HISTORY OF JOHNSON'S PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE: 1765-1934

THE HISTORY OF JOHNSON'S PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE: 1765-1934

by

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CONTENTS

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Certain inconsistencies in the spelling of the name, Shakespeare, may be noticed by the reader. For ourselves we have adopted the spelling found in the previous sentence. Variations from it may be found in quoted passages, and indicate the spelling used by the author from whom the quotation is taken. Similarly with regard to the term, Preface, we have taken the view that it is the title of a book, it having been separately printed, and have capitalized and italicized it accordingly. In quotations, however, we have copied the term exactly as found.

In regard to spelling in general, we have respected the whims of authors, even to the extent of retaining, in the case of one author, the small 'm' in the word 'mr.'

From chapter three onward, the dates appearing in parenthesis after the name of each of the periodicals or authors, indicate the year- or, at times, years- in which the work or the lecture dealing with Johnson's Preface or Edition was made public.

The numbers in parenthesis refer to the notes which are to be found at the end of each chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Samuel Johnson, the man with whom this survey deals, earned for himself a position of commanding eminence in the literary world of his day. But his fame has not remained confined to his era. His writings, his sayings, his opinions, which always won for him a following, exercise, to this day, a force which should not be underestimated. To be sure, Johnson's vogue is not as great as it was in its heyday. He is not as widely read or studied as he may once have been. But literary permanence is not to be measured in merely quantitative terms. Such a test, applied to even the greatest literary titans, might prove disappointing. To a limited, though significant body of readers, the name of Johnson is still one which is invested with vital and often pleasant associations.

The titles of books often possess connotations which raise them above the status of convenient handles for trade purposes or cataloguing. It is no accident that so many books are entitled- with slight variations- the Age of Johnson. Contemporary evidence apart, this fact is valid testimony to our belief in the dominant position that Johnson occupied in his day.

This supremacy he held for many reasons. One of these was his diversity of literary interests. Our concern, here, however, is with only one aspect: his critical treatment of Shakespeare. Opinion on Johnson's performance in this field has fluctuated from his day to our own. Even today the estimates vary. The purpose we have in view is to assemble and record

these opinions, as they were issued, from Johnson's time to the present.

The method by which we shall proceed will be based on a fivefold division of the subject. The first chapter will serve to indicate the successive stages of Johnson's interest in Shakespeare, up to the publication of his edition of the plays. The second chapter will contain an analysis of the Preface. The third will record the opinions on Johnson's performance expressed in the eighteenth century. Chapter four will consider the attitude of the nineteenth century writers towards Johnson. Chapter five will bring the record down to the present day.

Though our chief concern here will be with the Preface alone, it is inevitable that opinion concerning the edition proper should at times be included. But such references will be relatively few and have no material effect on the plan outlined above.

At this point a few general reflections may be in order. It is a principle which cannot be stated with too great emphasis: that for a fair judgment of Johnson's efforts in the field under consideration, we must view them in relation to his era and its attendant circumstances. We may then form whatever opinion we wish, knowing that, favorable or otherwise, it is, at least, a fair opinion.. For to judge a man without regard to the standards of his day is manifestly unreasonable.

The century in which Johnson lived and wrote, the eighteenth century, is generally referred to as the English Classical Age. The term is wide in its scope. In relation to literature, it

implies a deference to authority and adherence to the rules of the ancients; a distrust of emotions; a strong tendency towards didacticism; the setting of a deliberate restraint upon the imagination, making emotion subservient to intellect in poetry. It must be borne in mind, however, that these characteristics of so-called classicism do not apply with equal fullness to every writer. Particularly in their treatment of Shakespeare, the eighteenth century critics allowed themselves considerable latitude; and though they tempered their judgment by pointing out what they held to be faults in the poet, they nevertheless acclaimed him as a genius of the very highest rank.(1)

It is to this school of criticism that Johnson belongs. And yet, though of it, he is in a large measure superior to it. As a stylist, he ranks far above his predecessors and contemporary critics. Let those who require evidence on this score, read and compare the 'prefaces' of the century. Johnson surpassed them, however, not only in manner, but often in matter as well.

Yet these details, significant in themselves, are nevertheless of secondary importance. Of greater interest to us is the amount of independent judgment that Johnson showed. He could not entirely free himself from the fetters of the influences of his day. But towards that end he always strove. As we read

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(1) Robinson, H. S.: English Shakesperian Criticism in the Eighteenth Century, N. Y., 1932, p. xi-xv.

the Preface, we cannot help feeling that here was a man who was straining to overleap the boundaries of criticism, which had prevailed for so long that men held them immutable. He was only partly successful. But where he did succeed, he left no doubt that he was in advance of his time. His bold defence of the mingling of tragedy and comedy in Shakespeare, his masterly attack upon the validity of the unities:- these make him not only outstanding among the critics of his day, but also earn for him a position of esteem in the field of critical endeavor for all time.

CHAPTER I

Johnson and his Interest in Shakespeare: A Brief History.

The Plays of William Shakespear, in Eight Volumes, with the Corrections and Illustrations of Various Commentators: To which are added Notes by Sam. Johnson, did not appear until 1765, though Johnson contemplated this work for many years. As early as 1745, when he was working for the booksellers in London, eking out a scanty livelihood, he published, Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth, with remarks on Sir T. H.'s (Sir Thomas Hanmer's) Edition of Shakespeare. According to Boswell, his noted biographer, Johnson affixed to this pamphlet proposals for an edition by himself. When Sir Walter Raleigh in 1908 wrote his sympathetic study, Johnson on Shakespeare, he knew of no extant copies of the pamphlet containing these proposals and suggested that; "Johnson.....probably did not print any formal proposals. If any were printed, they are lost."(1) However, since these words were written, four copies of the Proposals affixed to the Miscellaneous Observations would seem to have been discovered.(2) Therefore, the first definite evidence of Johnson's project for a new edition of Shakespeare can be traced to the early date of 1745, when he appended to the aforementioned anonymous Miscellaneous Observations the Proposals for Printing a New Edition of the Plays of William Shakespear with Notes Critical and Explanatory, in which the Text will be corrected: The Various Readings remarked: The Conjectures of former Editors examined, and their

Omissions Supply'd, by the Author of the Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth. This Work will be printed in Ten small Volumes, of the same Paper and Print with the following Specimen.(3) So clearly did Johnson hold this edition in mind in 1745, that he could state the exact number of volumes and the type of paper and print to be used.

But the work was not undertaken until 1756. Professor Raleigh surmises that Johnson withdrew temporarily because of competition. "It seems likely," he says, "that after he (Johnson) had advertised his intention, he was discouraged and changed his mind. When he first thought of editing Shakespeare, he believed that he had only Rowe and Pope and Theobald to contend with and to supersede. Then while his notes on Macbeth were in the press, Hanmer's edition appeared, and it became known to him that the great Warburton was engaged on the same task."(4)

The editor of Courtney's Bibliography of Johnson states that "a letter from Tonson to Cave, Johnson's publisher, dated April 11, 1745, had the effect of stopping the edition."(5) This letter brought up legal obstructions to the publication, which, as Pegge in his Anonymiana puts it, "nipped the design (of Johnson and Cave) in the bud."(6) Finally, on June 2, 1756, Johnson and Jacob Tonson agreed to the publication.

We have evidence which shows clearly, that Johnson continued his interest in Shakespeare during the eleven years between the first and second Proposals, while he was occupied with the writing of the Dictionary. The prompt appearance of the Proposals

in 1756, immediately after the completion of the Dictionary, should itself substantiate our belief that Johnson must have kept the project in view while gathering material for the Dictionary. For so great an undertaking needs more than a momentary decision. But we have more tangible evidence than this in his essays in the Rambler. In number 156 of that periodical, dated Sept. 14, 1751, we find what may be regarded as a first draft of parts of the Preface; though, to be sure, Johnson has not yet reached in it the full courage of his later convictions in regard to his views upon drama. In this essay we see, in its inchoate stage, his standpoint on tragi-comedy. "We might have been more interested," he states, "in the distresses of his (Shakespeare's) heroes, had we not been so frequently diverted by the jokes of his buffoons."(7) Compare that with the bold statement in his Preface: "That this (mingling of tragedy and comedy) is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature."(8)

A second mention of Shakespeare appears in Rambler, number 168 (Oct. 26, 1751) where Johnson discusses some "imperfections of diction" of Lady Macbeth. Karl Young in his article Johnson on Shakespeare adds a third instance, saying: "By far the most important evidence of Shakespearean activities (during these years) is the Dedication he contributed to a work entitled Shakespear Illustrated- by the Author of the Female Quixote (i.e., Charlotte Lennox) which appeared in 1753."(9) Perhaps Karl Young places too much weight on the

importance of this evidence. Johnson's remarks on the subject of Shakespeare in this brief Dedication are, after all, rather general; such as he could at any time, with great ease and very little depth of thought, pen about the great poet. The fact remains, however, that though it may not be "the most important evidence of (Johnson's) Shakespearean activities," this Dedication does show a certain degree of interest in Shakespeare on the part of Johnson in the year 1753.

In 1756 appeared Johnson's famous Proposals for Printing the Dramatick Works of William Shakespear, about which Macaulay remarks with some asperity: "He proposed to bring out an edition of Shakespeare by subscription; and many subscribers sent in their names, and laid down their money; but he soon found the task so little to his taste that he turned to more attractive employments."(10) In these Proposals, which are, according to Raleigh "magnificient in their range and discernment," Johnson sets forth the duty of a Shakespearean commentator and critic.

He promises, in this edition, that:- "The corruptions of the text will be corrected by a careful collation of the oldest copies." He will also attempt "the elucidation of passages obscured by accident or time"- a task to which earlier critics, more concerned with the correction of the text, have not sufficiently attended. He will, furthermore, compare "the works of Shakespeare with those of writers who lived at the same time, immediately preceded, or immediately followed him," in order to ascertain Shakespeare's "ambiguities , disentangle his intricacies, and recover the meaning of words now lost in the darkness of antiquity..... (and) endeavour to read the books which the author read, to trace his knowledge to its source,

and compare his copies with their originals..... (and to observe the) faults and beauties"...of Shakespeare. Johnson adds some remarks on the ability, or lack of ability of the more prominent editors who were his predecessors in the field. Of Rowe and Pope he declares that they were limited in their capacity as editors by their ignorance "of the ancient English literature." Dr. Warburton "was detained by more important studies; and Mr. Theobald.....made no further inquiry after his author's meaning, when once he had notes sufficient to embellish his page with the expected decorations." Nevertheless, Johnson admitsthat "if....he hopes to attain any degree of superiority to his predecessors, it must be considered, that he has the advantage of their labours.....The former editors have affected to slight their predecessors: but in this edition all that is valuable will be adopted from every commentator, that posterity may consider it as including all the rest, and exhibiting whatever is hitherto known of the great father of the English drama."(11) On this note of avowed eclecticism the Proposals end.

The date Johnson set for the appearance of the edition was December 1757, but it did not see light until ... December 1765. Many reasons have been offered for the postponing and delaying of an enterprise so hopefully undertaken. Raleigh realized that "something steadier and more habitual than the fervour of the projecting imagination is required to carry through a long piece of editorial work."(12) One of the possible causes for the delay is shown in a passage that

Raleigh quotes. "On June 27, of the same year (1758) Dr. Grainger wrote Dr. Percy, 'I have several times called on Johnson to pay him part of your subscription. I say, part, because he never thinks of working if he has a couple of guineas in his pocket.' "(13) This quotation substantiates Raleigh's view that Johnson's "motive in writing was supplied by necessity." But necessity, which in his case meant financial stress, was alleviated at intervals, when from time to time subscriptions and money did come in.

That Johnson did use the money in the meantime, there can be no doubt. The following anecdote cited by Raleigh illustrates this. In 1763 a bookseller, bringing a subscription, asked that the subscriber's name be inserted in the printed list. "I shall print no list of subscribers," Johnson replied, "Sir, I have two very cogent reasons for not printing any list of subscribers;- one, that I have lost all the names,- the other, that I have spent all the money."(14)

Still another reason for the delay has been advanced by Leslie Stephen in his book Samuel Johnson. He claims that Johnson's constitutional indolence caused the delay. "A kind of strange oblivion has spread over me," Johnson says in April 1764, "so that I know not what has become of the last years, and perceive that incidents and intelligence pass over me without leaving any impression."(15) Boswell, in his Life, says, "But his indolence prevented him from pursuing it (the edition) with that diligence which alone can collect these scattered facts that genius, however acute, penetrating, or luminous,

cannot discover by its own force."(16) Of this difficulty Johnson has left his own account in the Life of Pope. "Indolence, interruption, business and pleasure," he says, " all take their turns of retardation; and every long work is lengthened by a thousand causes that can, and ten thousand that cannot be recounted. Perhaps no extensive and multifarious performance was ever effected within the term originally fixed in the undertaker's mind. He that runs against time has an antagonist not subject to casualties."(17) Thus briefly, and epigrammatically, in that last sentence, Johnson explains his own delay.

Years passed before the new edition finally did come out. Many times Boswell mentions that Johnson was busily engaged with his edition of Shakespeare. "In 1764 and 1765," he writes, "Johnson was so busily employed with his edition of Shakespeare, as to have had little leisure for any other literary exertion, or indeed, even for private correspondence."(18) Hawkins says that "his friends more concerned for his reputation than himself seemed to be contrived to entangle him by a wager, or some other pecuniary engagement, to perform his task within a certain time."(19) But Johnson, not to be outwitted in this by any such device, worked at it merely at intervals.

A public taunt was levelled at him in 1762 by Churchill in his satire, The Ghost, saying that,

"He for subscribers baits his hook,
And takes their cash- but where's the book?
No matter where- wise fear, we know,
Forbids the robbing of a foe;

But what, to serve our private ends,
Forbids the cheating of our friends?" (20)

Was Johnson deeply affected by this jibe? Macaulay seems to believe that we owe the appearance of the edition in 1765 to Churchill's insulting words. "Happily for his honour," he remarks somewhat sarcastically in his biographical essay on Johnson, "the charm which held him captive was at length broken by no gentle or friendly hand." (21) Nichol Smith adds to this belief when he writes in his introduction to Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare: "Thereafter (1760) Johnson would appear to have done little to it till he was awakened to activity by the attack on him in Churchill's Ghost." (22) And Raleigh, a warm admirer of Johnson, asserts: "There was no evidence that Johnson was in any way perturbed by Churchill's attack," but he nevertheless adds, "yet it was the means of hastening the long-deferred edition." (23) Though it is difficult to reach a definite conclusion on the matter, the prevailing opinion is that, along with other causes, Churchill's attack was instrumental in stirring Johnson to the completion of the task.

Finally in October 1765, more than twenty years after he first announced his intention to bring forth an edition of Shakespeare, there appeared The Plays of William Shakespeare. In that same year the Preface was also published by itself bearing the title, Mr. Johnson's Preface to his Edition of Shakespear's Plays. Actually he had spent nine years upon a task which he had promised to finish in a few months. But as

Raleigh so aptly puts it; "A longer delay would have been amply justified by the Preface alone, which Adam Smith styled, 'the most manly piece of criticism that was ever published in any country.' "(24)

In considering Johnson's qualifications for editing Shakespeare, we can do no better than to accept his own statement as to what he believed to be his chief literary talent. He once said to Sir Joshua Reynolds: "There are two things which I am confident I can do very well: one is an introduction to any literary work, stating what it is to contain, and how it should be executed in the most perfect manner; the other is a conclusion showing from various causes why the execution has not been equal to what the author promised to himself and to the publick."(25) The first he did in his Proposals and the second he attempted in the Preface.

"Every man's performance," says Johnson, "to be rightly estimated must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived and with his own particular opportunities."(26) What were Johnson's own "opportunities?" He was a man of outstanding literary eminence. When in 1756 he brought out his Proposals he had already won recognition as a dominant literary figure of his day. He had to his credit a play (Irene); various contributions to the literary journals of his day; a Life of the poet Richard Savage, which foreshadowed his Lives of the Poets; several poems, of which the most prominent are London and The Vanity of Human Wishes; the publication of the Rambler and

(later) the Idler; and the formidable Dictionary.

He was a master of the English language. Although not an Elizabethan specialist, he had, none the less, a good knowledge of Elizabethan English; and more especially, as Leslie Stephen expresses it, a sympathetic approach to the works of that period. "Johnson was not," he says, "like some contemporary antiquarians, a systematic student of the English Literature of the preceding centuries, but he had a strong affection for some of its chief masterpieces."(27) Johnson possessed an original mind. He was a man of great courage and honesty; he had a strong hatred of cant and a readiness to see things as they are. Even in the face of much opposition, he did not fear to speak the truth as he saw the truth. "Johnson is," says Raleigh, "the most punctiliously truthful of all English writers."(28) He abounded in a fine and mellow knowledge of humanity. This even Macaulay, who otherwise speaks disparagingly of Johnson's Preface and the edition in general, could not deny him. "The most valuable notes (of the edition), he writes, "are those in which he had an opportunity of showing how attentively he had during many years observed human life and human nature."(29)

He had a robust mind and a logical intellect opposed to subtlety. He could express himself clearly, bringing into full play, at need, a copious and resonant vocabulary. Both in conversation and in writing he had the gift of putting his opinions into lucid and forceful language. Perhaps his greatest asset as a critic was his sound common sense. "His

teaching," comments Roscoe, "always bears the stamp of common sense, which was characteristic of himself, of his age and of the English people."(30)

Johnson once wrote to Dr. Burney: "We must confess the faults of our favourite to gain credit to our praise of his excellencies."(31) Applying his own suggestion, we should now enumerate Johnson's shortcomings. Even as staunch an admirer as Smith characterizes his scholarship as, at times, slovenly; and his collation of the text as unsystematic,- though, to be sure, he maintains that Johnson's weak eyesight was responsible.(32) Again, too, he constantly took the didactic approach to Shakespeare, deprecating him for his unmoral attitude. But perhaps this indicates nothing more than that Johnson was a product of his times: an Englishman of the middle and later eighteenth century. This was the age in which the criterion of use and value of anything was the measure in which it imparted instruction and advanced the moral order of the world. It was, to revert to Johnson's own terminology, the influence of "the state of the age" upon "his own opportunities."

Thus when Johnson, enumerating Shakespeare's failings, says that "he sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose;" or when he dogmatically asserts that "it is always a writer's duty to make the world better;"(33) we today are not prepared to accept these statements unchallenged. But they were in full accord with Johnson's age.

However, notwithstanding his deficiencies, whether due to

lapses from sound judgment or an outlook which has become weakened with the progress of time, we are obliged, in all fairness, to concede his competence as a critic who has made a contribution of enduring value to the field of Shakespearean studies and scholarship.

NOTES

1. Raleigh, Sir Walter Alexander; Johnson on Shakespeare, London, 1908, p. vii.

2. W. P. Courtney, in his Bibliography of Johnson, (1915) p. 18, mentions that "a copy of the Miscellaneous Observations with the Proposals is in the library of Worcester College, Oxford; and a copy of the Proposals alone is in the Bodleian Library." Karl Young, in the Wisconsin Studies (1923) p. 172, adds: "Mr. Strickland Gibson, of the Bodleian Library, informs me that a third extant copy of the Proposals is affixed to a copy of the Miscellaneous Observations, in the Wrenn Library at the University of Texas.....Professor R. H. Griffith kindly tells me of a fourth copy of the Proposals in the library of Mr. Thomas J. Wise of London." In Courtney's Bibliography, p. 162-163, we find mentioned a work published in 1788 under the title Works of Samuel Johnson, L.L.D., in Fourteen Volumes, London. Printed for John Stockdale, Picadilly; and G. G. J. and J. Robinson, Pater-noster Row; in reference to which the editor states: "This volume appears to be very rare. Not the least point of interest is that it reprints in part the Proposals for the edition of Shakespeare which were issued with the Miscellaneous Observations on Macbeth in 1745, and has recently been rediscovered." This reprint of 1788, is not strictly speaking a fifth copy; nevertheless, it is worth

while here to call attention to its existence.

3. Quoted from the photographic copy of the Proposals of 1745, found in the Bodleian Library, as printed in Karl Young's essay, "Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare- One Aspect" in University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, 1923, opposite p. 172.

4. Raleigh, p. 7.

5. Courtney, William Prideaux: Bibliography of Johnson, Oxford, 1915, p. 18.

6. Courtney, p. 18.

7. Johnson, Samuel, L.L.D.: Works, London, 1816, vol. VI. p. 84.

8. Johnson, vol. II, p. 123.

9. Young, Karl, p. 177-178.

10. Macaulay, Lord T. B.: Works, London, 1916, vol. IV, p. 465.

11. Johnson, vol. II, p. 109-115.

12. Raleigh, p. xi.

13. Boswell, James: Life of Johnson, ed. by G. B. Hill, Oxford, 1887, vol. I, p. 319, note 3.

14. Raleigh, p. ix.

15. Stephen, Sir Leslie: Samuel Johnson, London, 1879, p. 49, (and (Boswell, vol. I, p. 482).

16. Boswell, vol. I, p. 319.

17. Boswell, vol. I, p. 319, note 3.

18. Boswell, vol. II, p. 1.

19. Raleigh, p. x.

20. Raleigh, p. x.

21. Macaulay, vol. IV, p. 469.

22. Smith, David Nichol: Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare,

Glasgow, 1903, p. lix.

23. Raleigh, p. x.

24. Raleigh, p. x.

25. Boswell, vol. I, p. 292.

26. Johnson, vol. II, p. 137-138.

27. Stephen, p. 172.

28. Raleigh, p. xv.

29. Macaulay, vol. IV, p. 470.

30. Roscoe, Edward Stanley: Aspects of Dr. Johnson, Cambridge University Press, 1928, p. 9.

31. Boswell, vol. I, p. 500.

32. Cambridge History of English Literature, Cambridge University Press, 1913, vol. X, p. 180.

33. Johnson, vol. II, p. 128.

CHAPTER II

The Preface Reviewed.

Since the publication of Johnson's Preface and edition of Shakespeare, opinion as to his merit as a Shakespearean critic has varied. In succeeding periods he has been treated with respect or indifference; now with strong dislike, and again with fervent admiration. Before we give our attention to the variety of verdicts on him, it is advisable first to consider the Preface itself: its views, its scope, and the contribution it made to eighteenth century Shakespearean criticism.

Nichol Smith, in his introduction to Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, indicates four main phases of interest in Shakespeare that prevailed among critics in Johnson's day. "The first deals with his neglect of the so-called rules of the drama; the second determines what was the extent of his learning; the third considers the treatment of his text; and the fourth, more purely aesthetic, shows his value as a delineator of character."(1) In this survey these questions and Johnson's opinion upon them will be discussed with a slight rearrangement of their order. Johnson first, however, expressed in random fashion certain general appreciative views upon Shakespeare which do not fit into this fourfold approach. Many of these utterances have a quality of truth - and therefore of permanence.

To fully appreciate Johnson and his sane, common-sense criticism, we will find it necessary to paraphrase such parts

of the essay as are most important, and to quote extensively from that work.(2)

To begin the Preface, before touching on the main points of controversy of his day, Johnson says that men "are more willing to honour past than present excellence;" and that man tends now "to find the faults of the moderns and the beauties of the ancients." Time is the only test that can be applied to a work, because it allows for comparisons with other works of the same kind. Shakespeare has begun "to assume the dignity of an ancient" for "he has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit." His works are now read for no other reason than desire for pleasure, and he is praised in so far as he gives it. "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature." Shakespeare is "above all modern writers, the poet of nature; who holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life." Thus, in the conventional diction of his day, without the romantic, emotional phraseology of the nineteenth century, does Johnson show his veneration for Shakespeare.

But Johnson is not a blind idolater. Later critics viewed Shakespeare as a god, aloof from the world, without blemish, and so to be held in reverence and profound awe. Theirs was the Age of Faith. Johnson, ever more honest than worshipful, ventured to show that Shakespeare had his faults, "sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit."(3)

He proceeds to enumerate and discuss these faults "in the proportion in which they appear to (him), without envious malignity or superstitious veneration."(4) As Houston maintains, Johnson "enters upon his task fearlessly but with moderation, and upon the whole has succeeded in laying before the reader Shakespeare's chief faults better than most of his successors."(5) What is great in the poet receives its just praise, and in the same spirit, without pettiness or rancour, that which is defective is criticized. "Not in a mean spirit," says Robinson, "but in an effort to arrive at a statement of what is permanent and significant, so that it may be placed beside what is temporary and trivial."(6)

What are the shortcomings that Johnson finds in Shakespeare? The poet "sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose.....This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better." Shakespeare's plots are often loosely formed and "he omits opportunities of instructing or delighting;" and towards the end of his work "he shortens the labor," at times, "to snatch the profit." He has no regard for chronology, and "we need not wonder to find Hector quoting Aristotle, when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothick mythology of fairies." His jests are gross and "neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy.....In tragedy his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more.....His set speeches are

commonly cold and weak" and he often applies "sonorous epithets and swelling figures" to "trivial sentiments." Lastly, Johnson mentions Shakespeare's devotion to puns. A quibble is to him "what luminous vapours are to the traveller." It "was to him the fatal Cleopatra, for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it."(7)

In presenting a list of the defects Johnson enumerates in Shakespeare, we must bear in mind that many of his (Johnson's) judgments are so remote from the general feeling prevalent today that they seem almost inexplicable. Some of these shortcomings are not really attributable to Shakespeare but are the result of a personal bias in the critic: others may be understood only when considered in the light of critical thought which was current in Johnson's age.

Johnson was a strongly religious man and felt that art and literature should be employed towards the moral elevation of the world. His indictment of Shakespeare is not so much that morality is entirely lacking in the poet, as that it merely appears incidentally. "His (Shakespeare's) precepts and axioms drop casually from him;"(8) whereas they should have been introduced with purpose. Today, such a view, though occasionally still voiced, is far from being commonly accepted. For the general public Shakespeare's greatness consists in the fact that his plays "please"; and it does not ask that they "instruct".

In considering the next defect, looseness of plot, charged by Johnson to Shakespeare, we have no means of knowing how

thorough an examination he made of the plays, nor on what principles he proceeded. It is, therefore, hard for us to accept unqualifiedly his verdict. In our day Professor George Pierce Baker, in his work entitled the Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, has made an analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic technique. He shows that we must relate the problem to the time in which the poet wrote and the central theme of the play. Together these determine the 'plot' and the manner in which it is treated. Plot is defined as "fable or story so proportioned and emphasized as to produce in the number of acts chosen the greatest possible amount of emotional effect."(9) Or it can be explained as design; namely (Baker here quotes W. H. Fleming, Shakespeare's Plots, p. 15) "the means by which the artist, out of a chaos of characters, actions, passions, evolves order." These requisites of good plotting, he maintains, Shakespeare fulfilled in most of his plays. Naturally, Shakespeare did not acquire a mastery of technique at once; but in the normal course of his development he did attain a full grasp of the essentials of plot-handling. Professor Baker takes frequent occasion to remind us that Shakespeare was writing for audiences of his day, giving them stories that appealed to them and writing them in a manner which, while it edified and elevated their dramatic judgment, was yet, at the same time, understandable to them. We must, therefore, not bring later tastes and standards to bear upon Shakespeare in criticizing his technique.(10)

In dealing with the charge that Shakespeare's humor is gross and his characters indelicate, it must be borne in mind that Johnson was no great scholar of Elizabethan literature, and had evidently not paid too close attention to the coarseness found in the plays of some of Shakespeare's contemporaries. After all, as a critic he should have viewed the matter in a comparative light. And in any event, indelicacies of expression or action are not really abundant in Shakespeare; they are to be found in isolated instances only. It is, indeed, surprising that Johnson should have overlooked the extraordinary delicacy with which Shakespeare depicts his heroines.

More puzzling to us is Johnson's ranking of the comedies above the tragedies; and his assertion that Shakespeare's declamations are cold and weak is equally perplexing. It may be that his limited concept of poetry and the fact that he had no ear for Elizabethan melody prevented him from a proper appreciation of the great qualities of Shakespeare's verse. As for the quibbles and puns in Shakespeare, which so troubled Johnson and his contemporaries, they do not today excite our annoyance at all. We rather endeavor to take a more sympathetic stand; knowing that on the one hand these word-plays were the fashion in Shakespeare's day, and on the other, that he often employed them in the speech of characters to whom such conceits were in the circumstances appropriate.

Having indicated Shakespeare's defects, Johnson next directs his attention to a consideration of the poet's so-

called neglect of the dramatic rules. His observations are a justification of Shakespeare in this matter.

Johnson was the first writer of note to defend tragi-comedy.[11] He held that Shakespeare's plays are strictly neither tragedies nor comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind, "exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature....and expressing the course of the world.... in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend."[12] The ancient writers had specialized- some selecting the field of tragedy, some that of comedy. Never, to Johnson's knowledge, had there been a single one who attempted both. Shakespeare was the first to combine the two. He "united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind, but in one composition. Almost all his plays are divided between serious and ludicrous characters."[13] True, such procedure is contrary to the critical rules; "but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature.... The mingled drama approaches nearer than either (tragedy or comedy, singly) to the appearance of life."[14]

In the main, the so-called rules of the drama referred to the doctrine of the three unities of time, place and action, though they included other matters pertaining to the stage, as well. The unities were supposed to have been put into practice by the classical dramatists of ancient times, and later formulated into a doctrine by Aristotle and Horace.

Today we take the absurdity of these rules for granted. In Lectures on Dryden, Verrall analyzes the doctrine of the unities and shows that the belief in the antiquity of their origin is unfounded. He points out that the actual formulation of the doctrine is attributable to the critics of the Renaissance, and that they were advocated, more especially, by the French critics, d'Aubignac and Rapin, and practised by Corneille.

The writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries assumed the unities to be found in substance in Aristotle's Poetics (on tragedy), and Horace's Ars Poetica; and to have been faithfully observed by the ancient tragedians. But by examining the state of the drama and the stage in ancient Athens, Verrall shows that the whole concept as expressed by the Renaissance critics was apocryphal and misleading. He cites instances of the Ancients who did not at all heed closely the unity of time: for example, Euripides, in the Suppliants.

As a matter of fact, Aristotle lays down no precept whatsoever on the unities. He never even uses the term. He simply observes of 'time' that it is limited- probably because for the choric form of tragedy, the limitation, though it proved confining to the playwright, was nevertheless a matter of practical necessity. On the question of 'place' he says nothing at all. The only theme of all the unities definitely treated by Aristotle was that of 'action'. He disapproved of 'episodic' (i. e., irrelevant) elements in plays. But this was only a rule of common sense and good

taste, and a question of economy of time. To sum it all up, the practice of the Athenian dramatists had nothing to do with the 'imitation of nature' or the imagination of the spectator- which were supposed, by the critics of the Renaissance, to be the raison d'etre of the unities- but was actuated by convenience alone.(15)

However, in Johnson's day the doctrine was still sovereign, and it required courage in a critic to attempt to dislodge it from its eminence. This Johnson recognized. "I am almost frighted," he says, "of my own temerity; and when I estimate the fame and the strength of those that maintain the contrary opinion, am ready to sink down in reverential silence."(16) Johnson's opinions on this subject were not mere a priori assertions. They rather were conclusions towards which he had been working through years of reflection and independent criticism. "Both by nature and by training," says Nichol Smith, "Johnson's tastes were classical.... In his Irene he had bowed to the rules; he had, however, begun to suspect them by the time he wrote the Rambler, and in the Preface to his edition suspicion has become a conviction."(17)

It was Johnson's singular distinction to be the most effective opponent of the dramatic rules. The attack is foreshadowed in the Rambler (no. 156) where he shows the folly of the rule of having only three actors on the stage at any one time. In his day this precept was honored mainly in the breach; yet, as he showed, no inconvenience resulted.

Similarly he was hostile to the arbitrary division of plays into five acts. There was no apparent reason why they should not be more or less. In the Preface, however, he launched his boldest attack.[18]

It is Nichol Smith's assertion that the "discussion of the three unities is perhaps the most brilliant in the whole preface."[19] Johnson first declares the historical plays, by their very nature, not subject to any laws of unity. In all his other works, Shakespeare has, on the whole, preserved the unity of action. His "plan has commonly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence....The general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation."[20] For the unities of time and place- which were supposed to make plays credible, and not unduly strain the imagination of the spectator- he had no regard.

Johnson sharply attacks the defenders of the unities and makes a plea for common sense. After all, "the truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first to the last, that the stage is only a stage, an that the players are only players." In the last analysis, no play is an actual reality, and depends on the imagination of the spectator. And surely "he that imagines" himself in a modern theatre to be viewing scenes in, say, Alexandria, "may imagine more.....The different actions that complete a story may be in places very remote from each other; and where

is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first Athens, and then Sicily, which was always known to be neither Sicily nor Athens, but a modern theatre."(21)

Johnson does not care to guess whether Shakespeare knew the unities, and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance. Nor would he vehemently reproach any other poet of distinction for his infringement upon them. He wisely realizes that "such violations of rules merely positive, become the comprehensive genius of Shakespeare, and such censures are suitable to the minute and slender criticism of Voltaire."(22)

Today we may read with amusement Johnson's summarization of his position. "Yet when I speak thus slightly of dramatick rules, I cannot but recollect how much wit and learning may be produced against me; before such authorities I am afraid to stand, not that I think the present question one of those that are to be decided by mere authority, but because it is to be suspected that these precepts have not been so easily received, but for better reasons than I have yet been able to find. The result of my inquiries, in which it would be ludicrous to boast of impartiality, is, that the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama, that though they may sometimes conduce to pleasure, they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction; and that a play, written with nice observation of critical rules, is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of superfluous and ostentatious art, by which

is shewn rather what is possible, than what is necessary."(23)

But we must maintain the proper perspective. In the eighteenth century such views were heresy, and took much daring to express. Johnson's discussion of Shakespeare's violation of the unities is one of his most forceful contributions to Shakespearean criticism. That his words were effective is proved by the fact that thenceforth the number of attacks on the unities increased.(24)

As an introduction to the second point of issue in Shakespearean criticism in the eighteenth century, i. e., the extent of the poet's learning, Johnson endeavors to place Shakespeare in his proper milieu. In order to "judge rightly of an author, we must transport ourselves to his time, and examine what were the wants of his contemporaries, and what were his means of supplying them."(25) Shakespeare's performance, to be correctly estimated, must be examined in the light of his generation. We must consider the state of society for which he produced his plays, the literary tastes of the time and the type of drama then current.

Johnson asserts that the English nation in Shakespeare's day was struggling to emerge from barbarity. He holds that part of this progress consisted in the transplanting to England ofthe philology of Italy in the reign of Henry the Eighth, the cultivation of learned languages by Lilly and other Elizabethans, and the reading of Italian and Spanish poets. But this was, as yet, confined to scholars and people of high rank.

"The publick was gross and dark." Shakespeare's audiences, made up of those who feasted upon adventures, giants, dragons and enchantments, asked not for the common occurrences of the world, but for strange events and fabulous transactions.

Shakespeare chose materials made popular by the novels of the day; "for his audience could not have followed him through the intricacies of the drama, had they not held the thread of the story in their hands."(26) He took his English history from English chronicles and ballads, and his ancient history from a translation by North of some of Plutarch's Lives. The source of As You Like It, was a contemporary pamphlet, and not Chaucer's Gamelyn, and Shakespeare found the tale of Hamlet, according to Johnson, "in plain English prose, which the critcks have now to seek in Saxo Grammaticus."(27)

Coming to the question of determining the extent of Shakespeare's learning, Johnson offers what is possibly the safest criterion, one grounded in unadorned common sense. Prior to Johnson, much pedantic learning had been expended, both by those who held the view that Shakespeare had had small learning, and by those who aimed to prove him erudite in the classics. Without delay and with characteristic directness, Johnson strikes at the crux of the matter. "There has always prevailed a tradition, that Shakespeare wanted learning, that he had no regular education, nor much skill in the dead languages. Jonson, his friend, affirms that he had small Latin, and less Greek; who, besides that he had no imaginable temptation to falsehood, wrote at a time when the char-

acter and acquistions of Shakespeare were known to multitudes. His evidence ought therefore to decide the controversy, unless some testimony of equal force could be opposed."(28)

Indeed, Johnson declares that Shakespeare's genius is above a consideration of mere learning. For one normally so reserved and carefully balanced in expression, Johnson voices his admiration for Shakespeare's creative endowments with an unusual amount of spirit. "The greater part of his (Shakespeare's) excellence was the product of his own genius..... There is a vigilance of observation and accuracy of distinction which books and precepts cannot confer; from this almost all original and native excellence proceeds. Shakespeare must have looked upon mankind with perspicacity, in the highest degree curious and attentive."(29) Shakespeare's great abilities overleaped the handicaps of his humble origin, the meagerness of his education and his pecuniary needs. "The genius of Shakespeare," Johnson goes on to say, "was not to be depressed by the weight of poverty, nor limited by the narrow conversation to which men in want are inevitably condemned; the incumbrances of his fortune were shaken from his mind, as dewdrops from a lion's mane."(30)

The phase of interest to Shakespearean critics in the eighteenth century concerning the poet's value as a delineator of character, likewise finds Johnson in a eulogizing strain. Naturally, we must turn to the edition itself for his appreciation of specific characters. Of these, perhaps, none is so famous as the note on Polonius; insomuch that it

is well worth citing here. "Polonius is a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation, confident of his knowledge, proud of his eloquence, and declining into dotage. His mode of oratory is truly represented as designed to ridicule the practice of those times, of prefaces that made no introduction, and of method that embarrassed rather than explained. This part of his character is accidental, the rest is natural. Such a man is positive and confident, because he knows that his mind was once strong, and knows not that it is become weak. Such a man excels in general principles, but fails in the particular application. He is knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon memory, and can draw from his repositories of [illegible] knowledge, he utters weighty sentences, and gives useful counsel; but as the mind in its enfeebled state cannot be kept long busy and intent, the old man is subject to sudden dereliction of his faculties. he loses the order of his ideas, and entangles himself in his own thoughts, till he recovers the leading principle, and falls again into his former train. This idea of dotage encroaching upon wisdom, will solve all the phaenomena of the character of Polonius."(31)

In the Preface, however, Johnson confines himself to general observations. His discussion of Shakespeare's skill in depicting character abounds in deep insight and fervent praise. Johnson maintains that Shakespeare, by his close observation of humanity, was able to draw for us characters that are true to life and universal in appeal. "Shakespeare has

no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion: even where the agency is supernatural the dialogue is level with life..... He has not only shewn human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but as it would be found in trials, to which it cannot be exposed." (32)

Johnson attacks his contemporary critics who censure Shakespeare for his so-called indecorum in portraying kings and men of high estate as possessing the failings of ordinary men. "Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accident.... His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him. He was inclined to shew an usurper and a murderer not only odious but despicable, he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings." (33)

The remainder of the Preface is devoted to comment on the corrupt state of Shakespeare's text, an account of the work of earlier editors, and a statement of his own method of editing.

The faulty condition of Shakespeare's text Johnson ascribes to careless copying, mutilations by actors, and failure of the press to correct the accumulated errors before printing. "In this state they remained, not.... because they were un-

regarded, but because the editor's art was not yet applied to modern languages, and our ancestors were accustomed to so much negligence of English printers, that they could very patiently endure it."(34)

Johnson's summary and estimate of his predecessors is characterized by its fairness and impartiality. No matter what particular failings they may have possessed, he generously credits them with having, each one in his turn, enriched in some degree the field of Shakespearean study. Rowe, the first of the eighteenth century editors, made many emendations, which his successors have received without acknowledgment..... Pope showed the extremely corrupt state of Shakespeare's text, and by collating the old copies, restored many lines to their integrity. Johnson is, however, very severe with Pope for alluding with contempt to the dull duty of an editor; and in a remarkable passage he defines the art of conjectural criticism. "The duty of a collator is indeed dull, yet, like other tedious tasks, is very necessary; but an emendatory critick would ill discharge his duty, without qualities very different from dulness. In perusing a corrupted piece, he must have before him all possibilities of meaning, with all possibilities of expression. Such must be his comprehension of thought, and such his copiousness of language. Out of many readings possible, he must be able to select that which best suits with the state, opinions, and modes of language prevailing in every age, and with his author's particular cast of thought, and turn of expression. Such must be his knowledge, and such his taste.

Conjectural criticism demands more than humanity possesses, and he that exercises it with most praise, has very frequent need of indulgence. Let us now be told no more of the dull duty of an editor."(35)

Pope was followed by Theobald, whom Johnson characterizes as a man of "narrow comprehension and small acquistions..... But zealous for minute accuracy, and not negligent in pursuing it."(36)-----Sir Thomas Hanmer, who next undertook an edition of Shakespeare, Johnson considered "eminently qualified by nature for such studies..... He had.... that intuition by which the poet's intention is immediately discovered, and that dexterity of intellect which dispatches its work by the easiest means."(37) -----As for Warburton, who immediately preceded Johnson in the field as an editor, his chief failing is "acquiescence in his first thoughts..... and that confidence which presumes to do, by surveying the surface, what labour only can perform, by penetrating the bottom."(38)

For himself, Johnson makes an honest confession of ignorance, resigning to time those passages which he did not understand, but hoped would hereafter be explained. In the beginning he collated all the folios, but afterwards used only the first. He minimized the use of conjecture. "As I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less." For in the last analysis, when the conjectural critic "succeeds best, he produces perhaps but one reading of many probable."(39)

The Preface is, as a whole, highly readable. It is, to be sure, marred by several defects. Johnson's physical handicaps, the literary tastes of his day, and his tendency to look for moral edification in any author, limited his capacity to appreciate Shakespeare. Nevertheless, by reason of its positive qualities, it remains an outstanding contribution to Shakespearean criticism of the eighteenth century. It gives full play to Johnson's common sense, his robust use of the English language, his honesty and impartiality. In it he boldly uttered critical opinions which were revolutionary in his day, and in ours are still, to a great extent, valid. We may ascribe to him what he claimed for his predecessors: that he did not leave Shakespeare without improvement.

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32. Johnson, vol. II, p. 121.

33. Johnson, vol. II, p. 122.

34. Johnson, vol. II, p. 150.

35. Johnson, vol. II, p. 151-152.

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38. Johnson, vol. II, p. 155.

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CHAPTER III

The Preface in the Eighteenth Century.

In October 1765, Johnson's long deferred edition appeared. By this time he was a very influential character, whose words were bound to attract the attention of the reading public. Tobias Smollett, the novelist, once referred to him as "the great Cham of literature," a title which suited Johnson very accurately, for "he held the foremost place in the literary society of his day."(1) He was known as the literary dictator of his time, whose opinions, writings and conversation held great weight. Therefore, it is not surprising, that this edition which had been so widely advertised long before its publication, and so eagerly awaited by his contemporaries, should attract widespread attention. The leading periodicals of Johnson's day devoted much space for review and critical comment upon it.

The more one reads the then current reviews, the more one is able to appreciate the smoothness and force of Johnson's writing. As Millar, in summarizing the qualities of Johnson's style, puts it, anyone "who has studied his writings with care," cannot but have "marked his fastidious choice and effective marshalling of epithets," and "noted the majestic roll of his sonorous periods..... Johnson's great work, from a literary point of view, was the restoration to our literature of some of the forgotten possibilities of English prose."(2)

This observation receives added force when we consider

the type of writing one meets in the reviews. With little exception, the style of the critics, at least when they wrote for the periodicals, was dull, ponderous and long-winded. The sentences are often of interminable length. They lack grace and polish, and at times require many rereadings for a clear understanding of the sense.

THE ANNUAL REGISTER (1765)

In the Annual Register for 1765 an evaluation of Johnson's work was printed. First the reviewer, in one long, drawn-out sentence- which is a typical specimen of the involved style of the then current reviews- thanks Johnson for his performance. "The less abilities seem requisite for a due performance of the task Dr. Johnson has undertaken in regard to Shakespeare's works, or at least of that part of this task, which he has thought proper to execute, the collating of the old copies in order to find out the genuine reading, and the comparing of former commentators on difficult passages, and the examining of these passages himself, in order to discover the true meaning, of that great poet; the more Mr. Johnson seems intitled to the thanks of the public, since, at that rate, he might have employed his great talents more to his own honour, though not more, perhaps, to the gratification of others."(3)

Referring to the delay in publication, this reviewer claims that "we are still of the opinion that notwithstanding the long delay of the work, and his not complying altogether with the expectation of the public, the public will be found considerably indebted to him; at least, till it can be proved,

that the delay and deficiency have been oweing to any wilful negligence on his part; a charge which it may not be so easy to prove, considering those vicissitudes to which, with regard to study, though not discernible, the mind of man is even more subject than his body is, with regard to labour; and from which the minds of the greatest geniuses are often less exempt than those of the meanest. The most, we think, that can be said of Mr. Johnson on this occasion, is, that he was rather rash in promising than backward in performing. It is, however, happy for the republic of letters, that he promised as he did; since, otherwise, we should, probably, never have received Shakespeare through his hands."(4)

If Johnson's Preface had been lost to us through accident, it might conceivably have been possible to reconstruct the more important parts of it by collating the various reviews of the months immediately following the publication. In the Gentleman's Magazine, the Critical and the Monthly Reviews of October and November 1765, are found long quotations of paragraph upon paragraph of the Preface. A good deal of the criticism of that day revolved around Johnson's daring opinions upon the unities, and the passages on that subject are extensively quoted. It would seem that a reader who in November 1765 was familiar with no other literature but the current reviews would have had a fair knowledge of the Preface; if not in its entirety, at least of its salient points.

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THE LONDON MAGAZINE (October 1765)

The very morning after the publication, one might say, before the printer's ink was dry on the sheets, there appeared in the London Magazine a review signed by one, T. H. This reviewer sums up what the public thought of Johnson's works in general, by saying: "But the appearance of any production of Mr. Johnson cannot fail of being grateful to the literary world; and, come when they will, like an agreeable guest, we are sure to give them a hearty welcome, though perhaps we may have betrayed some little impatience at their not coming sooner."(5) He then paraphrases and quotes somewhat at length from the Preface, concluding with a very favorable criticism of Johnson's effort. "On the whole," he states, "this Preface, as it is an elaborate, so it is also a fine piece of writing. It possesses all the virtues and vices of the peculiar stile of its author. It speaks, perhaps of Shakespear's beauties too sparingly, and of his faults too hardly; but it contains nevertheless, much truth, good sense, and just criticism."(6)

THE GENTLEMAN'S MAGAZINE (October 1765)

The eagerness with which the edition was expected, together with Johnson's popularity, seems to have given a great impetus to the sale of the work. In the Gentleman's Magazine, in its issue of October 1765, there appeared this statement in a review of the edition. "Of this work all commendation is precluded by the just celebrity of the author, and the rapid sale of the impression which has already made a second necessary,

though it has not been published a month."(7)

THE CRITICAL REVIEW (October 1765)

This review, though it supports Dr. Johnson's views upon the unities, is in general very tepid in its praise, as the following quotation will show. "We would not, however, be thought to insinuate, that Mr. Johnson's preface is without merit; we think, some parts of it are well wrote, and if the reader will indulge us in a pun, with a truely critical spirit, tho' not in the true spirit of criticism."(8) This reviewer approves of Johnson's conclusions about the unities, and prior to quoting many paragraphs about that topic, remarks: "Though Mr. Johnson, in characterizing his author, has been immoderately moderate; yet it is with pleasure we give our readers the following quotations from the preface."(9)

THE MONTHLY REVIEW (October and November 1765)

However, not all the reviews were as favorable as those quoted above. The Monthly Review had very little to say that was kind to Johnson. It cared neither for his style, nor his abilities, nor his opinions. About his style the reviewer remarks: "We find little in the first five pages of our Editor's preface, but trite and commonplace reflections, on our veneration for antiquity, and on the general talents of Shakespeare; delivered in the pompous style which is so peculiar to himself, and is so much admired, by some of his readers. In some places, however, he is less verbose; and then he is generally sensible, instructive and entertaining."(10) Like many critics of the

following century, the reviewer does not thoroughly understand Johnson, and lays stress upon the wrong points. Thus he writes: "It happens,... very unluckily for our Editor, that in spite of that respect which he is so notoriously ready to pay to his opponents, he shews himself to be as indifferent a pleader for Shakespeare as he hath proved against him."(11)

Johnson's attack upon the unities was the point most criticized by the reviewers. This writer has much to say against Johnson's opinions, and upon the whole thinks him in no way qualified to engage upon so difficult a discussion. "We entertain some suspicion," he states, "that the critical Reader will, on a due consideration of what is hereafter advanced, be apt to think Dr. Johnson too little acquainted with the nature and use of the drama, to engage successfully in a dispute of so much difficulty as that which relates to the breach or observation of the dramatic unities."(12)

Having indicted Johnson for his lack of ability, he continues to analyze the nature of the unities. Apropos of the statement found in the Preface that Shakespeare preserved the unity of action, the reviewer observes: "We cannot on the principles of common-sense, conceive, how any dramatic writer can be justly said to have preserved the unity of action, who hath confessedly shewn no regard to those of time and place; with which we apprehend it to be very strictly connected."(13) He challenges Johnson's contention that the audience is always in its senses, on the ground that the spectator is so intent on the scene in a play, "as to be absent with regard to every-

thing else."(14) And so, though he is always in his senses, he is, nevertheless, "unquestionably deceived."(15) The reviewer goes on to say that "Dr. Johnson, therefore, may fully prove the impossibility of the drama's being in its materiality credited, and yet by no means exculpate Shakespeare in the breach of the dramatic unities."(16)

The reviewer harshly summarizes the entire work, finding many faults and no saving graces. "There runs, indeed, through the whole of this preface, such a mixed and inconsistent vein of praise and censure respecting others; and of boasting and excuse regarding himself, that we think we discover it to be the production of a wavering pen, directed by a hand equally wearied and disgusted with a task injudiciously undertaken, and as indolently pursued."(17)

WILLIAM KENRICK (1765)

We have next to consider the opinion of one who seems to have been unable to speak of Johnson with that casual restraint which indicates mere difference of viewpoint. What he wrote he expressed with vehemence and ill-will. William Kenrick, whom Houston calls "one of the most infamous of all the town libellers,"(18) lost no time in assailing the edition. He brought forth A Review of Dr. Johnson's New Edition of Shakespeare: in which the Ignorance, or Inattention, of the Editor is exposed, and the Poet defended from the Persecution of his Commentators, 1765. This is, in brief, a scathing attack upon Johnson's work, trying to prove that he was incapable of under-

standing or interpreting the genius of Shakespeare. But this criticism was not enough for Kenrick, who was "one of those violent assailants whose aim is not merely to vanquish but even to exterminate his antagonist. With him, it is not enough that the editor of Shakespeare be proved to have mistaken his own powers and qualifications, when he undertook that arduous task, in which greater men than Dr. Johnson have failed of success- but he must also be exposed as a very pretender to all literature and science."(19) In the aforementioned Review, Kenrick had taken under consideration only a part of the edition. He threatened to continue this review of the author's work, together with a criticism of the Preface itself. But this continuation never materialized.

Johnson himself did not answer these libellous assertions of Kenrick, to whom he referred as "one of the many who have made themselves publick, without making themselves known."(20) Many of Johnson's friends did censure Kenrick for the offensive manner of his review, but their "faint and distant efforts, however, seem to have indicated their fear of coming to close quarters with this furious combatant."(21) Finally, a young Oxford student, by the name of Barclay, wrote an answer to Kenrick. Boswell says that "Johnson was at first angry that Kenrick's attack should have the credit of an answer. But afterwards, considering the young man's good intention, he kindly noticed him."(22) A brief examination of this answer is given in the Monthly Review, which says that "in the present Examiner (i. e., Barclay), we think he (Kenrick) hath indeed

met his match, in every respect."(23)

Barclay's article immediately evoked a reply, entitled A Defense of Dr. Kenrick's Review.... by a Friend, subscribed R. R. This 'friend' was none other than Kenrick himself, who continued for many years to attack Johnson. It seemed to be no distinction whatsoever to be reviled and slandered by Kenrick, nor to be referred to by him in terms such as these: "the self-sufficient, the arrogant Dr. Johnson," or "I could not, with patience, see a Goliath treat the muse of Shakespeare like a common drab, at his pleasure."(24) Kenrick was noted for his libels, and, indeed, proceedings were once commenced against him in the Court of King's Bench for a libel on Garrick.(25) The Critical Review seemed to interpret his motive in attacking Johnson as pecuniary. As its reviewer put it: "Though Mr. Kenrick, in his preface, discovers that his capital quarrel with Mr. Johnson is his accepting a pension; yet we believe he would be glad of furnishing his adversary an opportunity to attack him on the same ground."(26)

VOLTAIRE (1765-1767)

On the Continent, Johnson's Preface received disapproving notice from the celebrated Voltaire. The French philosopher, though he admired the vitality of English drama, spoke in censorious terms of those of its aspects which conflicted with his dramatic views and tastes. He looked askance at the mingling of tragedy and comedy in the same piece. He scouted the appearance of commoner and prince on the stage together. And he was especially shocked by the gross violation of the

unities. All these principles which so outraged his critical sensibilities, Johnson not only defended; he even made them the occasion of expressing in the Preface his contempt for Voltaire's criticism of Shakespeare.[27] This attack on himself Voltaire did not permit to go unnoticed. He attempted to even the score in one of the essays in his Philosophical Dictionary, entitled "Dramatic Art." In it he set forth his criticism of the English theatre, and then turned his fire upon Johnson. "I have cast my eyes," he remarked, "over an edition of Shakespeare put forth by Mr. Samuel Jonhson." Misspelling of a name was a habit with Voltaire. "I have seen," he continued, "that in it those foreigners are treated as possessing petty minds who are astonished to find in the pieces of this great Shakespeare a Roman senator playing a buffoon, and a king appearing on the stage intoxicated. I do not wish to suspect Mr. Jonhson of being a sorry jester and to be too fond of wine: but I find it a little extraordinary that he counts buffoonery and drunkenness among the beauties of the tragic theatre."[28] It is, perhaps, to be regretted that Johnson never replied to this stricture. For, as Lounsbury suggests, "had the preliminary skirmishes which occurred developed into a regular conflict, there would have been a battle royal which would have been memorable in the history of literary controversy."[29]

THOMAS TYRWHITT (1766)

Johnson's Preface did much to advance an interest in Shakespeare. Not only were the reviews of the day in England

taken up with the subject, but many small volumes appeared which dealt with the same topic, and in which their authors made critical references to Johnson's Edition and Preface. One of the more important of these was an anonymous work, published in 1766, bearing the title Observations and Conjectures upon some Passages of Shakespeare. This was written by Thomas Tyrwhitt, who said that "the author (i. e., Tyrwhitt) has not entered into the merits of Mr. Johnson's performance, but has set down some observations and conjectures."(30) This work is an examination of Johnson's edition and notes on the plays; however, it does not deal at length with the Preface.

JOSEPH RITSON (1783)

In 1783 there appeared Remarks, Critical and Illustrative on the Text and Notes of the Last Edition of Shakespeare, (Steevens in ten volumes, 1778). This volume was published anonymously, but the author seems to have been Joseph Ritson. In no uncertain terms he points out the defects of the Johnson and Steevens edition. Speaking of Shakespearean editors, he asks: "Where are they now- Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Warburton, Hanmer, Capell? Where even dr. Johnson and mr. Steevens may, in the course of a few revolving years, be sent to accompany them:- the regions of oblivion or disgrace."(31) Referring to the manner and method which Johnson, in the Preface, claims to have employed in collating the text, Ritson says: "He must be hardy, indeed, that dares give a flat contradiction to such positive assertions as these from so respectable a character.

But the cause of Shakespeare and truth obliges one to say that the learned writer is certainly mistaken. The text of his own edition, the notes of mr. Steevens and in some respect, the remarks in the following sheets, will prove that he never collated any one of the folios,- no not a single play, or at least that of his collations he has made little or no use. That he picked out a reading here and there from the old editions is true: all his predecessors did the same: but this is not collation. So much for dr. Johnson."(32) In short, though he speaks of Johnson as "so respectable a character," nevertheless, he does not think very highly of him as an editor of Shakespeare.

JOHN CALLANDER (1783)

In this year there also appeared a work about which very little is heard. The author, John Callander, seems very bitter against Johnson in this pamphlet entitled A Critical Review of the Works of Dr. Samuel Johnson. He believes that Johnson should "have thought more and written less.... (For).... many men have written trifles, many have written nonsense, and many have written lies, but did you ever hear of any man so apt to forget his own opinions and even to contradict them, as Dr. Johnson."(33) He does not agree with Johnson's manner, and says: "Yet the Doctor writes in the most peremptory and decisive tone-

> As who should say, I am Sir Oracle,
> And when I am to speak let no dog bark."(34)

Finally he ends his criticism with some scathing remarks which are italicized, presumably, for greater emphasis. "The Doctor's

preface concludes with these modest and respectful terms: 'I should feel little solicitude about the sentence, were it to be pronounced by the skilful and learned.' That is to say: 'You common readers are presumptuous, insignificant, shallow fellows, but men of sense and learning will distinguish and admire My merit.' "(35)

JAMES BOSWELL (1791)

We now turn to an appraisal from one who perhaps more than any other man of that century was qualified to express an opinion on Johnson's performance. James Boswell, who for many years staid close to Johnson and recorded his words upon many subjects, learned to understand his hero well, and gives us a warm appreciation of him in the role of Shakespearean critic. "In October of this year (1765)," he writes in his noted biography, "he (Johnson) at length gave the world his edition of Shakspeare, which, if it had no other merit but that of producing his Preface, in which the excellencies and defects of that immortal bard are displayed with a masterly hand, the nation would have no reason to complain. A blind indiscriminate admiration of Shakspeare had exposed the British nation to the ridicule of foreigners. Johnson, by candidly admitting the faults of his poet, had the more credit in bestowing on him deserved and indisputable praise; and doubtless none of all his panegyrists have done him half so much honour. Their praise was, like that of a counsel, upon his own side of the cause: Johnson's was like the grave, well-considered, and impartial opinion of the

judge, which falls from his lips with weight, and is received with reverence. What he did as a commentator has no small share of merit, though his researches were not so ample, and his investigations so acute as they might have been, which we now certainly know from the labours of other able and ingenious critics who have followed him. He has enriched his edition with a concise account of each play, and of its characteristick excellence. Many of his notes have illustrated obscurities in the text, and placed passages eminent fo beauty in a more conspicuous light; and he has in general exhibited such a mode of annotation, as may be beneficial to all subsequent editions."(36)

The appearance of Johnson's Preface and Edition called forth, as has been shown, much critical comment. The opinions given differed not merely in point of view, but also in manner: ranging from the plodding assertions of the critical reviews down to the polite but somewhat stilted observations of Voltaire; and embracing the heated pronouncements of Kenrick and the carping criticism of Ritson and Callander, as well as the admiring enthusiasm of Boswell. Some agreed with Johnson; others disagreed. There were those that gave Johnson a full and unstinted measure of praise; while others bestowed it grudgingly and with reservations. But none- and this is the crux of the matter- none of his contemporaries, who had any opinion at all to express, could speak with indifference.

It was apparent that Johnson's contribution to Shakespearean studies was not one which had been brought forth merely to moulder and be forgotten. The future would have to reckon with it as well.

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7. Gentleman's Magazine, vol. 35, 1765, p. 479.
8. Critical Review, vol. 20, 1765, p. 323.
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10. Monthly Review, vol. 33, 1765, p. 287.
11. Monthly Review, p. 295.
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14. Monthly Review, p. 298.
15. Monthly Review, p. 299.
16. Monthly Review, p. 375.
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19. Monthly Review, p. 457.
20. Boswell, J.: Life of Johnson, ed. by G. B. Hill, Oxford, 1887, vol. I, p. 498.
21. Monthly Review, vol. 34, p. 316.

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23. Monthly Review, p. 316.

24. Copies of Kenrick's work are difficult to obtain. I was able to procure for my use, only contemporary reviews of his writing.

25. Boswell, vol.I, p. 498fn.

26. Critical Review, p. 333.

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30. Smith, D. N.: Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, Glasgow, 1903, p. lx.

31. Ritson, Joseph: Remarks, Critical and Illustrative on the Text and Notes of the Last Edition of Shakespeare, London, 1783, p. ii.

32. Ritson, p. iii-iv.

33. Callander, John: A Critical Review of the Works of Dr. Samuel Johnson, Edinburgh, 1783, p. 67.

34. Callander, p. 67.

35. Callander, p. 69.

36. Boswell, p. 496-497.

CHAPTER IV

The Preface in the Nineteenth Century.

The nineteenth century was one of revolt and reaction against the principles of the Age of Johnson. In literature it represented an almost complete antithesis to the thoughts and critical outlook of that period which had adhered so strongly to classical traditions. This revolt made itself evident not only in the poetry and writings of the creative minds of the era, but in the reawakened interest these writers showed in the literature of the past. They wished to have nothing in common with their immediate predecessors whom they held to be too strict conformers to rules and regulations. They were not to be tied or hampered by arbitrary limitations on form or subject. Therefore, they turned back to the remote past to rediscover its beauties. In their own eyes they were the first to really appreciate Shakespeare, to enjoy his works to their fullest. They believed that although men before them had read Shakespeare and had written about him, they could not have thoroughly enjoyed nor understood the great genius of the poet, for they did not have the correct approach to literary criticism. For a critic to read Shakespeare, and then find faults in his writings, could only mean that he had no proper appreciation of the value of the bard. The nineteenth century critics felt that they must raise the criticism of Shakespeare to what Babcock calls "idolatry ad astra."(1) It was not enough merely to praise Shakespeare; these praises must be sung in high romantic tones. Hazlitt very aptly ex-

presses this idea, saying: "An overstrained enthusiasm is more pardonable with respect to Shakespear, than the want of it; for our admiration cannot easily surpass his genius."(2)

In the light of this sentiment, how could the mundane, common-sense, cold-sounding criticism of Johnson fare well amongst the romantic effervescences of the early nineteenth century? This new appreciation of Shakespeare brought in its wake an interest in Johnson, not merely because of his eminence as a literary figure, but more especially in his capacity as an editor and critic of Shakespeare. Many of the romantic writers may have borrowed freely of his ideas and suggestions concerning the historic approach to Shakespeare, and the method of interpretation of his characters. But no one admitted a debt to Johnson. Rather did they look down upon him, sparing no effort to condemn him and his performance. This century neither understood Johnson, nor cared to do so. It was the writers of this age who showed no appreciation of his sound qualities, for they expected emotional phraseology and outlook in a man who was by nature and circumstances unable to write in such a vein. The sane, calm, relatively dispassionate note in his criticism evoked no sympathy in the early nineteenth century, which felt that "Shakespear's bold and happy flights of imagination were equally thrown away upon our author (i. e., Johnson)."(3)

Opinion upon Johnson might well be divided into three stages, each marked by its own characteristics and point of view. The early 1800's found Johnson in great disfavor.

Writers of this period stood out in direct revolt against any idea that could be traced to a classic influence. Reason was frowned upon, and a critic of Johnson's stamp held in open disdain. Coleridge, Hazlitt and the German Shakespearean expert, Schlegel, who are the foremost writers in the field at this time, had very little to say in praise of Johnson. They viewed criticism in a different light from him, who, according to Hazlitt, made "criticism a kind of Procrustes' bed of genius, where he might cut down imagination to matter-of-fact, regulate the passions according to reason, and translate the whole into logical diagrams and rhetorical declamation."(4)

The second stage is, in a sense, the turning-point in opinion upon Johnson. The first exponent of the new attitude was Carlyle, who, though he never expressly wrote of Johnson as a critic of Shakespeare, may yet be considered in this survey, for he led the way to a newer appreciation of Johnson. From the end of the third decade of the nineteenth century onward, the pendulum swings toward an understanding and a more sympathetic evaluation of the merits of this great eighteenth century critic. This is not to say that attacks upon Johnson cease. But they are on the whole less virulent, and apart from one exception- Knight-, the carping note is quite modified. And against the animadversions of Knight can be juxtaposed the appreciative tone of Ulrici.

We come upon the third stage with the closing years of the century. It is difficult to sum up the attitude in an

expression. But the term, judicious, will serve the purpose. Men like Birrell and Dowden view Johnson's Shakespearean criticism in a tempered and restrained fashion. The former even speaks of him with affection. To be sure, they do not exhibit the unqualified enthusiasm of Raleigh or Nichol Smith. But their balanced views are definitely a presage of the attitude held in our own generation.

ANDREW BECKET (1815)

In order to facilitate matters and to trace the tendencies of the nineteenth century in the criticism of Johnson, we shall continue, as in the previous chapter, to review the writers of that period in chronological order. The continental writers seemed to feel that it was they who had first acquired the grace and insight for the proper interpretation of the greatness of Shakespeare, and that all others must owe a debt to them. Notwithstanding this claim, no separate consideration will be given them here, but we shall record their ideas in their natural order of time. There is, however, one English writer whom we shall take out of this chronological frame. As he is rarely heard of in the field of Shakespearean criticism, let us dispose of him at once. Besides, his writings do typify the early nineteenth century view so well that they, so to speak, set the tone. This man, Andrew Becket, in 1815 wrote a book called : Shakspeare's Himself Again: or The Language of the Poet Asserted: Being a Full but Dispassionate Examen of the Readings and Interpretations of the Several Editors.

This author approaches Shakespeare with "adoration." After a few general observations, he then turns to a special consideration of Johnson. "It is acknowledged, I believe, on all hands, that Johnson did little as a commentator on Shakspeare: that is to say, in giving clearness and consistency to the Poet's expression; while the charge of a want of morality in his writings, is much too hastily advanced..... It should be remembered, that if some things repugnant to our moral feelings be occasionally found in his pages, the Poet is no way deserving of reprehension on that account. It is not himself, but the character, who speaks. But the censure of the critic is not confined to this point alone. He is equally severe when speaking of him in the exercise of his art." (5)

Here the author quotes passages from the Preface to illustrate this point, and then proceeds: "This is a language by no means allowable in speaking of Shakspeare;- it is indeed far better suited to the meridian of Paris, than that of London." (This last is evidently a hit at the Voltairean school of criticism.) "But Johnson.....is frequently more sonorous than solid.....I must further observe of this Critic, who by the way has been much too highly panegyrized by his followers, that he is remarkably wanting in consistency." (6)

A page full of examples of this fault follows. Thus, Becket points out, Johnson first says that Shakespeare's "comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language..... His comedy, indeed often surpasses expectation or desire." But elsewhere he observes that the comic scenes are seldom success-

ful when the characters engage "in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm."(7) Needless to say, Becket's censure is not wholly justified, inasmuch as it can be seen that in the first quotation Johnson is referring to Shakespeare's comedy, which, on the whole, he admires, and in the second, merely to one aspect of it which does not meet with his approval. In like manner Becket later finds Johnson inconsistent in claiming on the one hand that "the business of a commentator is far from easy;" and on the other, that "the art of writing notes is not difficult of attainment." But Becket is confusing two aspects of editorial work. In the first citation Johnson has reference to conjectural criticism, which "demands more than humanity possesses;" and in the second, his remarks turn upon the art of note-writing in general and convey to his readers an explanation concerning the brevity of the notes.(8)

Becket then goes on to object to Johnson's statement that conjecture is an art not overmuch to be trusted. He holds the contrary opinion; that conjecture is "absolutely indispensable." Harking back again to the inconsistencies in Johnson, the author closes with this comment: "In a word, it may be said of Johnson .....that the latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning; or that he would prove the truth of his propositions by something like the reductio ad absurdum of the schools."(9) It is worth while, in passing, to note the view Becket takes of his task; it is so much in harmony with the early nineteenth century outlook. His is a patriotic mission. "It is for the honour of the nation to stand forward in the cause of Shakspeare."(10)

AUGUSTUS WILLIAM SCHLEGEL (1808)

In pleading for a more fervent appreciation of the poet, and in putting it on grounds of national honor, Becket may have had in mind a foreign scholar by the name of Schlegel, who had been writing with more enthusiasm of the glory of Shakespeare for Germans, than any English critic had been capable of doing in Shakespeare's England. In 1808 this critic began to write about Shakespeare, and his interpretation had great weight with the English. Hazlitt himself confesses to this influence. "We have the rather," he says, "availed ourselves of this testimony of a foreign critic (Schlegel) in behalf of Shakespear, because our own countryman, Dr. Johnson, has not been so favorable to him."(11) Yet had Hazlitt read Schlegel, without taking, at the same time, a biased attitude toward Johnson, he would have seen that the German merely restates Johnson's position, in many instances, in the language of a romanticist. Johnson claims that our imagination is capable of overleaping the bounds of time and place. In what, besides the romantic tinge of his phraseology, does Schlegel differ from this view when he writes: "The capacity of our mind to fly in thought, with the rapidity of lightning, through the immensity of time and space, is well known and acknowledged in common life; and shall poetry, whose very purpose it is to add all manner of wings to our minds, and which has at command all the magic of genuine illusion, that is, of a lively and enrapturing fiction, be alone compelled to renounce this

universal prerogative?"[12]

Schlegel condemns the English school of Shakespearean criticism of the eighteenth century, to which Johnson belongs. "The English critics," he says, "are unanimous in their praise of the truth and uniform consistency of his (Shakespeare's) characters, of his heartrending pathos, and his comic wit. Moreover, they extol the beauty and sublimity of his separate descriptions, images and expressions. This last is the most superficial and cheap mode of criticising art." Schlegel singles out Johnson, not only as an exponent of this method of criticism, but also as one who is at the same time inconsistent in his employment of it. His sin is, therefore, doubly great. Citing the Preface, Schlegel observes that "Johnson compares him who should endeavour to recommend this poet by passages unconnectedly torn from his works, to the pedant in Hierocles, who exhibited a brick as a sample of his house. And yet how little, and how very unsatisfactorily does he himself speak of the pieces considered as a whole! Let any man, for instance, bring together the short characters which he gives at the close of each play, and see if the aggregate will amount to the sum of admiration which he himself, at his outset, has stated as the correct standard for the appreciation of the poet. It was, generally speaking, the prevailing tendency of the time which preceded our own.....to consider everything having life as a mere accumulation of dead parts, to separate what exists only in connexion and cannot otherwise be conceived, instead of penetrating to the central point and viewing all the

parts as so many irradiations from it. Hence nothing is so rare as a critic who can elevate himself to the comprehensive contemplation of a work of art."(13) Johnson, accordingly, would fail to qualify by this standard as a 'rare' critic.

Schlegel takes issue with Johnson for the latter's assertion that Shakespeare "is not long soft and pathetick without some idle conceit, or contemptible equivocation."(14) First the German critic extols Shakespeare for his very accurate portrayal of character. "Of all the poets, perhaps, he alone has portrayed the mental diseases, melancholy, delirium, lunacy, with such inexpressible and, in every respect, definite truth, that the physician may enrich his observations from them in the same manner as from real cases."(15) Then taking the eighteenth century critic to task he adds: "And yet Johnson has objected to Shakespeare that his pathos is not always natural and free from affectation. There are, it is true, passages, though comparatively speaking very few, where his poetry exceeds the bounds of actual dialogue, where a too soaring imagination, a too luxuriant wit, rendered a complete dramatic forgetfulness of himself impossible. With this exception, the censure originated in a fanciless way of thinking, to which everything appears unnatural that does not consort with its own tame insipidity. Hence an idea has been formed of simple and natural pathos, which consists in exclamations destitute of imagery and nowise elevated above every-day life. But energetical passions electrify all the mental powers, and will consequently, in highly-favoured natures, give utterance

to themselves in ingenious and figurative expressions."(16)

The last point on which Schlegel disagrees with Johnson's opinion, is in his refutation by example from the play Cymbeline, of Johnson's contention that Shakespeare usually hurries over the conclusion of his piece. "Rather," Schlegel points out, "does he (Shakespeare), from a desire to satisfy the feelings, introduce a great deal which, so far as the understanding of the denouement requires, might in a strict sense be justly spared: our modern spectators are much more impatient to see the curtain drop, when there is nothing more to be determined, than those of his day could have been."(17)

There can be no doubt of the great extent of Schlegel's influence upon English Shakespearean critics. As has already been shown, Hazlitt openly avowed this influence, and Coleridge borrowed long passages from him almost verbatim. Raysor, in his scholarly work, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, draws a parallel between the two men (Schlegel and Coleridge), who were "both romantic critics in conscious revolt against the criticism of the previous age, particularly that of Dr. Johnson."(18) This 'conscious revolt' is the tone prevalent in their age. To qualify as a romantic, one must find fault with Johnson, for he represented the thoughts and manners of a time, neither to be held in sympathy nor to be esteemed.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1811-1814)

The next English critic of note, and perhaps the one who is responsible in the greatest degree for the trend of Shake-

spearean criticism in the nineteenth century, was Coleridge. He not only wrote copiously on the subject of Shakespeare but delivered, on two separate occasions, series of lectures upon the poet. His writings that have come down to us are fragmentary and chaotic, requiring much careful and laborious editing. The following passage from Saintsbury's History of English Criticism will help us to appreciate the state of the notes of his lectures which we possess. "We know from indisputable testimony of persons who actually heard the Lectures which these notes represent, that if we possessed reports in extenso by the most accurate and intelligent of reporters, things would be not so very much better, because of Coleridge's incurable habit of apology, digression, anticipation and repetition."(19) The task, for us, has been greatly alleviated by Raysor's two volumes on Coleridge (mentioned above), which have recently been published. This scholar has done much to make the perplexing mass of material available in as clear a fashion as possible, to the person who desires a systematic approach to this body of opinion on Shakespeare.

Raysor holds that "before Coleridge could fully develop his own point of view towards Shakespeare, he was obliged to attack the lingering neo-classical prejudices which still obscured Shakespeare's fame." In order to do so fully, he "singled out Dr. Johnson's great Preface to Shakespeare for persecution, and in all his lectures he recurred to the subject with a persistency which exposed him to the charge of repetition."(20) Very unfortunately for us (who could have made excellent use

of such definite and invaluable evidence of Coleridge's attitude towards Johnson) these lectures are among the lost ones of the years 1811-1812. We have, though, a very illuminating marginal note on Macbeth, marked with large brackets, and therefore, according to Raysor, "as if for omission," which indubitably shows Coleridge's contempt. "Johnson, the Frog-Critic.", he scribbles. "How nimbly it leaps, how excellently it swims- only the fore-legs (it must be admitted) are too long and the hind ones too short."(21) From still another source we can glean this endeavor to belittle Johnson. Some of Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare were attended by Henry Crabb Robinson, who kept a diary and included therein brief comment upon the various discourses. On the sixteenth of January, 1812, Robinson records: "He (Coleridge) .....excited a hiss once by calling Johnson a fellow, for which he happily apologized by observing that it is in the nature of evil to beget evil, and that we are thus apt to fall into the fault we censure."(22)

In his attack upon neo-classical prejudices, Coleridge adopted some of Johnson's ideas, amplifying them in his own terms. One of the faults the classical critics attributed to Shakespeare was his mingling of tragedy and comedy. Johnson, as we know, takes the view that this type of play, the tragi-comedy, is true to life and therefore, though contrary to the strict rules of the drama, admissible in the theatre. Coleridge, in a walk with Robinson, on January 29, 1811, talked about that topic. "The ancient drama," he observed, "is distinguished

from the Shaksperian in this, that it exhibits a sort of abstraction, not of character but of idea. A certain sentiment or passion was exhibited in all its purity, unmixed with anything that could interfere with its effect. Shakspere, on the other hand, imitates life, mingled as we find it with joy and sorrow."(23) Raysor here adds an editorial note acknowledging Johnson's influence, (a slight matter almost always overlooked by Coleridge himself). But Raysor seems to think that Coleridge improved upon Johnson, stating: "This is Dr. Johnson's defence of tragi-comedy, made clearer by the reference to Greek drama."(24) On rereading Johnson's clear-cut statements on this matter, it is hard to see in what way Coleridge made any improvements upon his predecessor.

Another of the chief concerns of the classical critic was Shakespeare's violation of the unities. Here Coleridge discerns two schools of thought: "the French, which evidently presupposes that a perfect delusion is to be aimed at,- an opinion which needs no fresh confutation."(25) Apropos of this, Raysor remarks that "Dr. Johnson ridiculed (this theory of literal delusion) with devastating power. But in the heat of debate Johnson emphasized too strongly the contrary view that 'A play read affects the mind like a play acted.' According to the famous Preface to Shakespeare the audience is perfectly conscious that dramatic performances are unreal. This is surely as extreme as the doctrine which Dr. Johnson destroyed, for it recognizes only the rational and not the imaginative state of the audience. Dr. Johnson's exaggeration shows clearly the nature of his characteristic limitations as a critic, which

Coleridge exposed with great satisfaction."[26] The second extreme of thought, "and the exact opposite (to the French)," Coleridge declares, "is one brought forward by Dr. Johnson, who supposes the auditors throughout in the full reflective knowledge of the contrary. In evincing the impossibility of delusion, he makes no sufficient allowance for an intermediate state, which I have before distinguished by the term, illusion, and have attempted to illustrate its quality and character by reference to our mental state, when dreaming."[27] It is possible that Coleridge is here led astray by his unsympathetic outlook upon Johnson. In the last analysis, the thing resolves itself into a matter of different wording of the same idea. For when Johnson speaks of the crediting of the drama, "whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original,"[28] is he not anticipating Coleridge, save that he does not actually use the term 'illusion'?

In his Preface, Johnson was strongly perturbed by Shakespeare's use of puns. This matter also concerned Coleridge, who had, perhaps, a better understanding of these verbal conceits. "Dr. Johnson asserts," he is reported by Collier as saying in one of his lectures, "that Shakspere loses the world for a toy, and can no more withstand a pun, or a play upon words, than his Antony could resist Cleopatra. Certain it is, that Shakspere gained more admiration in his day, and long afterwards, by the use of speech in this way, than modern writers have acquired by the abandonment of the practice: the latter, in adding to, what they have been pleased to call,

the rules of art, have sacrificed nature."(29) In this instance, Coleridge could more truly visualize the age of Shakespeare and the extraordinary ability with which the poet was endowed, to a far greater extent than Johnson. He therefore brings a more vital appreciation to this aspect of Shakespeare's art.

The final trace we have of Coleridge's attitude towards Johnson, comes in the fifth lecture of a series delivered in Bristol in the years of 1813-1814. The notes on these lectures, six in all, are rather full, but do not touch upon Johnson's Preface at any length. On December 30, 1813, Coleridge announced a second course of lectures on Shakespeare with an examinstion of Dr. Johnson's Preface. Since there exist no remains of these lectures on the Preface, we may assume that they either were never given, for Coleridge was ill at this time, or that they too are lost like the earlier reports, on the same theme, in Collier's transcription of the lectures of 1811-1812. In this fifth Bristol lecture, Coleridge takes issue with Johnson on his assertion "that the writings of Shakspere were deficient in pathos, and that he only put our senses into complete restfulness." This, Coleridge held to be much preferable "to that degree of excitement which was the object of the German drama; and concluded a very interesting lecture with reading some observations he penned after being present at the representation of a play in Germany, in which the wife of a colonel who had fallen into disgrace was frantic first for grief, and afterwards for joy."(30)

Before leaving Coleridge's contribution to the sum of

opinion upon Johnson in the nineteenth century, we may find it interesting to notice a suggestion made by the former concerning Johnson's style. "Dr. Johnson used to say that in most unrestrained discourse he always sought for the properest word,- that which best and most exactly conveyed his meaning: to a certain point he was right, but because he carried it too far, he was often laborious where he ought to have been light, and formal where he ought to have been familiar."(31)

Coleridge wrote extensively on Shakespeare, and upon Johnson as a representative critic of the poet. It is unfortunate for us in this day that those of his talks which pertain directly to Johnson's Preface are among the lost Bristol lectures. For from what we have been able to glean from scattered remarks, we may fairly say that these would have contributed much material of the greatest interest in our search for the history of opinion upon Johnson's labors in the critical fields.

WILLIAM HAZLITT (1817)

Hazlitt is the next great critic in the early part of this century. It is a mental relief for the reader, after he has laboriously waded through the chaotic welter of Coleridge's comments, to come upon the systematic, clearly thought out and polished utterances of Hazlitt. Coleridge is diffuse and undisciplined in his thinking and manner; on the other hand Hazlitt is concise, direct and readable. His opinion upon Johnson's Preface is embodied almost entirely in his preface to the Characters of Shakspear's Plays, a fact which simplifies

the task of reviewing his ideas.

Hazlitt opens his preface by quoting at length from the appreciative criticism of Schlegel. In introducing his views on Johnson to us, he finds it necessary to apologize for having availed himself "of this testimony of a foreign critic in behalf of Shakespear, because our own countryman, Dr. Johnson, has not been so favorable to him. It may be said of Shakespear," he adds, "that 'those who are not for him are against him:' for indifference is here the height of injustice."(32) He then points out why Johnson, for whose character he had "a high respect, mixed with something like personal attachment," was limited in his admiration for Shakespeare's genius. For Johnson "was neither a poet nor a judge of poetry. He might, in one sense, be a judge of poetry as it falls within the limits of prose, but not as it is poetry. Least of all was he qualified to be a judge of Shakespear, who 'alone is high fantastical.' Let those who have a prejudice against Johnson read Boswell's Life of him: as those whom he has prejudiced against Shakespear should read his 'Irene'. We do not say that a man to be a critic must necessarily be a poet: but to be a good critic, he ought not to be a bad poet. Such poetry as a man deliberately writes, such, and such only will he like."(33) This assertion by Hazlitt may be dubious as a general principle, but it does appear to apply, in some degree, to Johnson's criticism of poetry. He sums up this view later on in the terse comment that Johnson "could judge neither the heights nor the depths of poetry."(34)

Hazlitt evaluates Johnson's critical ability from a purely

romantic standpoint, and finds it wanting. "Dr. Johnson's Preface to his edition of Shakespear," he feels, "looks like a laborious attempt to bury the characteristic merits of his author under a load of cumbersome phraseology, and to weigh his excellences and defects in equal scales, stuffed full of 'swelling figures and sonorous epithets.' Nor could it well be otherwise; Dr. Johnson's general powers of reasoning overlaid his critical susceptibility. All his ideas were cast in a given mould, in a set form: they were made out by rule and system, by climax, inference and antithesis:- Shakespear's were the reverse."(35)

Two more reasons are given for Johnson's inability to appreciate Shakespeare. He lacked not only the fine sensibility but also the emotional intensity to be able to plumb the depths of the poet. Hazlitt finds that "according to Dr. Johnson, a mountain is sublime or a rose is beautiful; for that their name and definition imply. But he could no more be able to give the description of Dover cliff in 'Lear', or the description of flowers in 'The Winter's Tale', than to describe the objects of a sixth sense; nor do we think he would have any profound feeling of the beauty of the passages here referred to."(36) The other reason pertains more to Johnson's style than to his inherent capabilities. He wrote, according to Hazlitt, "a kind of rhyming prose, in which he was as much impelled to finish the different clauses of his sentences, and to balance one period against another, as the writer of heroic verse is to keep to lines of ten syllables with similar terminations. He no sooner acknowledges the merits of his author in one line than the

periodical revolution of his style carries the weight of his opinion over to the side of objection, thus keeping up a perpetual alternation of perfections and absurdities."(37) Again, "our critic seems more bent on maintaining the equilibrium of his style than the consistency or truth of his opinions."(38)

Before commencing a discussion of Shakespeare's individual plays, Hazlitt briefly sums up his contentions concerning our critic. "If Dr. Johnson's opinion was right," he concludes, "the following observations on Shakespear's Plays must be greatly exaggerated, if not ridiculous. If he was wrong, what has been said, may perhaps account for his being so, without detracting from his ability and judgment in other things."(39)

With these dominant men in the field of Shakespearean criticism, we leave the early years of the nineteenth century. The prevailing tendency, as we have seen, was to treat Johnson harshly.

THOMAS CARLYLE (1828 and 1841)

It is worth while here to set down the opinion of Thomas Carlyle, who said nothing directly about the Preface itself; nevertheless what he wrote about Johnson's prose in general, could perhaps apply with special cogency to that work. It is the more in season here, after the continuous flow of diatribe we have just witnessed, for it is the first favorable comment upon Johnson to be encountered in this century. In Heroes and Hero Worship he gives the following estimate. "Johnson's Writings, which once had such currency and celebrity, are now, as it were,

disowned by the young generation. It is not wonderful; Johnson's opinions are fast becoming obsolete: but his style of thinking and of living, we may hope, will never become obsolete. I find in Johnson's Books the indisputablest traces of a great intellect and great heart;- ever welcome, under what obstructions and perversions soever. They are sincere words, those of his; he means things by them. A wondrous buckram style,- the best he could get to then; a measured grandiloquence, stepping or rather stalking along in a very solemn way, grown obsolete now; sometimes a tumid size of phraseology not in proportion to the content of it: all this you will put up with. For the phraseology, tumid or not, has always something within it."(40)

In an essay on Goethe, which he had written in 1828, Carlyle refers to Johnson as "our leading writer of prose in this (Johnson's) period..... Johnson's prose is true, indeed, and sound, and full of practical sense: few men have seen more clearly into the motives, the interests, the whole walk and conversation of the living busy world as it lay before him; but further than this busy, and, to most of us, rather prosaic world, he seldom looked..... Prudence is the highest Virtue he can inculcate; and for that finer portion of our nature, that portion of it which belongs essentially to Literature strictly so called, where our highest feelings, our best joys and keenest sorrows, our Doubt, our Love, our Religion reside, he has no word to utter; no remedy, no counsel to give us in our straits; or at most, if, like poor Boswell, the patient is importunate, will answer: 'My dear Sir, endeavour to clear your mind of

Cant.' "[41] Insofar as it stresses the absence of poetical emotions in Johnson, Carlyle's estimate is on the whole still in harmony with the romantic tradition. But there is also a difference. Not only is Johnson praised for certain qualities in his style, but even where Carlyle notes Johnson's shortcomings, he does so without asperity: one might almost say, with regret.

CHARLES KNIGHT (1839-1843)

From Carlyle we turn to Charles Knight, who wrote toward the middle of the century, and find ourselves once again in the acrimonius atmosphere of fault-finding. The general tenor of Knight's comment is indicated in this reflection on Johnson: "The truth is that this learned, sensible, sometimes profound, and really great man, having trampled upon the unities and other tests of poetical merit, the fashion of Dryden's age, but not of his own, is perpetually groping about in the mists of his private judgment, now pursuing a glimmer of light, now involved in outer darkness. This system of criticism upon Shakspere was rotten to the foundation." Knight objects to Johnson's limited view of Shakespeare's art. Referring to the latter's famous eulogy of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirror of life, Knight sharply remarks: "Such is the leading idea of the critic. He sees nothing higher in Shakspere than an exhibition of the <u>real</u>." And "when Johnson is unable to trace this actual picture of life in Shakspere.....then he is bewildered; and he generally ends in blaming his author."

Johnson is indicted for inconsistencies and for seeking in Shakespeare a purposive and deliberate morality. For Shakespeare's moral effects are gained not "by didactic precepts not dropped casually," but rather by "his supereminent power of gradually raising the mind into a comprehension of what belongs to the spiritual part of our nature..... The whole moral purpose is thus evolved, through a series of deductions in the mind of him who is thus moved."

Knight decries Johnson's preference of Shakespeare's comedy to his tragedy. Moreover, when Johnson says of the pretended madness of Hamlet that it causes much mirth, it is evident that he has a "rude conception" of Shakespeare's art. Johnson's observation that Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakespeare of men, evokes from Knight the retort that: "If Shakspere speaks the language of men, as distinct from the language of poets, Othello is not poetry. It needs no further argument to show that the critic has a false theory of the poetical art. He has here narrowed the question to an absurdity."(42)

Clearly, Knight's opinion does Johnson, as a critic of Shakespeare, little honor. Really, however, his argument is disingenuous; it is quite patent that Johnson was taking an exalted view of Shakespeare's art. Shakespeare speaks the language of men: natural, true, life-like; but surely not unpoetical. Addison speaks the language of poets: affected and artificial. At least this, we take it, was what Johnson meant by his assertion.

HERMANN ULRICI (1847)

Writing in Germany only some four years after Knight, Hermann Ulrici affords a striking contrast to the latter. The German critic, examining the state of Shakespearean criticism in the eighteenth century, speaks commendably of Johnson. Ulrici believes that Johnson, although in favor of "the moralising tendency of the plays from domestic life, and (although) sober to a degree," was "nevertheless unquestionably the most eminent critic of the eighteenth century, in the domain of aesthetics and more particularly of poetry. The appearance of his edition .....may.....be considered to mark a new epoch in the history of Shakspeare's plays. His criticisms.....give proof, upon the whole, not only of sound common sense, but also of a secret spring of poetical feeling, which usually remains concealed, but occasionally bursts forth and gives a fillip to his reasoning common sense." Johnson's ideas of correctness lead him to his famous encomium of Shakespeare: that he is the poet of nature, who 'holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of the manners and customs of life,' and from whose works consequently 'may be collected a system of civil and economical prudence.' "However," says Ulrici, "from this same standpoint, Johnson also brings forward all kinds of reproaches against Shakspeare which are more ore less unfounded." Amerely casual morality; faulty plots; the often neglected endings of plays; anachronisms; superiority in comedy over tragedy:- these are the strictures which Johnson points out in Shakespeare, which, in Ulrici's opinion lack a sound critical basis.

"Nevertheless," he goes on to say of Johnson, "his criticisms must be regarded as marking an epoch. For Johnson was the first in England who ventured to defend Shakspeare for mixing the tragic and comic elements, and for disregarding the unities of place and time." And though "Johnson's apology cannot altogether be called a happy one," and though he did not utterly demolish the protagonists of the unities, yet he did fight "with telling reasons against the foolish prejudices that the unities of place and time were inviolable laws..... At all events, in his defence we have more independence of judgment and a higher aesthetic mind, than had until then been possessed by the professional critics of Shakspeare's works..... Johnson's attempt like the first dawn of a new morning, heralded a brighter day for aesthetic criticism and for the poetical literature of England." His edition also paved the way for the new "literary-historical treatment of Shakspeare's works..... With him and his immediate contemporaries.....begins the period of philological criticism" of the poet. It is true that Johnson's "principles are better than his execution." But they were adopted and used successfully by his followers in the field.(43)

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY (1856)

Macaulay's biographical essay on Johnson was written as a contribution to the eighth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. In it he gave his estimate of Johnson's edition of Shakespeare, an estimate which at first won widespread, though perhaps not over-critical acceptance. "This publication," we read, "saved Johnson's character for honesty, but added(44)

nothing to the fame of his abilities and learning. The Preface, though it contained some good passages, is not in his best manner. The most valuable notes are those in which he had an opportunity of showing how attentively he had during many years observed human life and nature..... But here praise must end. It would be difficult to name a more slovenly, a more worthless, edition of any great classic. The reader may turn over play after play without finding one happy conjectural emendation, or one ingenious and satisfactory explanation of a passage which had baffled preceding commentators."(45) It was this severe judgment which Johnson's protagonists in the ensuing century singled out to combat with great vigor.

W. G. CLARK and J. GLOVER (1863)

The preface to an edition of Shakespeare, by Clark and Glover, included a brief but frequently quoted reference to Johnson. "He did not always appreciate the naturalness, simplicity, and humour of his author, but his preface and notes are distinguished by clearness of thought and diction and by masterly common sense."(46)

RICHARD GRANT WHITE (1865)

The first American scholar to comment on Johnson was Richard Grant White. In his edition of the Works of Shakespeare he takes an unfavorable view, which may be found in the chapter on the Historical Sketch of the Text of Shakespeare. It is true that White is concerned essentially with Johnson's edition and not with the Preface itself. But as it is the only

American notice available to us in the nineteenth century, it is worth including. White says that "it is giving the Doctor (Johnson) but little praise to say that he was a better editor than his revered predecessor (Warburton)..... His notes, though often learned, and sometimes sensible, were generally wanting in just that kind of learning and of sense most needful for this task. The chief defect in Dr. Johnson's mind..... appears to have been an incapacity of the sympathetic apprehension of imaginative truth and beauty. In this he represented the period in which he lived; for, unlike the man whose works he undertook to edit, and presumed to patronize, he was of an age, and was not for all time. But when he opened Shakespeare's pages, even his common sense, which has been justly styled 'colossal', seems to have forsaken him, and his candor, in some degree to have followed it." White confesses that for this opinion of Johnson, which he first had occasion to express in 1854, he "was gravely rebuked both at home and abroad." But further reflection, he felt, confirmed him in his judgment; the more so, when he later found his stand upheld by "so eminent a critic as Lord Macaulay."(47)

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL (1887)

Toward the close of the century a change in attitude is definitely perceptible. At least in the case of Augustine Birrell the approach is well-nigh one of undiscriminating affection. In an essay entitled: Dr. Johnson, he writes: "If we should ever take occasion to say of Dr. Johnson's Preface

to Shakespeare what he himself said of a similar production of the poet Rowe, 'that it does not discover much profundity or penetration,' we ought in common fairness always to add that nobody else has ever written about Shakespeare one-half so entertainingly."(48) Citing a passage from the Preface as an example, Birrell prefixes it with this estimate of Johnson's prose. "The characteristics of Johnson's prose style are colossal good sense..... good humour, vigorous language, and movement from point to point, which can only be compared to the measured tread of a well-drilled company of soldiers."(49) A rather happy metaphor with which to describe Johnson's prose!

EDWARD DOWDEN (1899)

In the very last year of this century was published Edward Dowden's Introduction to Shakespeare, in which Johnson's edition is briefly reviewed. Dowden pleads in extenuation of Johnson's deficient scholarship the physical handicaps under which the critic labored. "He (Johnson) consulted the earlier texts to some extent, but was disqualified for the task of minute collation by his defective eyesight..... (But) .....his Preface is an admirable piece of criticism, robust and common-sense, though not illuminated by imagination, or very profound in its philosophical views..... Particularly noteworthy is Johnson's discussion of the doctrine of the unities of time and place..... After his manner as a critic Johnson sets his items of condemnation over against his items of praise..... Some of Johnson's censures are just, but it is evident that from his eighteenth

century standpoint he never quite comprehended the spirit of Elizabethan poetry. His knowledge of human nature renders some of his analyses of Shakespeare's characters of peculiar value; his comment on the character of Polonius is an example of passages which at once elucidate the meaning of Shakespeare and exhibit the mind of his critic."(50)

Dowden's appraisal is couched in restrained terms. It maintains a calmness of temper and tone which makes it as remote in manner as it is in time from the writers of the early decades of the nineteenth century. It brings our inquiry into opinion on Johnson in this era to an end, on a gentle note, and is a foreshadowing of the more appreciative type of criticism which came to prevail in the following century.

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CHAPTER V

The Preface in the Twentieth Century.

As we proceed to survey the record of opinion on Johnson in our own era, we find a crystallization of that view which was already becoming discernible at the close of the nineteenth century. By and large, the opinions expressed are at least favorable, and often fervently enthusiastic. How shall we regard this change in view? Shall we consider it simply as unaccountable, a mere fashion, or can it be explained on specific grounds?

On looking into the matter, we are confronted with several factors which differentiate this century from the nineteenth. Then the majority of writers (at least of those who fall within the scope of the subject in hand) were themselves critics of Shakespeare, and their interest in Johnson was confined, in the main, to his critical activities in that field. It was only the odd writer who, while considering Johnson from a more inclusive point of view, also commented upon his performance as a critic. Today the situation is reversed. Almost every writer on the subject of Johnson deals with various aspects, one of which is, incidentally, though not insignificantly, his rôle as a critic of Shakespeare.

This century has, indeed, seen a reawakened interest in Johnson. The publication of numerous books of which he is the subject, the appearance of several popular editions of Boswell's Life- all testify to this fact. To the modern writer Johnson is almost as heroic a figure as he was to Boswell.

He is the literary hero who dominated his age by the merit of his vast common sense, his ability to think sanely and write clearly (if at times pompously) , his energetic personality, and his deep understanding of human nature. It has even been said by some that Johnson's words, his thoughts, his outlook- have a special application to our own day. As Roscoe has put it: "There is evidence that the present generation has more appreciation of his work than had their immediate forefathers; and it may be that his realism, sincerity, and intellectual honesty are appreciated by those who have passed through the period of the Great War."(1)

But our concern here is limited to Johnson's labors in the Shakespearean field. And as we have already indicated, his star is surely in the ascendant. His views are accorded a respect which verges upon reverence. Those who, in apprais-ing his efforts, find defects, mention them casually- as who should say: Honesty compels us to point out his faults; though they were not really his faults, but rather those of his age. And the more ardent of his admirers gloss over his shortcomings, or convert them into meritorious qualities altogether.

This favorable attitude may perhaps be the outcome of the following factors. As has already been intimated, the charac-ter of our age is in some respects quite close to that of John-son's: if in nothing else, then at least in our matter-of-fact approach to life. We are in revolt against the excessive romanticism of the nineteenth century. The grounds for this revolt, at least in so far as it pertains to the field of

criticism, have been well stated by Raleigh. "The romantic 'attitude," he says, "begins to be fatiguing..... There is a taint of insincerity about romantic criticism, from which not even the great romantic critics are free. They are never in danger from the pitfalls that waylay the plodding critic; but they are always falling upward, as it were, into vacuity. They love to lose themselves in an O altitudo..... When they are inspired by their divinity they say wonderful things; when the inspiration fails them their language is maintained at the same height, and they say more than they feel. You can never be sure of them."(2)

The very passage of time may also have influenced this change. The heat and the rancor, which Johnson's words generated in the thoughts of the writers of the age immediately after his own, have burned themselves out. Distance has enabled us to see with a truer perspective. The accumulated labors of critics and scholars in the field of Shakespearean study, have made it evident that Johnson's contribution is a significant one, and has its positive values. These have been too long overlooked. But late though it be, recognition has come at last. For the present, at any rate, the fame of Johnson as a Shakespearean critic is assured.

THOMAS RAYNESFORD LOUNSBURY (1902)

At the outset of the century Lounsbury brought out a book entitled Shakespeare As a Dramatic Artist, the first in a series of three books by this author on the great poet.

This work is like many of the preceding age in that it deals with Johnson merely as one of the critics of Shakespeare. Nevertheless it may be said to strike the keynote of the twentieth century. From the very tone of his words we can feel that though the author may disagree with Johnson on occasion, he nonetheless holds him in great esteem. "It seems hard to believe," writes Lounsbury, "that a man of Johnson's intellectual powers should have thought it desirable that Shakespeare should have 'improved'- to use the technical language of homiletics- every occasion that presented itself for enforcing ethical instruction. Yet the words he employs both here (in the Preface) and elsewhere (in Lear and As You Like It) seem naturally to bear this interpretation."(3) (Italics our own.) Johnson may have been at fault in requiring a conscious morality in Shakespeare; but even while indicating this fault, Lounsbury pays tribute to Johnson's mental capacity. There is implicit in his tone a measure of surprise that a man of Johnson's intellectual stature should not have succeeded in overcoming the excessively moralistic tendencies of his century.

More often, however, Johnson's views win from Lounsbury an unqualified approval. Take Johnson's defence of Shakespeare's use of tragi-comedy. Lounsbury points out that "there was indeed no one- at least no one of eminence- to say a good word for it (tragi-comedy) until Johnson came forward to plead its cause. In the very same number of 'The Rambler'(4) in which he questioned the propriety of the unities, he professed

himself inclined to believe that he who regarded no other laws than those of nature would take under his protection tragi-comedy..... His defence of this mode of composition he made still stronger in the preface to his edition of Shakespeare."(5) Again he adds later: "Johnson's was almost the solitary voice raised in its favor."(6)

By far the most daring statements of Johnson occur in his attack upon the unities. Lounsbury accordingly lauds Johnson's performance in this regard. He notes that "Dr. Johnson was the most effective opponent of the unities during the eighteenth century. It was in one of his essays in 'The Rambler' that he first considered them..... At this time, he did little more than record his dissent. But when fourteen years later he brought out his edition of Shakespeare he was much more outspoken. In the preface to that work he not only examined the doctrine at considerable length, but he made no pretence to veil the contempt for it he felt. He ridiculed the idea that any representation is ever mistaken for reality, and summed up the situation by declaring that the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the first act to the last that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They do not believe for a moment that the place, where the scene is supposed to be, is Athens or Vienna or Venice or Verona, and still less that the persons who are speaking the words they hear are actually Theseus or Mariana or Shylock or Romeo. Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no limitation..... Yet while Johnson laid down principles

like these, which seem to us commonplace, he did it with a certain hesitation. He acknowledged that the weight of authority was against him and that he was almost frightened at his own temerity. These words are significant. Strongly intrenched indeed must have been the belief which could make Johnson falter about attacking it, whether it was held by few or by many, by great men or by little men."(7) But so great was Johnson's influence that, according to Lounsbury, "after [he] had given the weight of his authority to the denial of the obligatory nature of the unities, the number of those protesting became greater, and their expression of opinion much more decided."(8)

The trend of opinion on Johnson in the twentieth century is clearly indicated in this, its first writer of note in the field of Shakespearean studies. Lounsbury realizes Johnson's limitations, both those which were inherent in the man and those which were attributable to the age in which he lived and wrote. On the other hand he is careful to give to this "powerful voice" its just praise and position as an effective opponent of the dramatic rules.

DAVID NICHOL SMITH (1903 and 1913)

The following year, 1903, saw the appearance of Nichol Smith's Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare. This scholar holds Johnson in high esteem and speaks his appreciation of him in words of restrained but unconcealed warmth. He attempts to see Johnson in his correct perspective, revealing his merits

without ignoring his defects. To be sure, the defects, according to Smith, more often than not were due to circumstances beyond Johnson's control. What could he do if his scholarship suffered on account of his weak eyesight? Smith usually finds something of this sort to say in extenuation of Johnson's shortcomings. But the fact remains that his admiration for the man does not blind him to their existence; and his attenpts to account for them have the value of throwing some light upon the handicaps under which Johnson wrote.

Smith had occasion some ten years later, when he contributed a chapter on Johnson and Boswell to the Cambridge History of English Literature, to reiterate those views on Johnson which he had already recorded in the introduction to his earlier book. And since he sums up, in the article, his opinion so well, we shall quote from it first. "There was nothing new in Johnson's method as an editor. He aimed only at doing better what had been done already, and produced an edition of the old fashion at a time when the science of Shakespearean editing was about to make a distinct advance. But he had qualifications sometimes wanting in editors with more painful habits or more ostentatious equipment- a good knowledge of Elizabethan English, and imperturbable common sense. Like almost every text of Shakespeare that had yet appeared, or was to appear till our own day, it was based on the text of the most recent edition. What he sent to the printer was Warburton's text revised. But he worked on the 'settled principle that the reading of the ancient books is probably true,'

and learned to distrust conjecture. His collation was never methodical; his weak eyesight was a serious hindrance to an exacting task..... (But) he produced a text which, with all its shortcomings, was nearer the original than any that had yet appeared. Some of his emendations, which are always modest and occasionally minute, find an unsuspected place in our modern editions. Though his text has long been superseded, the advance of scholarship will never impair the value of his notes. It was a proud boast that not a single passage in the whole work had appeared to him corrupt which he had not endeavoured to restore, or obscure which he had not endeavoured to illustrate; and it did not go beyond the truth. No edition, within its limits, is a safer guide to Shakespeare's meaning. The student who searches the commentators for help in difficulties, soon learns to go straight to Johnson's note as the firm land of common sense in a sea of ingenious fancies. The same robust honesty gives the preface a place by itself among the critical pronouncements on Shakespeare. He did not hesitate to state what he believed to be Shakespeare's faults. Yet Shakespeare remained to him the greatest of English authors, and the only author worthy to be ranked with Homer. He, also, vindicated the liberties of the English stage. After conforming to the 'unities' in his own Irene, and then suggesting his doubts of them in The Rambler, he now proved that they are 'not essential to the drama.' The guiding rule in his criticism was that 'there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature.' A generation later, the French

'romantics' found their case stated in his preface, and they did not better what they borrowed." In a footnote to this last assertion Smith points out the fact that "Johnson's examination of the 'unities' is translated word for word in Henri Beyle's Racine et Shakespeare (1822)."(9)

In the foregoing passage Smith's appreciation of Johnson's sound qualities is compactly expressed. But in his introduction to the volume of Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare he goes into the matter in greater detail. He first expresses his indignation against those who hold Johnson in scorn. According to him "Johnson's Preface was remembered only to be despised. It is not rash to say that at the present time (1903) the majority of those who chance to speak of it pronounce it a discreditable performance."(10) This assertion requires some qualification. On the face of it Smith's condemnation is too sweeping; properly speaking, this statement applies only to the early nineteenth century critics, e. g., Coleridge and Hazlitt.

The reason for this slur upon the critic, Smith ascribes to the fact that Johnson had ventured to point out, in the honesty of his criticism, "that Shakespeare was not free from faults; and it was this which the nineteenth century chose to remark."(11) Smith, on the contrary, thinks very highly of Johnson's Preface, which, he says, "is an essay which can stand by itself," as a piece of general criticism. He discovers in Johnson many principles of editing which he feels it would be well for other critics to adopt. "As it has long

been the fashion to decry Johnson's edition," he remarks, "it is well to recall two statements in his Preface, which show that he had already discovered what later editors have found out for themselves: 'I collated all the folios at the beginning, but afterwards used only the first.' 'It has been my settled principle that the reading of the ancient books is probably true..... As I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less.' Johnson's collation may not have been thorough; but no modern editor can say that he proceeded on a wrong method."(12)

Smith praises Johnson's discussion of the three unities, which "is perhaps the most brilliant passage in the whole preface."(13) In the age of Johnson critics continued to find fault with the structure of Shakespeare's plays. They held, as the ensuing quotation from the Biographia Britannica shows, that "Shakespeare set himself to please the populace; and that the people 'had no notion of the rules of writing, or the model of the Ancients.' "(14) "But one (Johnson) whose tastes were classical, both by nature and by training," writes Smith, "had been thinking out the matter for himself. It was only after long reflection, and with much hesitation, that Johnson had disavowed what had almost come to be considered the very substance of classical faith..... His sturdy common sense and independence of judgment led him to anticipate much of what has been supposed to be the discovery of the romantic school. His Preface has received scant justice. There is no more convincing criticism of neo-classical doctrine. Henceforward

we hear less of the rules. Johnson had performed a great service for that class of critics, whose deference to learned opinion kept them from saying fully what they felt."(15)

Nor is this the only occasion in which Johnson, according to Smith, leads his generation in critical thought. His contribution to the question of the extent of Shakespeare's learning is noteworthy. "After such a display of misapplied learning (in the prefaces from Pope's day to that of Johnson)," Smith comments, "it is refreshing to meet with the common sense of one who was a greater scholar than any of these pedants. Johnson had less difficulty in giving his opinion on the extent of Shakespeare's learning than in discovering the reasons of the controversy. The evidence of Shakespeare's contemporary, he says, ought to decide the question unless some testimony of equal force can be opposed, and such testimony he refuses to find in the collections of the Uptons and Greys."(16)

Nichol Smith cannot leave the subject of Johnson's eminence as a Shakespearean critic of the eighteenth century without a final heartfelt encomium of the entire edition. "We may neglect the earlier eighteenth century editions of Shakespeare, but if we neglect Johnson's we run a serious risk. We may now abandon his text; we must rely on later scholarship for the explanation of many allusions; but, we shall never find his notes antiquated. Other editions are distinguished by accuracy, ingenuity, or learning; the supreme distinction of his is sagacity. He cleared a way through a mass of mis-

leading conjectures. In disputed passages he has an almost unerring instinct for the explanation which alone can be right; and when the reading is corrupt beyond emendation, he gives the most helpful statement of the probable meaning. Not only was Johnson's edition the best which had yet appeared; it is still one of the few editions which are indispensable."(17)

SIR WALTER ALEXANDER RALEIGH (1908)

For those who are disposed to admire Johnson, and who therefore enjoy reading Smith's favorable opinion of him, it is no doubt as great a pleasure to turn to Sir Walter Raleigh, the next great interpreter of his critical qualities. Raleigh differs from Smith in that his is not a minutely detailed study, but a more intimate, more personal, though not more fervent treatment of Johnson. Raleigh delivered a series of lectures on Johnson, all breathing an air of warm, sincere appreciation. For us the most essential of these is the one called: Johnson on Shakespeare. Raleigh may not offer us anything startling or particularly original on the subject, but what he does say is so aptly put, and with such delicacy of feeling, that one cannot but quote at length from this lecture.

Raleigh has a deep understanding of Johnson's work on Shakespeare, which he claims "has not been superseded." But he knows that the nineteenth century has neglected to appreciate the full extent of Johnson's contribution. Here he adds the condemnation of the romantic attitude, quoted above,(18) which in itself is characteristic of the thoughts of our own

age. In effect Raleigh says that the romantic critic is too flowery, too verbose, and oftimes verges on insincerity. The truer, if less adventurous path to an understanding of the greatness of Shakespeare is to be found in the calm, common-sense criticism of Johnson. "Those who approach the study of Shakespeare under the sober and vigorous guidance of Johnson will meet with fewer exciting adventures, but they will not see less of the subject. They will hear the greatness of Shakespeare discussed in language so quiet and modest as to sound tame in ears accustomed to hyperbole, but they will not, unless they are very dull or very careless, fall into the error of supposing that Johnson's admiration for Shakespeare was cold or partial."(19)

Many critics of the previous century take issue with Johnson on the grounds that since he not only found faults in Shakespeare but actually stressed these faults, he, therefore, most certainly could not fully understand what he himself called 'the transcendent and unbounded genius' of Shakespeare. Raleigh, defending Johnson from this charge, maintains that "the head and front of Johnson's offending was that he wrote and spoke of Shakespeare as one man may fitly speak of another. He claimed for himself the citizenship of that republic in which Shakespeare is admittedly pre-eminent; and dared to enumerate Shakespeare's faults. The whole tale of these, as they are catalogued by Johnson, might be ranged under two heads- carelessness, and excess of conceit. It would be foolish to deny these charges: the only possible reply to them is that Shakespeare's faults are never defects;

they belong to superabundant power,- power not putting forth its full resources even in the crisis of events; or power neglecting the task in hand to amuse itself with irresponsible display. The faults are of a piece with the virtues; and Johnson as good as admits this when he says that they are 'sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit.' None but Shakespeare, that is to say, could move easily and triumphantly under the weight of Shakespeare's faults. The detailed analysis of the faults is a fine piece of criticism, and has never been seriously challenged."(20)

On the subject of Johnson's notes in his edition, Raleigh waxes enthusiastic. To "Johnson's strong grasp of the main thread of the discourse, his sound sense, and his wide knowledge of humanity," he attributes the ability which "enables him (Johnson), in a hundred passages, to go straight to Shakespeare's meaning, while the philological and antiquarian commentators kill one another in the dark, or bury all dramatic life under the far-fetched spoils of learning. A reader of the new Variorum edition of Shakespeare soon falls into the habit, when he meets with an obscure passage, of consulting Johnson's notes before the others. Whole pages of complicated dialectic and minute controversy are often rendered useless by the few brief sentences which recall the reader's attention to the main drift, or remind him of some perfectly obvious circumstance."(21) And yet again in a final outburst of appreciation: "The reader who desires to have Johnson to himself for an hour, with no interpreter, cannot do better

than turn to the notes on Shakespeare. They are written informally and fluently; they are packed full of observation and wisdom; and their only fault is that they are too few." (22)

One is tempted to apply this last observation to Raleigh himself. His essay on Johnson is sympathetic, human and understanding. He writes in a fascinating style. The only fault the reader can find- if fault it be- is that the essay is too brief; there are so many points in the Preface which Raleigh does not discuss, and upon which he might with profit have brought his wholesome and refreshing comments to bear. How far greater our own appreciation of Johnson, the critic, would have grown, had he enlarged upon these points, it is idle to conjecture. But it is safe to say that none but the most callous can come away from a reading of Raleigh, without having been strongly imbued with the feeling of esteem for Johnson.

CHARLES F. JOHNSON (1909)

We have now to consider the opinions of two writers- Charles F. Johnson and George Saintsbury- who constitute the exception to our contention that this century is characterized by the favorable view it tends to adopt towards Johnson. But even while their respective opinions do not reflect credit on Johnson, it should at the same time be noticed that they do not seriously belittle him. Indeed on reading the opening words of C. F. Johnson, we are apt to be misled into the belief that he is one of the staunchest admirers of his il-

lustrious namesake. But we soon find that we have erred.

His book, entitled Shakespeare and His Critics, appeared in 1909. At the outset he declares that in reading Dr. Johnson's "introduction [Preface] to his edition of the plays (1765), we feel at once that we are in the grasp of a powerful intellect. There is a dignified march in the opening paragraphs, and a massive good sense in the handling of the subject, that is very impressive." Here praise ends and censure begins. "But we soon find that it is an intellect no less limited than powerful, and one strangely unconscious of its limitations."(23) Dr. Johnson's failings as a critic of Shakespeare, according to him, are: his insistence on the idea that poetry must convey a consciously moral lesson; and his dislike of the romantic in literature. "For him the poet must hold a mirror up to nature, but it must not be a magic mirror."(24) The appraisal closes on a note of half-hearted approval. "The great charm of Dr. Johnson as a man is, that he was absolutely honest; there was no affectation about him. This is not an undesirable trait in a critic, though by no means universal."(25)

GEORGE SAINTSBURY (1911)

The terse comment of George Saintsbury in A History of English Criticism damns with faint praise. "The Shakespeare Preface is a specially interesting document, because of its illustration, not merely of his [Johnson's] imbibed eighteenth century prejudices, but of that peculiar position of

compromise and reservation which.....is at once the condemnation and the salvation of the English critical position at this time." There are in the Preface "some scattered observations of the highest acuteness..... The rest, however, is, if not exactly a zigzag of contradiction, at least the contrasted utterance of two distinct voices..... In short, throughout the piece it is now Johnson himself who is speaking, now someone with a certain bundle of principles or prejudices which Johnson chooses to adopt for the time."(26)

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH (1918)

Shakespeare's Workmanship by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch contains only scattered observations on Johnson as a critic; but these show that he views Johnson, by and large, with favor. He acknowledges "the usual straight insight" of Dr. Johnson and the "usual common sense" with which he expounds the question of witchcraft in Macbeth.(27) He recognizes the mental alertness of Dr. Johnson whom "nothing loose in literature- in play or in poem- ever caught.....napping."(28) He admires him for his appreciation of Falstaff's character. "The performance I like best is Dr. Johnson's singular outburst beginning, 'But Falstaff- unimitated, inimitable Falstaff- how shall I describe thee?' because it breaks from the heart of a moralist who, being human, could not help himself."(29)

Quiller-Couch's affection for Johnson is, however, by no means, unqualified, and when the occasion seems to him to require it, he takes Johnson to task. Thus in his lecture on Cymbeline he observes that with Shakespeare's "romantic" plays

Johnson had only an "imperfect sympathy. He was a great man, a masculine critic: but the Woods of Westermain were not his province."(30)

SIR SIDNEY LEE (1922)

Of this author, Augustus Ralli, the historian of Shakespearean criticism, observes that "his name will be honoured while Shakespearian literature endures."(31) Lee's view of Johnson is therefore of interest to us. Although it is reserved in tone, it is, on the whole, on the side of praise. Lee says that although Johnson "made some independent collation of the Quartos and restored some passages which the Folios ignored, his textual labours were slight, and his verbal notes, however felicitous at times, show little close knowledge of sixteenth and seventeenth century literature. But in his preface and elsewhere he displays a genuinely, if occasionally sluggish, sense of Shakespeare's greatness, and his massive sagacity enabled him to indicate convincingly Shakespeare's triumphs of characterization. Dr. Johnson's praise is always helpful, although his blame is often arbitrary and misplaced."(32)

PERCY HAZEN HOUSTON (1923)

In a book entitled: Dr. Johnson, the author, Houston, devotes an entire chapter to the subject of the Preface. In it he hopes "to be able to prove that this much scorned Preface was a most important document in the history of criticism."(33) Unfortunately for us, however, he goes about this

task "largely through a paraphrase of Johnson's own words."(34) We should have preferred to hear Houston himself commenting at length on the topics Johnson discussed. At times, however, interspersed with the paraphrase, we read the author's own opinions; and what he has to say, lends itself to the support of our contention that the twentieth century has learned to appreciate to the full Johnson's strong qualities.

Houston praises Johnson's contribution towards the downfall of the dramatic rules. "The portion of the Preface," he writes, "which discusses directly the accepted standards of criticism regarding Shakespeare's violations of the laws of dramatic composition is the most striking and original contribution their author made to Shakespearean criticism..... His observations upon tragi-comedy, upon the historical plays, and upon the so-called unities of time and place really marked the end of the older order of dramatic criticism and sowed the seeds of modern Shakespearean study. It seems like the irony of fate that the great upholder of the older criticism, the staunch supporter of the principles of reason and common sense, should have prepared the way for the romantic enthusiasms of A. W. Schlegel and Manzoni, of Hazlitt and Coleridge. But so it was; and Johnson has not yet regained his former position as the sanest and most reasonable of Shakespearean critics because of the opprobrium heaped upon him by men who stole his wares and paid him with insult and contempt."(35)

Throughout the chapter one realizes that Houston never minimizes- though he occasionally criticizes- Johnson's per-

formance. He bears in mind the immensity of Johnson's task and the degree of success he attained in performing it. "Actually, then, he (Johnson) has looked at the poet through the eyes of his century, has felt his humanity and moral power if not the full force of his poetic gifts, has criticized him upon the whole with justice for his many real errors of taste, and has magnificently risen to his defence in permitting him the privilege of a great untrammelled genius to create or to employ his own dramatic forms. Further than this he could not well go; yet his efforts really cleared away much underbrush from paths of future critics. This was no small achievement. If, then, he has not only done the conventional thing in his distribution of praise and blame, but has anticipated the freer approach to the great romantic poet which characterized the first thirty years of the following century, we may assert with some assurance that Dr. Johnson, contrary to his evident purpose and inclination, really marks the parting of the ways in critical method and procedure, at least as applied to Shakespeare."(36)

In his conclusion, Houston, in one general statement, adequately sums up his opinion of the Preface. "Taking the Preface as a whole," he writes, "we may say with confidence that it is the most complete, the most sincere and eloquent, and the justest appreciation of Shakespeare's essential qualities which appeared in England before the nineteenth century. In respect to sustained sanity of judgment and reasonable admiration for the genius of a great poet, it has not been

greatly surpassed since it was written."(37)

KARL YOUNG (1923)

In Karl Young we are again confronted with an admirer of Johnson. In an article on Johnson he pays him the following tribute: His "strictures upon Shakespeare's indifference to 'poetical justice'....now sound quaint, and many of his textual emendations are no longer useful; but his disclosures of humanity in the plays, his exposition of the general nature of the poet's obscurities, his defence of the violations of the 'unities' and of 'decorum'.....his estimate of the author's learning, and his tribute to the 'transcendant and unbounded genius' displayed,- these services, along with his sane elucidations of innumerable special passages, are now a part of classical Shakespearean criticism. Johnson is no longer in eclipse behind the inspired impressionists, such as Coleridge and Hazlitt, or the ponderous theorizers, such as Ulrici and Gervinus."(38)

SIDNEY CASTLE ROBERTS (1926)

Roberts speaks at no great length, but there can be no doubt of the regard in which he holds Johnson. "Inevitably," he observes, "the greater part of (Johnson's) writing is coloured by eighteenth century didacticism."(39) But of Shakespeare, "Johnson writes with sane and splendid enthusiasm..... Johnson is no idolater, but his criticism of detail never obscured his vision of Shakespeare's universality."(40)

A. BOSKER (1930)

In general, Bosker, in his Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, is content simply to echo Nichol Smith's opinion of Johnson as an editor. He merely adds to it the view that "among Johnson's criticisms there are none that illustrate his independence of established opinions better than his discussion of tragi-comedy and that of the unities."(41) But this is a view in which Smith would surely acquiesce.

AUGUSTUS RALLI (1932)

The opinion of Ralli upon Dr. Johnson as a critic, is judiciously expressed, and, on the whole, on the side of approval. "It is always pleasant," we read, "to meet Dr. Johnson in the critical fields, and little of his work has surpassed his Shakesperian preface."(42) It "is a fine piece of work because it gives scope to his greatest quality- his strong common sense. That he could not isolate his aesthetic from his moral impressions was a fault, yet he did not deny his aesthetic impressions. It seemed to him that Shakespeare wrote in order to please, and succeeded- and that he himself had received much pleasure from reading Shakespeare. He therefore brings his common sense to bear upon the causes, and by means of it determines the reasons for Shakespeare's survival, and dissipates the objection to tragi-comedy and neglect of the unities. Aesthetic appreciation is not lacking, but it takes a secondary place, having been called in to serve as a handmaid to common sense. The essay pleases

becauses it expresses the whole, rather than the intellect only, of Johnson, and therefore borders upon his conversation, in which, as we know, he excelled, rather than in his writing. This was his special contribution; but where he failed was, in the manner of his century, in judging the drama as a game, and Shakespeare according to the skill with which he observed its rules, rather than his power to unveil a mystery. The emotion of awe is lacking....."(43) "Yet the present day has a use for his fault-finding that the ages of faith had not. Because he is not awed by Shakespeare he can see clearly what is before him....."(44)

Ralli appears to us inconsistent in pointing out on the one hand that Johnson "dissipates the objection to tragi-comedy and neglect of the unities," and on the other, that he judged "the drama as a game, and Shakespeare according to the skill with which he observed the rules." But aside from this inconsistency, Ralli's opinion is one carefully thought out and really favorable to Johnson.

HERBERT SPENCER ROBINSON (1932)

Robinson's words are testimony beyond all doubt to his admiration for Johnson. The Preface has for him , "at least, a three-fold importance:

(i) it is a masterly piece of prose

(ii) it is an index of Johnson's intellectual power

(iii) it is a partial summary of the literary ideals generally held at the time of its writing.

The Preface is the first attempt to arrive at a judicial estimate of Shakespeare's greatness. Honesty, frankness, and plain common-sense,- qualities which served to make Johnson a commanding figure in his age,- are the distinguishing characteristics of his summary of faults and virtues."(45) Again, "Johnson may be defective on the esthetic side, but when the problem is one that may be settled by reason, he is.....a thorough master of the situation."(46) In the matter of Shakespeare's characters and of tragi-comedy, Robinson holds that Johnson's discussion of these topics is a "clear" and "perfect anticipation" of Coleridge's views.(47)

While our main concern here is with opinion on the Preface, it is hard to refrain from citing so finely turned out a paragraph as the one in which Robinson gives his estimate of the notes. The words are instinct with a warmth and truth of observation; insomuch that we shall quote the passage in full. "The Preface alone, great as it is does not give a complete estimate of Johnson's merit as a critic. In order to obtain a proper appreciation, we must turn to the Notes, which are superior to those of any other editor. They rarely touch questions of scholarship, but they are always interesting, always human, even when, as frequently happens, they are wrong. It is easy for Notes to lack individuality, to bear no trace of their author, but in Johnson's we always feel the powerful personality behind them. They often have a biographical interest, and when they do not explain the genius of Shakespeare, they help to explain a genius of a different type, Johnson

himself. Finally, they may be read with a pleasure that cannot be derived from the Notes of editors who surpassed him in technical equipment."(48)

Lastly, Robinson expresses the view that "Johnson's Preface is the outstanding work in this period, (1733-1765). It is a masterly summary of the esthetic ideas current at the time of its writing. It seeks to approach Shakespeare in a judicial manner, and although successful in this aim, it also reveals critical limitations. The Preface struck a death-blow at the validity of the Unities, which perhaps is to be regarded as its most significant feature."(49)

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And so our survey draws to its end. We have shown how opinion on Johnson fluctuated in different ages; we have seen that the tendency of the present century is to respect Johnson and regard him with affection. In view of this, we can perhaps find no more fitting words with which to conclude, than those written by T. S. Elliot (1934): "No poet can ask more of posterity than to be greatly honoured by the great; and Johnson's words about Shakespeare are great honour."(50)

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