

# ARTHUR ADCOCK

FAMOUS HOUSES AND  
LITERARY SHRINES OF  
LONDON

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**Literary Shrines of London**

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# A. St. John Adcock Famous Houses and Literary Shrines of London

## CHAPTER I SOME CELEBRATED COCKNEYS

You cannot stir the ground of London anywhere but straightway it flowers into romance. Read the inscriptions on the crumbling tombs of our early merchant princes and adventurers in some of the old City churches, and it glimmers upon you that if ever the history of London's commercial rise and progress gets adequately written it will read like a series of stories out of the *Arabian Nights*. Think what dashing and magnificent figures, what tales of dark plottings, fierce warfare, and glorious heroisms must brighten and darken the pages of any political history of London; and even more glamorous, more intensely and humanly alive, would be a social history of London, beginning perhaps in those days of the fourteenth century when Langland was living in Cornhill and writing his *Vision of Piers Plowman*, or farther back still, in Richard the First's time, when that fine spirit, the first of English demagogues, William Fitzosbert, was haranguing

the folkmoot in St. Paul's Churchyard, urging them to resist the tyrannic taxations of the Lord Mayor and his Court of wealthy Aldermen – a passion for justice that brought him into such danger that he and certain of his friends had to seek sanctuary, and barricaded themselves in Bow Church. The church was fired by order of a bishop who had no sympathy with reformers, and Fitzosbert and his friends, breaking out through the flames, were stabbed and struck down in Cheapside, hustled to the Tower, hastily tried and sentenced, dragged out by the heels through the streets, and hanged at Smithfield. I have always thought this would make a good, live starting-point, and had I but world enough and time I would sooner write that history than anything else.

No need to hunt after topics when you are writing about London; they come to you. The air is full of them. The very names of the streets are cabalistic words. Once you know London, myriads of great spirits may be called from the vasty deep by sight or sound of such names as Fleet Street, Strand, Whitehall, Drury Lane, The Temple, Newgate Street, Aldersgate, Lombard Street, Cloth Fair, Paternoster Row, Holborn, Bishopsgate, and a hundred others. You have only to walk into Whitefriars Street and see “Hanging-sword Alley” inscribed on the wall of a court at the top of a narrow flight of steps, and all Alsatia rises again around you, as Ilion rose like a mist to the music of Apollo's playing. Loiter along Cornhill in the right mood and Thomas Archer's house shall rebuild itself for

you at the corner of Pope's Head Alley, where he started the first English newspaper in 1603, and you will wonder why nobody writes a full history of London journalism.

As for literary London – every other street you traverse is haunted with memories of poets, novelists, and men of letters, and it is some of the obscurest of these associations that are the most curiously fascinating. I have a vivid, youthful remembrance of a tumble-down, red-tiled shop near the end of Leathersellers' Buildings which I satisfied myself was the identical place in which Robert Bloomfield worked as a shoemaker's assistant; Devereux Court still retains something of the Grecian Coffee-house that used to be frequented by Addison and Steele, but I knew the Court first, and am still drawn to it most, as the site of that vanished Tom's Coffee-house where Akenside often spent his winter evenings; and if I had my choice of bringing visibly back out of nothingness one of the old Charing Cross houses, it would be the butcher's shop that was kept by the uncle who adopted Prior in his boyhood.

Plenty of unpleasant things have been said about London, but never by her own children, or such children of her adoption as Johnson and Dickens. Says Hobbes, who was born at Malmesbury, "London has a great belly, but no palate," and Bishop Stubbs (a native of Knaresborough) more recently described it as "always the purse, seldom the head, and never the heart of England." Later still an eminent speaker, quoting this fantastic dictum of Stubbs's, went a step further and informed

his audience that “not many men eminent in literature have been born in London”; a statement so demonstrably inaccurate that one may safely undertake to show that at least as many men eminent in literature, to say nothing of art and science, have been born in London as in any other half-dozen towns of the kingdom put together.

To begin with, the morning star of our literature, Geoffrey Chaucer, was born in Thames Street, not far from the wharf where, after he was married and had leased a home for himself in Aldgate, he held office as a Comptroller of Customs, and the pen that was presently to write the *Canterbury Tales* “moved over bills of lading.” The “poets’ poet,” Spenser, was born in East Smithfield, by the Tower, and in his *Prothalamion* speaks of his birthplace affectionately as —

“Merry London, my most kindly nurse,  
That to me gave this life’s first native source,  
Though from another place I take my name.”

Ben Jonson was born in Hartshorn Lane, Charing Cross; four of his contemporary dramatists, Fletcher, Webster, Shirley and Middleton, were also Londoners by birth; Sir Thomas Browne, author of the *Religio Medici*, was born in the parish of St. Michael-le-Quern, in the very heart of the city; and Bread Street, Cheapside, is hallowed by the fact that Milton had his birth there.

Dr. Donne, the son of a London merchant, was also born within a stone’s throw of Cheapside; and his disciple, Cowley,

came into the world in Fleet Street, at the corner of Chancery Lane. But Cowley was a renegade; he acquired an unnatural preference for the country, and not only held that “God the first garden made, and the first city Cain,” but ended a poem in praise of nature and a quiet life with —

“Methinks I see  
The monster London laugh at me;  
I should at thee too, foolish city,  
If it were fit to laugh at misery;  
But thy estate I pity.  
Let but thy wicked men from out thee go,  
And all the fools that crowd thee so,  
Even thou, who dost thy millions boast,  
A village less than Islington wilt grow,  
A solitude almost.”

The daintiest of our lyrists, Herrick, was born over his father’s shop in Cheapside, and you may take it he was only playing with poetical fancies when, in some lines to his friend Endymion Porter, he praised the country with its “nut-brown mirth and russet wit,” and again when, in a set of verses on “The Country Life,” he assured his brother he was “thrice and above blest,” because he could —

“Leave the city, for exchange, to see  
The country’s sweet simplicity.”



If you want to find him in earnest, turn to that enraptured outburst of his on “His Return to London” —

“Ravished in spirit I come, nay more I fly  
To thee, blessed place of my nativity!..  
O place! O people! manners framed to please  
All nations, customs, kindreds, languages!  
I am a free-born Roman; suffer then  
That I amongst you live a citizen.  
London my home is, though by hard fate sent  
Into a long and irksome banishment;  
Yet since called back, henceforward let me be,  
O native country! repossessed by thee;  
For rather than I'll to the West return,  
I'll beg of thee first here to have mine urn.”

There speaks the true Cockney; he would sooner be dead in London than alive in the West of England. Even Lamb's love of London was scarcely greater than that.

It was fitting that Pope, essentially a town poet, should be born in Lombard Street. In the next thoroughfare, Cornhill, Gray was born; and, son of a butcher, Defoe began life in the parish of St. Giles's, Cripplegate. Shakespeare was an alien, but Bacon was born at York House, in the Strand; which, to my thinking, is the strongest argument in favour of the theory that he wrote the plays. Churchill was born at Vine Street, Westminster; Keats in Moorfields; and, staunchest and one of the most incorrigible

Londoners of them all, Charles Lamb in Crown Office Row, Temple. He refers, in one of his essays, to Hare Court, in the Temple, and says: “It was a gloomy, churchyard-like court, with three trees and a pump in it. I was born near it, and used to drink at that pump when I was a Rechabite of six years old.” The pump is no longer there, only one half of Hare Court remains as it was in Lamb’s day, and Crown Office Row has been rebuilt. His homes in Mitre Court Buildings and Inner Temple Lane have vanished also; but the Temple is still rich in reminiscences of him. Paper Buildings, King’s Bench Walk, Harcourt Buildings, the fountain near Garden Court, the old Elizabethan Hall, in which tradition says Shakespeare read one of his plays to Queen Elizabeth – these and the church, the gardens, the winding lanes and quaint byways of the Temple, made up, as he said, his earliest recollections. “I repeat to this day,” he writes, “no verses to myself more frequently, or with kindlier emotion, than those of Spenser, where he speaks of this spot —

‘There when they came whereas those bricky towers  
The which on Themmes broad aged back doth ride,  
Where now the studious lawyers have their bowers,  
There whylome wont the Templar knights to bide,  
Till they decayed through pride.’”

And, “indeed,” he adds, “it is the most elegant spot in the metropolis.”

But his letters and essays are full of his love of London. “I

don't care much," he wrote to Wordsworth, "if I never see a mountain. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments as any of your mountaineers can have done with dead Nature... I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy in so much life." Again, "Fleet Street and the Strand," he writes to Manning, "are better places to live in for good and all than amidst Skiddaw." After he had removed to Edmonton, on account of his sister's health, it was to Wordsworth he wrote, saying how he pined to be back again in London: "In dreams I am in Fleet Market, but I wake and cry to sleep again... Oh, never let the lying poets be believed who 'tice men from the cheerful haunts of streets... A garden was the primitive prison, till man, with Promethean felicity and boldness, luckily sinned himself out of it. Thence followed Babylon, Nineveh, Venice, London... I would live in London shirtless, bookless."

But to get back to our catalogue of birthplaces – Blake was born in Broad Street, near Golden Square; Byron in Holles Street; Hood in the Poultry, within sight of the Mansion House; Dante and Christina Rossetti were Londoners born; so were Swinburne, Browning, Philip Bourke Marston, John Stuart Mill, Ruskin, Turner, Holman Hunt, Sir Arthur Sullivan – but if we go outside literary Londoners this chapter will end only with the book. Moreover, my purpose is not so much to talk of authors and artists who were born in London, as to give some record of the still surviving houses in which many of them lived; whether they

had their birth here or not, the majority of them came here to live and work, for, so far as England is concerned, there is more than a grain of truth in Lamb's enthusiastic boast that "London is the only fostering soil of genius."

## CHAPTER II

# SHAKESPEARE IN LONDON

The London that Shakespeare knew has vanished like a dream. The Great Fire swept most of it out of existence in a few days of 1666, and the two and a half centuries of time since then have made away with nearly all the rest of it. The Tower still remains; there are parts of the Temple; a stray relic or so, such as the London Stone in Cannon Street, by which Shakespeare lays one of the Jack Cade scenes of his *Henry VI*. There are the stately water-gates along the Embankment, too; here and there an old house or so, such as that above the Inner Temple gateway, those of Staple Inn, those in Cloth Fair, and over in the Borough High Street; a few ancient Inns, like the Mitre off Ely Place, the Dick Whittington in Cloth Fair, the George in Southwark; some dozen of churches, including Westminster Abbey (in whose Jerusalem Chamber the translators of the Bible held their meetings), St. Saviour's, Southwark, St. Bartholomew the Great in Smithfield, St. Andrew Undershaft, St. Ethelburga's and St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, in which latter parish it seems probable that Shakespeare was for a while a householder; otherwise Elizabethan London has dwindled to little but remembered sites of once-famous buildings and streets that have changed in everything but their names.

Until quite recently none of us knew of any address in London that had ever been Shakespeare's; we knew of no house, of no street even, which had once numbered him among its tenants, though we know that he passed at least twenty of the busiest and most momentous years of his life in the metropolis. There is a plausible but vague tradition that during some part of that period he had lodgings in Southwark near the Globe Theatre, in which he acted, for which he wrote plays, and of which he was one of the proprietors. There used to be an inscription: "Here lived William Shakespeare," on the face of an old gabled house in Aldersgate Street, but there was never a rag of evidence to support the statement. We have no letters of Shakespeare, but we have one or two that refer to him, and one written to him by Richard Quiney, and I think we may infer from this latter that Shakespeare occasionally visited Quiney, who was a vintner, dwelling at the sign of the Bell in Carter Lane. Otherwise, except for a handful of small-beer chronicles about him that were picked up in theatrical circles two or three generations after his death, we had no record of any incident in his London life that brought us into actual personal touch with him until little more than two years ago. Then an American professor, Mr. Charles William Wallace, came over and did what our English students do not appear to have had the energy or enterprise to do for themselves – he toiled carefully through the dusty piles of documents preserved in the Record Office, and succeeded in unearthing one of the most interesting Shakespearean discoveries that have ever

been made – a discovery that gives us vividly intimate glimpses of Shakespeare's life in London, and establishes beyond question his place of residence here in the years when he was writing some of the greatest of his dramas.

In 1587 the company of the “Queen's Players” made their first appearance in Stratford-on-Avon, and it was about this date, so far as can be traced, that Shakespeare ran away from home; so you may reasonably play with a fancy that he joined this company in some very minor capacity and travelled with them to London. At this time, Burbage, who was by profession an actor and by trade a carpenter and joiner, was owner and manager of “The Theatre,” which stood in Shoreditch near the site of the present Standard Theatre, and close by was a rival house, “The Curtain” (commemorated nowadays by Curtain Road); and according to the legend, which has developed into a legend of exact detail, yet rests on nothing but the airiest rumour, it was outside one or both of these theatres Shakespeare picked up a living on his arrival in London by minding horses whilst their owners were inside witnessing a performance.

By 1593 Shakespeare had become known as an actor and as a dramatist. He had revised and tinkered at various plays for Burbage's company, and as a consequence had been charged with plagiarism by poor Greene, whose *Groatsworth of Wit* (published after he had died miserably in Dowgate) pours scorn on the “upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a players hide* supposes he is as well able to

bumbast out a blank verse as the best of you; and being an absolute *Johannes fac totum*, is in his own conceit the only Shakespeare in a countrie.” For his acting, Shakespeare appears for the first time in the Lord Chamberlain’s accounts of 1594 as having taken equal shares with William Kemp and Richard Burbage in a sum of twenty pounds “for two severall Comedies or Interludes shewed by them” before Queen Elizabeth at Christmas 1593.

After the Theatre of Shoreditch was pulled down in 1598, Burbage built the Globe Theatre on Bankside, Southwark, on the ground of which part of Barclay & Perkins’s brewery now stands; and Shakespeare, “being a deserveing man,” was taken as one of the partners and received a “chief-actor’s share” of the profits. And it is to this prosperous period of his London career that Professor Wallace’s recent discoveries belong.

In 1598 there lived in a shop at the corner of Silver Street and Monkwell Street a certain Christopher Mountjoy, a maker of wigs and fashionable headdresses. He was a Frenchman, born at Cressy, and probably a refugee Huguenot. His household consisted of a wife and daughter, an apprentice named Stephen Bellott, and one lodger, and this lodger was William Shakespeare. Being out of his apprenticeship in 1604, Stephen had six pounds from his master and, with this and his own savings, went travelling into Spain, but returned towards the end of the year and resumed work again at Mountjoy’s shop. In his ’prentice days Stephen seems to have formed some shy attachment to his master’s daughter, Mary, but because of his



lack of means and prospects, or because he was naturally reticent, he had made no attempt to press his suit, and Madame Mountjoy, seeing how the young people were affected to each other, followed the fashion of the time and persuaded Shakespeare, who had then been living under the same roof with them for six years, to act as match-maker between her and the hesitating lover. She one day laid the case before Shakespeare and asked his good offices, as Professor Wallace has it; she told him that "if he could bring the young man to make a proposal of marriage, a dower fitting to their station should be settled upon them at marriage. This was the sum of fifty pounds in money of that time, or approximately four hundred pounds in money of to-day." Shakespeare consented to undertake this delicate duty; he spoke with young Bellott, and the outcome of his negotiations was that Stephen and Mary were married, as the entry in the church register shows, at St. Olave, Silver Street, on the 19th November 1604.

On the death of Madame Mountjoy in 1606, Stephen and his wife went back to live with the father and help him in his business, but they soon fell out with him, and became on such bad terms that some six months later they left him and took lodgings with George Wilkins, a victualler, who kept an inn in the parish of St. Sepulchre's. The quarrel between them culminated in Stephen Bellott bringing an action in the Court of Requests in 1612, to recover from his father-in-law a promised dower of sixty pounds and to ensure that Mountjoy carried out an alleged

arrangement to bequeath a sum of two hundred pounds to him by his will. At the Record Office Professor Wallace found all the legal documents relating to these proceedings, and amongst them are the depositions of Shakespeare setting forth to the best of his recollection his own share in the arranging of the marriage. From these depositions, and from those of other witnesses who make reference to him, one gets the first clear and authentic revelation of Shakespeare's home life in London.

He lived with the Mountjoys over that shop at the corner of Monkwell Street for at least six years, down to the date of the wedding, and there is little doubt that he stayed on with them after that. It is more than likely, indeed, that he was still boarding there when he appeared as a witness in the 1612 lawsuit and stated that he had been intimate with the family some "ten years, more or less." Throughout the later of those years he was absent on occasional visits to Stratford, and hitherto it has been generally assumed (on the negative evidence that no trace of him could be found after this date) that he returned and settled down in Stratford permanently about 1609.

Taking only the six years we are certain of, however, he wrote between 1598 and 1604 *Henry V.*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Othello*. In the two years following, whilst it is pretty sure he was still dwelling with the Mountjoys, he wrote *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, and the fact that he had his home here during the

period in which he was writing ten of his plays – three of them amongst the greatest he or any man ever wrote – makes this corner of Monkwell Street the most glorious literary landmark in the world.

The house in which he lodged was destroyed by the Great Fire, and the site is occupied now by an old tavern, “The Cooper’s Arms.” Almost facing it, just the other side of Silver Street, is a fragment of the churchyard of St. Olave’s. The church, in which the apprentice Stephen was married to Mary Mountjoy, vanished also in the Great Fire and was not rebuilt, and this weedy remnant of the churchyard with its three or four crumbling tombs is all that survives of the street as Shakespeare knew it; his glance must have rested on that forlorn garden of the dead as often as he looked from the windows opposite or came out at Mountjoy’s door.

Turning to the right when he came out at that door, half a minute’s walk up Falcon Street would have brought him into Aldersgate Street, so the announcement on one of the shops there that he had lived in it may have been nothing worse than a perfectly honest mistake; it was known as a fact that he lived thereabouts, and tradition settled on the wrong house instead of on the right one, that was a hundred yards or so away from it. But when Shakespeare issued from Mountjoy’s shop you may depend that his feet more frequently trod the ground in the opposite direction; he would go to the left, along Silver Street, into Wood Street, and down the length of that to Cheapside, where, almost

fronting the end of Wood Street, stood the Mermaid Tavern, and he must needs pass to the right or left of it, by way of Friday Street, or Bread Street, across Cannon Street and then down Huggin Lane or Little Bread Street Hill to Thames Street, whence, from Queenhithe, Puddle Wharf, or Paul's Wharf, he could take boat over the Thames to the Globe Theatre on Bankside.

There has been no theatre on Bankside these many years; there is nothing there or in that vicinity now that belongs to Shakespeare's age except some scattered, ancient, inglorious houses that he may or may not have known and the stately cathedral of St. Saviour. This holds still the span of ground that has belonged to it since before Chaucer's day. You may enter and see there the quaint effigy of Chaucer's contemporary, Gower, sleeping on his five-century-old tomb; and here and there about the aisles and in the nave are memorials of remembered or forgotten men and women who died while Shakespeare was living, and somewhere in it were buried men, too, who were intimate with him, though no evidence of their burial there remains except in the parish register. In the "monthly accounts" of St. Saviour's you come upon these entries concerning two of his contemporary dramatists: —

"1625. *August* 29th, John Fletcher, a poet, in the church."

"1638. *March* 18th, Philip Massinger, stranger, in the church."

the inference being that Fletcher had resided in the parish, and Massinger, the “stranger,” had not. But earlier than either of these, it is on record that on the 31st December 1607, Shakespeare’s youngest brother, Edmund, “a player,” was buried here, and a fee of twenty shillings was paid by some one for “a forenoon knell of the great bell.”

St. Saviour’s, then, the sites of the Globe Theatre and the Mermaid, and that corner of Monkwell Street are London’s chief Shakespearean shrines. The discovery of the Monkwell Street residence emphasises that before Ben Jonson founded his Apollo Club at the Devil Tavern by Temple Bar, Cheapside and not Fleet Street was the heart of literary London. Whilst Shakespeare made his home with the Mountjoys, Ben Jonson and Dekker were living near him in Cripplegate, in which district also resided Johnson the actor, Anthony Munday, and other of Shakespeare’s intimates; nearer still, in Aldermanbury, lived Heminges and Condell, his brother actors, who first collected and published his plays after his death: and George Wilkins, at whose inn near St. Sepulchre’s Stephen Bellott and his wife lodged after their quarrel with Mountjoy, was a minor dramatist who, besides collaborating with Rowley, collaborated with Shakespeare himself in the writing of *Pericles*. Coryat, the eccentric author of the *Crudities*, lived in Bow Lane; Donne, who was born in Wood Street, wrote his early poems there in the house of the good merchant, his father, and was a frequenter of the Mermaid.

In 1608 Milton was born in Bread Street (Shakespeare must have passed his door many a time in his goings to and fro), and grew up to live and work within the City walls in Aldersgate Street, and in Bartholomew Close, and just without them in Bunhill Row, and was brought back within them to be buried in Cripplegate Church. These, and its earlier and many later literary associations, help to halo Cheapside and its environs, and, in spite of the sordid commercial aspect and history that have overtaken it, to make it for ever a street in the kingdom of romance.

And the chief glory of Cheapside itself is, of course, the Mermaid. One of these days a fitting sign will be placed above the spot where it stood, and set forth in letters of gold the great names that are inseparable from its story, and first among these will be the names of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, Selden, Donne, Carew, Fuller, Sir Walter Raleigh.

The Mermaid rose on Cheapside with a side entrance in Friday Street, and of evenings when no business took him to the theatre, or towards midnight when he was on his way home from it, Shakespeare often turned aside into this famous meeting-place of the immortals of his generation. Everybody is familiar with those rapturous lines in Beaumont's letter to Ben Jonson, "written before he and Master Fletcher came to London with two of the precedent comedies, then not finished, which deferred their merry meetings at the Mermaid;" but one cannot talk of the Mermaid without remembering them and quoting from them once again: —

“In this warm shine  
I lie and dream of your full Mermaid wine...  
Methinks the little wit I had is lost  
Since I saw you: for wit is like a rest  
Held up at tennis, which men do the best  
With the best gamesters! What things have we seen  
Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have been  
So nimble and so full of subtile flame  
As if that every one from whence they came  
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,  
And had resolved to live a fool the rest  
Of his dull life; then when there hath been thrown  
Wit able enough to justify the town  
For three days past, wit that might warrant be  
For the whole city to talk foolishly  
Till that were cancelled; and when that was gone,  
We left an air behind us which alone  
Was able to make the next two companies  
Right witty; though but downright fools, mere wise.”

Well might Keats ask in a much later day (probably whilst he was tenanting the Cheapside rooms over Bird-in-Hand Court in which he wrote the sonnet on Chapman's Homer):

“Souls of poets dead and gone,  
What Elysium have ye known,  
Happy field or mossy cavern  
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?”

And in our own time, in *Christmas at the Mermaid*, Watts-Dunton has recreated that glamorous hostelry and brought together again the fine spirits who used to frequent it – brought them together in an imaginary winter's night shortly after Shakespeare had departed from them and gone back to Stratford for good. Jonson is of that visionary company, and Raleigh, Lodge, Dekker, Chapman, Drayton and Heywood, and it is Heywood who breaks in, after the tale-telling and reminiscent talk, with —

“More than all the pictures, Ben,  
Winter weaves by wood or stream,  
Christmas loves our London, when  
Rise thy clouds of wassail-steam:  
Clouds like these that, curling, take  
Forms of faces gone, and wake  
Many a lay from lips we loved, and make  
London like a dream.”

It is because of the memories that sleep within it, like music in a lute until a hand that knows touches it, because of all it has been, and because it is never more wonderful than when you can so make it like a dream, that I give thanks for the fog that comes down upon London at intervals, in the grey months, and with silent wizardries conjures it out of sight. Look at this same Cheapside on a clear day, and it is simply a plain, prosperous,



common-place street, but when a fog steals quietly through it and spiritualises it to something of the vagueness and grandeur and mystery of poetry it is no longer a mere earthly thoroughfare under the control of the Corporation; it becomes a dream-street in some mist-built city of the clouds, and you feel that at any moment the pavements might thin out and shred away and let you through into starry, illimitable spaces. Where the brown fog warms to a misty, golden glow you know there are shop windows. As you advance the street-lamps twinkle in the thick air, as if they were kindled magically at your coming and flickered out again directly you were past. The coiling darkness is loud with noises of life, but you walk among them with a sense of aloofness and solitude, for you can see nothing but flitting shadows all about you and know that you are yourself only a shadow to them.

For me, three of the loveliest and most strangely touching sights of London are the stars shining very high in the blue and very quietly when you look up at them from the roaring depths of a crowded, naphtha-flaring, poverty-stricken market street; a sunrise brightening over the Thames below London Bridge, while the barges are still asleep with the gleam of their lamps showing pale in the dawn; and the blurred lights and ghostly buildings of a long city road that is clothed in mystery and transfigured by a brooding, dream-haunted fog. Perhaps this is only because of the dim feeling one has that the stars and the sunrise are of the things that the wasting centuries have not changed; and the fog that blots out to-day makes it easier to realise that yesterday and

the life of yesterday are close about us still, and that we might see them with our waking eyes, even as we see them in our dreams, if the darkness would but lift.

# **CHAPTER III**

## **WHERE POPE STAYED AT BATTERSEA**

Coming from Chelsea by way of Battersea Bridge, you go a few yards along the Battersea Bridge Road, then turn aside into Church Road, and presently you pass a narrow, mean street of small houses, which is Bolingbroke Road, and serves to remind you that the Bolingbrokes were once lords of the manor of Battersea and proprietors of the ferry that crossed the river hereabouts before the first Battersea Bridge was built. A little further down Church Road, past squat and grimy houses on the one hand and gaunt walls and yawning gateways of mills, distilleries, and miscellaneous “works” on the other, and you come to a gloomy gateway that has “To Bolingbroke House” painted up on one of its side-walls. Through this opening you see a busy, littered yard; straw and scraps of paper and odds and ends of waste blow about on its stones; stacks of packing-cases and wooden boxes rise up against a drab background of brick buildings, and deep in the yard, with a space before it in which men are at work and a waggon is loading, you find the forlorn left wing – all that survives – of what was once the family seat of Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, whose chief title to remembrance now is that he was the friend of Alexander Pope.

Worn and dingy with age, its stone porch stained and crumbling, and some of its windows broken, the place has a strange, neglected look, though it is still used for business purposes, and you have glimpses of clerks writing at their desks in the rooms from which Pope used to gaze out on very different surroundings.

It is difficult, indeed, to associate such a house and such a neighbourhood as this has now become with so fastidious, finicking, and modish a poet as Pope. All the adjacent streets are squalid, poverty-stricken, noisy; along the main road, almost within hearing, trams and motor-buses shuttle continually to and fro: except for a quaint, dirty, weary-looking cottage that still stands dreaming here and there among its ugly, mid-Victorian neighbours, and for the river that laps below the fence at the end of the yard, there is scarcely anything left of the quiet, green, rural Battersea village with which he was familiar; even the church whose steeple rises near by above the mills, and in which Bolingbroke was buried, was rebuilt a few years after his death.

Nevertheless, this weatherbeaten, time-wasted old house down the yard is the same house that, when it stood with Bolingbroke's lawn before it and his pleasant gardens sloping to the Thames, was the occasional home of Pope, and numbered Swift, Thomson, and other of the great men of letters of Queen Anne's reign among its visitors. One of the rooms overlooking the river, a room lined with cedar, beautifully inlaid, is still

known as “Mr. Pope’s parlour”; it is said to have been used by Pope as his study, and that he wrote his *Essay on Man* in it.

It is therefore the more fitting that Pope should have dedicated *An Essay on Man* to Bolingbroke, whom he addresses in the opening lines with that exhortation: —

“Awake, my St. John, leave all meaner things  
To low ambition, and the pride of kings!”

He dedicated also one of his Imitations of Horace to —

“St. John, whose love indulged my labours past,  
Matures my present, and shall bound my last.”

A man of brilliant gifts, both as writer and statesman, Bolingbroke became involved in the political intrigues of his day, and in 1715 had to flee to Calais to escape arrest for high treason. Eight years later he was allowed to return, and his forfeited estates were given back to him. On the death of his father he took up his residence at Battersea, and it was there that he died of cancer in 1751. “Pope used to speak of him,” writes Warton, “as a being of a superior order that had condescended to visit this lower world;” and he, in his turn, said of Pope, “I never in my life knew a man that had so tender a heart for his particular friends, or more general friendship for mankind.”

And on the whole one feels that this character of Pope was truer than Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s presentation of him as

“the wicked asp of Twickenham”; for if he was viciously cruel to Colley Cibber and the poor Grub Street scribblers whom he satirises in *The Dunciad*, he was kindness itself to Akenside and other of his younger rivals in reading their manuscripts and recommending them to his publishers; and if he retorted bitterly upon Addison after he had fallen out with him, he kept unbroken to the last his close friendship with Swift, Gay, Garth, Atterbury, Bolingbroke, and with Arbuthnot, for whose services in helping him through “this long disease, my life” he expressed a touchingly affectionate gratitude. If he had been the heartless little monster his enemies painted him he could not have felt so tireless and beautiful a love for his father and mother and, despite his own feebleness and shattered health, have devoted himself so assiduously to the care of his mother in her declining years. “O friend,” he writes to Arbuthnot, in the Prologue to the Satires: —

“O friend, may each domestic bliss be thine!  
Be no unpleasing melancholy mine:  
Me let the tender office long engage  
To rock the cradle of reposing age,  
With lenient arts extend a mother’s breath,  
Make languor smile, and smooth the bed of death,  
Explore the thought, explain the asking eye,  
And keep a while one parent from the sky.”

All his life, Pope dwelt in London or on the skirts of it. He was twenty-eight when, soon after the death of his father in 1715, he

leased the famous villa at Twickenham and took his mother to live with him there, and it was from there when she died, a very old lady of ninety-three, that on the 10th June 1783, he wrote to an artist friend the letter that enshrines his sorrow: —

“As I know you and I naturally desire to see one another, I hoped that this day our wishes would have met and brought you hither. And this for the very reason which possibly might hinder your coming, that my poor mother is dead. I thank God her death was easy, as her life was innocent, and as it cost her not a groan or even a sigh, there is yet upon her countenance such an expression of tranquillity, nay, almost of pleasure, that, far from horrid, it is even amiable to behold it. It would form the finest image of a saint expired that ever painter drew, and it would be the greatest obligation art could ever bestow on a friend if you could come and sketch it for me. I am sure if there be no prevalent obstacle you will leave every common business to do this; and I hope to see you this evening as late as you will, or to-morrow morning as early, before this winter flower is faded. I will defer her interment till to-morrow night. I know you love me or I would not have written this – I could not (at this time) have written at all. Adieu. May you die as happily.”

From Twickenham Pope made frequent visits to London, where he stayed in lodgings, or at the houses of friends; and in the last four or five years of his life, after Bolingbroke had settled down at Battersea, he put up as often as not at Bolingbroke House. Of his personal appearance at this date there are a

good many records. One of his numerous lampooners, unkindly enough but very graphically, pictures him as —

“Meagre and wan, and steeple crowned,  
His visage long, his shoulders round;  
His crippled corse two spindle pegs  
Support, instead of human legs;  
His shrivelled skin’s of dusty grain,  
A cricket’s voice, and monkey’s brain.”

His old enemy, John Dennis, sneering at his hunched and drooping figure, described him as “a young, short, squab gentleman, the very bow of the god of love.” He had to be laced up tightly in bodices made of stiff canvas, so that he might hold himself erect, and, says Dr. Johnson, “his stature was so low, that to bring him to a level with a common table it was necessary to raise his seat. But his face was not displeasing, and his eyes were animated and vivid.” And here is Sir Joshua Reynolds’s word-picture of him: “He was about four feet six inches high, very hump-backed and deformed. He wore a black coat, and, according to the fashion of that time, had on a little sword. He had a large and very fine eye, and a long, handsome nose; his mouth had those peculiar marks which are always found in the mouths of crooked persons, and the muscles which run across the cheek were so strongly marked that they seemed like small cords.”

This is the queer, misshapen, pathetic little shape that haunts



that old-world house in the yard at Battersea, and you may gather something of the life he lived there, and of the writing with which he busied himself in the cedar parlour, from these extracts out of two of his letters, both of which were written to Warburton: —

*“January 12, 1743-4.*

“Of the public I can tell you nothing worthy of the reflection of a reasonable man; and of myself only an account that would give you pain; for my asthma has increased every week since you last heard from me to the degree of confining me totally to the fireside; so that I have hardly seen any of my friends but two (Lord and Lady Bolingbroke), who happen to be divided from the world as much as myself, and are constantly retired at Battersea. There I have passed much of my time, and often wished you of the company, as the best I know to make me not regret the loss of others, and to prepare me for a nobler scene than any mortal greatness can open to us. I fear by the account you gave me of the time you design to come this way, one of them (Lord B.) whom I much wish you had a glimpse of (as a being *paullo minus ab angelio*), will be gone again, unless you pass some weeks in London before Mr. Allen arrives there in March. My present indisposition takes up almost all my hours to render a very few of them supportable; yet I go on softly to prepare the great edition of my things with your notes, and as fast as I receive any from you, I add others in order (determining to finish the Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot and two or three of the best of Horace, particularly that of Augustus, first), which will fall into the same volume with

the Essay on Man. I determined to publish a small number of the Essay, and of the other on Criticism, ere now, as a sample of the rest, but Bowyer advised delay, though I now see I was not in the wrong.”

*“February 21, 1743-4.*

“I own that the late encroachments on my constitution make me willing to see the end of all further care about me or my works. I would rest from the one in a full resignation of my being to be disposed of by the Father of all mercy, and for the other (though indeed a trifle, yet a trifle may be some example) I would commit them to the candour of a sensible and reflecting judge, rather than to the malice of every short-sighted and malevolent critic or inadvertent and censorious reader. And no hand can set them in so good a light, or so well turn them best side to the day, as your own. This obliges me to confess I have for some months thought myself going, and that not slowly, down the hill – the rather as every attempt of the physicians, and still the last medicines more forcible in their nature, have utterly failed to serve me. I was at last, about seven days ago, taken with so violent a fit at Battersea, that my friends, Lord Bolingbroke and Lord Marchmont, sent for present help to the surgeon, whose bleeding me, I am persuaded, saved my life by the instantaneous effect it had, and which has continued so much to amend me that I have passed five days without oppression, and recovered, what I have three days wanted, some degree of expectoration and some hours together of sleep. I can now go to Twickenham, to try if the

air will not take some part in reviving me, if I can avoid colds, and between that place and Battersea, with my Lord Bolingbroke, I will pass what I have of life while he stays, which I can tell you, to my great satisfaction, will be this fortnight or three weeks yet.”

In the year after writing this Pope came to the end of all further care about himself and his works; he died at Twickenham, and lies buried under the middle aisle of Twickenham Church.

## CHAPTER IV

### HOGARTH

Before he took up residence at the Twickenham villa, Pope lived for some time with his father in one of the houses of Mawson's Buildings (now Mawson Row), Chiswick. So far it has been impossible to decide which of these five red-brick houses is the one that was theirs, for the only evidence of their tenancy consists of certain letters preserved at the British Museum, which are addressed to "Alexr. Pope, Esquire, Mawson's Buildings, in Chiswick," and on the backs of these are written portions of the original drafts of Pope's translation of the *Iliad*. James Ralph, the unfortunate poetaster whom Pope satirised in his *Dunciad*, was also a native of Chiswick, and lies buried in the parish churchyard. One other link Pope has with Chiswick – he wrote a rather poor epigram on Thomas Wood, who resided there, and who seems to have been connected with the Church, for according to the poet —

"Tom Wood of Chiswick, deep divine,  
To painter Kent gave all his coin;  
'Tis the first coin, I'm bold to say,  
That ever churchman gave away."

This Kent, I take it, was the man of the same name who

likewise lived at Chiswick in Pope's day, and was more notable as a landscape gardener than as a painter.

But, to say nothing of William Morris's more recent association with the district, the most interesting house in Chiswick is Hogarth's. It is a red-brick villa of the Queen Anne style, with a quaint, overhanging bay window, and stands in a large, walled garden, not far from the parish church. For many years this was Hogarth's summer residence – his "villakin," as he called it. His workshop, or studio, that used to be at the foot of the garden, has been demolished; otherwise the house remains very much as it was when he occupied it.

Hogarth was essentially a town man; he was almost, if not quite, as good a Londoner as Lamb. He was born in Bartholomew Close, West Smithfield, that storied place where Milton had lived before, and Washington Irving went to live after, him; and he spent nearly all his life in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. He was rarely absent from London at all, and never for long; even when he was supposed to be passing his summers at his Chiswick villa, he made frequent excursions into town, and would put up for a few days at his house in Leicester Square – or Leicester Fields, as it then was.

In 1712 Hogarth went to serve a six years' apprenticeship to Ellis Gamble, a silver-plate engraver, in Cranbourne Alley (now Cranbourne Street), and, on the death of his father in 1718, he started business for himself as an engraver in what had been his father's house in Long Lane, West Smithfield, and

later removed to the corner of Cranbourne Alley, leaving his mother with his two sisters, who had opened shop as mercers, at the old Long Lane address. He engraved for them a shop card, duly setting forth that “Mary and Ann Hogarth, from the old Frock Shop, the corner of the Long Wall, facing the Cloysters, Removed to ye King’s Arms joining to ye Little Britain Gate, near Long Walk, Sells ye best and most Fashionable Ready Made Frocks, Sutes of Fustian, Ticken, and Holland, Stript Dimity and Flanel Waistcoats, blue and canvas Frocks, and bluecoat Boys’ Drars., Likewise Fustians, Tickens, Hollands, white stript Dimitys, white and stript Flannels in ye piece, by Wholesale or Retale at Reasonable Rates.”

Hogarth was very self-satisfied and rather illiterate; his spelling and his grammar – as in this shop-card – were continually going wrong. But he was kindly, good-hearted, high-minded, and had imagination and an original genius that could laugh at the nice, mechanical accomplishments of the schoolmaster. It was Nollekens, the sculptor, who said that he frequently saw Hogarth sauntering round Leicester Square, playing the nurse, “with his master’s sickly child hanging its head over his shoulder.” That was in the early days, when he was still serving his time to Gamble, and not even dreaming, I suppose, that he would one day own the big house at the south-east corner of the Square, would enjoy some of his highest triumphs and sharpest humiliations in it, and die in it at last, leaving behind him work that would give him a place among the very first of

English painters.

Even before so fastidious a critic as Whistler had declared that Hogarth was “the greatest English artist who ever lived,” Hazlitt had said much the same thing, and paid a glowing tribute to the vitality and dramatic life of his pictures; but perhaps no critic has written a finer, more incisive criticism on him than Lamb did in his essay on “The Genius and Character of Hogarth.” Lamb had been familiar with two of Hogarth’s series of prints – “The Harlot’s Progress,” and “The Rake’s Progress” – since his boyhood; and though he was keenly alive to the humour of them, he denied that their chief appeal was to the risible faculties. It was their profound seriousness, their stern satire, the wonderful creative force that underlay them, that most impressed him. “I was pleased,” he says, “with the reply of a gentleman who, being asked which book he most esteemed in his library, answered ‘Shakespeare’; being asked which he esteemed next best, replied ‘Hogarth.’ His graphic representations are indeed books; they have the teeming, fruitful, suggestive meaning of words. Other pictures we look at; his prints we read.” He protests against confounding “the painting of subjects in common or vulgar life with the being a vulgar artist. The quantity of thought which Hogarth crowds into every picture would alone unvulgarise every subject he might choose. Let us take the lowest of his subjects, the print called ‘Gin Lane.’ Here is plenty of poverty and low stuff to disgust upon a superficial view; and accordingly a cold spectator feels himself immediately disgusted and repelled. I have seen

many turn away from it, not being able to bear it. The same persons would, perhaps, have looked with great complacency upon Poussin's celebrated picture of the 'Plague of Athens.' Disease and death and bewildering terror in Athenian garments are endurable, and come, as the delicate critics express it, within the 'limits of pleasurable sensation.' But the scenes of their own St. Giles's, delineated by their own countryman, are too shocking to think of... We are for ever deceiving ourselves with names and theories. We call one man a great historical painter because he has taken for his subjects kings or great men, or transactions over which time has thrown a grandeur. We term another the painter of common life, and set him down in our minds for an artist of an inferior class, without reflecting whether the quantity of thought shown by the latter may not much more than level the distinction which their mere choice of subjects may seem to place between them; or whether, in fact, from that very common life a great artist may not extract as deep an interest as another man from that which we are pleased to call history." He found that, though many of the pictures had much in them that is ugly and repellent, "there is in most of them that sprinkling of the better nature which, like holy water, chases away and disperses the contagion of the bad. They have this in them besides, that they bring us acquainted with the everyday human face." And because of this, of their truth to contemporary life, and the vigorous realism of the stories they tell, he ranked the work of Hogarth not only high among that of the world's great painters, but with the best novels



of such men as Smollett and Fielding.

According to a note in his fragmentary autobiography, Hogarth conceived an early admiration for the paintings of Sir James Thornhill, and, somewhere about 1727, he joined the painting school that Sir James established in the Piazza, at the corner of James Street, Covent Garden. And Sir James soon seems to have taken a particular interest in his pupil, and had him as a frequent visitor to his house at 75 Dean Street, Soho; and on March 23rd, 1729, he eloped with his teacher's daughter, and they were married at old Paddington Church. There are paintings and decorations still to be seen on the walls of the Dean Street house, in some of which Hogarth is believed to have had a hand.

After his marriage, Hogarth lived for a while at Lambeth; but it was not long before he was reconciled to his father-in-law. In 1730 he was engaged with Sir James Thornhill on their famous picture of "The House of Commons"; and a year later, when he was engraving his series of prints "The Harlot's Progress," he and his wife had apparently taken up quarters with Sir James in the Piazza.

"The Harlot's Progress," and the issue of "The Rake's Progress" shortly afterwards, lifted Hogarth into fame. He began to move in better society, and was to be met with at the fashionable as well as at the Bohemian clubs of the day. He and Thornhill founded the Arts Club at the Turk's Head, in Gerrard Street; and, after the latter's death, he took over Thornhill's art school, and transferred it to Peter's Court, St. Martin's Lane.

Occasionally he visited Richardson, the novelist, in Salisbury Court; and it was here he first made the acquaintance of Dr. Johnson. He struck up a friendship with Garrick, too, and painted several portraits of him, for one of which he received two hundred pounds; and with Fielding, of whom he has given us the only portrait we possess.

By 1733 Hogarth was prosperous enough to take the house in Leicester Square that was pulled down, in 1870, to furnish a site for the Archbishop Tenison School that has replaced it; and in 1749, “having sacrificed enough to his fame and fortune,” he purchased the villa at Chiswick as a summer holiday home, and became a familiar figure about the Chiswick lanes from time to time – “a blue-eyed, intelligent little man, with a scar over his right eye, and wearing a fur cap.” Allan Cunningham furnishes a more vivid description of his personal appearance in his *Lives of the Painters*, where he says he was “rather below the middle height; his eye was peculiarly bright and piercing; his look shrewd, sarcastic, and intelligent; the forehead high and round. He was active in person, bustling in manner, and fond of affecting a little state and importance. He was of a temper cheerful, joyous, and companionable, fond of mirth and good-fellowship.” Benjamin West called him a strutting, consequential little man; and, one way and another, we know that he was sturdy, obstinate, pugnacious, and that once he thrashed a ruffian whom he found maltreating the beautiful drummeress that he sketched in his picture of Southwark Fair. Possibly that scar over his right

eye was a record of this chivalrous deed.

There are very few records of his home life, and these are of the homeliest, most ordinary sort. He was fond of smoking, and the arm-chair, in which he was wont to sit with his pipe, is still preserved at Chiswick. He had a favourite dog, a pet cat, and a bullfinch, which he buried in his Chiswick garden, commemorating them with tablets that have now vanished from the wall, the bird's epitaph being "Alas, poor Dick!" and the dog's, "Life to the last enjoyed, here Pompey lies" – which parodies a line in the *Candidate*, by that dissipated, brilliant satirist, Charles Churchill: "Life to the last enjoyed, here Churchill lies."

The *Candidate* was published at the beginning of 1764, and on the 25th October of that year Hogarth died. Churchill had been a warm friend of his, but before the end had become one of his bitterest enemies – that enmity arising in this wise. In 1762 Hogarth published a political print called the *Times*, in which he supported the policy of Lord Bute, and ridiculed Pitt, Temple, and Wilkes. By way of retaliation, Wilkes wrote a scathing attack upon Hogarth in his paper, the *North Briton*, in which he made a sneering reference to Mrs. Hogarth. This stirred Hogarth to anger; and when Wilkes was presently arrested on a charge of high treason, he sat in court and sketched the prisoner, immortalising his villainous squint, and accentuating all the worst qualities in his features. On this print making its appearance, Churchill, a staunch friend and partisan of Wilkes,

took up the cudgels, and scarified Hogarth without mercy in *An Epistle to William Hogarth* (1763), praising his art, but pouring contempt upon his envy and self-esteem, and affecting to believe that he was in his dotage. He can laud the genius, he says, but not the man.

“Freely let him wear  
The wreath which Genius wove and planted there:  
Foe as I am, should envy tear it down,  
Myself would labour to replace the crown...  
Hogarth unrivalled stands, and shall engage  
Unrivalled praise to the most distant age.”

But for the man —

“Hogarth, stand forth – I dare thee to be tried  
In that great Court where Conscience must preside;  
At that most solemn bar hold up thy hand;  
Think before whom, on what account you stand;  
Speak, but consider well; – from first to last  
Review thy life, weigh every action past.  
Canst thou remember from thy earliest youth,  
And as thy God must judge thee, speak the truth,  
A single instance where, self laid aside,  
And Justice taking place of Fear and Pride,  
Thou with an equal eye didst Genius view,  
And give to Merit what was Merit’s due?  
Genius and Merit are a sure offence,

And thy soul sickens at the name of sense.  
Is any one so foolish to succeed?  
On Envy's altar he is doomed to bleed;  
Hogarth, a guilty pleasure in his eyes,  
The place of executioner supplies;  
See how he gloats, enjoys the sacred feast,  
And proves himself by cruelty a priest...  
Oft have I known thee, Hogarth, weak and vain,  
Thyself the idol of thy awkward strain,  
Through the dull measure of a summer's day,  
In phrase most vile, prate long, long hours away,  
Whilst friends with friends all gaping sit, and gaze,  
To hear a Hogarth babble Hogarth's praise...  
With all the symptoms of assured decay,  
With age and sickness pinched and worn away,  
Pale quivering lips, lank cheeks, and faltering tongue,  
The spirits out of tune, the nerves unstrung,  
The body shrivelled up, the dim eyes sunk  
Within their sockets deep, thy weak hams shrunk,  
The body's weight unable to sustain,  
The stream of life scarce trembling through the vein,  
More than half killed by honest truths which fell,  
Through thy own fault, from men who wished thee well —  
Canst thou, e'en thus, thy thoughts to vengeance give  
And, dead to all things else, to malice live?  
Hence, dotard, to thy closet; shut thee in;  
By deep repentance wash away thy sin;  
From haunts of men to shame and sorrow fly,  
And, on the verge of death, learn how to die!"

Hurt and deeply mortified, a month later Hogarth satirised Churchill's former connection with the Church and present loose living in a caricature which represented him as a bear wearing torn clerical bands, with ruffles on his paws, in one hand a pot of porter, and in the other a bundle of lies and copies of the *North Briton*. Garrick had heard that Churchill was making ready to issue that vitriolic satire of his, and hastened to beg him, "by the regard you profess to me, that you don't tilt at my friend Hogarth before you see me. He is a great and original genius. I love him as a man, and reverence him as an artist. I would not for all the politics and politicians in the universe that you two should have the least cause of ill-will to each other. I am sure you will not publish against him if you think twice." One could honour Garrick if it were for nothing else but that letter; but it was written in vain, and the exasperation and humiliation that Hogarth suffered under Churchill's lash are said to have hastened his death. He had been broken in health and ailing all through the summer of 1764, but took several plates down to his Chiswick villa with him for retouching, and – possibly with some foreboding of his own approaching dissolution – drew for a new volume of his prints a tailpiece depicting "the end of all things."

But he could not be satisfied to keep away from London, and on 25th October was conveyed from Chiswick to his house in Leicester Square, "very weak," says Nichols, "but remarkably cheerful, and, receiving an agreeable letter from Dr.

Franklin” (Benjamin Franklin was, by the way, dwelling at this time in Bartholomew Close; he did not remove to 7 Craven Street, Strand, until three years later), “he drew up a rough draft of an answer to it; but, going to bed, was seized with a vomiting, upon which he rang the bell with such violence that he broke it, and expired about two hours afterwards in the arms of Mrs. Mary Lewis, who was called up on his being suddenly taken ill.”

He was buried in Chiswick Churchyard; and in 1771 his friends erected a monument over him, the epitaph on which was written by Garrick: —

“Farewell, great Painter of Mankind,  
Who reached the noblest point of Art,  
Whose pictured morals charm the Mind,  
And through the eye correct the Heart.

If Genius fire thee, Reader, stay;  
If Nature touch thee, drop a tear;  
If neither move thee, turn away,  
For Hogarth’s honoured dust lies here.”

Garrick sent his verses to Dr. Johnson, who frankly criticised them, and offered him a revised version, the first lines of which were a distinct improvement: —

“The hand of Art here torpid lies  
That traced the essential form of Grace;  
Here Death has closed the curious eyes

That saw the manners in the face.”...

Garrick preferred his own composition, slightly altered, as it now appears; but Johnson’s was certainly the better effort of the two.

Mrs. Hogarth retained possession of the Leicester Square house until her death in 1789, but she resided principally at Chiswick. Sir Richard Phillips saw her there, when he was a boy, and had vivid recollections of her as a stately old lady, wheeled to the parish church on Sundays in a bath-chair, and sailing in up the nave with her raised head-dress, silk sacque, black calash, and crutched cane, accompanied by a relative (the Mary Lewis who was with Hogarth when he died), and preceded by her grey-haired man-servant, Samuel, who carried her prayer-books, and, after she was seated, shut the pew door on her.

From 1824 to 1826 the Hogarth villa was inhabited by the Rev. H. F. Cary, the translator of Dante, who was one of Charles Lamb’s many friends, and wrote the feeble epitaph that is on his tomb at Edmonton.



# CHAPTER V

## GOLDSMITH, REYNOLDS, AND SOME OF THEIR CIRCLE

One of Sir James Thornhill's illustrious sitters was Sir Isaac Newton, who lived within a stone's throw of Hogarth's London house, just round the corner out of Leicester Square, at No. 35 St. Martin's Street. Here Sir Isaac made his home from 1720 to 1725. The red brick walls have been stuccoed over; and the observatory that the philosopher built for himself on the roof, after being turned into a Sunday-school, was removed about forty years ago, and helped to supply pews for the Orange Street Chapel that stands next door.

The greatest of Newton's work was done before he set up in St. Martin's Street, but he told a friend that the happiest years of his life had been spent in the observatory there. Though he kept his carriage, lived in some style, had half-a-dozen male and female servants, and was always hospitable, he was not fond of society, and talked but little in it. Johnson once remarked to Sir William Jones that if Newton had flourished in ancient Greece, he would have been worshipped as a divinity, but there was nothing godlike in his appearance. "He was a man of no very promising aspect," says Herne; and Humphrey Newton describes his famous relative as of a carriage "meek, sedate, and humble; never seeming angry,

of profound thought, his countenance mild, pleasant, and comely. He always kept close to his studies... I never knew him to take any recreation or pastime, thinking all hours lost that were not spent in his studies." There are a good many stories told of his eccentricities and absent-mindedness. He would ride through London in his coach with one arm out of the window on one side and one out on the other; he would sometimes start to get up of a morning and sit down on his bed, absorbed in thought, and so remain for hours without dressing himself; and, when his dinner was laid, he would walk about the room, forgetting to eat it, and carelessly eat it standing when his attention was called to it. On one occasion, when he was leading his horse up a hill, he found, when he went to remount on reaching the top, that the animal had slipped its bridle and stayed behind without his perceiving it, and he had nothing in his hand but some of the harness. "When he had friends to entertain," according to Dr. Stukeley, "if he went into his study to fetch a bottle of wine, there was danger of his forgetting them," and not coming back again. And it is told of this same Dr. Stukeley that he called one day to see Newton, and was shown into the dining-room, where Sir Isaac's dinner was in readiness. After a long wait, feeling hungry as well as impatient, Stukeley ate the cold chicken intended for his host, and left nothing but the bones. By-and-by Sir Isaac entered, made his greetings and apologies, and, whilst they were talking, drew a chair to the table, took off the dish-cover, and at sight of the bones merely observed placidly, "How absent we philosophers

are! I had forgotten that I had dined!”

Later, this same house in St. Martin’s Street was occupied by Dr. Burney and his daughter Fanny, who wrote *Evelina* here.

Near by, in Leicester Square again, on the opposite side, and almost exactly facing Hogarth’s residence, was the house of Sir Joshua Reynolds. From 1753 to 1761 Sir Joshua lived at 5 Great Newport Street, which was built in Charles II.’s days, and is still standing. It is now and has for a century past been occupied by a firm of art dealers; so that it happens from time to time that a picture of Reynolds’s is here put up for sale, “on the very spot where it was painted.” But in the crowning years of his career – from 1761 till his death, in 1792 – Sir Joshua dwelt at 42 Leicester Square, and what was formerly his studio there has been transformed into one of Messrs. Puttick and Simpson’s auction rooms. Here is Allan Cunningham’s description of it, and of the painter’s method of work: “His study was octagonal, some twenty feet long by sixteen broad, and about fifteen feet high. The window was small and square, and the sill nine feet from the floor. His sitters’ chair moved on castors, and stood above the floor about a foot and a half. He held his palette by the handle, and the sticks of his brushes were eighteen inches long. He wrought standing, and with great celerity. He rose early, breakfasted at nine, entered his study at ten, examined designs or touched unfinished portraits, till eleven brought him a sitter; painted till four, then dressed, and gave the evenings to company.”

And to the best of good company too. By day, the chariot of a duke or a marchioness might drive to his door, and return later to wait for his lordship or her ladyship, who was occupying the sitter's chair, while Sir Joshua was busy at his easel; but of an evening he would have such men as Dr. Johnson, Boswell, Goldsmith, Garrick, Burke (who was living close at hand, in Gerrard Street) gathered about his dinner-table; for in spite of his deafness he was the very soul of sociability. He never got out of his naturally careless, Bohemian habits. He was the favourite portrait-painter of the fashionable world, but mixed with the aristocracy without apeing any of their etiquette. "There was something singular in the style and economy of Sir Joshua's table that contributed to pleasantry and good-humour; a coarse, inelegant plenty, without any regard to order and arrangement," according to Courtenay. "A table prepared for seven or eight was often compelled to contain fifteen or sixteen. When this pressing difficulty was got over, a deficiency of knives, plates, forks, and glasses succeeded. The attendance was in the same style; and it was absolutely necessary to call instantly for beer, bread, or wine, that you might be supplied with them before the first course was over. He was once prevailed on to furnish the table with decanters and glasses at dinner, to save time and prevent the tardy manœuvres of two or three occasional, undisciplined domestics. As these accelerating utensils were demolished in the course of service, Sir Joshua would never be persuaded to replace them. But these trifling embarrassments only served to

enhance the hilarity and singular pleasure of the entertainment. The wines, cookery, and dishes were but little attended to; nor was the fish or venison ever talked of or recommended. Amidst this convivial, animated bustle among his guests, our host sat perfectly composed; always attentive to what was said, never minding what was ate or drunk, but left every one at perfect liberty to scramble for himself. Temporal and spiritual peers, physicians, lawyers, actors, and musicians composed the motley group, and played their parts without dissonance or discord.”

He was so imperturbable and easy-natured that Dr. Johnson said if he ever quarrelled with him he would find it most difficult to know how to abuse him; and even the sharp-tongued Mrs. Thrale praised his peaceful temper, and considered that of him “all good should be said, and no harm.” He shared Hogarth’s contempt for the old masters; but, unlike Hogarth, he was not loud and aggressive in his objections to them.

“When they talked of their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff,  
He shifted his trumpet, and only took snuff.”

It was on Reynolds’s suggestion that he and Johnson founded, in 1763, what later became celebrated as the Literary Club. They held their first meetings at the Turk’s Head (where Hogarth and Thornhill had previously established their Art Club), and among the original members were Burke, Langton, Beauclerk, Goldsmith, and Sir John Hawkins. The latter, an arrant snob,

objected to Goldsmith's election on the ground that he was "a mere literary drudge," but his protest carried no weight with the rest. Five years later, when, under the patronage of the king, Reynolds inaugurated the Royal Academy, Johnson was appointed its first Professor of Ancient Literature, and Goldsmith its first Professor of History, Reynolds himself being its first President – in which office, on his death in 1792, he was succeeded by Benjamin West. West was an American, and had won a considerable reputation in his own country before he came over and settled down in England. He was introduced to Johnson and Reynolds, and was for some time a neighbour of Sir Joshua's, in Castle Street, Leicester Square. But he is more closely associated with the house that still stands at 14 Newman Street, Oxford Street, in which he lived and worked for forty-five years, and in which he died.

A far greater contemporary painter, who moved on the fringes of Sir Joshua's circle, was Gainsborough. That he did not come familiarly into the circle, and sometimes make one of the memorable company that gathered round Reynolds's dinner-table, was owing to some lack of geniality in himself, that kept him from responding to Sir Joshua's friendly advances. He came from Bath to London in 1774, when he was forty-seven years of age, took a studio at Schonberg House, Pall Mall, and it was not long before celebrities and leaders of fashion were flocking to it to sit for their portraits, and he was recognised as a successful rival of Reynolds. Reynolds was so far from feeling jealousy

or resentment that he promptly paid his popular rival a visit; but Gainsborough did not trouble himself to return the call. No doubt it was to some extent owing to Reynolds, too, that in the year of his appearance in London he was elected to the council of management of the Royal Academy; but he ignored the honour, did not attend any meetings, and sent nothing to the exhibition. Reynolds was frankly outspoken in his admiration of Gainsborough's work, and was even anxious to have his own portrait painted by him. After some delay appointments were fixed, and Sir Joshua duly went to Schonberg House, and the painting was commenced. But after the first sitting he was taken ill; and when, on his recovery, he wrote to tell Gainsborough that he was ready to come again, he received no reply, and the portrait had to remain an unfinished sketch.

His coldness to Reynolds is inexplicable, for he was a kindly-disposed man, and sociable. He kept almost open house in Pall Mall, and such jovial spirits as the Sheridans, Colman, and Garrick were among the constant guests at his table.

The year after Gainsborough's coming to London, Sheridan's *Rivals* was produced at the Covent Garden Theatre, to be followed two years after by *The School for Scandal*. Before he was out of his twenties Sheridan had finished his career as a dramatist, turned to politics, and was one of the most brilliant of Parliamentary orators, still remaining principal proprietor of Drury Lane Theatre. All his life he was living beyond his income, borrowing, getting into debt, and dodging duns and bailiffs

with the gayest imperturbability. Everybody liked him, and was susceptible to his charm. Wherever the wits foregathered, he was the best drinker, the best talker, and the wittiest among them. Byron writes of him in his *Diary*: "What a wreck that man is! and all from bad pilotage; for no one had ever better gales, though now and then a little too squally. Poor dear Sherry! I shall never forget the day he and Rogers and Moore and I passed together; when he talked and we listened, without one yawn, from six till one in the morning." In a letter to Moore, Byron records a dinner at which Sheridan, Colman, and a large party were present, and at the finish, when they were all the worse for drink, "Kinnaird and I had to conduct Sheridan down a damned corkscrew staircase, which had certainly been constructed before the discovery of fermented liquors, and to which no legs, however crooked, could possibly accommodate themselves. We deposited him safe at home, where his man, evidently used to the business, waited to receive him in the hall."

This was in October 1815, and 14 Savile Row is the house at which Sheridan was thus deposited by his noble friend. He was then an old man of sixty-four, and a year later he died there, five thousand pounds in debt, and only saved, by the emphatic intervention of the doctor who was attending him, from being arrested by bailiffs as he lay dying, and carried off to a sponging-house in his blankets.

The year that brought Gainsborough to London (1774) was also the year of Goldsmith's death; and I want to get back to



Goldsmith for a little, in this chapter, and to say something of Richardson. For it is curiously interesting to note how the lives of all these famous men, though there was little enough in common between some of them, met at certain points and established certain connecting links between them; so that it is possible, as Leigh Hunt has said somewhere, to trace a sort of genealogy of such acquaintanceships, such notable meetings and touchings of “beamy hands,” coming down in an unbroken line from Shakespeare to our own day.

Thus, Hogarth first met Johnson in Richardson’s parlour at Salisbury Court; and, in 1757, Goldsmith was employed by Richardson, and worked on his printing premises, in the same court, as reader and corrector to the press; and these, and most of the other immortals named in this chapter – including Sheridan, though he was then so young a man that he outlived them all, and counts among the friends of Lord Byron – have a common link in Dr. Johnson, who was so great a Londoner that he must needs have a chapter presently to himself, or one that he shall share with none but the inevitable Boswell.

Whilst Goldsmith was working as one of his employees, Richardson was not only a prosperous printer, he was already the most popular novelist of his day. *Pamela*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, and *Sir Charles Grandison* had carried his fame throughout the kingdom and beyond it, and were drawing rapturous admiration and tears of sentiment from countless admirers in France as well as in England; and, as befitted a man of his means and

eminence, he had supplemented his house off Fleet Street with a country residence at Parson's Green, where he died in 1761. Down to 1754, however, his country house was The Grange, at North End, Fulham, then a pretty, old-world spot, – “the pleasantest village within ten miles of London.” And it was here that all his novels were written; for he took The Grange in 1738, and *Pamela* appeared in 1740, and *Sir Charles Grandison* in 1753. Here, too, he used to give large literary parties, to which Johnson occasionally went with Boswell. But whatever other authors were there, you may safely depend that Fielding was never among the guests; for with all his high morality Richardson was intolerably self-complacent and vain, and never forgave Fielding for burlesquing Pamela as “Shamela,” and parodying her impossible virtues in *Joseph Andrews*.

Boswell gives two good anecdotes illustrative of Richardson's fretful vanity and the limits of his conversational powers. “Richardson had little conversation,” he says Johnson once remarked to him, “except about his own works, of which Sir Joshua Reynolds said he was always willing to talk, and glad to have them introduced. Johnson, when he carried Mr. Langton to see him, professed that he could bring him out in conversation, and used this illusive expression: ‘Sir, I can make him *rear*.’ But he failed; for in that interview Richardson said little else than that there lay in the room a translation of his *Clarissa* into German.” And in a footnote to this Boswell adds: “A literary lady has favoured me with a characteristic anecdote of Richardson. One

day at his country house at North End, where a large company was assembled at dinner, a gentleman who was just returned from Paris, willing to please Mr. Richardson, mentioned to him a very flattering circumstance – that he had seen his *Clarissa* lying on the king's brother's table. Richardson, observing that part of the company were engaged in talking to each other, affected not to attend to it. But by-and-by, when there was a general silence, and he thought that the flattery might be fully heard, he addressed himself to the gentleman, 'I think, sir, you were saying something about – ' pausing in a high flutter of expectation. The gentleman, provoked at his inordinate vanity, resolved not to indulge it, and with an exquisitely sly air of indifference remarked, 'A mere trifle, sir, not worth repeating.' The mortification of Richardson was visible, and he did not speak ten words more the whole day. Dr. Johnson was present, and appeared to enjoy it much."

While Fielding was roystering in the wild haunts of Bohemian London, gambling at his club, reeling home to his chambers in Pump Court, and writing his novels in odds and ends of soberer time, Richardson was methodically composing his books at Fulham, getting up early of summer mornings, working at his manuscript in the little summer-house that he had built in his garden, then reading over breakfast to the worshipping members of his family the results of his morning's labour. Wherever he went, groups of adoring ladies were sure to gather about him, to chatter fervently of their delight in his interminable stories; and he snuffed up their incense with a solemn and self-satisfied joy,

for he took himself as seriously as he was taken by them, and never felt that he was ridiculous, even when he looked it. Not infrequently he would sit in his drawing-room at The Grange, or in the summer-house, surrounded by a rapt audience of feminine believers, who wept as he read aloud to them of the sufferings and heroic virtue of Pamela, or the persecutions of the gentle Clarissa. You cannot think of it without imagining there, in one of the rooms, the comfortable, obese, touchy, rather pompous, double-chinned little gentleman, in his fair wig and dark coat, an ink-horn set in the arm of his chair with a quill sticking out of it, one hand thrust into the front of his waistcoat, the book or manuscript in his hand, reading gravely and deliberately his long, minute dissections of character, his elaborate descriptions of events and incidents, his formal dialogues, pleased when his stilted sentiment or simple sentimentality brought tears to the eyes of his listeners, and not ashamed to shed one or two with them.

He drew a word-portrait of himself for Lady Bradshaigh, which is fairly well known but is worth repeating, and, judging by the portraits we have of him, is a fairly true one. He paints himself as "short, rather plump, about five feet five inches, fair wig, one hand generally in his bosom, the other a cane in it, which he leans upon under the skirts of his coat that it may imperceptibly serve him as a support when attacked by sudden tremors or dizziness, which too frequently attack him, but, thank God! not so often as formerly; looking directly forthright, as

passers-by would imagine, but observing all that stirs on either hand of him without moving his short neck; hardly ever turning back; of a light-brown complexion, teeth not yet failing him; smooth faced, and ruddy cheeked; at some times looking to be about sixty-five, at other times much younger; a regular, even pace, stealing away the ground rather than seeming to rid it; a grey eye, too often overclouded by mistiness from the head; by chance lively – very lively it will be, if he have hope of seeing a lady whom he loves and honours.”

Richardson's summer-house is long since gone from the garden, and long ago now The Grange was divided in two, and in the half that has been stucco-fronted Burne-Jones went to live in 1867, dying there in 1898.

Five years after Goldsmith had given up proofreading for Richardson, you find him still drudging amid the squalor of Grub Street, still living from hand to mouth, writing reviews and prefaces, revising and preparing new editions of dull books on dull subjects, for a sum of twenty-one pounds compiling a two-volume *History of England* in the form of a series of letters, and generally subduing his heart and mind to the doing of the wretched hack-work to which the impecunious literary man in all ages has usually been condemned.

His new taskmaster was Mr. Newbery the publisher, and he was living, in those days of 1762, in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street; but the publisher was not altogether ungenerous, and made arrangements that enabled his poor hack to leave town

at intervals and work in the fresh air and rural environment of Islington. Newbery had chambers of his own there in Canonbury Tower, and Goldsmith used to put up at a cottage near by that was kept by an elderly Mrs. Fleming, a friend or relative of Newbery's, his bills for board and lodging being periodically settled by his employer, who deducted the amount of them from whatever fell due to Goldsmith from time to time for work done. Fortunately Mrs. Fleming's accounts have been preserved, and we get an idea of Goldsmith's wardrobe from her washing-lists, and learn from the items she carefully details that she now and then lent him small sums in cash – tenpence one day, and one and twopence another; that occasionally, when he had a friend to dinner, though she duly noted it, she ostentatiously made no charge; but when four gentlemen came to take tea with him, she debited him with eighteenpence.

Probably one of those friends who had a free dinner was Hogarth, for he travelled out to Islington occasionally on a visit to Goldsmith; and there is a painting of his which is known as "Goldsmith's Hostess," and is believed to be none other than Mrs. Fleming's portrait.

You remember Boswell's story of how *The Vicar of Wakefield* saved Goldsmith from imprisonment for debt. "I received one morning a letter from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress," Johnson told him, "and, as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him

directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle of madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork in the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it, and saw its merit. I told the landlady I should soon return; and, having gone to a bookseller, sold it for sixty pounds. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill." Everything points to Mrs. Fleming as that harsh landlady, and the lodging in her cottage at Islington as the scene of that famous interlude. The presumption is that Goldsmith had incurred a much heavier liability to her than was covered by what was accruing to him for his services to Newbery, as a result of his giving time to the writing of *The Vicar of Wakefield* that should have been devoted to his usual drudgery; and the cautious Newbery declined to make further advances, and advised his relative, the landlady, to adopt summary methods for the recovery of her debt. Goldsmith never lodged with Mrs. Fleming after that date; but later, when Newbery took a lease of Canonbury Tower, he was from time to time a guest there, and occupied a room in the turret. During one of these visits he wrote *The Traveller*; and in later years Charles Lamb often walked across from his Islington home to the Tower to watch the

sunset from the summit, and to be entertained by the tenant of it in the panelled chamber where Goldsmith's poem was written.

It was with the publication of *The Traveller* that Goldsmith began to emerge from Grub Street. Its success was considerable enough to lead to the publisher's looking out the manuscript of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and issuing that also; and in 1768, having made five hundred pounds by the production and publishing of *The Good-natured Man*, he removed from an attic in the Staircase, Inner Temple, and purchased a lease of three rooms on the second floor of 2 Brick Court, Temple. Blackstone, the lawyer, then working on his *Commentaries*, had chambers immediately below him, and complained angrily of the distracting noises – the singing, dancing, and playing blind-man's-buff – that went on over his head when Goldsmith was entertaining his friends.

Pale, round-faced, plain-featured, with a bulging forehead and an ugly, long upper lip, there was more of kindness and geniality than of dignity or intellect in Goldsmith's appearance. "His person was short," says Boswell, who was jealous of his friendship with Johnson, and never realised how great he was, "his countenance was coarse and vulgar, his deportment that of a scholar awkwardly affecting the easy gentleman. Those who were in any way distinguished excited envy in him to so ridiculous an excess that the instances of it are hardly credible." But Boswell misjudged him because, conceited and petty himself, he easily read those qualities into the behaviour of the other, and so



misunderstood him. Goldsmith may have had some harmless vanity in the matter of dress, when he could afford to indulge it; but as for vanity of his achievements, that speaking of poetry as

“My shame in crowds, my solitary pride,”

is the spontaneous confession of a naturally shy and diffident spirit. When a man has been buffeted as he had been, has had to slave so hard and wait so long for his reward as he had slaved and waited, he accepts the fame that comes to him merely as wages well earned, and is not likely to grow swollen-headed concerning it. And for his envious character – here is what Boswell gives as a specimen of it. Johnson had come from an unexpected interview with the king, and a party of friends at Sir Joshua Reynolds’s house in Leicester Square were gathered about him pressing for a full account of what had taken place. During all the time that Johnson was employed in this narration, remarks Boswell, “Dr. Goldsmith remained unmoved upon a sofa at some distance, affecting not to join in the least in the eager curiosity of the company. He assigned as a reason for his gloom and seeming inattention that he apprehended Johnson had relinquished his purpose of furnishing him with a prologue to his play, with the hopes of which he had been flattered; but it was strongly suspected that he was fretting with chagrin and envy at the singular honour Dr. Johnson had lately enjoyed. At length, the frankness and simplicity of his natural character prevailed.

He sprung from the sofa, advanced to Johnson, and in a kind of flutter from imagining himself in the situation which he had just been hearing described, exclaimed, ‘Well, you acquitted yourself in this conversation better than I should have done; for I should have bowed and stammered through the whole of it.’” Naturally this talk with the king would not seem such a breathlessly overwhelming honour to such a man as Goldsmith as to such a snob as Boswell. It was in keeping with Goldsmith’s nature that he should sit quietly listening and imagining the whole thing as he heard about it, instead of fussing round open-mouthed to pester the narrator with trivial questions; but Boswell was incapable of realising this.

When Boswell, in his toadying spirit, was saying that in any conversation Johnson was entitled to the honour of unquestionable superiority, and Goldsmith, with a truer conception of the art and pleasure of social intercourse, replied, “Sir, you are for making a monarchy of what should be a republic,” Boswell took it as another proof of Goldsmith’s envy, and of his “incessant desire of being conspicuous in company.” He goes on to say: “He was still more mortified when, talking in a company with fluent vivacity and, as he flattered himself, to the admiration of all who were present, a German who sat next to him, and perceived Johnson rolling himself as if about to speak, suddenly stopped him, saying, ‘Stay, stay! Doctor Johnson is going to say something!’ This was no doubt very provoking, especially to one so irritable as Goldsmith, who frequently

mentioned it with strong expressions of indignation.” A vain man would not have mentioned it frequently, but a man with Goldsmith’s sense of fun would be tickled by it, and rejoice to tell it as a joke against himself, simulating indignation to heighten the jest. When he heard that jape at Sir Joshua’s table of taking peas to Hammersmith because that was the way to Turn’am Green, and afterwards retelling it muddled the phrase and made nonsense of it, Boswell offers it as further evidence that he was a blundering fool. But it is more likely that he blundered on purpose, merely to raise a laugh, that being his queer, freakish fashion of humour. But the Laird of Auchinleck and some of the others were too staid and heavy to follow his nimble wits in their grotesque and airy dancings.

Why, even the egregious Boswell has to admit that “Goldsmith, however, was often very fortunate in his witty contests, even when he entered the lists with Johnson himself.” And once, when Johnson observed, “It is amazing how little Goldsmith knows; he seldom comes where he is not more ignorant than any one else,” Reynolds put in quietly, “Yet there is no man whose company is more liked”; and the Doctor promptly admitted that, saying, “When people find a man of the most distinguished abilities as a writer their inferior while he is with them, it must be highly gratifying to them.” But that did not fully explain why he was liked, of course; and what Johnson added as to “what Goldsmith comically says of himself” shows that Goldie knew his own weaknesses, and was amused by them.

Lamb would have understood him and laughed with him, for he loved to frivol and play the fool in the same vein. When he was dead, Johnson said he was “a very great man”; and don’t you think there is some touch of remorse in that later remark of his, that the partiality of Goldsmith’s friends was always against him, and “it was with difficulty we could give him a hearing”?

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