Collection on his recommendation. In all, three divines and a writer of religious verse were voluntarily added to his labour.

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1. Boswell's Life, IV, 35, n.3.

Whilst Johnson was called upon to write some fifty lives, Isaac Watts was one of his chosen few. It is to him we turn this afternoon. Apart from wishing to see the poems included in the Collection, why should Johnson, the professed Anglican, choose to write the life of a dissenting minister? The reason is not far to seek. He was led beyond the intention of the booksellers by - as he tells us in the Author's Advertisement to the first edition - "the honest desire of giving useful pleasure". And, again, in his Prayers and Meditations he expressed the hope that the Lives had been "written ... in such a manner as may tend to the promotion of piety". Piety, then, was paramount. It will be seen that Johnson's concern for men and his honest desire to teach them the art of living - and of dying - have influenced the writing of this and other Lives. Piety - and a sense of duty to Watts and his readers - prompted Johnson to recommend Watts. He held him in veneration as a man and in high esteem as a writer. If he could not allow him the highest excellence as a poet, he could admire his saintly character and praise his design in the promotion of piety. There was sufficient merit in Watts for Johnson to pay his personal tribute to the dissenting minister.

In a partisan age, the reception of the Life was various. There were those who considered Johnson a renegade in his praise of a Dissenter; others who thought him a bigoted devotee of the established church. For his part, Johnson could be relied upon to speak his own mind. Where he recognised merit he praised it; where he found a good man he commended him. Robust supporter of his church as he was, he did not allow sectarian labels to prejudice his thinking to any marked extent. He drew a distinction between the sect and the individual members of it. He could praise a Dissenter, but not dissent. Consistent with this principle, Johnson included Watts in the Lives. Two other references in this early review are of interest since they illustrate Johnson's consistency of thought when he came later to assess the poet and the man. The first quotation concerns Johnson's comments on Elizabeth Harrison's Miscellanies - a collection of prose and verse by various authors:

The poets have had Dr. Watts before their eyes; a writer, who, if he stood not in the first class of genius, compensated by a ready application of his powers to the promotion of piety.

Johnson's admiration and respect for the profound sense of piety that pervaded his works were above sectarian controversy. The Anglican and the Dissenter are forgotten when we read Johnson's moving tribute to the theologian: "I have mentioned his treatises of Theology as distinct from his other productions, but



the truth is that whatever he took in hand was, by his incessant solicitude for souls, converted to Theology. As piety predominated in his mind, it is diffused over his works; under his direction it may be truly said, "Theologiae Philosophia ancillatur," philosophy is subservient to evangelical instruction: it is difficult to read a page without learning, or at least wishing, to be better. The attention is caught by indirect instruction, and he that sat down only to reason is on a sudden compelled to pray."

Having early formed his opinion of Watts as a man and a poet, as we have seen, and having voluntarily resolved to write the Life of a dissenter, Johnson was still faced with the practical problem of finding suitable biographical material. There is little in Boswell to suggest that Johnson had any personal knowledge of Watts, or that they had ever met during the eleven years in which Watts and Johnson were both living in London. The Life of Watts eventually appeared in volume VIII of the Prefaces, Biographical and Critical to the Works of the English Poets. This was one of the remaining six volumes for which "the world was kept in impatience"<sup>2</sup> and did not appear until 1781. Yet, from the outset, Johnson had begun his quest for material.

Johnson's difficulties were resolved when there appeared in 1780 the Memoirs of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D. written by the Rev. Thomas Gibbons. It would appear that Johnson lost no time in meeting the author. In his diary for 14 August 1780, Gibbons recorded: "Visited the celebrated Dr. Samuel Johnson." The meeting, which escaped Boswell's notice, was undoubtedly mutually successful. Within a year of their meeting, Johnson's own Life of Watts was published. Again in the company of Johnson and Dilly - this time shortly after the publication of the Lives - Boswell recorded a reference to the author of the Memoirs: Dr. Gibbons, the Dissenting minister, being mentioned, he (Johnson) said, "I took to Dr. Gibbons," and addressing himself to Mr. Charles Dilly, added, "I shall be glad to see him. Tell him, if he'll call on me, and dawdle over a dish of tea in an afternoon, I shall take it kind."<sup>3</sup> This prospect of Johnson dawdling over a dish of tea with a dissenting minister affords a further happy example of his disregard for any natural antipathy towards the sect when he liked the man. Clearly, the acquaintance continued. As late as 17 May 1784 - six months before Johnson's

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2. Boswell's Life, III, 435.

3. Boswell's Life, IV, 126.

death - Gibbons recorded in his diary: "Dined with Dr. Saml. Johnson, Mr. Boswell, &c., at Mr. Dilly's."

Let us now turn to the use which Johnson made of Gibbons' Memoirs, when writing his own Life of Watts, and examine in particular some of the occasions where he departed from the source or added his own interpolations. It is always fascinating and illuminating to observe Johnson at work on a source and to see how he moulds material to his use; how it filters through his own experience and receives the impress of something of Johnson himself. Johnson's indebtedness to Gibbons - perhaps more consciously manifest in view of the protracted search for biographical material - is evidenced in his reference to him by name when referring to Gibbons' account of the poet's father. Furthermore, Gibbons is named again when Johnson paid him the honour of quoting at length from the Memoirs, adding a special tribute to the author and "the narrative of one who writes what he knows." It should, perhaps, be added that Johnson made no such acknowledgment for many other biographical details used in the Life for which he was similarly indebted to the Gibbons' Memoirs.

Dr. Thomas Gibbons was minister of the Independent church at Haberdashers' Hall and a tutor of the Dissenting Academy at Mile End. He was an intimate friend of Watts and was in possession of manuscripts given him by Watts and members of his immediate family. When Watts died, Gibbons succeeded him as the leader of London Independency. As the author of the first extended biography of Watts, he showed sincere admiration for his friend, and revealed a conscious desire to imitate him both in his life and in his writings.

"ISAAC WATTS was born July 17, 1674, at Southampton, where his father, of the same name, kept a boarding-school for young gentlemen though common report makes him a shoemaker. He appears, from the narrative of Dr. Gibbons, to have been neither indigent nor illiterate."

With this initial reference to Gibbons, Johnson began his Life of Watts.

In the Memoirs, Gibbons relates various anecdotes concerning young Isaac's fondness for reading and his early aptitude for study. We are told that he began to learn Latin at the age of four and made swift progress in this and in Greek. Under the care of the Rev. Mr. Pinhorne, a clergyman of the Establishment, Isaac also added Hebrew to his early studies. He became,

Gibbons tells us, the delight of his friends and the admiration of the neighbourhood. When, at the age of seven, Isaac produced some Latin verse, his mother found it hard to believe that it was truly his own work. To demonstrate his ability, by way of dispelling any further doubt, Isaac thereupon composed an acrostic upon his own name:

I am a vile polluted lump of earth,  
S o I've continued ever since my birth,  
A lthough Jehovah grace does daily give me,  
A s sure this monster Satan will deceive me,  
C ome therefore, Lord, from Satan's claws relieve me.

W ash me in thy blood, O Christ,  
A nd grace divine impart,  
T hen search and try the corners of my heart,  
T hat I in all things may be fit to do  
S ervice to thee, and sing thy praises too.<sup>4</sup>

To the modern reader, the lines sound remarkable for their seriousness and religious precocity. To Gibbons they illustrated the child's wonderful attainment.

Gibbons continued the story of Isaac's education by telling of the group of gentlemen at Southampton who wished to encourage the early genius shown by the pupil at the Free-School. They were prepared to meet the cost of sending the young man to one of the English Universities. Under the Act of Uniformity (1662), Oxford and Cambridge were barred to Dissenters since entrance was conditional upon subscription to the Articles of the Established Church. Born a child of Dissent, Watts remained faithful to his sect and refused the offer of assistance. Later in life, Watts was again to stand firm to his principles when he refused the deanery of Salisbury. When the Act of Toleration made the lot of the Dissenter easier, there was a tendency towards disintegration, but Watts remained a Dissenter to the end of his days. In consequence, Watts went to London in 1690 to join one of the Academies that had been set up to offer university education to Dissenters.

During his days as a student and shortly afterwards - Gibbons tells us - Watts devoted some of his time to the writing of poetry. In these early poems, Gibbons discerned the "amazing flame", the "poetic fire burning strongest in the poet's younger years." As an example of early promise, he included the Epistle to his brother, Enoch Watts, in the *Memoirs*. Johnson also made reference to the Epistle and, with the verses before him, added his own brief

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4. Gibbons, p.8.

comment on them: He was, as he hints in his Miscellanies a maker of verses from fifteen to fifty, and in his youth he appears to have paid attention to Latin poetry. His verses to his brother, in the glyconick measure, written when he was seventeen, are remarkably easy and elegant. The narrative, here, would suggest that Johnson had gone direct to the Miscellanies for Watts's jocular description of himself as "a maker of verses from fifteen to fifty." But, again, he was relying on one of Gibbons' footnotes containing the quotation. Besides chronicling the life of the poet, Gibbons was intent on demonstrating to the world the beauty of his poetry. Assuming the role of critic, he offered the reader his own analysis and assessment of the poems. His enthusiastic critiques contain such adulatory phrases as: "most astonishing energy", "images of invincible strength and sovereign majesty" and, again, "most lively and suitable language... finely imagined." One ode in particular he adjudged as being comparable to "any of the Lyric performances of the Greek and Latin writers." After conducting his reader through the poem, he pronounced that there was "no blemish found to deform." Johnson preferred to make his own assessment of the poems. Nor could he resist yet another attack on the "Pindarick madness" - there are several to be found in the Lives. Where Gibbons had seen only "eminent excellencies", Johnson's more critical eye saw at least one "deformity." He was content to place the poet "at a very little distance from excellence": Some of his other odes are deformed by the Pindarick folly then prevailing, and are written with such neglect of all metrical rules as is without example among the ancients; but his diction, though perhaps not always exactly pure, has such copiousness and splendour, as shews that he was but at a very little distance from excellence. It has been noted above that Johnson did not follow Gibbons in quoting from the theological exercises which Watts composed at the Academy. The practicalities of life, however, were always of interest to Johnson. He followed his little Pindaric excursion with a paraphrase from Gibbons:

His method of study was to impress the contents of his books upon his memory by abridging them, and by interleaving them to amplify one system with supplements from another.

On leaving the Academy, Watts returned to his father's house at Southampton for the next two years. It was a time of reading, meditation and prayer. The mutual respect and affection of father and son was constantly enjoyed over a long span of years. Dr. Watts was himself in his sixty-third year when his father died.

During the next phase of his life Watts turned to teaching.

For five years he resided in the family of Sir Richard Hartopp at Stoke Newington as tutor to the son. It was for his pupil that Watts wrote his Logick. Watts, meanwhile, continued his own studies and at the age of 24 began to preach. In the same year he was appointed assistant to Dr. Chauncey, the Pastor of the Church then meeting at Mark Lane. Some three years later he succeeded Dr. Chauncey as pastor. Shortly after this, Watts broke down in health and it became necessary to ease his burden of duties by appointing an assistant.

Sir Thomas Abney was a devout gentleman with many saintly qualities. Moreover, he was a successful saint with interests rooted as firmly in business as in philanthropy. One of the original directors and promoters of the Bank of England, President of St. Thomas's Hospital for the poor in Southwark, a Sheriff of London and Middlesex, and later Lord Mayor and Member of Parliament for London. When he died, some eight years afterwards, Watts remained a member of the household with the widow and her daughters. From 1712, Watts acted as chaplain to the household and voluntarily took up the duties of tutor to the Abney children. He was accepted as a member of the family and there was no condescension of patronage on either side.

The span of years with Sir Thomas Abney and his family seems of particular significance to Johnson. Like Watts, Johnson knew the solace of a friendly roof.

Another of Johnson's minor enlargements upon the source is illustrated in his reference to the part that gesture should play in public speaking. The topic is discussed by Gibbons during his extensive observations on the technique displayed by Watts in the pulpit. Gesticulation appears to have been one of Johnson's favourite talking points. Certainly, he dealt with the subject in true Johnsonian manner when it arose in Watts: "He did not endeavour to assist his eloquence by any gesticulations; for, as no corporeal actions have any correspondence with theological truth, he did not see how they could enforce it."

Another characteristic featured by Gibbons was Watt's moderation: As to foods and drinks he was very moderate and exemplary: he was so far from being in subjection to his appetites, or giving indulgence to them in the least degree imprudent or improper ... Johnson had known poverty too well to sentimentalise over charity. Again taking his information from Gibbons, he included a brief, factual tribute to Watts's generosity: "His tenderness appeared in his attention to children and to the poor."



To the poor, while he lived in the family of his friend, he allowed the third part of his annual revenue, though the whole was not a hundred a year." It was not only to the physical needs of children that Watts ministered. His mastery of language enabled him to write for all classes and all ages of readers. With lucidity and befitting dignity he provided intelligible instruction for young people and for children. An independent testimony to this aspect of his work was given in Dr. Caleb Ashworth's memorial sermon to Dr. Watts: "Though he was capable of conversing with the greatest men on the most abstruse subjects, as appears by his successful attempts to make some of the more learned sciences more easily attained, yet he condescended to be a teacher of babes.<sup>5</sup>" Johnson could admire this condescension for two reasons. First, he believed that ethics, or morality, was "one of those studies which ought to begin with the first glimpse of reason, and only end with life itself."<sup>6</sup> Secondly, he had high praise - and he allowed it also to Milton - for a man who could descend from the heights of literary eminence to accommodate the needs of youth. To the facts taken from Gibbons, Johnson added his own reflections and transmuted the material into a golden testimony to Watts:

for children he condescended to lay aside the scholar, the philosopher, and the wit, to write little poems of devotion and systems of instruction, adapted to their wants and capabilities, from the dawn of reason through its gradations of advance in the morning of life.

Every man acquainted with the common principles of human action will look with veneration on the writer who is at one time combating Locke, and at another making a catechism for children in their fourth year. A voluntary descent from the dignity of science is perhaps the hardest lesson that humility can teach.

In his assessment of Watts as a poet, Johnson was even more at variance with Gibbons. He found much to praise, but it was praise tempered with criticism. Not surprisingly, Johnson differed from Gibbons in his evaluation of the religious poetry. His own established ideas on the propriety of religious verse are forcibly expressed in Waller: "The ideas of Christian Theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction, and too majestic for ornament; to recommend them by tropes and figures is to magnify by a concave mirror the sidereal hemisphere."<sup>7</sup>

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5. "Reflections on the fall of a great man." Quoted by Gibbons, p.335.

6. Works, V, 243.

7. Lives, I, 292f.

Inevitably, then, against the fulsome praise of Gibbons, that of Johnson sounds faintly patronising: "It is sufficient for Watts to have done better than others what no man has done well."

But it is equally sincere and no less generous a commendation, when we remember his general views on religious poetry. For Gibbons, his poet's place on Parnassus was assured. And if we apply Johnson's test of the common reader to the works, then Gibbons has been proved right at least in one respect. In our own day the hymn books enshrine for Watts the monuments of his praise.

The final assessment of the poet and the man was essentially Johnson's own: "He is at least one of the few poets with whom youth and ignorance may be safely pleased; and 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."

Full of years and wisdom, Johnson had little now to gain from the poetry of "youth and ignorance". In "doing what he could" for Watts, he was intent on honouring the man. Biographically he had nothing of importance to add to Gibbons. Even so, throughout the Life, the spirit of Johnson is evident: something of himself has been imparted to the material. In a very real sense we may think of Watts as one of "Johnson's Lives."

#### References:

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Lives of the English Poets, ed. G.B. Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1905).  
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#### AN IMPORTANT JOHNSON DISCOVERY

Dr. Ronald Mac Keith and Dr. Lawrence Mc Henry have drawn attention to the bust of Samuel Johnson in the possession of the Royal Literary Fund. We have received the following note regarding it. "With a small group which included the present Curator of the National Portrait Gallery, Mr. Kingsley Adams, his successor Mr. Dana Piper, Mr. Esmond de Beer and other Johnsonians, Dr. Ronald Mac Keith, in March, 1964, discussed the history of the bust of Samuel Johnson and, to the satisfaction of his hearers, established its authenticity as a death-mask of the Doctor. Dr. Mac Keith will read a paper on this subject at one of our meetings next session.

# MEDICAL CASE NOTES ON SAMUEL JOHNSON IN THE HEBERDEN MANUSCRIPTS

by

Lawrence C. McHenry, Jr., M.D.\*

The purpose of this short communication is to publish for the first time two case notes mentioning Dr. Samuel Johnson's name that were found in the Heberden manuscripts, and to establish that two other notes undoubtedly refer to Johnson. Although a complete medical history of Johnson is not the purpose of this paper, and will be published elsewhere, reference will be made to certain details in Johnson's medical history to substantiate the validity of the Heberden notes.

Among the manuscripts of William Heberden, M.D. (1710-1801) in the library of the Royal College of Physicians, London, is the Index Historiae Morborum. This is composed of short case notes on the patients that Heberden saw during his long medical career. The material in the case histories in his Index formed the basis for his Commentaries on the history and cure of diseases. This was compiled in 1782, when Heberden retired, but was not published until 1802. It became a classic English textbook of medicine, and recently (1962) was re-issued in paperback by the Library of the New York Academy of Medicine.

Although the Commentaries was completed in 1782, Heberden continued to record case notes in his Index until at least 1787. He wrote the notes in Latin under alphabetical headings of various diseases or symptoms. His Commentaries was similarly arranged. Many of the case notes were numbered with numbers going up to 7000 in the late 1780's. At times it appears that the same patient may have different numbers, particularly in regard to his different symptoms. Such is the case with the notes on Johnson. Other case notes are merely dated, rather than numbered. The distinction between Heberden's numbering versus dating his various notes is not clear. It is from two specific dates that we are able to identify notes that undoubtedly referred to Johnson. Although in general Heberden does not mention the patient's name in his notes, in two other notes he recorded Johnson's name three times - probably because of the great fame of his patient. These

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\* Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, Washington, D.C.

four notes are the only ones that appear to refer to Samuel Johnson.\* Others under different sections, e.g., "Suffocatio" or "Catarrhus", cannot be identified as referring to Johnson.

It has long been known that Heberden was one of Johnson's physicians - particularly during the last two years of his life. The first known instance that Heberden saw him professionally was on 17 June 1783. During the previous night Johnson had awakened with a "certain indistinctness in his head" and perceived that he had suffered a "paralytic stroke". Johnson found that he was unable to speak and had difficulty writing. In the morning he wrote to John Taylor: "I am very desirous of Dr. Heberden's assistance as I think my case is not past remedy. Let me see you as soon as it is possible. Bring Dr. Heberden with you if you can..."

Taylor did bring Heberden to see him, for Johnson later writes that Heberden came and cared for him throughout this entire illness. In his Index in the section on "Paralysis" on page 351 Heberden has the following case note that is dated the day Johnson's stroke occurred, the day he saw him.

vox subito perit in viro nato LXXIV, mente et membris  
illasis; quae intra paucos dies fere restituitur.  
17 Jun 1783.

or

Voice suddenly went in man aged 74, mind and limbs  
affected; voice almost restored within a few days.  
17 June 1783.

Although his name is not mentioned, this undoubtedly refers to Johnson. The patient's age and the date are correct. His speech difficulty did nearly clear up in two days. Johnson does not mention affection of his limbs, for they probably

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\* In 1849, Squibb wrote in the London Journal of Medicine (page 618) that he found what he could not but presume to be Johnson's case; "I say presume, as Dr. Heberden does not give the name of his patients, but numbers..." The case description (No. 6335) does fit with Johnson's symptoms and the treatment, but it is recorded with a chronological sequence of notes from May to November 1785. This probably, therefore, is not Johnson's case.

recovered within hours as is most often the case in such transient "strokes". The next entry that probably refers to Johnson is under "Testiculus". In the fall of 1783 Johnson noted an increase in size of a testicular swelling that had been present since 1781. The mass had become cumbersome but was not painful. Johnson decided the mass should be punctured to determine its nature. In late August, 1783, he summoned William Cruickshank and Sir Percival Pott who performed a paracentesis. Within a few weeks following the initial drainage of this sarcocoele, as it was diagnosed, inflammation developed with pain and further swelling. This became more distressing and sometime before 23 September 1783 Johnson wrote to Heberden at Windsor - expecting him on the 24th. On the 24th. the infected sarcocoele spontaneously drained through the previous puncture site. On page 424 in Heberden's Index is the single entry:

Testiculus, sarcocoele vetus paracentesi tentatur; humor paucus pergit exstillare e vulnere, et tumor minuitur cum omnium malorum allevamento 24 Sept. 1783.

or

Testicle. Old sarcocoele was explored by paracentesis; scanty fluid continued to drain from the wound, and swelling lessened with relief of all distress. 24 Sept. 1783.

Although this also does not mention Johnson's name, it is doubtful that Heberden, retired from active practice, would have seen two such unique cases on the same day. From Johnson's letters we know that he saw Heberden on or about the 24th.

For nearly 30 years Johnson suffered from a chronic cough, bouts of chest pain and finally developed "asthma" or difficulty in breathing. In the last two or three years of his life dyspnea and dropsy from heart failure aggravated shortness of breath that resulted from his chronic lung disease. Johnson tried a variety of medicines, but relied mostly on bleeding, purging, opium, and later, squills. At times he followed his physicians' advice, at others he followed his own. The details of his illness are vividly, and in many places, minutely described. His clinical condition during life was confirmed by the post-mortem findings that included emphysema, residual pleurisy, and cardiac enlargement. It was Johnson's final illnesses, asthma and dropsy, that Heberden saw fit to record in more detail, and with mention of his patient's name. The longest entries concerning



Johnson in the Index are under "Asthma" and "Hydrops". The note under "Asthma" on page 32 was written in 1784 and is in chronological sequence with other such case notes. It was most likely written shortly after Johnson's death for it largely describes the post-mortem findings.

asthmatici cadavere inciso, pulmones post apertum thoracem turgidi inflati manebant; quinetiam eorum superficies reperta erat bullulis aereis aliquantulum exstantibus. & tenuissima membrana inclusis. una harum aperta fuit absque eo, ut aliae collaberentur. nullum aliud vitium in pulmone aut thorace deprehendebatur. Dr. S. Johnson, grave impediens recubationem excipit crebras pleuritides, et diuturnam cordis palpitationem. 6331.

or

when the body of an asthmatic was cut into, the lungs remained stiff, inflated, after the chest was opened, their surface was quite covered by small bullae of air, standing out to some extent, enclosed by a very thin membrane. One of these was opened, without its collapsing like others. No other disease in the lung or chest detected. Dr. S. Johnson, (asthma) seriously prevents his lying flat, frequent pleurisies, and daily palpitations of the heart. 6331.

The note under "Hydrops" is a single entry on page 200 and was probably written at a later date for the penmanship in the original manuscript appears to be that of an aged hand.

Hydrops. anasarca concedit purgantibus & ves. parv. femori et aceto scillitico. Dr. Sam Johnson - et Wimberley. - inciso cadavere hydropico, crura, femora, et lumbi aqua surgebant, vix tamen ulla in ventre reperta fuit. Dr. S. Johnson - excipit veterem tussim, quae in asthma desierat. Infus. fol. digitalis e fol.  $\frac{z}{8}$  ii Aq.  $\frac{z}{8}$  8 cochleatim sumitur singulis horis per 9 hora s et urine  $\frac{z}{8}$  v sine ulla nausea reddebantur, sed non sine quadam ventriculi molestia. vesperi subito extinctus fuit. 6316.

or

Dropsy. anasarca yielded to purges, scarifying of thigh and vinegar of squill. Dr. Sam Johnson - and Wimberley. - when the dropsical corpse was cut into, the legs, thighs,

and loins were distended with water, yet scarcely any was found in the belly. Dr. S. Johnson. - was taken with the old cough, which had ended in asthma. Infusion of digitalis leaf, 2 ounces of leaf to eight ounces of water, taken in a spoonful every hour for 9 hours, and 5 ounces of urine were yielded without any nausea, but not without some stomach trouble. He died suddenly in the evening. 6316.

The description in both of these notes accord well with Johnson's clinical history and autopsy findings. Most notable, however, is the sentence in "Hydrops" where Heberden mentions prescribing digitalis for Johnson.

Digitalis had been effective as a home remedy for the treatment of dropsy for many years. Although William Withering had used the drug as a diuretic from 1775, he did not formally publish his findings until 1785. Before this it had been used by many physicians and had appeared in the Edinburgh Dispensatory for 1783. As Withering himself had pointed out, during its early use it was prescribed in excessive dosages and often produced side effects. This appears to be the case in Heberden's recommendation of one spoonful every hour of 2 ounces of leaf dissolved in 8 ounces of water. It seems unusual that Johnson would not mention taking digitalis, for he was well acquainted with many medicines. In his Aegri Ephemeris, a medical diary kept 6 July to 31 October 1784, there is no mention of digitalis. During this period, however, he apparently did not see Heberden. It was therefore probably in the Spring or early Summer, 1784, that Heberden recommended digitalis. Johnson had been using squills as a diuretic with some success from March 1784, but by August Johnson wished "O for an efficacious Diuretick!" On October 13th, he wrote Heberden describing his state of health since February. Included in the original letter, but not in the published version, are "...statements of the effect produced by these (squills and opium) and other medicines." If letter No. 1022 can be located we will possibly learn that digitalis was one of the "other medicines" Heberden prescribed, and later made note of himself in his Index. Heberden quite probably wanted to bring out the fact he had tried on Dr. Johnson what had become the most efficacious of all diuretics, but without success, for age or disease had conquered the great lexicographer.

The Heberden notes are published with permission of the Harveian Librarian of the Royal College of Physicians, London, and through the kindness of the Librarian, Mr. L.M. Payne. Patrick Strong, B.M. kindly translated the Latin notes.

# JOHNSON AND DR. BURNEY.

At a meeting of the Johnson Society of London, held on March 21st. Dr. Roger Lonsdale, Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, read an interesting paper on Dr. Burney. Among the distinguished company who listened to the paper were Mr. Ketton Cremer, Dr. James Osborne of Yale University, and his wife, Dr. Chester L. Shaver of Oberlin College, Oberlin, O., and Mrs. Shaver, and Dr. Oppenheimer of the University of Colorado.

The following is the impression of the lecture retained by our reporter. Dr. Burney was born in Shrewsbury in 1726. As a boy he showed great interest and technical ability in music. The Rector of the neighbouring village of Condover was an accomplished musician, who gave him much instruction. When Burney was only fourteen, his skill was such that he deputised for the Cathedral organist in Chester; in this way he became known to such eminent musicians as Dr. Arne and George Frederick Handel, when they were passing through the city, as a result they gave him substantial help later in life. In 1746, when he was twenty, he became a pupil of Dr. Arne, in London; he recommended him to Fulke Greville, a well known figure in the society of his day. Mixing in the circle which Greville frequented, Burney's unfailing good temper and ready wit made him a general favourite. Burney fell in love with Esther Sleepe and married her. In 1749 he was appointed organist at St. Dionis, Backchurch, at £30. a year. His eldest daughter, and his son James, who later in life voyaged with Captain Cook, and eventually became an Admiral, were born here. To keep them Dr. Burney worked so excessively that his health broke down and he left London, becoming organist at St. Margaret's Church, King's Lynn, in Norfolk, in 1751 and remaining there until 1760. During this time his famous daughter Frances, his second son Charles and his youngest daughter, Charlotte, were born. Soon after the latter event his wife died. Left alone he married again in 1767, after his return to London, to Mrs. Stephen Allen, the widow of a citizen of King's Lynn. Burney did not enjoy life in King's Lynn, he wrote, "The organ is execrably bad and a total ignorance of the most known and common musical merits runs through the whole body of people I have yet conversed with." He consoled himself by riding round the country, giving music lessons and by steady reading, especially of Johnson's 'Rambler'. This led him to have a great admiration for the great doctor. Burney noted, "The Ramblers certainly were little noticed at first, Smart, the poet first mentioned them to me as excellent papers, before I had

heard any one else speak of them. When I went into Norfolk in the Autumn of 1751 I found but one person (the Rev. Mr. Squires, a man of learning, and a general purchaser of new books), who knew anything of them. -- Before I left Norfolk in the year 1760, the Ramblers were in high favour among persons of learning and good taste. Others there were, devoid of both, who said that the hard words in the Rambler were used by the author to render his Dictionary indispensably necessary. When the Dictionary appeared, in 1747, Burney did his utmost to secure subscribers to this and to Johnson's edition of Shakespeare, which however did not appear until 1765. This brought him into correspondence with Johnson who, on April 8th., 1775, wrote to him thus, "Sir, if you imagine that by delaying my answer I intended to shew any neglect of the notice with which you have favoured me, you will neither think justly of yourself or of me. Your civilities were offered with too much elegance not to engage attention; and I have too much pleasure in pleasing men like you, not to feel very sensibly the distinction which you have bestowed upon me. Few consequences of my endeavours to please or to benefit mankind have delighted me more than your friendship thus voluntarily offered, which now I have it I hope to keep, because I hope to continue to deserve it. I have no Dictionaries to dispose of for myself, but shall be glad to have you direct your friends to Mr. Dodsley, because it was by his recommendation that I was employed in the work.

When you have leisure to think again upon me, let me be favoured with another letter; and another yet, when you have looked into my Dictionary. If you find faults, I shall endeavour to mend them; if you find none, I shall think you blinded by kind partiality: but to have made you partial in his favour, will very much gratify the ambition of, Sir, your most obliged and most humble servant, Sam: Johnson.  
Gough Square, Fleet Street, April 8, 1775.

When Burney came to London in 1760 he had breakfast with Dr. Johnson and also dined with him in Gough Square. Burney first moved into a house in Poland Street, not far from Oxford Street; here he obtained a clientele of fashionable pupils. One of his compositions, written at this time, was his burlesque, "Ode on St. Cecilia's Day," at which Johnson was vastly amused. Johnson scorned music and musicians. Burney tells us that Johnson admitted in his preface the deficiency of the technical part of his Dictionary; and said that he should be obliged to Burney for definitions of musical terms for the next edition, which, however, Johnson did not live to superintend. Of the French Horn Johnson

said that it is so far from melancholy, per se, that when the strain is light, and in the field, there is nothing so cheerful.

While he was in King's Lynn Burney had begun to plan a "History of Music". On coming to London he continued to work on this book and in 1772-3 he travelled extensively in France, Italy, Germany, and Austria, searching for original manuscripts. He wrote a book "Travel Journies" describing his experiences. The style of this book was so attractive that it is said to have influenced Johnson when he came to write his "Tour in the Hebridies". When the "History of Music" appeared in 1776 Johnson wrote a preface for it.

Among the pupils whom Burney taught in London was Queeney Thrale, which led to his introduction to the Thrale circle at Streatham. Burney was elected to the Literary Club and frequently attended their dinners. In November, 1770 the Burneys left Poland Street and went to live in a house in Queen Square. In October, 1774, they moved again to a house in Orange Street, just off Leicester Square. In 1784 Dr. Burney became organist to the Duke of York's Hospital in Chelsea and there he remained until he died in 1814. When Johnson was dying he repeated to the friends around him, "Do all the good you can." This might well be taken as a motto for the life of Dr. Burney.

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#### JOHNSON'S HOUSE

During the next few months there will doubtless be many visitors, to Johnson's House in Gough Square, which is about one hundred yards from the north side of the centre of Fleet Street. Money is needed for its maintenance and we hope that visitors will contribute generously to this. It is a five storied Georgian building, with a small garden on the southside, Miss Margaret Eliot is the Curator. When Thomas Carlyle visited the house he wrote this description of it, "We ourselves, not without labour and risk, lately discovered Gough Square, between Fleet Street, and Holborn (adjoining both to Bolt Court and to Johnson's Court); and on the second day of search, the very house there, wherein the English Dictionary was composed. It is the first or corner house on the right hand, as you enter through the arched way from the North-West. The actual occupant, an elderly, well washed, decent-looking man, invited us to enter; and courteously undertook to be cicerone. It is a stout, old-fashioned, oak-balustraded house: "I have spent many a pound and penny on it since then" said the worthy landlord: "here, you see, this bedroom was the Doctor's study; that was the garden" (a plot of delved ground somewhat larger than a bed quilt), where he walked for exercise; these three garret bedrooms, (where his three copiests sat and wrote) were the place he kept - his pupils in."



## OBITUARY

MR. W.H. GRAHAM.

Whether at some future time the history of the Johnson Society of London will come to be written cannot yet be said but the period when, through the good offices of Mr. Blakeney, it met in the Alpine Club was a distinct phase in its life. During this time Mr. Graham, as Chairman, brought a quiet air of courtesy and good will into the meetings of the Society. It was a time when members brought their own books and quoted from them in the discussions. Mr. Graham had a fine library at his home in St. George's Square and was an adept at choosing the right line for the discussion which followed. During many years he enjoyed his retirement and ranged over London, for he was a great walker, and knew and loved the city so well. Keats wrote, and experienced the lines,

"He has his winter too of pale misfeature,

Or else he would forget his mortal nature."

Mr. Graham had a wife to whom he was devoted, she suffered illness over many years and died suddenly in his presence; this shattered the end of his life but he showed that fortitude which a good man has.

One of the more surprising qualities of our late Chairman was his outstanding power as an actor. Some of us may remember his inspiring performance in the dramatic reading of IRENE given by our Society. In his earlier days he had been intimately connected in association with William Poel and his circle with the movement to rehabilitate Elizabethan drama. Then there was his devotion to Gibbon and his great work. This was in one way surprising as there were factors in Gibbon's masterpiece which were not congenial to his propriety and orthodox religious views. But he was big enough to overlook this, and to admire THE DECLINE AND FALL for its nobler features.

Those who were fortunate enough to share his friendship were conscious that he was a man of uncompromising integrity, and that beneath the courteous and urbane exterior there was a mind of unwavering rectitude. Perhaps his personality may be best expressed in the words "He was a man whom Johnson would have respected and admired, one whom he would have been glad to number among his friends."

#### REVIEWS

Maurice J. Quinlan, Samuel Johnson: A Layman's Religion.

University of Wisconsin Press, 1964.

The religion of Dr. Johnson has been the subject of innumerable essays and articles, but to Professor Quinlan has fallen the distinction of writing the first full-length book on Johnson's religious convictions and practice. It may be said without hesitation that this book is a notable contribution both to Johnsonian studies and to our knowledge of religion in England in the eighteenth century.

Johnson was a staunch Church of England man, convinced of the truth of its doctrines, devoted to its Liturgy and respectful of its organisation and discipline. Nevertheless he was deeply influenced by two whose relationship to the Church of England was of a somewhat ambiguous character, William Law, the Non-Juror, and Samuel Clarke, the near-Arian, near-Deist divine whose heterodox opinions only narrowly escaped the condemnation of Convocation. Two of Professor Quinlan's chapters deal with Johnson's indebtedness to Law and Clarke. Though these two stood far apart from each other theologically, the influence of each upon Johnson was complementary to that of the other. From Law, whose Serious Call he read while at Oxford, Johnson derived his sense of the demandingness of religion, and to the end of his days he was haunted by the ideal of Christian perfection, or the Christian's entire conformity in thought and deed with the mind and will of God. Inevitably Johnson, beset by human weakness, was compelled to lament his failure to attain this ideal - "the broken vow, the frequent fall" - and it was here that Clarke spoke to his condition, first by his deprecation of unwarranted scrupulosity, and secondly by his teaching on the Atonement as the means by which penitent sinners might secure salvation. Although repudiating his unorthodox views on the Trinity and the person of Christ, Johnson acknowledged an immeasurable debt to Clarke for his interpretation of the Atonement, one of his last acts being to urge his physician Brocklesby to study Clarke's sermons, "because he is fullest on the propitiatory sacrifice."

It will be recalled that Professor Quinlan was the author of an article, "The Rumour of Dr. Johnson's Conversion" (Journal of Religion, March 1948), to which a reply was made by Professor Donald Greene in his essay, "Dr. Johnson's 'Late Conversion': a Reconsideration," in Johnsonian Studies (Cairo, 1962). In the present work Professor Quinlan once more reviews the evidence for

Johnson's alleged evangelical conversion in February 1784, at the time of his remarkable though temporary recovery from dropsy, and finds it unconvincing. The prayer of Johnson before his last Communion contained the petition, "Forgive and accept my late conversion," which Strahan deleted from the prayer as given in the Prayers and Meditations. A letter of Cowper to Newton in May 1784 refers to Johnson's conversion as "a singular proof of the omnipotence of divine grace": the report had apparently reached Cowper from Newton, who in turn had heard it from the Moravian Latrobe. It is important to understand what is meant by conversion in this context. It denotes not necessarily (to quote one of Johnson's definitions in the Dictionary) "a change from reprobation to grace, from a bad to a holy life," but rather a quickening of faith and spiritual awareness, leading to personal trust in Christ for salvation in place of dependence on one's own efforts and strivings, and an assurance of one's acceptance with God. The typical example of such a conversion is John Wesley's experience in May 1738, when (in his own words) "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Did Johnson experience such a conversion in February 1784 as Greene affirms and Quinlan denies? On this question a personal assessment of the evidence may not be out of place in this review.

Allowance must be made for the Evangelical proneness to spiritual scalp-hunting: the reviewer recalls how eager certain evangelical acquaintances of his were some thirty years ago to claim a certain well-known cricketer as a "converted man." Nevertheless it would seem that at the time in question Johnson did experience a quickening of faith which for a while at least calmed his fears and brought peace to his conscience, coincident it would appear with the relief of his physical symptoms. The report which reached Cowper was not without foundation. What intellectually Johnson had learned from Clarke had now become personally his through an act of spiritual appropriation. We may if we will liken this to an "evangelical conversion," provided we recognise that it fell short of the fullness of such an experience in that the element of confident assurance was lacking in Johnson's case. His faith in Christ did not completely triumph over his fear of death and dread of judgment. In the following April - only two months later - he confessed to John Taylor that "the approach of death is very dreadful," and in June he told Dr. Adams, the Master of Pembroke, "As I cannot be sure that I have fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted, I am

afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned." Almost to the end salvation remained for Johnson a matter of hope rather than of assurance, and his words to Hawkins a fortnight before he died fall short of the full confidence of faith: "I have had such rays of hope shot into my soul as have almost persuaded me that I am in the state of reconciliation with God." It was, and is, to all lovers of Johnson a cause for thankfulness that at the end anxiety and doubt gave place to peace, and (to quote his physician) "All his fears were calmed and absorbed by the prevalence of his faith, and his trust in the merits and propitiation of Jesus Christ." One could wish that Johnson had known those as then unwritten lines of Principal Shairp:

"Let me no more my comfort draw  
From my frail hold on Thee;  
In this alone rejoice with awe,  
Thy mighty grasp of me."

To return to Professor Quinlan's book, we must congratulate the author on his exact and exhaustive scholarship, though a theologian might here and there regard him as venturing somewhat uncertainly into deep waters. His references show the wide extent of his reading. Only one relevant work seems to have escaped his notice, Eighteenth Century Studies, by the Dominican Robert Bracey, O.P. (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1925), which contains essays on Johnson's Roman Catholic friends and Johnson as Preacher.

The following misprints should be corrected: p. 12, 1.22 for "Me" read "We"; p. 14, 1. 19 for "Mann" read "Man"; p. 115, 1. 4 close inverted commas after "charity"; p. 229, 1. 15 for "Green" read "Greene". On p. 85, 1. 22 "Prebend" is incorrectly used for "Prebendary". The abbreviated title on the spine, Samuel Johnson, might mislead those casually glancing at library shelves.

Our final word must be to express our gratitude to Professor Quinlan for this valuable addition to the vast and ever growing body of Johnsonian literature.

A. R. Winnett.

The Lives of the Poets, Samuel Johnson, Selected and Introduced by Sir Sydney Roberts. London. The Fontana Library. Pp. 384. Price 8/6.

The appearance of a paper back edition of Johnson's "Lives of the Poets" will be welcomed on many grounds. First, because the selection is made by Sir Sydney Roberts, himself a great scholar, and for many years Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge. In his Introduction he points out that the poets whose lives are recorded were chosen by the publishers but that Johnson added to the list Thomson, Blackmore, Watts, Pomfret and Yalden. The original Lives were fifty two in number and of these fourteen are included in this volume, of which six, Cowley, Milton, Dryden, Watts, Thomson and Gray may be considered as poets of importance, and eight are of lesser standing.

It is interesting to see how differently Johnson deals with these writers.

Cowley, who is the first to be discussed, is judged by many to be, next to Dryden, the principal poet of the seventeenth century. The essay upon him includes a most interesting study of the metaphysical poets of the first half of the seventeenth century, their work is not easy to understand but becomes much clearer after reading Johnson's account; he gives 25 quotations from Cowley and 17 from Donne. On the other hand the essay on Milton is almost entirely devoted to his prose and very little to his poetry. John Keats gave up reading Milton's poetry on account of the Latin inversions in it. One would expect a Latin scholar, like Johnson, to have shown interest in the Latin structure of so much of this poetry, but he does not do so. While Johnson sometimes uses Greek quotations for the heading of his Ramblers, in this essay when he makes a quotation from Homer,

"----- a quo ceu fonte perenni  
Vatum Pieriis ora aquis."

he gives it in Latin; as he quotes Socrates in Greek a few pages later, it shows that he probably quoted the Latin from memory and did not attempt to look up the original in the Greek text. Johnson considered the masque of Comus as the greatest of Milton's work.

In the "Private papers of Henry Rycroft" George Gissing has a delightful description of a man receiving a parcel of second



hand books; before he opens it he makes up the fire and then deliberately sets himself to enjoy the riches contained in the parcel. So too, the reader may well ask himself, why some of the lesser biographies were written by Johnson. Take the one relating the life of Edmund Smith, to whom twenty pages are given. How did Johnson come to take such an interest and to know so much about Smith. At first you may think that they were members of neighbouring colleges, Christ Church and Pembroke; but then you realise that Smith was admitted to his Masters degree at Oxford in 1696, whereas Johnson was only entered at Pembroke in 1728. You may think that Johnson's interest was like that which he shared with Richard Savage in his poverty. Johnson writes of Smith, "A man, who under poverty, calamity and disappointments, could make so many friends, and those so truly valuable, must have just and noble ideas of the passion of friendship, in the success of which consist the greatest, if not the only happiness of his life. How well this might be applied to Johnson himself. As the reader follows the story to the end he finds that it was Gilbert Walmesley, the Registrar of the Ecclesiastical Court of Lichfield, who was one of the early patrons of Johnson, who was acquainted with Smith and gave Johnson the information.

John Dryden (1631-1700) has the greatest length of any Life in this selection, that is a fitting tribute to the greatest poet of the seventeenth century. It is too long and too detailed for comment here.

Among the shorter Lives how pathetic is the account of John Pomfret (1667-1702) which occupies barely a page in this edition. The Introduction considers that this Life was probably suggested because "no composition in our language has been more often perused than Pomfret's 'The Choice'". How appealing is the quatrain,

"Near some fair Town, I'd have a private Seat,  
Built Uniform, not Little, nor too Great:  
Better, if on rising ground it stood;  
On this side Fields, on that a neighbouring Wood."

The poem may be read in full in the Oxford Book of 18th Century Verse. At the time some parts of it were thought to reflect on the conduct of the writer, who was a clergyman. He came to London and successfully cleared his name, but while there he caught a fever from which he died at the early age of 36; he did not live to enjoy the retirement of which he dreamed.

This Selection will be found to be full of interest and instruction for those who read it.

F.N. Doubleday.

# THE JOHNSON SOCIETY OF LONDON

Accounts for the year ending 31st. December, 1963.

<u>Expenditure</u>				<u>Income</u>			
To: The New Rambler	76	13	9	By: Subscriptions	87	14	4
Programmes	7	5	0	Add Subs. in Arrears	1	10	0
Meetings	16	17	9	Less Subs. in Advance	89	4	4
Stationery and Postage	4	6	11		7	0	0
Miscellaneous	2	0	8	Sales of The New Rambler	82	4	4
				Interest on Life Membership Fund	15	12	0
				Interest on Deposit A/C.	6	19	0
				Excess of Expenditure over Income	1	5	0
					1	3	9
					£ 107	4	1

<u>BALANCE SHEET</u>			
Capital Account B/F from 1962	235	19	5
Donations received 1963	10	0	0
Sale of Books	3	10	0
	249	9	5
Less Excess of Expenditure over Income	1	3	9
	248	5	8
Subscriptions in Advance	7	0	0
	£ 255	5	8

J. H. L. January, 1964.