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THE MINOR WORKS OF DOCTOR JOHNSON.

Johnson, as is familiarly known, was a copious writer for the old fashioned English magazines, from a very early date. Many of his contributions, including some of his characteristic and perhaps invented reports of parliamentary debates, are now undistinguishable in the mass; but a number of his hackney pieces have been collected and made public. His fondness for biography, of which he was to become the most noted subject in modern times, was early remarkable. Not to speak of his 'Lives of the Poets,' which we exclude, as belonging to his greater productions, there are a number of truly valuable sketches, which retain all the importance they ever possessed. Such are his memoirs of Father Paul, of the prodigy Barretier, of the great navigators Blake and Drake, of the great physician Boerhaave and Sydenham, of Ascham, Sir Thomas Browne and Frederick the Great. These may now be read with much instruction. Their moral tone is high from the very first, and they abound in those sagacious observations on life and manners, which afterwards won for Johnson the name of the British Moralist. At the same time they are singularly free from that affected balance in the periods, which reached its maximum in the Rambler.

There are none of Johnson's writings which are more unwisely neglected.

We never could bring ourselves to admire the great essayist's epistles. These are laboured and bookish; very remote from the uncourtly abruptness of his common talk; as if his pen had let down the ink with difficulty; in a word, as unlike as possible to those of Montague, Cowper or Walpole. There is a lumbering whale-like awkwardness in the badinage, and a torpid coldness in the love. Yet from the Hebrides, where he was uncommonly full of matter, the great man sends brief jottings which compare oddly with the same affair as expanded to inflation in his *Tour*. After all, some of the Doctor's best sayings are in these letters, as for example, "The blaze of reputation cannot be blown out, but it often dies in the socket." Invalids will recognise a familiar experience in the following swoln period: "The amusements and consolations of languor and depression are conferred by familiar and domestic companions, which (*sic*) can be visited or called at will, and can occasionally be quieted or dismissed, who do not obstruct accommodation by ceremony, or destroy indolence by awakening effort." His really compassionate heart produced few things more tender than the letter to Mrs. Thrale, on her child's death: "He is gone, and we are going! We could not have enjoyed him long, and shall not long be separated from him. He has probably escaped many such pangs as you are now feeling."

The late Dr. Green used to tell us in college, that Johnson had produced no greater monument of his ability as a writer, than his Preface to the English Dictionary. Here he obviously laid out his strength and rubbed up his polish to the very last degree. The mingled pride and sorrow with which the old man looks back on his toil and its results, give a dignity and pathos to this short composition, such as pertain to few of his works. "Though no book," says he, "was ever spared out of tenderness to the author, and the world is little solicitous to know whence proceed the faults of that

which it condemns; yet it may gratify curiosity to inform it that the English Dictionary was written with little assistance of the learned, and without any patronage of the great; not in the soft obscurities of retirement, or under the shelter of academic bowers, but amidst inconvenience and distraction, in sickness and sorrow." Harmony, which is never wanting in Johnson's periods, exists in this in its perfection; and as to the sentiment, we see the injured old man proudly turning his back on the tardy advances of Chesterfield. The closing cadence is surpassingly soft and moving: "I have protracted my work till most of those 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."

With the Observations on Shakspeare, we confess we have never been satisfied. The time had not yet arrived for a generous estimate of the great poet. His adventurous irregularities became glaring faults, before the square and rule of such a critic. Where he echoes the general voice of admiration, Johnson often does so with manly reasons. His minute emendations and expositions of the text show great acuteness. But we remember few instances in which he has brought to light the recondite principle of any tragedy, or aided the imaginative student by any happy key to structural intricacy in the action. The Preface has been read by most of us from childhood, and will still be read for the massive elaboration of the style, but later treatises have thrown broader lights upon the genius of the chief dramatist.

Let every great man beware what scraps of writing he leaves in his trash-basket; the bobtails of his boys' kites, the papillotes of his girls, and the very cigar-lighters of his study will all be unrolled like Herculean papyri, and duly printed. Great part of Goethe's Posthumous Works is about as valuable as the ashes of his pipe, or the parings of his nails. Poor Johnson surely never meant that all the world

should be admitted to the sanctity of his Romish devotions. Now that they have been so many years in print, we break no squares when we comment on them. It would be comfortable if through some cranny one little ray of Christian gospel had penetrated into these monkish crypts. But no. Johnson's Laudian, Oxonian, non-juring religion took another turn. Hence the "Prayers and Meditations," first published in 1785, by Dr. Strahan, have a singular interest. Here we have the wrong side of a noble tapestry, with all the knots and tangled threads. Some of the prayers are fine compositions, imitating the best liturgical productions of the English church. Through the whole there are touches of sorrow which awaken sympathy. On the anniversary of his wife's death, he prays 'fletibus lacrymis.' The prayers in infirmity and old age are very affecting. From year to year we find the poor old man praying for his dead wife; thus, "I prayed for Tett"—"Commended Tetty and my other friends." But his religion ran much into abstinences. "Avoided wine, and tempered a very few glasses with sherbet." "One cup of tea, without milk." "I, by negligence, poured milk into the tea." These are the moles and warts upon a great and venerable surface.

It would be hardly right to number 'Taxation no Tyranny' among Johnson's minor works; since it concentrated all the strong extract of his bitterness, and since it gave him his pension. Specious error was never more strongly put. There is however no American child, who does not perceive its fallacies. There is a bull-dog directness in the assault, which does not give the doctor time to round off his periods. The tract is more like his common chat than much of his publications, and may give us a notion of the way in which he would have spoken in parliament. There are several other political pamphlets, little perused in our day, but bearing the indisputable impress of the great reasoner and sturdy dogmatist. One of them, as early as 1756, has important relation to America, in a very different tone from

the one just mentioned. The chief interest of the tract on the Falkland Islands, to readers of our day, is derived from the keen strictures on Junius; in these are several stinging Johnsoniana. Junius is not to mistake "the venom of the shaft for the vigour of the bow," "while he walks like Jack the Giant-killer in a coat of darkness, he may do much mischief with little strength." "He that contradicts acknowledged truth will always have an audience."

'The Fountains' is a pretty tale, shooting up like a jet d'eau among yew trees. 'Theodore' has acquired a marked position among modern apologues. The species is almost extinct. Among the Prefaces and Dedications which Johnson was called upon, almost as a matter of trade, to write for his friends, there are a few which are still deserving of perusal or consultation. Here he had full play for the sonorous rhythm of his most swelling diction, and his demonstrative eloquence revelled in the gorgeousness of panegyric. The dedication to James's Medical Dictionary takes us back to 1743; it is short and simple. In this way he introduces a Handbook of Stenography, a Guide to the game of Draughts, a Treatise on the Globes, Interest Tables, and Artists' Catalogues. Some excellent remarks on Scriptural commentaries are buried in a dedication of 1758. All these items may be designated as job-work. That Johnson should have been so often called upon to lend his aid in such matters, may show how just was the value set by shrewd publishers on the correct and graceful tournure of a prefatory note which sometimes did not go beyond a dozen lines. It is like the gilded letters of a sign, often surmounting the door of a dingy shop and mean wares.

Among minor works may be classed all Dr. Johnson's poems. His productions in this kind were made to order; mosaics, and not growths, still less inspirations. The best things he ever penned in verse are his versions, which have some of Churchill's strength and much of Pope's elegance. 'London' would live, if he had written nothing else. 'The

Vanity of Human Wishes' is classical. If any body in our day has perused 'Irene,' it must be a proof-reader. The lighter pieces are heavy and pedestrian. Johnson piqued himself on the facility of his Latin verse; it was the result of long and arduous schoolmastership. Warton severely criticises his 'Messia,' which however was only an academic exercise. The hexameters, written after the completion of the Dictionary, may be placed high; the piece abounds with mingled gaiety and pathos. We see the author in those memorable lines—

"Tristis et atra quies, et tardae tedia vitae,  
Nascuntur curis curae, vexatque dolorum  
Importuna cohors, vacuae mala somnia mentis."

The Epitaph on Goldsmith, which occasioned famous debate, is an exquisite morsel of lapidary prose, of which one expression is quoted as freely as if it were found in an ancient author; yet weighed in the scale of Parr's latinity, and compared with Roman marbles, it is judged to be wanting in the true antique.

Scarcely any voluminous writer can be named, who has written so little that is trifling or foolish, or who is so exempt from the charge of uttering any thing to corrupt or seduce. The very smallest productions bear the mark of a grave and stately mind. As we grow older we understand Johnson better; have more pity for his sorrows and sympathy with his infirmities; learn to descry his deep benevolence under a rugged surface, and honour the stubborn integrity of his principles. To have held so high a moral standard in so loose an age and among a convivial circle, is no small praise. The day is past in which his style was held to be a model; but we trust even his more fugitive productions will not willingly be let die.

J.