Gulliver's Travels records the pretended four voyages of one Lemuel Gulliver, and his adventures in four astounding countries. The first book tells of his voyage and shipwreck in Lilliput, where the inhabitants are about as tall as one's thumb, and all their acts and motives are on the same dwarfish scale. In the petty quarrels of these dwarfs we are supposed to see the littleness of humanity. The statesmen who obtain place and favor by cutting monkey capers on the tight rope before their sovereign, and the two great parties, the Littleendians and Bigendians, who plunge the country into civil war over the momentous question of whether an egg should be broken on its big or on its little end, are satires on the politics of Swift's own day and generation. The style is simple and convincing; the surprising situations and adventures are as absorbing as those of Defoe's masterpiece; and altogether it is the most interesting of Swift's satires.

On the second voyage Gulliver is abandoned in Brobdingnag, where the inhabitants are giants, and everything is done upon an enormous scale. The meanness of humanity seems all the more detestable in view of the greatness of these superior beings. When Gulliver tells about his own people, their ambitions and wars and conquests, the giants can only wonder that such great venom could exist in such little insects.

In the third voyage Gulliver continues his adventures in Laputa, and this is a satire upon all the scientists and philosophers. Laputa is a flying island, held up in the air by a loadstone; and all the professors of the famous academy at Lagado are of the same airy constitution. The philosopher who worked eight years to extract sunshine from cucumbers is typical of Swift's satiric treatment of all scientific problems. It is in this voyage that we hear of the Struldbrugs, a ghastly race of men who are doomed to live upon earth after losing hope and the desire for life. The picture is all the more terrible in view of the last years of Swift's own life, in which he was compelled to live on, a burden to himself and his friends.

In these three voyages the evident purpose is to strip off the veil of habit and custom, with which men deceive themselves, and show the crude vices of humanity as Swift fancies he sees them. In the fourth voyage the merciless satire is carried out to its logical conclusion. This brings us to the land of the Houyhnhnms, in which horses, superior and intelligent creatures, are the ruling animals. All our interest, however, is centered on the Yahoos, a frightful race, having the form and appearance of men, but living in unspeakable degradation.

The *Journal to Stella*, written chiefly in the years 1710-1713 for the benefit of Esther Johnson, is interesting to us for two reasons. It is, first, an excellent commentary on

contemporary characters and political events, by one of the most powerful and original minds of the age; and second, in its love passages and purely personal descriptions it gives us the best picture we possess of Swift himself at the summit of his power and influence. As we read now its words of tenderness for the woman who loved him, and who brought almost the only ray of sunlight into his life, we can only wonder and be silent. Entirely different are his *Drapier's Letters*, a model of political harangue and of popular argument, which roused an unthinking English public and did much benefit to Ireland by preventing the politicians' plan of debasing the Irish coinage. Swift's poems, though vigorous and original (like Defoe's, of the same period), are generally satirical, often coarse, and seldom rise above doggerel. Unlike his friend Addison, Swift saw, in the growing polish and decency of society, only a mask for hypocrisy; and he often used his verse to shock the new-born modesty by pointing out some native ugliness which his diseased mind discovered under every beautiful exterior.

Miscellaneous Works

That Swift is the most original writer of his time, and one of the greatest masters of English prose, is undeniable. Directness, vigor, simplicity, mark every page. Among writers of that age he stands almost alone in his disdain of literary effects. Keeping his object steadily before him, he drives straight on to the end, with a convincing power that has never been surpassed in our language. Even in his most grotesque creations, the reader never loses the sense of reality, of being present as an eyewitness of the most impossible events, so powerful and convincing is Swift's prose. Defoe had the same power; but in writing *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, his task was comparatively easy, since his hero and his adventures were both natural; while Swift gives reality to pygmies, giants, and the most impossible situations, as easily as if he were writing of facts. Notwithstanding these excellent qualities, the ordinary reader will do

Character of Swift's Prose

well to confine himself to *Gulliver's Travels* and a book of well-chosen selections. For, it must be confessed, the bulk of Swift's work is not wholesome reading. It is too terribly satiric and destructive; it emphasizes the faults and failings of humanity; and so runs counter to the general course of our literature, which from Cynewulf to Tennyson follows the Ideal, as Merlin followed the Gleam,[1] and is not satisfied till the hidden beauty of man's soul and the divine purpose of his struggle are manifest.

JOSEPH ADDISON (1672–1719)

In the pleasant art of living with one's fellows, Addison is easily a master. It is due to his perfect expression of that art, of that new social life which, as we have noted, was characteristic of the Age of Anne, that Addison occupies such a large place in the history of literature. Of less power and originality than Swift, he nevertheless wields, and deserves to wield, a more lasting influence. Swift is the storm, roaring against the ice and frost of the late spring of English life. Addison is the sunshine, which melts the ice and dries the mud and makes the earth thrill with light and hope. Like Swift, he despised shams, but unlike him, he never lost faith in humanity; and in all his satires there is a gentle kindliness which makes one think better of his fellow-men, even while he laughs at their little vanities.

JOSEPH ADDISON

Two things Addison did for our literature which are of inestimable value. First, he overcame a certain corrupt

[1] See Tennyson's "Merlin and the Gleam."

tendency bequeathed by Restoration literature. It was the apparent aim of the low drama, and even of much of the poetry of that age, to make virtue ridiculous and vice attractive. Addison set himself squarely against this unworthy tendency. To strip off the mask of vice, to show its ugliness and deformity, but to reveal virtue in its own native loveliness, — that was Addison's purpose; and he succeeded so well that never, since his day, has our English literature seriously followed after false gods. As Macaulay says, "So effectually did he retort on vice the mockery which had recently been directed against virtue, that since his time the open violation of decency has always been considered amongst us a sure mark of a fool." And second, prompted and aided by the more original genius of his friend Steele, Addison seized upon the new social life of the clubs and made it the subject of endless pleasant essays upon types of men and manners. *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* are the beginning of the modern essay; and their studies of human character, as exemplified in Sir Roger de Coverley, are a preparation for the modern novel.

Addison's Influence

Life. Addison's life, like his writings, is in marked contrast to that of Swift. He was born in Milston, Wiltshire, in 1672. His father was a scholarly English clergyman, and all his life Addison followed naturally the quiet and cultured ways to which he was early accustomed. At the famous Charterhouse School, in London, and in his university life at Oxford, he excelled in character and scholarship and became known as a writer of graceful verses. He had some intention, at one time, of entering the Church, but was easily persuaded by his friends to take up the government service instead. Unlike Swift, who abused his political superiors, Addison took the more tactful way of winning the friendship of men in large places. His lines to Dryden won that literary leader's instant favor, and one of his Latin poems, "The Peace of Ryswick" (1697), with its kindly appreciation of King William's statesmen, brought him into favorable political notice. It brought him also a pension of three hundred pounds a year, with a suggestion that he travel abroad and cultivate the art of diplomacy; which he promptly did to his own great advantage.

From a literary view point the most interesting work of Addison's early life is his *Account of the Greatest English Poets* (1693), written while he was a fellow of Oxford University. One rubs his eyes to find Dryden lavishly praised, Spenser excused or patronized, while Shakespeare is not even mentioned. But Addison was writing under Boileau's "classic" rules; and the poet, like the age, was perhaps too artificial to appreciate natural genius.

While he was traveling abroad, the death of William and the loss of power by the Whigs suddenly stopped Addison's pension; necessity brought him home, and for a time he lived in poverty and obscurity. Then occurred the battle of Blenheim, and in the effort to find a poet to celebrate the event, Addison was brought to the Tories' attention. His poem, "The Campaign," celebrating the victory, took the country by storm. Instead of making the hero slay his thousands and ten thousands, like the old epic heroes, Addison had some sense of what is required in a modern general, and so made Marlborough direct the battle from the outside, comparing him to an angel riding on the whirlwind:

> 'T was then great Marlbro's mighty soul was proved,
> That, in the shock of charging hosts unmoved,
> Amidst confusion, horror, and despair,
> Examined all the dreadful scenes of war;
> In peaceful thought the field of death surveyed,
> To fainting squadrons sent the timely aid,
> Inspired repulsed battalions to engage,
> And taught the doubtful battle where to rage.
> So when an angel by divine command
> With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,
> (Such as of late o'er pale Britannia past,)
> Calm and serene he drives the furious blast;
> And, pleased th' Almighty's orders to perform,
> Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm.

That one doubtful simile made Addison's fortune. Never before or since was a poet's mechanical work so well rewarded. It was called the finest thing ever written, and from that day Addison rose steadily in political favor and office. He became in turn Under-secretary, member of Parliament, Secretary for Ireland, and finally Secretary of State. Probably no other literary man, aided by his pen alone, ever rose so rapidly and so high in office.

The rest of Addison's life was divided between political duties and literature. His essays for the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, which we still cherish, were written between 1709 and 1714; but he won more literary fame by his classic tragedy *Cato*, which we have almost forgotten. In 1716 he married a widow, the Countess of Warwick, and went to live at her home, the famous Holland House. His married life lasted only three years, and was probably not a happy one. Certainly he never wrote of women except with gentle satire, and he became more and more a clubman, spending most of his time in the clubs and coffeehouses of London. Up to this time his life had been singularly peaceful; but his last years were shadowed by quarrels, first with Pope, then with Swift, and finally with his lifelong friend Steele. The first quarrel was on literary grounds, and was largely the result of Pope's jealousy. The latter's venomous caricature of Addison as Atticus shows how he took his petty revenge on a great and good man who had been his friend. The other quarrels with Swift, and especially with his old friend Steele, were the unfortunate result of political differences, and show how impossible it is to mingle literary ideals with party politics. He died serenely in 1719. A brief description from Thackeray's *English Humorists* is his best epitaph:

> A life prosperous and beautiful, a calm death; an immense fame and affection afterwards for his happy and spotless name.

Works of Addison. The most enduring of Addison's works are his famous *Essays*, collected from the *Tatler* and *Spectator*. We have spoken of him as a master of the art of gentle living, and these essays are a perpetual inducement to others to know and to practice the same fine art. To an age of fundamental coarseness and artificiality he came with a wholesome message of refinement and simplicity, much as Ruskin and Arnold spoke to a later age of materialism; only Addison's success was greater than theirs because of his greater knowledge of life and his greater faith in men. He attacks all the little vanities and all the big vices of his time, not in Swift's terrible way, which makes us feel hopeless of humanity, but with a kindly ridicule and gentle humor which takes speedy improvement for granted. To read

The Essays

Swift's brutal "Letters to a Young Lady," and then to read Addison's "Dissection of a Beau's Head" and his "Dissection of a Coquette's Heart," is to know at once the secret of the latter's more enduring influence.

Three other results of these delightful essays are worthy of attention: first, they are the best picture we possess of the new social life of England, with its many new interests; second, they advanced the art of literary criticism to a much higher stage than it had ever before reached, and however much we differ from their judgment and their interpretation of such a man as Milton, they certainly led Englishmen to a better knowledge and appreciation of their own literature; and finally, in Ned Softly the literary dabbler, Will Wimble the poor relation, Sir Andrew Freeport the merchant, Will Honeycomb the fop, and Sir Roger the country gentleman, they give us characters that live forever as part of that goodly company which extends from Chaucer's country parson to Kipling's Mulvaney. Addison and Steele not only introduced the modern essay, but in such characters as these they herald the dawn of the modern novel. Of all his essays the best known and loved are those which introduce us to Sir Roger de Coverley, the genial dictator of life and manners in the quiet English country.

Addison's Style

In style these essays are remarkable as showing the growing perfection of the English language. Johnson says, "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." And again he says, "Give nights and days, sir, to the study of Addison if you mean to be a good writer, or, what is more worth, an honest man." That was good criticism for its day, and even at the present time critics are agreed that Addison's *Essays* are well worth reading once for their own sake, and many times for their influence in shaping a clear and graceful style of writing.

Poems

Addison's poems, which were enormously popular in his day, are now seldom read. His *Cato*, with its classic unities and lack of dramatic power, must be regarded as a failure, if we study it as tragedy; but it offers an excellent example of the rhetoric and fine sentiment which were then considered the essentials of good writing. The best scene from this tragedy is in the fifth act, where Cato soliloquizes, with Plato's *Immortality of the Soul* open in his hand, and a drawn sword on the table before him:

> It must be so — Plato, thou reason'st well! —
> Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond desire,
> This longing after immortality?
> Or whence this secret dread, and inward horror,
> Of falling into nought? why shrinks the soul
> Back on herself, and startles at destruction?
> 'T is the divinity that stirs within us;
> 'T is heaven itself, that points out an hereafter,
> And intimates eternity to man.

Many readers make frequent use of one portion of Addison's poetry without knowing to whom they are indebted. His devout nature found expression in many hymns, a few of which are still used and loved in our churches. Many a congregation thrills, as Thackeray did, to the splendid sweep of his "God in Nature," beginning, "The spacious firmament on high." Almost as well known and loved are his "Traveler's Hymn," and his "Continued Help," beginning, "When all thy mercies, O my God." The latter hymn — written in a storm at sea off the Italian coast, when the captain and crew were demoralized by terror — shows that poetry, especially a good hymn that one can sing in the same spirit as one would say his prayers, is sometimes the most practical and helpful thing in the world.

Richard Steele (1672–1729). Steele was in almost every respect the antithesis of his friend and fellow-worker, — a rollicking, good-hearted, emotional, lovable Irishman. At the Charterhouse School and at Oxford he shared everything with

Addison, asking nothing but love in return. Unlike Addison, he studied but little, and left the university to enter the Horse Guards. He was in turn soldier, captain, poet, playwright, essayist, member of Parliament, manager of a theater, publisher of a newspaper, and twenty other things, — all of which he began joyously and then abandoned, sometimes against his will, as when he was expelled from Parliament, and again because some other interest of the moment had more attraction. His poems and plays are now little known; but the reader who searches them out will find one or two suggestive things about Steele himself. For instance, he loves children; and he is one of the few writers of his time who show a sincere and unswerving respect for womanhood. Even more than Addison he ridicules vice and makes virtue lovely. He is the originator of the *Tatler*, and joins with Addison in creating the *Spectator*, — the two periodicals which, in the short space of less than four years, did more to influence subsequent literature than all other magazines of the century combined. Moreover, he is the original genius of Sir Roger, and of many other characters and essays for which Addison usually receives the whole credit. It is often impossible in the *Tatler* essays to separate the work of the two men; but the majority of critics hold that the more original parts, the characters, the thought, the overflowing kindliness, are largely Steele's creation; while to Addison fell the work of polishing and perfecting the essays, and of adding that touch of humor which made them the most welcome literary visitors that England had ever received.

The Tatler and The Spectator. On account of his talent in writing political pamphlets, Steele was awarded the position of official gazetteer. While in this position, and writing for several small newspapers, the idea occurred to Steele to publish a paper which should contain not only the political news, but also the gossip of the clubs and coffeehouses, with some light essays on the life and manners of the age. The immediate

result — for Steele never let an idea remain idle — was the famous *Tatler*, the first number of which appeared April 12, 1709. It was a small folio sheet, appearing on post days, three times a week, and it sold for a penny a copy. That it had a serious purpose is evident from this dedication to the first volume of collected *Tatler* essays:

> The general purpose of this paper is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behavior.

The success of this unheard-of combination of news, gossip, and essay was instantaneous. Not a club or a coffeehouse in London could afford to be without it, and over its pages began the first general interest in contemporary English life as expressed in literature. Steele at first wrote the entire paper and signed his essays with the name of Isaac Bickerstaff, which had been made famous by Swift a few years before. Addison is said to have soon recognized one of his own remarks to Steele, and the secret of the authorship was out. From that time Addison was a regular contributor, and occasionally other writers added essays on the new social life of England.[1]

Steele lost his position as gazetteer, and the *Tatler* was discontinued after less than two years' life, but not till it won an astonishing popularity and made ready the way for its successor. Two months later, on March 1, 1711, appeared the first number of the *Spectator*. In the new magazine politics and news, as such, were ignored; it was a literary magazine, pure and simple, and its entire contents consisted of a single light essay. It was considered a crazy venture at the time, but its instant success proved that men were eager for some literary expression of the new social ideals. The

[1] Of the *Tatler* essays Addison contributed forty-two; thirty-six others were written in collaboration with Steele; while at least a hundred and eighty are the work of Steele alone.

following whimsical letter to the editor may serve to indicate the part played by the *Spectator* in the daily life of London:

Mr. Spectator, — Your paper is a part of my tea equipage; and my servant knows my humor so well, that in calling for my breakfast this morning (it being past my usual hour) she answered, the *Spectator* was not yet come in, but the teakettle boiled, and she expected it every moment.

It is in the incomparable *Spectator* papers that Addison shows himself most "worthy to be remembered." He contributed the majority of its essays, and in its first number appears this description of the Spectator, by which name Addison is now generally known:

There is no place of general resort wherein I do not often make my appearance; sometimes I am seen thrusting my head into a round of politicians at Will's [Coffeehouse] and listening with great attention to the narratives that are made in those little circular audiences. Sometimes I smoke a pipe at Child's, and, whilst I seem attentive to nothing but *The Postman*, overhear the conversation of every table in the room. I appear on Sunday nights at St. James's, and sometimes join the little committee of politics in the inner room, as one who comes to hear and improve. My face is likewise very well known at the Grecian, the Cocoa Tree, and in the theaters both of Drury Lane and the Haymarket. I have been taken for a merchant upon the Exchange for above these ten years; and sometimes pass for a Jew in the assembly of stock jobbers at Jonathan's. . . . Thus I live in the world rather as a spectator of mankind than as one of the species, . . . which is the character I intend to preserve in this paper.

The large place which these two little magazines hold in our literature seems most disproportionate to their short span of days. In the short space of four years in which Addison and Steele worked together the light essay was established as one of the most important forms of modern literature, and the literary magazine won its place as the expression of the social life of a nation.

Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)

The reader of Boswell's *Johnson*, after listening to endless grumblings and watching the clumsy actions of the hero, often finds himself wondering why he should end his reading with a profound respect for this "old bear" who is the object of Boswell's groveling attention. Here is a man who was certainly not the greatest writer of his age, perhaps not even a great writer at all, but who was nevertheless the dictator of English letters, and who still looms across the centuries of a magnificent literature as its most striking and original figure. Here, moreover, is a huge, fat, awkward man, of vulgar manners and appearance, who monopolizes conversation, argues violently, abuses everybody, clubs down opposition, — "Madam" (speaking to his cultivated hostess at table), "talk no more nonsense"; "Sir" (turning to a distinguished guest), "I perceive you are a vile Whig." While talking he makes curious animal sounds, "sometimes giving a half whistle, sometimes clucking like a hen"; and when he has concluded a violent dispute and laid his opponents low by dogmatism or ridicule, he leans back to "blow out his breath like a whale" and gulp down numberless cups of hot tea. Yet this curious dictator of an elegant age was a veritable lion, much sought after by society; and around him in his own poor house gathered the foremost artists, scholars, actors, and literary men of London, — all honoring the man, loving him,

SAMUEL JOHNSON

and listening to his dogmatism as the Greeks listened to the voice of their oracle.

What is the secret of this astounding spectacle? If the reader turns naturally to Johnson's works for an explanation, he will be disappointed. Reading his verses, we find nothing to delight or inspire us, but rather gloom and pessimism, with a few moral observations in rimed couplets:

> But, scarce observed, the knowing and the bold
> Fall in the general massacre of gold;
> Wide-wasting pest! that rages unconfined,
> And crowds with crimes the records of mankind;
> For gold his sword the hireling ruffian draws,
> For gold the hireling judge distorts the laws;
> Wealth heaped on wealth nor truth nor safety buys;
> The dangers gather as the treasures rise.[1]

That is excellent common sense, but it is not poetry; and it is not necessary to hunt through Johnson's bulky volumes for the information, since any moralist can give us offhand the same doctrine. As for his *Rambler* essays, once so successful, though we marvel at the big words, the carefully balanced sentences, the classical allusions, one might as well try to get interested in an old-fashioned, three-hour sermon. We read a few pages listlessly, yawn, and go to bed.

Since the man's work fails to account for his leadership and influence, we examine his personality; and here everything is interesting. Because of a few oft-quoted passages from Boswell's biography, Johnson appears to us as an eccentric bear, who amuses us by his growlings and clumsy antics. But there is another Johnson, a brave, patient, kindly, religious soul, who, as Goldsmith said, had "nothing of the bear but his skin"; a man who battled like a hero against poverty and pain and melancholy and the awful fear of death, and who overcame them manfully. "*That trouble passed away; so will this*," sang the sorrowing Deor in the first old

[1] From "The Vanity of Human Wishes."

Anglo-Saxon lyric; and that expresses the great and suffering spirit of Johnson, who in the face of enormous obstacles never lost faith in God or in himself. Though he was a reactionary in politics, upholding the arbitrary power of kings and opposing the growing liberty of the people, yet his political theories, like his manners, were no deeper than his skin; for in all London there was none more kind to the wretched, and none more ready to extend an open hand to every struggling man and woman who crossed his path. When he passed poor homeless Arabs sleeping in the streets he would slip a coin into their hands, in order that they might have a happy awakening; for he himself knew well what it meant to be hungry. Such was Johnson, — a "mass of genuine manhood," as Carlyle called him, and as such, men loved and honored him.[1]

Life of Johnson. Johnson was born in Lichfield, Staffordshire, in 1709. He was the son of a small bookseller, a poor man, but intelligent and fond of literature, as booksellers invariably were in the good days when every town had its bookshop. From his childhood Johnson had to struggle against physical deformity and disease and the consequent disinclination to hard work. He prepared for the university, partly in the schools, but largely by omnivorous reading in his father's shop, and when he entered Oxford he had read more classical authors than had most of the graduates. Before finishing his course he had to leave the university on account of his poverty, and at once he began his long struggle as a hack writer to earn his living.

At twenty-five years he married a woman old enough to be his mother, — a genuine love match, he called it, — and with her dowry of £800 they started a private school together, which was a dismal failure. Then, without money or influential friends, he left his home and wife in Lichfield and tramped to London, accompanied only by David Garrick, afterwards the famous actor, who had been one of his pupils. Here, led by old associations, Johnson made himself

[1] A very lovable side of Johnson's nature is shown by his doing penance in the public market place for his unfilial conduct as a boy. (See, in Hawthorne's *Our Old Home*, the article on "Lichfield and Johnson.") His sterling manhood is recalled in his famous letter to Lord Chesterfield, refusing the latter's patronage for the *Dictionary*. The student should read this incident entire, in Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

known to the booksellers, and now and then earned a penny by writing prefaces, reviews, and translations.

It was a dog's life, indeed, that he led there with his literary brethren. Many of the writers of the day, who are ridiculed in Pope's heartless *Dunciad*, having no wealthy patrons to support them, lived largely in the streets and taverns, sleeping on an ash heap or under a wharf, like rats; glad of a crust, and happy over a single meal which enabled them to work for a while without the reminder of hunger. A few favored ones lived in wretched lodgings in Grub Street, which has since become a synonym for the fortunes of struggling writers.[1] Often, Johnson tells us, he walked the streets all night long, in dreary weather, when it was too cold to sleep, without food or shelter. But he wrote steadily for the booksellers and for the *Gentleman's Magazine*, and presently he became known in London and received enough work to earn a bare living.

The works which occasioned this small success were his poem, "London," and his *Life of the Poet Savage*, a wretched life, at best, which were perhaps better left without a biographer. But his success was genuine, though small, and presently the booksellers of London are coming to him to ask him to write a dictionary of the English language. It was an enormous work, taking nearly eight years of his time, and long before he had finished it he had eaten up the money which he received for his labor. In the leisure intervals of this work he wrote "The Vanity of Human Wishes" and other poems, and finished his classic tragedy of *Irene*.

Led by the great success of the *Spectator*, Johnson started two magazines, *The Rambler* (1750–1752) and *The Idler* (1758–1760). Later the *Rambler* essays were published in book form and ran rapidly through ten editions; but the financial returns were small, and Johnson spent a large part of his earnings in charity. When his mother died, in 1759, Johnson, although one of the best known men in London, had no money, and hurriedly finished *Rasselas*, his only romance, in order, it is said, to pay for his mother's burial.

It was not till 1762, when Johnson was fifty-three years old, that his literary labors were rewarded in the usual way by royalty, and he received from George III a yearly pension of three hundred pounds. Then began a little sunshine in his life. With Joshua Reynolds, the

[1] In Johnson's *Dictionary* we find this definition: "Grub-street, the name of a street in London much inhabited by writers of small histories, *dictionaries*, and temporary poems; whence any mean production is called Grub-street."

artist, he founded the famous Literary Club, of which Burke, Pitt, Fox, Gibbon, Goldsmith, and indeed all the great literary men and politicians of the time, were members. This is the period of Johnson's famous conversations, which were caught in minutest detail by Boswell and given to the world. His idea of conversation, as shown in a hundred places in Boswell, is to overcome your adversary at any cost; to knock him down by arguments, or, when these fail, by personal ridicule; to dogmatize on every possible question, pronounce a few oracles, and then desist with the air of victory. Concerning the philosopher Hume's view of death he says: "Sir, if he really thinks so, his perceptions are disturbed, he is mad. If he does not think so, he lies." Exit opposition. There is nothing more to be said. Curiously enough, it is often the palpable blunders of these monologues that now attract us, as if we were enjoying a good joke at the dictator's expense. Once a lady asked him, "Dr. Johnson, why did you define *pastern* as the knee of a horse?" "Ignorance, madame, pure ignorance," thundered the great authority.

When seventy years of age, Johnson was visited by several booksellers of the city, who were about to bring out a new edition of the English poets, and who wanted Johnson, as the leading literary man of London, to write the prefaces to the several volumes. The result was his *Lives of the Poets*, as it is now known, and this is his last literary work. He died in his poor Fleet Street house, in 1784, and was buried among England's honored poets in Westminster Abbey.

Johnson's Works. "A book," says Dr. Johnson, "should help us either to enjoy life or to endure it." Judged by this standard, one is puzzled what to recommend among Johnson's numerous books. The two things which belong among the things "worthy to be remembered" are his *Dictionary* and his *Lives of the Poets*, though both these are valuable, not as literature, but rather as a study of literature. The *Dictionary*, as the first ambitious attempt at an English lexicon, is extremely valuable, notwithstanding the fact that his derivations are often faulty, and that he frequently exercises his humor or prejudice in his curious definitions. In defining "oats," for example, as a grain given in England to horses and in Scotland to the people, he indulges

The English Dictionary

his prejudice against the Scotch, whom he never understood, just as, in his definition of "pension," he takes occasion to rap the writers who had flattered their patrons since the days of Elizabeth; though he afterwards accepted a comfortable pension for himself. With characteristic honesty he refused to alter his definition in subsequent editions of the *Dictionary*.

Lives of the Poets

The *Lives of the Poets* are the simplest and most readable of his literary works. For ten years before beginning these biographies he had given himself up to conversation, and the ponderous style of his *Rambler* essays here gives way to a lighter and more natural expression. As criticisms they are often misleading, giving praise to artificial poets, like Cowley and Pope, and doing scant justice or abundant injustice to nobler poets like Gray and Milton; and they are not to be compared with those found in Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, which was published in the same generation. As biographies, however, they are excellent reading, and we owe to them some of our best known pictures of the early English poets.

Poems and Essays

Of Johnson's poems the reader will have enough if he glance over "The Vanity of Human Wishes." His only story, *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, is a matter of rhetoric rather than of romance, but is interesting still to the reader who wants to hear Johnson's personal views of society, philosophy, and religion. Any one of his *Essays*, like that on "Reading," or "The Pernicious Effects of Revery," will be enough to acquaint the reader with the Johnsonese style, which was once much admired and copied by orators, but which happily has been replaced by a more natural way of speaking. Most of his works, it must be confessed, are rather tiresome. It is not to his books, but rather to the picture of the man himself, as given by Boswell, that Johnson owes his great place in our literature.

Boswell's "Life of Johnson"

In James Boswell (1740–1795) we have another extraordinary figure, — a shallow little Scotch barrister, who trots about like a dog at the heels of his big master, frantic at a caress and groveling at a cuff, and abundantly contented if only he can be near him and record his oracles. All his life long Boswell's one ambition seems to have been to shine in the reflected glory of great men, and his chief task to record their sayings and doings. When he came to London, at twenty-two years of age, Johnson, then at the beginning of his great fame, was to this insatiable little glory-seeker like a Silver Doctor to a hungry trout. He sought an introduction as a man seeks gold, haunted every place where Johnson declaimed, until in Davies's bookstore the supreme opportunity came. This is his record of the great event:

> I was much agitated [says Boswell] and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, "Don't tell him where I come from." "From Scotland," cried Davies roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said I, "I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." . . . "That, sir" [cried Johnson], "I find is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help." This stroke stunned me a good deal; and when we had sat down I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next.

Then for several years, with a persistency that no rebuffs could abate, and with a thick skin that no amount of ridicule could render sensitive, he follows Johnson; forces his way into the Literary Club, where he is not welcome, in order to be near his idol; carries him off on a visit to the Hebrides; talks with him on every possible occasion; and, when he is not invited to a feast, waits outside the house or tavern in order to walk home with his master in the thick fog of the early morning. And the moment the oracle is out of sight and in bed, Boswell patters home to record in detail all that he has seen and heard. It is to his minute record that we owe our only perfect picture of a great man; all his vanity as