JAMES CALLENDER

DEFORMITIES OF SAMUEL JOHNSON, SELECTED FROM HIS WORKS

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Содержание

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INTRODUCTION

During the early part of his literary career, James Thomson Callender (1758-1803)[1] belittled Samuel Johnson; during the later, he denigrated Thomas Jefferson. Thus his reputation as a Scots master of scurrility and a vicious scandalmonger was earned on both sides of the Atlantic.

Probably because his anonymous pamphlets about Johnson's writings – the *Deformities of Dr. Samuel Johnson, Selected from his Works* (1782) and *A Critical Review of the Works of Dr. Samuel Johnson* (1783) – were not both ascribed to him until 1940, Callender first came into public notice in 1792, when in Scotland he published *The Political Progress of Britain, or An Impartial Account of the Principal Abuses in the*

[1] The *DNB* and the *DAB* both contain accounts of Callender (complete, of course, with lists of their primary sources) to which we are indebted for various details in our own sketch of his life. However, neither mentions his pamphlets on Johnson.

Government of this Country from the Revolution in 1688. For these intemperate remarks, though anonymous, he was indicted in 1793 for sedition. He fled from Edinburgh and made his way, "with some difficulty," soon thereafter to Philadelphia.

During the first several years in Philadelphia, he was reporter of the Congressional debates for the Philadelphia *Gazette* and did some editorial hackwork. He also published the third edition of the *Political Progress*, which was favorably noticed by Jefferson. In 1797 he published *The History of the United States for 1796: Including a Variety of Particulars Relative to the Federal Government Previous to that Period*, which brought the charge against Alexander Hamilton of "a connection with one James Reynolds for purpose of improper pecuniary speculation." Hamilton, after making preliminary preparations for a duel, came to the conclusion that he would have to sacrifice his private reputation to clear his public actions. So he calmly wrote, "My real crime is an amorous connection with his [Reynolds'] wife for a considerable time, with his privity and connivance, if not originally brought on by a combination between the husband and wife with the design to extort money from me."[2]

In *The Prospect before Us* (1800), written under the secret patronage of Jefferson, Callender assailed John Adams and lashed through Adams at his predecessor, Washington. Ending his diatribe, he said, "Take your choice, between Adams, war

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[2] Quoted from Hamilton by David Loth in *Alexander Hamilton: Portrait of a Prodigy* (New York, 1939), p. 249.

and beggery and Jefferson, peace and competency." Because of his remarks about Adams, he was tried under the Sedition Law, fined $200, and sent to prison for nine months. While in prison he wrote two fiery anti-Federalist pamphlets, for which Jefferson advanced money under ambiguous terms. When Jefferson became President in 1801, he pardoned Callender (and all others convicted under the unwise Sedition Law), and Callender's fine was remitted. But Callender was not satisfied; he wanted Jefferson to appoint him postmaster of Richmond, Virginia. Jefferson refused, in spite of the tone of blackmail which now pervaded Callender's importunities. Soon he turned his political coat and began editing the most scurrilous anti-Jefferson paper in the country, the Richmond *Recorder*, to the infinite delight of the Federalists, who immediately circulated the periodical far and wide. Callender accused Jefferson of dishonesty and cowardice, but pure malice inspired his most injurious charges.

> It is well known that the man, *whom it delighted the people to honor*, keeps … as his concubine, one of his own slaves. Her name is Sally. The name of her eldest son is Tom. His features are said to bear a striking resemblance to those of the president himself… By this wench Sally, our President has had several children. There is not an individual in the neighborhood of Charlottesville who does not believe the story; and not a few who *know it*… Behold the favorite! the first born of republicanism! the pinnacle of all that is good and great! If the friends of Mr. Jefferson

> are convinced of his innocence, they will make an appeal… If they rest in silence, or if they content themselves with resting upon a *general denial*, they cannot hope for credit. The allegation is of a nature too *black* to be suffered to remain in suspense. We should be glad to hear of its refutation. We give it to the world under the firmest belief that such a refutation *never can be made*. The AFRICAN VENUS is said to officiate as housekeeper at Montecello. When Mr. Jefferson has read this article, he will find leisure to estimate how much has been lost or gained by so many unprovoked attacks upon J. T. Callender![3]

Callender's ignominious end came on 17 July 1803. The *Gentleman's Magazine* declared (LXXIII [September 1803], 882) that he, "after experiencing many varieties of fortune as Iscariot Hackney … drowned himself … in James River": the coroner's jury, however, declared that his death was accidental, following intoxication.

There can be scant doubt that the *Deformities* and *A Critical Review*[4] have a common origin. The paper, type, and makeup of

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[3] From the Richmond *Recorder* as printed in the New York *Evening Post*, 10 September 1802; quoted from *Jefferson Reader*, ed. Francis Coleman Rosenberger (New York, 1953), pp. 109-111.

[4] There were apparently three editions of *A Critical Review*: (1) Edinburgh: Printed for J. Dickson, and W. Creech, 1783. (2) Second Edition. London. Printed for the Author, and sold by T. Cadell and J. Stockdale; at Edinburgh, by J. Dickson and W. Creech, 1783. (3) London. Printed for R. Rusted, 1787. We are indebted to the Pierpont Morgan Library for a photographic reproduction of its copy of the first edition of the pamphlet.

the title-pages indicate that they were issued from the same press. In the "Introduction" to *A Critical Review*, the statement is made that "The author of the present trifle was last year induced to publish a few remarks on the writings of Dr. Samuel Johnson… Like the former essay, these pages will endeavour to ascertain the genuine importance of Dr. Johnson's literary character" (pp. iii, v). In the text on page 50, the *Deformities* is cited in proprietary tones; and it is also mentioned in notes on pages 19, 37, 55, and 63. Moreover, the tell-tale words "deformities" and "deformity" appear (pp. 31, 43) in the text, and there is an advertisement for the *Deformities* on page 72.

An attempt to identify the author of the *Deformities* was made by George Steevens when it appeared. In a letter to William Cole dated 14 May 1782, he says that it was "written by a Club of Caledonian Wits."[5] The *Critical Review* for August 1782 (LIV, 140) surmised that "the pamphlet … is apparently written by some angry Caledonian, who, warmed with the deepest resentment for some real or supposed injury, gives vent to his indignation, and treats every part of Dr. Johnson's character with the utmost asperity." A month later, the *Gentleman's Magazine* (LII [September 1782], 439), "reciting the circumstance" of the origin of the *Deformities*, contended that it was a revenge pamphlet inspired by an anti-Ossian publication by William Shaw ("Nadir" Shaw, in the *Deformities*), who "'denied the

[5] Brit. Mus. Addit. MS 6401, f. 175 b. Part of this letter is quoted by L. F. Powell in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, IV, 499 (cited hereafter as *Life*).

existence of Gaelic poetry…'" "Dr. Johnson was his patron; and THEREFORE this Essayist, 'by fair and copious quotations from Dr. Johnson's ponderous performances, has attempted to illustrate'" his extraordinary defects. And in February 1783 (LXVIII, 185-186), the *Monthly Review* briefly noted:

> This seems to be the production of some ingenious but angry Scotchman, who has taken great pains to prove, what all the world knows, that there are many exceptionable passages in the writings of Dr. Johnson. There are, however, few spots in this literary luminary now pointed out that have not been discovered before. So that the present map must be considered rather as a monument of the delineator's malignity, than of his wit. – His *personalities* seem to indicate personal provocation; though perhaps it may be all pure *nationality*.

Though Boswell mentions the pamphlet and quotes a letter in which Johnson comments on it,[6] neither he nor any of his editors before L. F. Powell try to identify the incensed author. In 1815 Robert Anderson said that the *Deformities*, "an invidious contrast to 'The Beauties of Johnson,'" is "the production of Mr. Thomson Callender, nephew of Thomson the poet."[7]

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[6] Writing to Boswell on 28 March 1782, Johnson remarks: "The Beauties of Johnson are said to have got money to the collector; if the 'Deformities' have the same success, I shall be still a more extensive benefactor" (*The Letters of Samuel Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman [Oxford, 1952], II, 475).

[7] *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. With Critical Observations on His Works* (3rd ed.; Edinburgh, 1815), p. 231. Anderson is apparently incorrect in saying that Callender was Thomson's nephew.

When the *Deformities* was catalogued in the Bodleian Library in 1834,[8] it was attributed to John Callander of Craigforth. In *A Critical Review of the Works of Dr. Samuel Johnson*, the statement is made (p. 4) that "Mr. Callander of Craigforth … observes" that "'Had the laborious Johnson been better acquainted with the oriental tongues, or had he even understood the first rudiments of the northern languages from which the English and Scots derive their origin, his bulky volumes had not presented to us the melancholy truth, that unwearied industry, *devoid of settled principles*, avails only to add one error to another.'" This latter blast, taken from the "Introduction" to Callander's *Two Ancient Scottish Poems, The Gaberlunzie Man and Christ's Kirk on the Green* (Edinburgh, 1782), may well have been the evidence that caused *A Critical Review* to be attributed to John Callander of Craigforth; then, because of the interconnections between it and the *Deformities* and because of their convincing similarity, the *Deformities* was also assigned to him. On the other hand, one is puzzled by the Bodleian's failure to accept the passage from John Callander in *A Critical Review* as conclusive evidence that he was not the author of that work.[9]

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[8] There is apparently no copy of *A Critical Review* in the Bodleian.

[9] In his Introduction to a recent reprint (New York, 1965) of John Rae's *Life of Adam Smith* (1895), Jacob Viner (who expresses his indebtedness to "Herman W. Liebert for bringing *A Critical Review* to my attention and for warning me that J. T. Callender, its author, was probably also the author of *Deformities of Dr. Samuel Johnson*") concludes that the quotation from John Callander in *A Critical Review* is sufficient "to acquit John Callander of any responsibility for authorship of either *Deformities of Samuel Johnson*

When the *Deformities* and *A Critical Review* were catalogued in the British Museum, in 1854 and 1862, they were likewise attributed to John Callander of Craigforth. In 1915 Courtney and Smith seemed to doubt that John Callander wrote them; for, they noticed, "strangely enough no mention of them is made by Robert Chambers in his memoir of Callander."[10] The *Catalogue of Printed Books in the Edinburgh Library* (1918) assigns *A Critical Review* to John Callander; it does not list the *Deformities*. Arthur G. Kennedy, in *A Bibliography of Writings on the English Language* (1927), attributes the *Deformities* to John Callander; he lists the 1787 issue of *A Critical Review* as anonymous. In their *Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature* (1926-1932), Halkett and Laing assign *A Critical Review* to John Callander on the authority of the British Museum; the *Deformities* is also assigned to him on the authority of a note by Chalmers in 1782.

Finally, L. F. Powell, *primus editorum*, in his revision of G. B. Hill's edition of Boswell's *Life* (1934-1950), quoted from a letter by James Thomson Callender to John Stockdale, dated 4 October 1783, which says: "I will be greatly obliged to you, for delivering the remaining Copies of Deformities of Johnson to the bearer, and sending me his Receipt for them." Dr. Powell thinks – rightly, we believe, when all the other evidence is taken into

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or *A Critical Review*" (p. 68; see also pp. 62-69).

[10] William P. Courtney and D. Nichol Smith, *A Bibliography of Samuel Johnson* (Oxford, 1915; reissued with facsimiles, 1925), p. 136.

account – that this letter "shows" that Callender "was the author of the book."[11]

Then in 1940, D. Nichol Smith, no doubt having followed the suspicion he and W. P. Courtney expressed in 1915, and having available the proof unearthed by Dr. Powell, attributed both items to J. T. Callender in the *CBEL* (II, 627), listing two editions of the *Deformities* in 1782 and two of *A Critical Review* in 1783. The British Museum *Catalogue* also now credits the same Scotsman with both works.

The information in Callender's letter to Stockdale, Anderson's identification, a fairly plausible reason that the *Deformities* was so long attributed to John Callander, the similarity of the styles and contents of the two pamphlets, the parallel circumstances of publication, the virtual acknowledgement of the *Deformities* in *A Critical Review*– all point to a safe conclusion that the two works were the creations of James Thomson Callender.

Though students of Johnson have frequently noticed the bitter ridicule in the *Deformities* and *A Critical Review*, they (since the author of the pamphlets was unknown) have seldom,[12] if ever, detailed Callender's turbulent career in America. Similarly,

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[11] *Life*, IV, 499. Callender's letter itself, reproduced in the *R. B. Adam Library* (III, 48), is now in the Hyde Collection. Dr. Powell, like Robert Anderson, says that James Thomson Callender was a nephew of the poet James Thomson, and gives the *DNB* as the source of his information.

[12] In 1962, one of the present writers, J. E. Congleton, published an article on "James Thomson Callender, Johnson and Jefferson" (*Johnsonian Studies* [Cairo, 1962], pp. 161-172) which forms the basis of a part of the present introduction.

students of American history have studied Callender's attacks on early American statesmen; but they have been completely unaware, it seems, that the pamphleteer who wrote them began his career by making fun of Samuel Johnson. Now that the authorship of these two early productions has been established, a study of them provides details that illuminate the foreground of Callender's career in America. Likewise, of course, the particulars of his activities in America illuminate the background of his career in Great Britain.

Near the conclusion of the *Deformities*, Callender relates the "circumstances which," as he says, "gave … birth" to the work.

> In 1778, Mr William Shaw published an Analysis of the Gaelic language. He quoted specimens of Gaelic poetry, and harangued on its beauties… A few months ago, he printed a pamphlet. He traduced decent characters. He denied the existence of Gaelic poetry, and his name was echoed in the newspapers as a miracle of candour. Is there in the annals of Grubæan impudence any parallel to this?.. This incomparable bookbuilder, who writes a dictionary before he can write grammar, had previously boasted what a harvest he would reap from English credulity. He was not deceived. The bait was caught… Mr Shaw wants only money… But better things might have been expected from the moral and majestic author of the Rambler. He must have seen the Analysis of the Gaelic language, for Shaw mentions him as the patron of that work. He must have seen the specimens of Celtic poetry there inserted. That

> he is likewise the patron of this poor scribble, no man, I suppose, will offer to deny. From this single circumstance, Dr Johnson stands convicted of *an illiberal intention to deceive*. Candour can hardly hesitate to sum up his character in the vulgar but expressive pollysyllable [pp. 86-87].

Readily available facts support some of the central assertions in this rather heated description of the inception of the *Deformities*. Specifically, as readers of Boswell's *Life* may recall, Johnson must be considered a – if not the – principal patron of the Scotsman William Shaw's *Analysis of the Gaelic Language*: he wrote the official proposals for the work, he solicited subscribers to it, and he received from the grateful author a public acknowledgement (in the "Introduction") that "To the advice and encouragement of Dr. Johnson, the friend of letters and humanity, the public is indebted for these sheets."[13] It is probable, too, that he examined the book at least cursorily[14] and that in doing so he caught sight of one or more of the references to Ossian's poetry, perhaps including the "specimen" on pages 145-149. Moreover, in the pamphlet Callender mentions, entitled *An Enquiry into the Authenticity of the Poems Ascribed to Ossian* (1781), Shaw, setting out to demolish the arguments favoring the ostensible origins of the purported translations, accords (p. 2) Johnson pride of place in starting "objections" to the poems and quotes (pp. 6-12)

[13] *Life*, III, 106, 107, 214, 488.

[14] *Ibid.*, III, 106.

approvingly first a lengthy passage from *A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775) and then Johnson's famous letter to James Macpherson. In addition, Boswell records Johnson's later assistance to Shaw in composing a reply to John Clark's pro-Ossian *Answer to Mr. Shaw's Inquiry* (1781).[15] But to admit all this is scarcely to "convict" Johnson of a deliberate "*intention to deceive*." On the contrary, since by 1778 his scepticism regarding the Ossianic writings was widely known, his *Journey* having appeared three years earlier, it could be argued that his patronage of Shaw's *Analysis* revealed a degree of understanding and tolerance not always associated with his name.

For the irate Callender, however, such "shameful" conduct demanded countermeasures – even by "a private individual, without interest or connections." The self-appointed champion both of "virtue" and also of "a world … weary of" the culprit's "arrogant pedantry" and "officious malice," he hoped "to humble and reform" Johnson by "glean[ing] the tithe of" his "absurdities," which, Callender declares, illustrate, among other defects, Johnson's "prolixity," "corruptions of our language," "want of general learning," "antipathy to rival merit," "paralytick reasoning," "adherence to contradictions," "defiance of decency," and "contempt of truth" (pp. 87-88).

After garnering the supposed proofs of these multitudinous "deformities," Callender published his book at Edinburgh (where

[15] *Ibid.*, IV, 252-253, 526.

it was sold by "W. Creech") in the early part of 1782.[16] The pamphlet, priced at a shilling and consisting of a two-page introduction and sixty-three pages of text, was also sold at London by "T. Longman, and J. Stockdale."[17] Towards the end of the same year (probably in December),[18] encouraged by the initial "reception," he brought out a second, enlarged edition of the work, which he had "perused … with honest attention, from the first line to the last, that he might endeavour to supply its deficiencies, and to correct its errors" (p. vi). Selling for "eighteen pence"[19] and appearing at both Edinburgh and London, this edition includes a separate preface and comes to a total of eighty-nine pages. We have chosen it as the text for the present reproduction of the *Deformities*.

Callender's very limited powers of ridicule and exposure reside largely in his amassment of material, not in his ability

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[16] The work appeared well before 28 March 1782 when Johnson referred to it in the letter of Boswell cited above in note 6. In the *Life* (IV, 148), Boswell remarks that he had previously "informed" Johnson "that as 'The Beauties of Johnson' had been published in London, some obscure scribbler had published at Edinburgh, what he called 'The Deformities of Johnson.'"

[17] On p. 63, Callender calls the work "a shilling pamphlet." We are grateful to the Pierpont Morgan Library for a photographic reproduction of its copy of the first edition of the *Deformities*.

[18] Since its Preface is dated 21 November 1782, the second edition was presumably published after that time but before the beginning of 1783.

[19] At the end of the second edition, Callender declares: "To collect every particle of *inanity* which may be found in our *patriot's* works is infinitely beyond the limits of an eighteen-pence pamphlet" (p. 88).

to arrange and synthesize that material. Indeed, one looks in vain at the work for anything more than the most obvious and elementary form of organization. The Preface begins with brief general remarks on "man's" incapacity to "reform" his "follies" and the "prejudice" and "good nature" of the "public" respecting this human frailty, offers "Dr. Samuel Johnson" as a capital example of the general observation, proceeds to "enquire" how "such a man crawled to the summit of classical reputation," and concludes, rather abruptly, with a short postcript on the second edition of the *Deformities* itself. The Introduction stresses the enormous differences that, according to Callender, often exist between a man's words and deeds – particularly, so the reader is told repeatedly if a bit obliquely, between Johnson's writings (especially the *Dictionary*) and actions.

The body of the pamphlet may be divided into five unequal parts. In the first (pp. 11-15), Callender launches a freewheeling attack on Johnson, accusing him of "ill-nature," a revengeful spirit, peevishness, and insolence (among other lamentable traits), and announces his chosen mode of chastisement: "From the Doctor's volumes I am to select some passages, illustrate them with a few observations, and submit them to the reader's opinion." In the second (pp. 15-47), he presents a disconnected string of quotations drawn from a number of Johnson's works and embellished with caustic strictures on their creator's presumed moral, intellectual, and literary shortcomings. In the third and longest section (pp. 47-82), separated from the second by a

small printer's device, Callender, after "quoting [pp. 47-51] the remarks already made by a judicious friend,[20] on this subject," begins a series of disjointed, angry comments on the supposed weaknesses of "the Doctor's English Dictionary." Thirty-one pages later, having vented his ire on the choice and definitions of hundreds of words in the *Dictionary*, he "take[s] leave" of the "enormous compilation," stigmatized as "perhaps … the strangest farrago which pedantry ever produced," and "return[s]" briefly, in part four (pp. 82-86; set off from part three by another small device), "to the rest of" Johnson's publications, extracts from which he again employs as a means of exhibiting his subject's supposed faults. Finally, he brings the rambling essay to a close (pp. 86-89) by recounting its origins, repeating his principal charges against Johnson, and reasserting his hopes for the Doctor's "reformation."

Although it contains some lively reading (with the author himself being the center of our interest about as often as his subject) and should certainly be readily accessible to students of eighteenth-century literature, the *Deformities* merits only restricted attention as a valid critique of Johnson's character and writings. Ostensibly employing, by and large, an inductive argument, it professes to demonstrate the pronounced

[20] In a footnote on p. 51, Callender tells us that the "remarks" of the "judicious friend" appear in No. 12 of the *Weekly Mirror*, a periodical which, according to the *CBEL* (II, 665, 685), was published at Edinburgh from 22 September 1780 through 23 March 1781, for a total of 26 numbers; the editor was apparently James Tytler, the publisher J. Mennons.

ethical and mental flaws of the Great Cham, who enjoys, so Callender freely confesses, an unrivalled reputation among his contemporaries for his achievements in letters and lexicography. Besides the deplorable qualities mentioned above and excluding for the moment a consideration of those most evident in the *Dictionary*, Johnson's faults are alleged to include dishonesty, pride, vulgarity, slovenliness, dullness, contempt for other persons, prejudice (especially against the Scots), ingratitude, "gross expressions," turgid language, and, above all, ignorance, "nonsense," and countless inconsistencies. To this sweeping broadside of invective, the modern reader must respond with steady, sometimes amused, sometimes annoyed disbelief. He recognizes, to be sure, certain points of likeness between Callender's abusive imputations and (say) Boswell's highly laudatory portrait. But the former's accusations are so irresponsible and intemperate, so obviously the outburst of a quivering Scotsman's intense indignation, and the evidence adduced is so often wrenched from its context and misapplied, that the reader inevitably finds himself a partisan of Johnson even when he might be occasionally inclined to admit the tenability of Callender's criticism.

Among Johnson's works, the *Dictionary*, as already indicated, bears the brunt of Callender's heaviest, most sustained assault. Its principal "deformities," to judge from the amount of space devoted to them, occur in its definitions and word-list. In Callender's opinion, "most of the definitions … may

be divided into three classes; the erroneous, œnigmatical, and superfluous" (p. 58); many of them explicate "indecent," "blackguard" expressions (pp. 54, 74); and some, exemplifying the lexicographer's "political tenets," are downright "seditious and impudent" (p. 13). Of the word-list itself, probably "two thousand" members, comprising a "profusion of trash," are "not to be found at all in any other book" (p. 70).

A short introduction is scarcely the place to examine the presumed existence of these defects in the *Dictionary*. Nevertheless, a few facts, based on a random sampling of passages in the *Deformities*, may provide a partial historical perspective for Callender's censures. Of the group of 210 words on pages 71-72 whose real currency he doubts or denies, 190 also appear in the second edition (1736) of Nathan Bailey's *Dictionarium Britannicum*, a copy of which Johnson interleaved and used as he compiled his own *Dictionary*. Equally revealing, the *OED* includes 204 of the 210, the second edition of *Webster's International* 158, and the third edition 108. Again, of the 65 words on pages 51-53 whose definitions Callender objects to, 48 also appear, with comparable explanations, in Bailey's dictionary. Finally, an unsystematic comparison of Bailey's and Johnson's works reveals a much higher incidence of so-called "indecent" – at least sexual – terms in the former than in the latter. The author of the *Deformities*, it is quite obvious, knew what he disliked about the *Dictionary*; when pressing his strictures against the book, however, as when mounting his other

attacks on Johnson, his violent passions rode roughshod over his faint pretensions to fairness and objectivity.

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Nihil rerum mortalium tam instabile ac fluxum est, quam fama– Tacitus.

The diversion of baiting an Author has the sanction of all ages and nations, and is more lawful than the sport of teizing other animals because for the most part HE comes voluntarily to the stake.
Rambler, No. 176.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Man is endowed with sagacity sufficient to discover his errors, but seldom has fortitude to forsake them. Hence it arises that even the weakest of the species can point out the follies of his companions, and fancies that he can reform his own. We are amazed that a being like ourselves should thus deliberately act below the dignity of reason, but we forget that our own conduct may also be reviewed with contempt and pity.

The world is buried in prejudice: Every department of knowledge is deeply infected by its fatal poison. Thus we frequently respect or reprobate a book without a perusal, merely on account of the Author's name. Not one in ten thousand of his panegyrists hath ever comprehended the system of Newton. – What then is the value of *their* approbation? The public have long heard that a late English Dictionary is a most masterly performance; but is there a single man in England who ever read it half through? No. The school-boy imagines that it is above his capacity: The man of letters feels it to be below his; but being considered as a fashionable decoration in a closet of books, it is bought without the least chance of being perused, and WE (for the *first* time to be sure) have been admiring we know not what.

However as the variety of our sentiments is without end, it

often happens, that while a philosopher is celebrated by one part of his readers, he is despised by some of the rest. Almost all the great authors of the present age have been more bitterly reviled than any other subjects of England, the Ministry excepted. But in a matter so frivolous as the merit of a book, the public are seldom guilty of gross injustice. Indeed, when an acute historian continues, in contempt of his own conviction, to persist in a falsehood, merely because he hath once affirmed it – when an elegant poet, in search of sublimity, soars, or rather sinks beyond the kenn of common sense[21] – when an astronomer treats his antagonist like a felon – when an advocate of piety impregnates his pages with slander, scurrility, and treason – then the world may be pardoned though they abate something of their veneration for the dignity of the learned.

We can hardly produce a stronger evidence of the prejudice, and the good nature of the public, than their indulgence to the foibles of Dr Samuel Johnson; nor a stronger evidence of the force of self-conceit, than that disdain of admonition which forms the capital feature in his character. He seems to fancy that his opinions cannot be disputed; and many of his admirers acquiesce in his idea; yet his volumes are of no great value; his personal appearance cannot much recommend him; his conversation would shock the rudest savage. His ignorance, his misconduct, and his success, are a striking proof that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. Let us enquire

[21] Read Mr Mason's Ode to Truth, and pick out a single sentiment if you can.

by what singular series of accidents, such a man crawled to the summit of classical reputation?

Most of his verses were among his early productions, and they merit abundant praise. His account of Savage compelled our approbation, and discovered a species of excellence but very little known in the annals of English literature. The force of language and of thought which he displayed in the Rambler, extended his reputation, and atoned for his numerous imperfections. He had by this time engaged to write an English Dictionary. Wise men are known by their work, says the Proverb. After many years he produced a performance of which I shall only say what can easily be proved, that few books are so unworthy of the title which they bear, and so void of every thing intellectual.

But Dr Johnson's credit was supported by something very different from intrinsic merit. As he was not worth a shilling, his work was printed and patronized by a phalanx of booksellers; and we can have no doubt that much of his success was owing to their vigorous but interested exertions. He had likewise other assistance, which would have been more than sufficient to support the reputation of an ordinary writer. He was protected by Mr. Garrick, the darling of mankind. England herself never produced a more generous friend: And though he seldom wrote lessons of morality, nothing could exceed the clearness of his understanding, but the benevolence of his heart. By him, it is probable, Dr Johnson was introduced to the late Earl of Chesterfield; a Minister, a man of letters, and a friend to merit.

His Lordship was persuaded to celebrate, by anticipation, the merits of the Doctor's Dictionary[22], and his condescension is said to have been repaid by the most ungrateful insolence. Of these two illustrious men it may almost be affirmed that their influence was universal, and when supported by the weight of the booksellers, opposition sunk before it. The Doctor soon after received a pension from the most unfortunate of all Statesmen, a Statesman whom North Britons ought to mention as seldom as possible, and his name acquired additional splendour from the dignity of Independence.

Since that period his reputation, or at least his popularity, has been rather on the decline. His edition of Shakespeare was with difficulty forced upon the world by every artifice of trade. His political pieces have long since insured the detestation of his countrymen, a few individuals excepted. His Tour, considered as a whole, is a ridiculous performance. His lives of English Poets abound with judicious observations; but the great misfortune is, that our historian can very seldom conceal the narrowness of his soul.

Of the present trifle the Author has very little to say. The reception which it at first met with has induced him to risk a second edition. He has perused it with honest attention, from the first line to the last, that he might endeavour to supply its deficiencies, and to correct its errors. In the execution of this task, he has frequently had occasion to remark, that it is more

[22] World, No. 100.

easy to demolish a palace than to erect a cottage.

Edinburgh, }
Nov. 21, 1782.

INTRODUCTION

When a boy peruses a book with pleasure, his admiration riseth immediately from the work to its author. His fancy fondly ranks his favourite with the wise, and the virtuous. He glows with a lover's impatience, to reach the presence of this *superior being*, to drink of science at the fountain-head, to complete his ideas at once, and riot in all the luxuries of learning.

The novice unhappily presumes, that men who command the passions of others cannot be slaves to their own: That a historian must feel the worth of justice and tenderness, while he tells us, how kings and conquerors are commonly the burden and the curse of society: That an assertor of public freedom will never become the dupe of flattery, and the pimp of oppression: That the founder of a system cannot want words to explain it: *That* the compiler of a *dictionary* has at least a common degree of knowledge: *That* an inventor of *new* terms can tell what they mean: *That* he, who refines and fixes the language of empires, is able to converse, without the pertness of a pedant, or the vulgarity of a porter: *That* a preacher of morality will blush to persist in vindictive, deliberate, and detected falsehoods: *That* he who totters on the brink of eternity will speak with caution and humanity of the dead: And *that* a traveller, who pretends to veracity, dares not avow contradictions.

But in learning, as in life, much of our happiness flows from

deception. Ignorance, the parent of wonder, is often the parent of esteem and love. While devouring Horace we venerate the Deserter of Brutus, and the Slave of Cæsar. Transported by his sublime eloquence, the reader of Cicero forgets that Cicero himself was a plagiarist and a coward: That Rome was but a den of robbers: That Cataline resembled the rest; and that this rebel was only revenging the blood of butchered nations, of Samnium, of Epirus, of Carthage, and of – Hannibal.

'The laurels which human praise confers are withered and blasted by the unworthiness of those who wear them.' There is often a curious contrast between an author and his books. The mildest, the politest, the wisest, and the most *worthy* man alive, pens five hundred pages to display the pleasures of friendship and the beauties of benevolence; but alas! he is a theorist only, for his sympathy never cost him a shilling. A party-tool talks of public spirit. A pedant commands our tears. A pensioner inveighs against pensions; and a bankrupt preaches public œconomy. The philosopher quotes Horace, while he defrauds his valet. A mimick of Richardson, is a domestic tyrant: A Sydenham, the rendezvous of diseases: A declaimer against envy, of all men the most invidious. The satirist has not a reformer's virtues. The poet of love and friendship is without a mistress, or a friend; while a time-server celebrates the valour of heroes, and exults in the *freedom* of England. Like Penelope, most writers employ part of their time to undo the labours of the rest. Judging by their lives one would think it were their chief study to render

learning ridiculous. We lose all respect for teachers, who, when the lesson is ended, are 'no wiser or better than common men.' To be convinced that books are trifles, let us only remark how little good they do, and how little those, who love them, love each other. The monopolists of literary fame, for the most part, regard a rival as an enemy. Their mutual hostilities, like those of aquatick animals, are unavoidable and constant; and their voracity differs from that of the shark, but as a half-devoured carcase, from a murdered reputation. The existence of many books depends on the ruin of some of the rest; yet, with our *English Dictionary*, a few *immortal* compositions are to live unwounded by the shafts of envy, and to descend in a torrent of applause from one century to another. A thousand of their critics will exist and be forgotten; a thousand of their imitators will sink into contempt; but THEY shall defy the force of time; continue to flourish thro' every *fashion* of philosophy, and, like Egyptian pyramids, perish but in the ruins of the globe.

DEFORMITIES, &c

In the number of men who dishonour their own genius, ought to be ranked Dr Samuel Johnson; for his abilities and learning are not accompanied by candour and generosity. His life of Pomfret concludes with this maxim, that 'he who pleases many, must have merit;' yet, in defiance of his own rule, the Doctor has, a thousand times, attempted to prove, that they who please many, have *no* merit. His invidious and revengeful remark on Chesterfield, would have disgraced any other man. He said, and nobody but himself would have said it, that Churchill was a shallow fellow. And he once told some of his admirers, that Swift was a *shallow*, a *very shallow* fellow: reminding us of the Lilliputian who drew *his* bow to Gulliver[23]. For the memory of this man, who may be

[23] Swift had the splendid misfortune to be a man of genius. By a very singular felicity, he excelled both in verse and prose. He boasted, that no *new* word was to be found in his volumes; though, in glory above all writers of his time, he did not fancy *that* entitled him to ingross or insult conversation. He was no less remarkably clean, than *some* are remarkably dirty. His love of fame never led him into the lowest of all vices; and a sense of his own dignity made him respect the importance and the feelings of others. He often went many miles on foot, that he might be able to bestow on the poor, what a coach would have cost him. He raised some hundreds of families from beggary, by lending them five pounds a-piece only. He inspired his footmen with Celtic attachment. Whatever was his pride, he shewed none of it in 'the venerable presence of misery.' Though a poet he was free from vanity; though an author and a divine, his example did not fall behind his precepts; though a courtier, he disdained to fawn on his superiors; though a patriot, he never, like our successive generations of blasted orators, sacrificed his principles to his passions. 'His meanest talent was his wit.' His learning had no

classed with Cato and Phocion, the Doctor feels no tenderness or respect. And for that[24], and other critical blasphemies, he has undergone innumerable floggings. No writer of this nation has made more noise. None has discovered more contempt for other men's reputations, or more confidence in his own. I would humbly submit a few hints for his improvement, if he be not 'too old to learn.' And, whatever freedoms I take, the Doctor himself may be quoted as a precedent for insolent invective, and brutal reproach. He has told us[25], that 'the two lowest of all human beings are, a scribbler for a party, and a commissioner of excise.' This very man was himself the hired scribbler of a party; and why should a commissioner of excise be one of the meanest of mankind? In the preface to his octavo Dictionary, the Doctor affirms, that, 'by the labours of all his predecessors, not even the *lowest* expectation can be gratified.' The author of a revisal of Shakespeare[26] attacks (he says) with '*gloomy malignity*, as if he were dragging to justice an assassin or incendiary. He bites like

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pedantry, his piety no superstition; his benevolence almost no parallel. His intrepid eloquence first pointed out to his oppressed countrymen, that path to Independence, to happiness, and to glory, which their posterity, at this moment, so nobly pursue. His treatise on the conduct of their foreign allies, first taught the English nation the dangers of a continental war, dispelled their delusive dreams of conquest, and stopt them in the full career to ruin.

[24] See parallel between Diogenes and Dr Johnson in Town and Country Magazine. In his life of Swift, the Doctor tells us, that 'he relieved without pity, and assisted without kindness.'

[25] Idler, No. 70.

[26] Preface to Shakespeare.

a viper, and would be glad to leave inflammations and gangrene behind him.' For this shocking language, which could have been answered by nothing but a blow, the *primum mobile*, perhaps, was, that the critic had dedicated his book to Lord Kaims, (a Scotsman, and another very *shallow* fellow) 'as the truest judge, and most intelligent admirer of Shakespeare.'

His treatment of Colley Cibber is, if possible, worse. That great ornament of the stage was a man of genius, at least equal to Dr Johnson – but they had a quarrel, and though Cibber has been more than twenty years buried, the Doctor, in his life of Pope, studies to revenge it. His expressions are gross. 'In the Dunciad, among other *worthless* scribblers he (Pope) had mentioned *Cibber*. The dishonour of being shewn as *Cibber's* antagonist could never be compensated by the victory. *Cibber* had nothing to lose – The shafts of satire were directed in vain against *Cibber*, being repelled by the impenetrable impudence,' &c.[27] We have been deafened about the Doctor's private virtues; of which these passages are a very poor evidence.

It is believed by some, that Dr Johnson's *admirable* Dictionary is the most capital monument of human genius; that the studies of Archimedes and Newton are but like a feather in the scale with this amazing work; that he has given our language a stability, which, without him, it had never known; that he has performed alone, what, in other nations, whole academies fail to perform; and that as the fruit of *his* learning and sagacity, our compositions

[27] Life of Pope.

will be classical and immortal. This may be true; but the book displays many proofs or his *ill-nature*, and evinces what I want to insist on, viz. that *he who despises politeness cannot deserve it*. For his seditious and impudent definitions[28] he would, in Queen Anne's reign, have had a fair chance of mounting the pillory. Hume, Smith, and Chesterfield may be quoted to prove, that Walpole and Excise were improper objects of execration; but an *emanation* of royal munificence has, of late, relaxed the Doctor's *frigorific* virtue; and, in his *False Alarm*, he affirms, that our government approaches nearer to perfection, *than any other that fiction has feigned, or history recorded*. This is going pretty far; but the peevish, though *incorruptible* patriot, proceeds

[28] The following extracts from the Doctor's Dictionary are a key to his political tenets: Excise, a hateful tax levied upon commodities, and adjudged, not by the common judges of property, but *wretches* hired by those to whom excise is paid. *Gazetteer*, was lately a term of the utmost infamy, being usually applied to wretches that were *hired* to vindicate the court. *Pension*, an allowance made to any one without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country. *Pensioner*, a slave of state, hired by a stipend to obey his master. King, monarch, supreme governour. *Monarch*, a governour invested with *absolute* authority, a *King*. *Whig*, 1. whey, 2. the name of a *faction*. *Tory*, one who adheres to the *antient* constitution of the state, and the apostolical hierarchy of the church of England, opposed to a *whig*. *Johnson's fol. Dic.* The word *faction* is always used in a *bad* sense; though, in defining it, the Doctor did not, and, after what he had said of a whig, perhaps durst not say, that a faction is always a term for the supposed disturbers of public peace. 'The most obsequious of the slaves of pride, the most rapturous of the gazers upon wealth, the most officious of the whisperers of greatness, are collected from seminaries appropriated to the study of wisdom and of virtue;' *Rambler*, No. 180. That is to say, men of learning are a set of the most sneaking, pitiful, time-serving rascals. The reader will make his own applications.

a great deal farther. His political pieces have great elegance and wit; yet, if the tenth part of what he advances in them be true, his countrymen are a mob of ignorant, ungrateful, rebellious ruffians. Every member in Opposition is a fool, a firebrand, a monster; worse, if that were possible, than Ravillac, Hambden, or Milton[29]. Here is a short specimen:

'On the original contrivers of mischief let an insulted nation pour out its vengeance. With whatever design they have inflamed this pernicious contest, they are themselves equally detestable. If they wish success to the colonies, they are TRAITORS to this country; if they wish their defeat, they are TRAITORS at once to America and England. To them (Mess. Burke & Co.) and them only, must be imputed the interruption of commerce, and the miseries of war, the sorrow of those who shall be ruined, and the blood of those that shall fall[30].'

From the Doctor's volumes I am to select some passages, illustrate them with a few observations, and submit them to the reader's opinion. These pages aim at *perspicacity*. They are ambitious to record TRUTH.

'He that writes the life of another, is either his friend or

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[29] See *Political tracts by the author of the Rambler*. His character of Hambden, the reader will find in the 1st page of Waller's life. Of Milton, he says, that 'his impudence had been at least equal to his other powers. Such was his malignity, that hell grew darker at his frown. He thought women born only for obedience, and men only for rebellion.' There is much more in the same tone; and, with what justice his epithets are applied, let Englishmen judge.

[30] Taxation no tyranny.

his enemy, and wishes either to exalt his praise, or aggravate his infamy[31].' The Doctor betrays a degree of inconsistency incompatible with his reputed abilities. After such a confession, what have we to hope for in *his* lives of English poets?

Having thus denied veracity both to Plutarch and *himself*, this Idler, in the very next page, leaps at once from the wildest scepticism to the wildest credulity. The paragraph is too long for insertion; but the tenor of it is, that 'a man's account of himself, left behind him unpublished, may be *depended on*;' because, 'by self-love all have been so often betrayed, *that* (now for the strangest flight of nonsense) all are on the watch against its artifices.'

In his Dictionary, *temperance* is defined to be '*moderation opposed to gluttony and drunkenness*.' And he has since defined 'sobriety or temperance' to be '*nothing* but the forbearance of *pleasure*[32].' This maxim needs no comment.

'A man will, in the hour of darkness and fatigue, be content to leave behind him every thing but *himself*[33].' Here the Doctor supposes, that a person can leave *himself* behind *himself*. When the reader examines the passage in the original, he will be convinced, that this cannot be an error of the press only. Had the Rambler, when he crossed Tweed, left behind him his pride, his indolence, and his vulgarity, he would have returned a much

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[31] Ibid, No. 89.

[32] Idler, No. 85.

[33] Tour, p. 59.

wiser, better, and happier man than he did.

Form, he explains to be, 'the external appearance of any thing, shape;' but, when speaking of hills in the North of Scotland, he says, 'the appearance is that of matter incapable of FORM[34]!' He has seen *matter*, not only destitute, but incapable of *shape*. He has seen an *appearance* which is incapable of *external* appearance. And yet, in the same book, he seems to regret the weakness of his vision.

Beauty is 'that assemblage of graces which pleases the eye.' But, in the Idler[35], he displays his true idea of beauty; and it is a very lame piece of philosophy. Judge from a few samples: 'If a man, born blind, was to recover his sight, and the most beautiful woman was to be brought before him, he could not determine whether she was handsome or not. Nor if the most handsome and most deformed were produced, could he any better determine to which he should give the preference, having seen only these two.' And again, 'as we are then more accustomed to beauty than deformity, we may conclude *that* to be the reason why we approve and admire it.' Moreover, 'though habit and custom cannot be said to be the cause[36] of beauty, IT is certainly the cause of our liking it[37]. I have no doubt, but that, if we were more

[34] Tour, p. 84.

[35] Idler, No. 82.

[36] He should have said *causes*, for he mentions *two*. – What is the Doctor's distinction here between habit and custom?

[37] *Quere*, Are we more accustomed to beauty than deformity? or is not the fact otherwise. – Did habit ever make a sick man fond of disease, or a poor man fond of

used to deformity than beauty, deformity would then lose the idea now annexed to it, and take that of beauty; as if the whole world should agree that *yes* and *no* should change their meanings, *yes* would then deny, and *no* would affirm.' This is such a perfection of nonsense, that the reader will, perhaps, think it a forgery; but he will find it *verbatim et literatim*, and the whole number is in the same stile.

'Swift in his *petty* treatise on the English language, allows that new words *must* sometimes be introduced, but proposes that *none* should be suffered to become obsolete[38].' The Doctor has not given a fair quotation from Swift. One would imagine that Swift had proposed to retain every word which is to be found in any of our popular authors, but he neither said nor meant any such thing. His words are these: 'They' (the members of the proposed society) 'will find many words *that deserve to be utterly thrown out of our language*!' And the Dean says nothing afterwards which infers a contradiction[39].

In his account of Lyttleton, the Doctor's good nature is evident. He speaks not a word as to the merit of the history

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poverty?

[38] Vide Preface to folio Dict.

[39] Dr Campbell of Aberdeen, on the use of new words, says, 'That nothing can be juster than Johnson's manner of arguing on this subject, in regard to what Swift a little chimerically proposeth, that though new words be introduced, none should be suffered to become obsolete.' This Gentleman ought to have consulted Swift himself. Let him peruse the 'petty treatise,' and then let him blush for having trusted an author void of fidelity.

of Henry II. but – 'It was published with such anxiety as only *vanity* can dictate.' We are next entertained with a page of dirty anecdotes concerning its publication, which the Doctor seems to have picked up from some printer's journeyman. 'The Persian Letters have something of that indistinct and headstrong ardour for liberty which a man of genius *always* catches when he enters the world, and *always* suffers to cool as he passes forward.' Of the admired monody to the memory of Lady Lyttleton, we are told only that it is *long*. 'His dialogues of the dead were very eagerly read, tho' the production rather, as it seems of leisure than of study, rather effusions than compositions. The names of his persons too often enable the reader to anticipate their conversation; and when they have met, they too often part without a conclusion.' These remarks apply with peculiar justice to Dr Johnson's dictionary, for that work is an *effusion* rather than a *composition*. His reader is for the most part able to anticipate his definitions, and they generally end without conclusion. Lord Lyttleton's poems 'have *nothing* to be *despised* and *little* to be *admired*.' But here, as usual, the Doctor contradicts himself, and in the very next line 'of his Progress of Love, *it is sufficient blame to say* that it is pastoral. His blank verse in Blenheim has neither much force, nor much elegance. His little performances, whether songs or epigrams, are sometimes spritely, and sometimes *insipid*' – and of course *despicable*. The candid and accurate author of the Rambler has forgot the existence of that beautiful blossom of sensibility, that

pure effusion of friendship, the prologue to Coriolanus.

The life of Dr Young has been written by a lawyer, who conveys the meanest thoughts in the meanest language. His stile is dry, stiff, grovelling, and impure. His anecdotes and ideas, are evidently the cud of Dr Johnson's conversation. He continues in the same fretful tone from the first line to the last. He is at once most contemptuous and contemptible. Whatever he says is insipid or disgusting. He is the bad imitator of a bad original; and an honest man cannot peruse his libel without indignation. He steps out of his way to remind us of Milton's *corporal correction*, a story fabricated, as is well known, by his Employer. His ignorance has already been illustrated in a periodical pamphlet. Johnson himself, with all his imperfections, is often as far superior to this unhappy penman, as the author of the Night-Thoughts is superior to Johnson. And yet this critical assassin, this literary jackall, is celebrated by the Doctor[40]. *Pares*

[40] As the venerable and admirable father of *the* English Dictionary has treated the names of such men as Young and Lyttleton with so little ceremony, the reader will perhaps forgive the insertion of his own character, as drawn by Chesterfield. 'I am almost in a fever, whenever I am in his company. His figure (without being deformed) seems made to disgrace or ridicule the common structure of the human body. His legs and arms are never in the position, which, according to the situation of his body, they ought to be in; but constantly employed in committing acts of hostility upon the graces. He throws any where but down his throat, whatever he means to drink; and only mangles what he means to carve. *Inattentive to all the regards of social life*, he mistimes, or misplaces every thing. He disputes with heat, and indiscriminately, mindless of the rank, character, and situation, of those with whom he disputes; absolutely ignorant of the several gradations of familiarity or respect, he is exactly the same to his superiors, his equals, and his inferiors; and therefore by a necessary consequence absurd to two

cum paribus facile congregantur.

'Dryden's poem on the death of Mrs Killigrew is undoubtedly the noblest ode that our language ever has produced. The first part flows with a torrent of enthusiasm. All the stanzas, indeed, are not equal.' He proceeds to compare it with an imperial crown, &c. But, a little after, 'the ode on St Cecilia's day is allowed *to stand without a rival*[41].' These are his identical words; and his admirers may reconcile them if they can. Indeed, he seems ashamed of his own inconsistency, and is ready to relapse; but thinks, upon the whole, that Alexander's Feast 'may, *perhaps*, be pronounced superior to the ode on Killigrew.' Dr Johnson is said to be the greatest critic of his age; yet the verses on Mrs Killigrew are beneath all criticism; and, perhaps, no person ever read them through, except their author, and himself.

Dryden's fable 'of the Cock and Fox seems hardly worth the labour of *rejuvenescence*[42].' Some *narcotic* seems to have *refrigerated* the red liquor which circulates in the Doctor's

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of the three. Is it possible to love such a man? No. The utmost I can do for him, is to consider him as a respectable Hottentot.' Churchill's account of our hero comes nearly to the same. And I presume that the inimitable Dr Smollet, has exhibited a third picture of this illustrious original in Humphry Clinker, Vol. 1. – Dr Johnson's letter to the Earl of Chesterfield concludes in these words: 'Whatever be the event of my endeavours, I shall *not easily* regret an attempt which has procured me the honour of appearing thus publicly, my Lord, your Lordship's most obedient, and most humble servant, Sam. Johnson.' These extracts afford a striking contrast between the severity of the polite peer, and the humble politeness (for *once*) of the rugged pedant.

[41] Lives of English poets, vol. iii. p. 243 and 284. 12*mo* edit.

[42] Vide Life of Dryden.

veins[43], and to have *hebetated* and *obtunded* his powers of *excogitation*[44], for elegance and wit never met more happily than here. Peruse only the first page of this poem, and then judge. The nonsense which has been written by critics is, in quantity and absurdity, beyond all conception. Perhaps his admirers may answer, that my remark is but the *ramification* of envy, the *intumescence* of ill-nature, the *exacerbation* of 'gloomy malignity.' However, it would not be amiss to commit that page of *inanity* to the power of *cremation*; and let not his fondest idolaters confide in its *indiscerptibility*. In painting the sentiments and the scenes of common life, to write English which Englishmen cannot read, is a degree of insolence hardly known till now, and seems to be nothing but the poor refuge of pedantic dullness.

His Abyssinian tale hath many beauties, yet the characters are insipid, the narrative ridiculous, the moral invisible, and the reader disappointed. '*Intercepting interruptions* and *volant* animals' are above common comprehension. The Newtonian system had reached the happy valley; for its inhabitants talk of the earth's *attraction*

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[43] Vid. Dict. article Blood.

[44] *Excogitation*, this combination of letters is to be found in the Doctor's works, though not in his Dictionary.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.