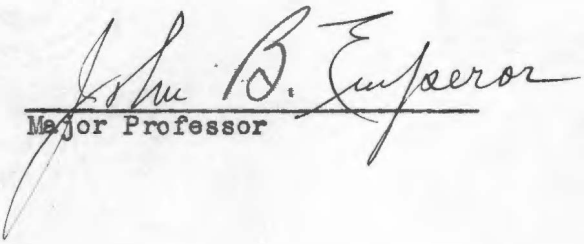


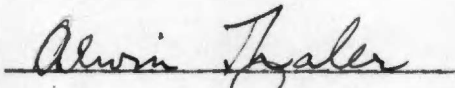
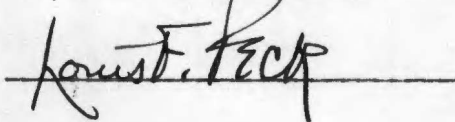
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To the Committee on Graduate Study:

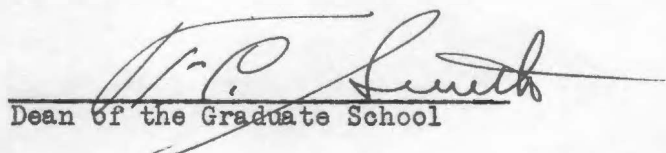
I am submitting to you a thesis written by Florence G. Marsh entitled "The Personal Religion of Five Representative Eighteenth-Century Poets." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.


Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Committee


Dean of the Graduate School

THE PERSONAL RELIGION OF FIVE REPRESENTATIVE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POETS

A THESIS

Submitted to
The Committee on Graduate Study
of
The University of Tennessee
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

by

Florence G. Marsh

August, 1943

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PREFACE

This thesis had its inception in a study of the personal religion of Samuel Johnson, done in the fall quarter of 1942 for Dr. Emperor's seminar. That study, which forms the second chapter here, was extended to include the personal religion of Thomas Gray, James Thomson, Edward Young, and William Shenstone because of my interest in the subject. The selection of the men to be studied was largely arbitrary; five seemed to be all that the scope of a thesis would permit me to treat adequately.

Hoxie Neale Fairchild's Religious Trends in English Poetry, I am sorry to say, I was unable to secure until this thesis was completed. The thesis may be regarded as supplementary to his excellent study: Johnson he does not treat at all, Gray and Shenstone he treats very briefly. My studies of Thomson and Young I believe are in some respects fuller than are Dr. Fairchild's, though I should have profited greatly had I had the benefit of his survey in making my own. As it is, however, my study is completely independent.

In the writing of this paper I have received many kindnesses for which I am grateful. I wish to thank the librarians for their generous and friendly aid, especially Miss Goehring, who has been most helpful in obtaining inter-library loans for me; I am grateful to Dr. Thaler for reading and commenting on my Chapter dealing with Samuel Johnson and to Dr. Peck for his helpful criticism of my Chapter dealing with Thomas Gray. And I wish to express my very real gratitude to Dr. Emperor, who has been my best critic and constant guide.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I shall study the personal religion of five representative eighteenth-century English poets — Johnson, Gray, Thomson, Young, and Shenstone. My purpose has been by an examination of their spoken and written words and of their actual lives to ascertain as nearly as possible the essential quality of their religious thought and life. With the possible exception of Johnson, no one of them is a great religious figure, but each is an English poet of some distinction. It has seemed worth while to study their personal religion in an effort to know better the men themselves and their thinking.

My sources have been the poems, letters and other writing of the men themselves and the biographical material about the men. In the case of Johnson, for whom there is superabundant material, my study has been based on the biographical material alone, and a real study remains to be made of Johnson's own writing. I question, however, that such a study would materially alter my findings. For all the other men I have examined all their writing available to me¹ as well as the biographical material.

The study has been limited to the opinions, feelings, and conduct of the men themselves. Indirectly, in such a study as this, the ideas at

¹Manuscript material in unpublished form has, of course, not been available. Gray's Latin poems I have not read except for those poems for which translations could be found.

work in the period emerge, but the movements of the time, the influences responsible for the ideas of the men being studied, have concerned me only in so far as they have clearly appeared in the opinions or feelings of the men under consideration. Shaftesbury's influence on Thomson, the influence of Newtonian science on Thomson, Young's debt to Christian apologists — these and questions like them I have had of necessity to leave untouched or simply to take someone else's word for. The scope of this study did not include them. A study of the influences which shaped the religious thinking of these men would lead to a history of eighteenth-century thought and would prove a project for a lifetime. In case the reader feels a need of knowing something more of the intellectual life of the age in which these men lived, I can only refer him to Leslie Stephen's History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century. I have taken such a background for granted throughout this paper.

The scope of the study has likewise excluded any consideration of the problem of the relation between religious fervor and poetical intensity and performance. In the case of Young, the connection is self-evident. With Johnson, Gray, Thomson and Shenstone, on the other hand, the connection of religious thought with poetic utterance is sometimes slight. I believe a case could be made to establish the point that a man's religious thinking has a real relation to his ultimate position as a first or second or third-rate writer, but I have not attempted to make such a case.

The most serious limitation of such a study as this is, of course, the difficulty of reading the human heart. A great deal of subjective judgment has been necessary; since a man's opinion of himself may conflict with the evidence offered by his actual life, judgment has, especially in

the case of Young, been very difficult. Whether or not a man's most private relationship can ever be fully determined by another, and whether or not it can be determined on the basis of poems, essays, letters, and life is open to question. One can judge only on what appears, however, and hope that one is doing no serious injustice.

My method of procedure has been in each case to examine the man's theological beliefs, his ethics, and his spiritual quality. Theological belief has proved to be the most tangible factor in religion; it is fairly easy to isolate and to establish. Study of a man's ethics involves a study of his conduct and character throughout his life, and it may seem that I have included irrelevant biographical material. I have gone, however, on the assumption that conduct is, after all, the best test of a man's real beliefs and that a man's actual life is the best index to the sincerity and depth of his religious belief. What I mean by spirituality is difficult to define and has proved difficult to study. It is, however, the element that all religions have in common, and may perhaps be defined as a man's attitude toward his life and his God. To my mind, it is the most important factor in a discussion of a man's personal religion.

In the words of William James:

When we survey the whole field of religion, we find a great variety in the thoughts that have prevailed there; but the feelings on the one hand and the conduct on the other are almost always the same....The theories which Religion generates, being thus variable, are secondary; and if you wish to grasp her essence you must look to the feelings and the conduct as being the more constant elements.²

²William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), p. 504.

Most of this study is devoted to "the feelings and the conduct" of Johnson, Gray, Thomson, Young, and Shenstone.

CHAPTER II

THE PERSONAL RELIGION OF SAMUEL JOHNSON

Boswell, in his final summary of Johnson's character, describes Johnson as "a sincere and zealous Christian of high Church-of-England... principles, which he would not tamely submit to be questioned." Johnson had "perhaps, at an early period, narrowed his mind somewhat too much," but he was "steady and inflexible in maintaining the obligations of religion and morality; both from a regard for the order of society, and from a veneration for the GREAT SOURCE of all order."¹ In order to reach a perhaps more exact understanding of Johnson's personal religion, I have attempted in this paper to gather the evidence concerning Johnson's views on questions of religious doctrine, the evidence concerning the origins and nature of his faith, and the evidence concerning the effect of this faith on his life.

Johnson's views on religious doctrine at first seem completely orthodox. He disliked to hear "anything concerning a future state which was not authorized by the regular canons of orthodoxy," and so discouraged talk of an essay which maintained the future life of brutes.² Boswell comments that Johnson's unwillingness to concede that universal prescience in

¹ James Boswell, Life of Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press [Oxford Standard Edition], 1933), II, 653. Further references to this work will be given as Life.

² Ibid., I, 370.

the Deity is incompatible with the idea of free will can be attributed to "his supposed orthodoxy" which "shrunk from any abridgement of an attribute usually ascribed to the Divinity."³ Dr. Adams, writing to Boswell, says of Dr. Johnson, "You know his extreme zeal for orthodoxy."⁴ He would recommend Dr. Clarke's sermons were Dr. Clarke orthodox, but "upon the doctrine of the Trinity...he is a condemned heretick."⁵

At times Johnson was rather extreme in his support of the Church of England. He protested against allowing anyone to preach "any opinion contrary to the doctrine of the established church" because it would tend "to lessen the authority of the church, and consequently, to lessen the influence of religion." The state had a perfect right to prohibit any teaching contrary to established doctrine. It might be "morally or theologically wrong" to restrain opinions thought to be dangerous, but it was "politically right."⁶ Johnson supported the use of creeds and confessions, saying that they are "only a voluntary declaration of agreement in certain articles of faith, which a church has a right to require."⁷

³ Ibid., I, 402.

⁴ Ibid., II, 645, n. 1.

⁵ Ibid., II, 189.

⁶ Ibid., I, 511-516. See also ibid., II, 493.

⁷ James Boswell, Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D., and Samuel Johnson, Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, edited by R. W. Chapman (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 235. Future references will be made to either Journey or Tour.

Furthermore he had no patience with omitting the requirement that the boys at the University subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles. "They ought," he said, "to consider, that our Universities were founded to bring up members for the Church of England." It was not sufficient to subscribe to the Bible, for all sects and even Mohometans subscribe to the Bible.⁸ He was most unwilling to admit the Scotch were more pious than the English in any instance, perhaps because of his prejudice against the Scotch, but equally possibly because of his extreme loyalty to the Church of England.⁹ When one of the Presbyterian clergy spoke of "fat bishops and drowsy deans... Dr. Johnson was so highly offended, that he said to him, 'Sir, you know no more of our church than a Hottentot.'¹⁰ Boswell himself aroused Johnson's wrath by saying as an example of absurd stories told of Johnson that he "would stand before a battery of cannon, to restore the Convocation to its full powers." Johnson "thundered" back, "And would I not, Sir? Shall the Presbyterian Kirk of Scotland have its General Assembly, and the Church of England be denied its Convocation?"¹¹

Johnson's orthodoxy is perhaps clear enough from these comments so that it may be less profitable to seek evidence establishing his orthodoxy than it will be to present evidence of his liberal views. Therefore, since Johnson's views on some of the more controversial articles seem to be

⁸Life, I, 438-439.

⁹Tour, p. 237, n. 1.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 419.

¹¹Life, I, 310.

intellectual arguments that do not add perceptibly to an appreciation of his faith, I shall treat them rather hastily. It would certainly require a greater knowledge of theology than I possess to equate his beliefs with each of the Thirty-nine Articles.¹² However, it is sufficiently easy to see that, if not completely orthodox, he adhered closely to most of the articles. Mrs. Piozzi comments that "the natural depravity of mankind and remains of original sin were...fixed in Mr. Johnson's opinion."¹³ His belief in the Trinity is apparent from his explanation to Boswell that "the three persons in the Godhead are Three in one sense, and One in another. We cannot tell how; and that is the mystery!"¹⁴ and from his use in his prayers of the expression "Three Persons and one God."¹⁵ His account of the satisfaction of Christ, given while on the famous tour, as being not an atonement for sin but a satisfaction of divine justice¹⁶ is not as orthodox as his fuller explanation, dictated later, in which he says, "The peculiar doctrine of Christianity

¹²My information concerning the Thirty-nine Articles was obtained from Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), III, 487-516.

¹³~~Hester~~ Lynch Piozzi, Anecdotes of Samuel Johnson, edited by S. C. Roberts (Cambridge: The University Press, 1932), p. 115. See Life, II, 424; Tour, p. 300. Future references to Mrs. Piozzi's work will be given as Anecdotes.

¹⁴Tour, p. 21.

¹⁵Samuel Johnson, "Prayers and Meditations" in Johnsonian Miscellanies, edited by George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1897), I, 7, 24. Future references will be given as Miscellanies.

¹⁶Tour, p. 215.

is that of an universal sacrifice and perpetual propitiation."¹⁷ However, since just before his death, Johnson put his trust in the propitiatory sacrifice and recommended Dr. Clarke's sermons "because he is fullest on the propitiatory sacrifice,"¹⁸ this may be considered his final view. That his faith in the satisfaction of Christ was constant, however he explained it, is clear from his prayers, in which he speaks of "the satisfaction of Jesus Christ," of "the benefits" of Christ's death,²⁰ and of "the sacrifice by which thy son Jesus Christ has taken away the sins of the world."²¹ He seems to me to take the position of the articles, which, as I read them, are, despite Boswell's comment to the contrary, against a belief in transubstantiation.²² He fully supported the articles' assertion of the authority of magistrates and seems to have gone even beyond them in his contention that civil authorities should suppress unauthorized religious views.²³ His belief in Revelation appears when in a discussion of the efficacy of prayer, he said, "Revelation has told us, it will be effectual"²⁴ and when he commented that we were not sure of a future state

¹⁷Life, II, 424-425.

¹⁸Ibid., II, 645.

¹⁹Miscellanies, p. 7.

²⁰Ibid., p. 20.

²¹Ibid., p. 117.

²²Tour, p. 204.

²³Ante, p. 6, n. 6.

²⁴Tour, p. 202.

of compensation for the unhappiness of this life until "we had a positive revelation."²⁵

However, when Boswell inquired if it were necessary to believe all the Thirty-nine Articles, Johnson answered, "Why, Sir, that is a question which has been much agitated. Some have thought it necessary that they should all be believed; others have considered them to be only articles of peace, that is to say, you are not to preach against them."²⁶ Johnson himself clearly differs from them with respect to the question of predestination or free will and with respect to the idea of purgatory. Johnson did not like to discuss the idea of predestination. "We know our will is free, and there's an end on't,"²⁷ and again, "All theory is against the freedom of the will; all experience is for it."²⁸ Purgatory he believed "a very harmless doctrine"; there was "nothing unreasonable" in it.²⁹ There is, in his opinion, "no harm in believing" that "departed souls do not all at once arrive at the utmost state of perfection."³⁰ As Boswell points out, Johnson's prayer after his wife's death asking whatever is best for her "in her present state" and "finally to receive her

²⁵Life, II, 239.

²⁶Ibid., I, 402.

²⁷Ibid., I, 388.

²⁸Ibid., II, 220-221.

²⁹Ibid., I, 402.

³⁰Ibid., I, 447.

to eternal happiness" seems to indicate his belief in a middle state.³¹

These deviations from the articles of his church are not as remarkable as is his very liberal view that "all Christians...agree in the essential articles, and that their differences are trivial, and rather political than religious."³² Here his true tolerance becomes clear, and one agrees with Boswell's finding Johnson "very liberal in his way of thinking" when talking calmly in private.³³

He is consistently generous in his attitude toward condemned criminals. Boswell inquired if a man who is the aggressor in a duel and is killed has much chance of going to a state of happiness. Johnson replied that "we are not to judge determinately of the state in which a man leaves this life. He may in a moment have repented effectively, and it is possible may have been accepted by God."³⁴ He insisted that "a man may be sincere in good principles, without having good practice."³⁵ To Dr. Dodd, who had been condemned for forgery, he wrote,

Be comforted: your crime, morally or religiously considered, has no very deep dye of turpitude. It corrupted no man's principles; it attacked no man's life. Of this, and of all other sins, you are earnestly to repent; and may God, who knoweth our frailty...accept your repentance.³⁶

³¹Ibid., I, 160-161. See Miscellanies, p. 15.

³²Life, I, 270-271. See also ibid., I, 438.

³³Ibid., II, 250.

³⁴Ibid., II, 270.

³⁵Ibid., II, 631.

³⁶Ibid., II, 113.

When he heard of Hackman, who had shot Miss Ray, he was concerned "particularly with his prayer for the mercy of heaven" and said "in a solemn fervid tone, 'I hope he shall find mercy.'"³⁷ Of a probationer who was opposed in his application because he was alleged guilty of fornication five years before, Johnson said, "Why...if he has repented, it is not a sufficient objection. A man who is good enough to go to heaven, is good enough to be a clergy man."³⁸ When asked if a man who had lived a good life, but died in an act of sin, could be saved, Johnson replied that if a man had lived a good life and then was "hurried by passion to do what is wrong, and is suddenly carried off,...he will have the reward of his...good life; God will not take a catch of him." Upon Boswell's insisting that the text is "As the tree falls, so it must lie," Johnson explained that the state of the tree was meant.³⁹ For one so zealous in the support of religion, this is a remarkably generous attitude toward the fallen.

Another instance of the breadth of his views appears in his prayers for the dead. It does not seem that a strictly orthodox member of the Church of England would have prayed as Johnson did that the soul of his dead wife might minister to him.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, he resolved not to "deviate too much from the common and received methods of devotion,"⁴¹

³⁷Ibid., II, 288.

³⁸Ibid., I, 453.

³⁹Ibid., II, 498.

⁴⁰Miscellanies, p. 11.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 15.

and almost always, in his prayers for the dead, employs the phrase "so far as it be lawful."⁴²

His speculations concerning the nature of life after death are those of a liberal, open mind. In his letter to James Elphinston after the death of Elphinston's mother, he wrote that "neither reason nor revelation" denies the hope that

she may, in her present state, look with pleasure upon every act of virtue...Whether this be more than a pleasing dream, or a just opinion of separate spirits, is, indeed, of no great importance to us, when we consider ourselves as acting under the eye of God: yet, surely, there is something pleasing in the belief that our separation from those we love is merely corporeal.⁴³

Again, he speculated that music may be part of "future felicity" since some "philosophers and divines" maintain that "we shall not be spiritualized to such a degree, but that something of matter...will remain."⁴⁴ When a lady kindly imagines that a copy of Shakespeare's works will greet Boswell in the next world, Johnson "smiled benignantly...and did not appear to disapprove of the notion."⁴⁵ On the other hand, he believed "the happiness of an unembodied spirit will consist in a consciousness of the favour of God, in the contemplation of truth, and in the possession of felicitating ideas" and that "all relationship is dissolved."⁴⁶ On the

⁴²Ibid., pp. 14, 15, 25, 30, 41.

⁴³Life, I, 447.

⁴⁴Ibid..

⁴⁵Ibid., II, 236.

⁴⁶Ibid., I, 446.

question of eternal punishment, he believed that

it may...perhaps be necessary, in order to preserve both men and angels in a state of rectitude, that they should have continually before them the punishment of those who have deviated from it; but we may hope that by some other means a full rectitude may be preserved. Some of the texts of Scripture upon this subject are...indeed strong; but they may admit of a mitigated interpretation.⁴⁷

He was reluctant to discuss the idea of resurrection, saying only,

It is not to be the same body; for the Scripture uses the illustration of grain sown, and we know that the grain which grows is not the same with what is sown...it is enough if there be such a sameness as to distinguish identity of person.⁴⁸

His interest in second sight, also, it seems to me, may be taken as proof of his open mind. He came away from Scotland "willing to believe,"⁴⁹ and, according to Boswell, "his elevated wish for more and more evidence of Spirit...led him to a love of such mysterious disquisitions."⁵⁰ Johnson thought, "A total disbelief in them [apparitions]...adverse to the opinion of the existence of the soul between death and the last day."⁵¹

Not only does this liberality and open-mindedness appear, but also there is a great deal of plain common sense in his views. His attitude seems rational; he has a reasoned rather than a dogmatic approach to religious questions. When Boswell wished to have arguments for Christianity always in

⁴⁷Ibid., II, 153.

⁴⁸Ibid., II, 402.

⁴⁹Journey, p. 100.

⁵⁰Life, I, 438.

⁵¹Ibid., II, 402.

readiness, Johnson observed that all objections cannot be answered. "You have demonstration for a First Cause; you see he must be good as well as powerful, because there is nothing to make him otherwise, and goodness of itself is preferable. Yet you have against this, what is very certain, the unhappiness of human life."⁵² In discussing atheism and the supposition of the absence of a governing mind, Johnson is logical.

If it [eternal necessity without design] were so, why has it ceased? Why don't we see men thus produced around us now? If it stops because there is now no need of it, then it is plain there is, and ever has been, an all-powerful intelligence.⁵³

He refused to ponder "why was it so? or why was it not so?" because we can know little of final causes.⁵⁴ He admitted that Christian religion is "in some degree strange to reason," but testimony, to his mind, cast the balance.⁵⁵

After a system is well established upon positive evidence, a few partial objections ought not to shake it. The human mind is so limited, that it cannot take in all the parts of a subject, so that there may be objections against anything.⁵⁶

There is a balance in favor of the Christian religion "from the number of great men who have been convinced of its truth."⁵⁷ In reply to an account of a servant who "would not believe the scriptures, because he could not read them in the original tongues, and be sure that they were not invented, 'Why, foolish fellow, (said Johnson,) has he any better authority for almost

⁵²Ibid., II, 238-239.

⁵³Tour, p. 189.

⁵⁴Life, I, 270.

⁵⁵Ibid., I, 266. See also ibid., I, 286.

⁵⁶Ibid., I, 297.

⁵⁷Ibid., I, 303.

everything that he believes?'⁵⁸

When he was questioned about belief in miracles, he admitted "that the great difficulty of proving miracles should make us very cautious in believing them." But he considered that

Although God has made Nature to operate by certain fixed laws, yet it is not unreasonable to think that he may suspend those laws, in order to establish a system highly advantageous to mankind...The miracles which prove it [Christian religion] are attested by men who had no interest in deceiving us; but who, on the contrary, were told they should suffer persecution, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts which they asserted. Indeed, for some centuries the heathen did not pretend to deny the miracles; but said they were performed by the aid of evil spirits. This is a circumstance of great weight. Then...when we take the proofs derived from prophecies which have been so exactly fulfilled, we have most satisfactory evidence.⁵⁹

Furthermore, he believed that "the Christian revelation is not proved by miracles alone, but is connected with prophecies, and with the doctrine in confirmation of which the miracles were wrought."⁶⁰

His interpretation of scripture is logical rather than literal. A Mr. Erskine objected to the passage

where we are told that the angel of the Lord smote in one night forty thousand Assyrians. 'Sir, (said Johnson,) you should recollect that there was a supernatural interposition; they were destroyed by pestilence. You are not to suppose the angel of the Lord went about and stabbed each of them with a dagger, or knocked them on the head, man by man.'⁶¹

⁵⁸Ibid., I. 340-341.

⁵⁹Ibid., II, 297.

⁶⁰Ibid., II, 144.

⁶¹Ibid., I, 456.

Yet when Dr. Blacklock spoke of scepticism in morals and religion, Dr. Johnson encouraged him to have faith, saying that "the greatest concern we have in this world, the choice of our profession, must be determined without demonstrative reasoning."⁶² Nevertheless, Johnson seems consistently to support his own faith by just such reasoning.

His common sense appears also in his hostility to scruples. As Mrs. Piozzi says, "...his first care was for general, not particular or petty morality." In his opinion "scruples would...certainly make men miserable, and seldom make them good." He advised flight "from those instructors against whom our Saviour denounces heavy judgment, for having bound up burdens grievous to be borne, and laid them on the shoulders of mortal men."⁶³ He exclaimed,

Oh, let us not be found when our Master calls us, ripping the lace off our waistcoats, but the spirit of contention from our souls and tongues! Let us all conform in outward customs, which are of no consequence, to the manners of those whom we live among, and despise such paltry distinctions. Alas, Sir,...a man who cannot get to heaven in a green coat, will not find his way thither the sooner in a grey coat.⁶⁴

He advised a clerk who went to him with conscientious scruples about paper and packthread which his master allowed him to take to "leave off tormenting your neighbours about paper and packthread, while we all live together in a world that is bursting with sin and sorrow."⁶⁵ Boswell inquired if he

⁶²Tour, p. 189.

⁶³Anecdotes, p. 74.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 72.

⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 145-146. See also pp. 144, 147.

might consult another lawyer on Sunday and was told he might.

It is not criminal, though it is not what one should do, who is anxious for the preservation and increase of piety, to which a peculiar observance of Sunday is a great help. The distinction is clear between what is of moral and what is of ritual obligation.⁶⁶

He struggled against his own scruples, resolving to conquer them.⁶⁷

Several of his remarks about prayer are equally full of common sense. "He observed, that to reason philosophically on the nature of prayer, was very unprofitable."⁶⁸ He thought the "same arguments which are used against God's hearing prayer, will serve against his rewarding good, and punishing evil. He has resolved, he has declared, in the former case as in the latter."⁶⁹ During a conversation about saying grace at breakfast, he observed that, "It is enough if we have stated seasons of prayer; no matter when...custom is to be followed."⁷⁰

Furthermore, he was of the opinion that "Christmas might be kept as well upon one day of the year as another" as long as there is a "stated day for commemorating the birth of our Saviour."⁷¹ He refused to be troubled by the existence of evil, saying that

if moral evil be consistent with the government of the Deity, why may not physical evil be also consistent with it? It is

⁶⁶Life, I, 603.

⁶⁷Miscellanies, pp. 40, 41, 46.

⁶⁸Life, I, 458.

⁶⁹Tour, p. 183.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 237.

⁷¹Life, I, 667.

more strange that there should be evil spirits, than evil men: evil unembodied spirits, than evil embodied spirits. And as to storms, we know there are such things; and it is no worse that evil spirits raise them, than that they rise.⁷²

Johnson's views on religious doctrine, then, appear fundamentally those of a logical, rational mind; while he steadfastly, and sometimes dogmatically, supported the Church of England and adhered quite closely to its Thirty-nine Articles, he was nevertheless liberal, open-minded, and extremely sensible.

But Johnson's views on questions of doctrine, however interesting they may be and however large they may loom in any discussion of his religion, do not reveal a great deal concerning the really spiritual side of his nature. For that an examination of the origins and nature of his faith seems necessary.

In considering the origins of Johnson's faith, it may be well to dispose immediately of Mrs. Piozzi's version. She relates that when Johnson was ten years old he was disturbed by scruples of infidelity "which preyed upon his spirits"; that searching for "evidence of the truth of revelation" he recollected a book, De Veritate Religionis, and thought himself "highly culpable for neglecting" it; that when he discovered he could not read it, he considered

his conscience as lightened of a crime...but from the pain which guilt had given him, he now began to deduce the soul's immortality...and from that moment resolving to be a Christian, became one of the most zealous and pious ones.⁷³

⁷²Tour, p. 187.

⁷³Anecdotes, pp. 14-15.

Boswell dismisses this as "a strange fantastical account,"⁷⁴ and so it seems. Certainly it is incompatible with Johnson's own statements as they are given in Boswell's Life, and does not well accord with the fact that the first item of his Prayers and Meditations was not written until 1729 when Johnson was twenty years old.⁷⁵ However, it may be taken as typical of his uneasy spirit and his lifelong self-accusations.

According to Boswell's account, Johnson's early training laid the foundations of his faith. Johnson recalled "having had the first notice of Heaven, 'a place to which good people went,' and hell, 'a place to which bad people went,'"⁷⁶ but he "fell into an inattention to religion, or an indifference about it," in his ninth year when the church in Lichfield was being repaired and he took to reading in the fields on Sunday. About his fourteenth year, according to Boswell's report, he "became a sort of lax talker against religion," for he did not "much think against it." While he was in Oxford, he took up Law's Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, which "was the first occasion" of his "thinking in earnest of religion."⁷⁷ Apparently about the time of his reading Law, he had a serious illness, for he later told Boswell that at an early part of his life he was "regardless of religion" but that "sickness brought it back."⁷⁸ Birkbeck Hill points out

⁷⁴Life, I, 47, n. 1.

⁷⁵Miscellanies, p. 5.

⁷⁶Life, I, 26.

⁷⁷Ibid., I, 46-47.

⁷⁸Ibid., II, 492-493.

that "during the vacation of 1727 he [Johnson] had a serious illness"⁷⁹ so that Johnson's two statements in the Life are not incompatible. Furthermore, the date of his illness has the merit of coinciding with the date of the first entry in the Prayers and Meditations.

Law's Serious Call was a strong reminder of the necessity of preparing for death. Johnson's personal religion, revived by this book in a period of illness, seems clearly to have been motivated by the thought of death. This becomes especially clear when one observes Johnson's statement that "from the year 1752, the year in which my poor Tetty died,...I have received the sacrament every year at Easter,"⁸⁰ and when one notices the fact that before his wife's death he had observed with special prayer only his birthday and New Year's Day and those apparently not regularly. After her death, he regularly observed special days of prayer and meditation. In addition, one cannot help observing that the entries in Prayers and Meditations before the death of his wife are few and irregular: there are entries for 1729, 1732, 1734, 1736, 1738, 174 4/5, 174 7/8, and 17 49/50, taking in all only five pages.⁸¹ After his wife's death in 1752, the entries are regular for ten years; the year 1763 has no entry; after that year there are entries for every year until his death, and the nearer he approaches to

⁷⁹Boswell's Life of Johnson, edited by George Birkbeck Hill (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1891), IV, 249, n. 1. Other references will be given as Life, Hill ed.

⁸⁰Miscellanies, p. 84.

⁸¹Ibid., pp. 5-9.

death the more entries there are. The entries for the last four years of his life cover twenty-nine pages;⁸² a corresponding number of pages at the beginning covers thirty-six years.⁸³ It seems fairly clear that fear of death was the strongest original impetus to Johnson's interest in religion and that it became increasingly important.

This view is supported by abundant evidence concerning Johnson's fear of death. As might be expected, the strongest expressions of it occur late in his life, but it was constant during his entire life. In 1769 when Boswell asked if the fear of death was not natural to man, Johnson replied, "So much so, Sir, that the whole of life is but keeping away the thoughts of it."⁸⁴ In 1773 he discussed death earnestly, and with as little fear as he ever showed, saying, "There is no rational principle by which a man can die contented, but a trust in the mercy of God through the merits of Jesus Christ."⁸⁵ In 1777, although he admitted that "he had never had a moment in which death was not terrible to him," his fear was not overwhelming, since he went on to say "that our being in an unhappy uncertainty as to our salvation, was mysterious" and that "we must wait till we are in another state of being, to have many things explained to us."⁸⁶ His uncertainty of his salvation becomes, however, increasingly apparent. He said several times that a man cannot be sure of salvation, cannot be

⁸²Ibid., pp. 91-120.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 5-34.

⁸⁴Life, I, 394.

⁸⁵Tour, p. 276.

⁸⁶Life, II, 117-118. See also ibid., II, 153.

sure that his obedience and repentance will obtain salvation. There is hope, but no certainty.⁸⁷ He did not believe "confidence with respect to futurity, any part of the character of a brave, a wise or a good man."⁸⁸ In the last year of his life he repeatedly expressed his terror. In a letter to Dr. Taylor he wrote, "O! my friend, the approach of death is very dreadful. I am afraid to think on that which I know I cannot avoid."⁸⁹ When Dr. Adams urged that God was infinitely good, Johnson replied that he was afraid he was one of those individuals who should be damned, and explained passionately and loudly that he meant, "Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly!" Boswell asked if a man might not have enough hope to be free from the fear of death, and Johnson replied,

A man may have such a degree of hope as to keep him quiet. You see I am not quiet, from the vehemence with which I talk; but I do not despair...I do not forget the merits of my Redeemer; but my Redeemer has said that he will set some on his right hand and some on his left.⁹⁰

It seems to me that Johnson's fear of death and his desire of immortality can scarcely be overemphasized. His was a gloomy religion; there is none of the joy of St. Francis of Assisi, none of the ecstasy of the great saints and mystics. To Johnson, the great article of Christianity is the revelation of immortality. He felt that a "reasonable hope of a happy

⁸⁷Ibid., II, 223, 423, 490, 539.

⁸⁸Ibid., II, 629-630.

⁸⁹Ibid., II, 533-534.

⁹⁰Ibid., 554-555. See also ibid., II, 117, 121, 224, 525; also Anecdotes, p. 123.

futurity" is the "one solid basis of happiness";⁹¹ yet there is little evidence of joy in his own faith. He sincerely felt the obligations "of making the concerns of eternity the governing principles" of his life,⁹² and thought much "of securing happiness in another world...In comparison of that, how little are all other things!"⁹³ The result with Johnson was to deepen his constitutional melancholy. He disapproved with good reason of Dr. Blair's having written that "he who does not feel joy in religion is far from the kingdom of heaven! There are many good men whose fear of God predominates over their love."⁹⁴ Well might Johnson object, for he spoke of himself. He said he was "...no friend to making religion appear too hard," that many good people had "done harm by giving severe notions of it";⁹⁵ yet he made excessive demands on himself. Mrs. Piozzi says,

His daily terror lest he had not done enough originated in piety, but ended in little less than disease. Reasonable with regard to others, he had formed vain hopes of performing impossibilities himself; and finding his good works ever below his desires and intent, filled his imagination with fears that he should never obtain forgiveness.⁹⁶

His prayers are full of expressions of repentance⁹⁷ and of the desire for

⁹¹Life, II, 114.

⁹²Ibid., I, 418.

⁹³Ibid., I, 590.

⁹⁴Ibid., II, 255-256.

⁹⁵Tour, p. 373.

⁹⁶Anecdotes, p. 74. See also p. 123.

⁹⁷Miscellanies, pp. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 26, 27, 31, 34, 40, 56, 77.

salvation.⁹⁸ The expressions of thanks are far fewer, and most often are for recovery from illness or for prolongation of life.⁹⁹ He prayed "to lead a new life in thy Faith, Fear, and Love,"¹⁰⁰ to "lead the residue" of his life "in fear,"¹⁰¹ and to "lead a new life in thy faith and fear."¹⁰² Truly his seems a religion of fear, more than love, of God. His petition, "Have mercy upon me, O God, have mercy upon me; years and infirmities oppress me, terrours and anxiety beset me" is unmistakable in its feeling.¹⁰³

Except for this great terror of death, this dreadful uncertainty of his salvation, Johnson's religion seems to have been fairly unemotional and exceedingly practical. His statements that every man who attacked his belief "diminished in some degree his confidence in it," and therefore made him uneasy,¹⁰⁴ and that "you are to a certain extent hurt by knowing that even one man does not believe"¹⁰⁵ do not seem to me to indicate either the zeal of one anxious to convert others or a heart distressed by the

⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 26, 28, 31, 32, 38, 40, 42, 43, 46, 47, 50, 51, 77, 79, 82, 85, 87, 91, 93, 94, 95, 101, 108, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 121, 122, 123.

⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 7, 8, 9, 11, 18, 41, 49, 50, 60, 93, 94, 100, 119.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁰¹Ibid., pp. 13-14.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁰⁴Life, II, 8.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., II, 286.

possible fate of others.¹⁰⁶ That this is true becomes apparent, I think, from his response to Boswell's query if a "'poor Turk must be a Mohometan, just as a poor Englishman must be a Christian?'... 'Why, yes, Sir; and what then?'"¹⁰⁷ He was hurt, I am afraid, by another's disbelief because of the fear he felt that his own belief might not bring him salvation. His hostility to a change in religious belief also illustrates the unemotional character of his belief. The religion in which you have been educated, he said, is

the religion given you, the religion in which it may be said Providence has placed you. If you live conscientiously in that religion, you may be safe. But error is dangerous indeed, if you err when you choose a religion for yourself.¹⁰⁸

One cannot be held responsible for being born into a certain faith; therefore the safe thing is to stay there. The emotional conviction of St. Paul or St. Augustine just is not here. Johnson noted that "the greatest part of our knowledge is implicit faith; and as to religion, have we heard all that a disciple of Confucius, all that a Mohometan, can say for himself?"¹⁰⁹ He used the term "implicit faith," but he did not mean that shining, glorious faith the martyrs held. He did not believe a young friend who had become a Quaker could have had "any proper conviction that it was

¹⁰⁶However, Johnson exerted all his influence in behalf of the translation of the Bible in Erse. See post, p. 44.

¹⁰⁷Life, I, 341.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., II, 225.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

her duty to change her religion" because she could not have known enough either of the church or of the New Testament.¹¹⁰ He simply did not comprehend emotional conviction, as appears from his remark that the inward light "was a principle utterly incompatible with social or civil security."¹¹¹ Furthermore, his practical attitude is apparent from his remark that

you must consider that we have perfect and imperfect obligations...it is a duty to instruct the ignorant, and of consequence to convert infidels to Christianity; but no man in the common course of things is obliged to carry this to such a degree as to incur the danger of martyrdom, as no man is obliged to strip himself in order to give charity.¹¹²

His belief that poverty is no virtue further indicates his practical spirit. He wrote Boswell,

When the thoughts are extended to a future state, the present life seems hardly worthy of all those principles of conduct, and maxims of prudence, which one generation of men has transmitted to another; but upon a closer view, when it is perceived how much evil is produced, and how much good is impeded by embarrassment and distress, and how little room the expedients of poverty leave for the exercise of virtue, it grows manifest that the boundless importance of the next life enforces some attention to the interests of this.¹¹³

Granted that this is encouragement to Boswell to avoid debt, nevertheless I believe it is a true index to Johnson's practicality. He defended lux-

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Life, I, 419.

¹¹²Ibid., I, 512.

¹¹³Ibid, II, 450.

ury,¹¹⁴ and believed that it was "in general better to spend money than to give it away."¹¹⁵ Yet he believed that "getting money is not all a man's business: to cultivate kindness is a valuable part of the business of life."¹¹⁶ Certainly his own living illustrates this.¹¹⁷ He told Edwards, a lawyer who had given much to his poor relations, that he had been "rich in the most valuable sense of the word...it is better to live rich than to die rich."¹¹⁸ He recommended as ideal Dr. Cheyne's rule:

To neglect nothing to secure my eternal peace, more than if I had been certified I should die within the day; nor to mind anything that my secular obligations and duties demanded of me, less than if I had been ensured to live fifty years more.¹¹⁹

Another instance of his practicality appears when he is questioned as to the permissibility of fighting. The text "Unto him that smiteth thee on one cheek, offer him also the other" is, in his opinion, "meant only to have the effect of moderating passion"; it was not to be taken literally. Even a Quaker would not take literally the passage "From him that would borrow of thee, turn thou not away" if the borrower's credit were not good. "A man may shoot the man who invades his character, as he may shoot him

¹¹⁴Tour, p. 402.

¹¹⁵Life, II, 463.

¹¹⁶Ibid., II, 140.

¹¹⁷Post, pp. 46-48.

¹¹⁸Life, II, 229.

¹¹⁹Tour, p. 259.

who attempts to break into his house."¹²⁰

Numerous briefer remarks further indicate his very practical spirit. "If we perform our duty, we shall be safe and steady";¹²¹ "it matters not how a man dies, but how he lives";¹²² "Life is made up of little things; and that character is the best which does little but repeated acts of beneficence";¹²³ "no man is obliged to do as much as he can do. A man is to have part of his life to himself."¹²⁴ "Every man is to take existence on the terms on which it is given to him";¹²⁵ "it is culpable to murmur at the established order of the creation, as it is vain to oppose it."¹²⁶ The way to determine what is vicious is to see "whether more evil than good is produced."¹²⁷

All this is by no means to assert that Johnson had no real religious feeling. He was almost morbid in his fear; otherwise he was practical rather than emotional; but no man was more genuinely devout. When Boswell and Dr. Adams urged him to edit a book of prayers, he called out "in great agitation... 'Do not talk thus of what is so awful. I know

¹²⁰Life, II, 489-490.

¹²¹Ibid., I, 430.

¹²²Ibid., I, 404.

¹²³Anecdotes, p. 60.

¹²⁴Life, I, 341.

¹²⁵Ibid., II, 39.

¹²⁶Ibid., II, 452.

¹²⁷Ibid., II, 221, 222.

not what time God will allow me in this world. There are many things which I wish to do!" When they persisted, Johnson cried, "'Let me alone, let me alone; I am over powered.' And then he put his hands before his face, and reclined for some time upon the table."¹²⁸ There is no way of knowing, of course, just what feeling here overpowered Johnson, but it seems to have been a feeling of his own unworthiness, the humility of a genuinely devout man. His saying, "I never read of a hermit, but in imagination I kiss his feet; never of a monastery, but I could fall on my knees, and kiss the pavement"¹²⁹ reveals a very real reverence for holy things, as does his statement, "I look with reverence upon every place that has been set apart for religion," and his remaining bareheaded while he was within the walls of the ruined chapel at Rasay.¹³⁰ Mrs. Piozzi relates that whenever he tried to relate the Dies irae, Dies illa, "he could never pass the stanza ending...Tantus labor non sit cassus, without bursting into tears."¹³¹ Once on taking the sacrament, he was struck by "tender images," and was "so mollified by the concluding address to our Saviour" that he could not utter it.¹³²

The truest test of anyone's religion, I believe, is the extent to which it affects his daily living. William Law, whose book so much in-

¹²⁸Ibid., II, 551.

¹²⁹Tour, pp. 198-199.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 270.

¹³¹Anecdotes, p. 130.

¹³²Miscellanies, p. 76.

fluenced Johnson, defines devotion as "a life given, or devoted, to God,"¹³³ and in this sort of devotion few men have ever excelled Johnson. He himself said,

The morality of an action depends on the motive from which we act. If I fling half a crown to a beggar with intention to break his head, and he picks it up and buys victuals with it, the physical effect is good; but, with respect to me, the action is very wrong. So, religious exercises, if not performed with an intention to please God, avail us nothing.¹³⁴

Johnson's real desire to please God is unmistakable.

Certain days of his life were entirely set aside for prayer and meditation: his birthday, New Year's Day, the anniversary of his wife's death, Good Friday, and Easter were all observed after his wife's death with special prayers of his own composition and with rigid self-examination. His observance of Passion Week, begun after Tetty's death,¹³⁵ was particularly strict. Mrs. Piozzi observes that

Mr. Johnson, though in general a gross feeder, kept fast in Lent, particularly the holy week, with a rigour very dangerous to his general health; but...yet he did not hold the commutation of offences by voluntary penance, or encourage others to practice severity upon themselves. He even once said, 'that he thought it an error to endeavour at pleasing God by taking the rod of reproof out of his hands.'¹³⁶

Nevertheless, on Good Friday Johnson often ate nothing and drank only tea without milk, though fasting became more difficult for him as he aged.¹³⁷

¹³³William Law, A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1931), p. 1.

¹³⁴Life, I, 266.

¹³⁵Miscellanies, p. 59.

¹³⁶Anecdotes, p. 61.

¹³⁷Miscellanies, pp. 28, 38-39, 53, 59, 63, 71, 72, 75, 78, 87, 97, See also Life, I, 484, 586-587; ibid., II, 483.

In 1778 he remarked that he had often "fasted from one Sunday's dinner to the Tuesday's dinner, without any inconvenience,"¹³⁸ but his self-denial was by no means easy for him, and sometimes caused him real distress. Of the twelve references found to his fasts, six mention discomfort,¹³⁹ and once he records that his dinner (apparently his lack of dinner) made him "a little peevish."¹⁴⁰ He was not an ascetic by nature; he enjoyed good eating, and his appetites were violent.¹⁴¹ Towards the end of his life, he was less rigorous. In the same year (1778) that he spoke of fasting from Tuesday to Sunday, he observed, "It has happened this week, as it never happened in Passion Week before, that I have never dined at home, and I have therefore neither practiced abstinence nor peculiar devotion."¹⁴² In 1781, he dined with bishops twice in Passion Week. Boswell comments that Johnson would never have permitted that laxity at the time he wrote The Rambler, but "that by being much more in company, and enjoying more luxurious living, he had contracted a keener relish of pleasure, and was consequently less rigorous in his religious rites," but this Johnson would not acknowledge.¹⁴³ However, he continued always to observe the time with prayer and self-examination, and "would not even

¹³⁸Life, II, 231.

¹³⁹Miscellanies, pp. 59, 63, 72, 75, 83, 97.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴¹Life, I, 312-313; II, 387.

¹⁴²Miscellanies, p. 82.

¹⁴³Life, II, 398.

look at a proof sheet of his Life of Waller on Good Friday."¹⁴⁴ In the rules for the club meeting at the Essex Head, formed in the last year of his life, there was the proviso that "in the week before Easter there shall be no meeting."¹⁴⁵

There is little evidence of his receiving the sacrament at any time but Easter. He received with his mother's servant Kitty Chambers before she died,¹⁴⁶ with Mrs. Williams before her death, and just previous to his own death.¹⁴⁷ In 1779 he purposed "to communicate at least three times a year,"¹⁴⁸ but he does not seem to have done this.¹⁴⁹ Boswell's impression was that Johnson "did not choose to approach the altar without previous preparation,"¹⁵⁰ and received only after fasting and prayer. The sacrament left Johnson "mild and placid";¹⁵¹ certainly he intended his commemoration of Christ's death to "quicken...[his] repentance, encrease [sic]...[his] hope, and strengthen...[his] faith and enlarge...[his] Charity."¹⁵²

In his own eyes, he lived "not without an habitual reverence for the Sabbath, yet without that attention to its religious duties which

¹⁴⁴Ibid., II, 236.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., II, 521, n. 2.

¹⁴⁶Miscellanies, p. 44.

¹⁴⁷Life, II, 533-534.

¹⁴⁸Miscellanies, p. 92.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 92, n. 2.

¹⁵⁰Life, II, 422.

¹⁵¹Ibid., II, 17.

¹⁵²Miscellanies, p. 27.

Christianity requires."¹⁵³ "It should be different (he observed) from another day. There may be relaxation, but there should be no levity."¹⁵⁴ He did observe, however, that there "might have been a dispensation obtained for working on Sunday in the time of harvest."¹⁵⁵ He himself did "not like to read anything on a Sunday, but what is theological"; not that he "would scrupulously refuse to look at anything which a friend" might show him in a newspaper, but in general, he "would read only what is theological."¹⁵⁶ He reproached himself for neglecting public worship,¹⁵⁷ and often resolved to attend regularly.¹⁵⁸ When he missed Sunday service, he "endeavoured to supply" it "by attendance on Divine Worship in the following week."¹⁵⁹ Since he finally determined, however, to "make no more such superstitious stipulations, which entangle the mind with unbidden obligations,"¹⁶⁰ he obviously did not always succeed in supplying his omissions. When one reflects that he was too deaf to hear much of the service and too near-sighted to observe a great deal, one marvels that he taxed himself with the duty, especially as he undoubtedly

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁵⁴Tour, p. 202.

¹⁵⁵Life, II, 236.

¹⁵⁶Tour, p. 378.

¹⁵⁷Miscellanies, p. 59.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 17, 25, 26, 27, 40.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 56, 81. See also Life, II, 301.

¹⁶⁰Miscellanies, p. 81.

knew that "there is not one command in all the Gospel for public worship; and perhaps it is a duty that is least insisted upon in Scripture of any other."¹⁶¹ Johnson himself declared, "Ceremonies prudential or convenient are less obligatory than positive ordinances, as bodily worship is only the token to others or ourselves of mental worship."¹⁶² Apparently he felt that he should set an example.

He said he went more frequently to church when there were prayers only, then when there was also a sermon, as the people required more an example for the one than the other; it being much easier for them to hear a sermon, than to fix their minds on prayer.¹⁶³

When he visited Lichfield, he hoped to "Shew a good example by frequent attendance on publick worship."¹⁶⁴ He knew that "Though it be true that 'God dwelleth not in temples made with hands,' yet in this state of being our minds are more piously affected in places appropriated to divine worship, than in others."¹⁶⁵

His religion, however, was far from being a religion of only certain days and Sundays. He was not one to fall into that folly. In a letter to Boswell, he advised him "in an hour of religious retirement" to "return thanks to God, who has exempted you from any strong temptation to faction, treachery, plunder, and disloyalty."¹⁶⁶ Undoubtedly, Johnson had many such

¹⁶¹Law, p. 5.

¹⁶²Life, I, 532.

¹⁶³Ibid., I, 454.

¹⁶⁴Miscellanies, p. 101.

¹⁶⁵Life, II, 499.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., II, 517.

an hour. Boswell in the Tour, writes, "After we had offered up our private devotions, and had chatted a little from our beds, Dr. Johnson said, 'God bless us both, for Jesus Christ's sake! Good night!'"¹⁶⁷ When Mr. Thrale's health was broken, Johnson "constantly mentioned him" in his prayers, and after Mr. Thrale's death, made "particular supplication for his surviving family."¹⁶⁸ One can be sure he prayed regularly. He approved of the fact that "Some people have a particular room in their house, where they say their prayers" as it might "animate devotion."¹⁶⁹ He went, however, "voluntarily to church on the week day but few times" in his life.¹⁷⁰

Johnson's religion was a steady source of support to him. After his wife's death, he at once sent for Dr. Taylor and requested "him to join with him in prayer. He then prayed extempore, as did Dr. Taylor; and thus...his troubled mind was, in some degree, soothed and composed."¹⁷¹ His written prayers show how humbly he accepted sorrow, and how he sought assistance and comfort not only for the death of his wife, but for the deaths of his mother and his friends.¹⁷² Similarly, he sought relief from illness in prayer, and once, at least, he believed he obtained it. He

¹⁶⁷Tour, p. 248.

¹⁶⁸Miscellanies, pp. 99-100.

¹⁶⁹Life, II, 499.

¹⁷⁰Miscellanies, p. 58.

¹⁷¹Life, I, 159.

¹⁷²Miscellanies, pp. 10, 11, 12, 18, 22, 45, 99, 100.

communicated to Boswell

with solemn earnestness, a very remarkable circumstance which had happened in the course of his illness, when he was much distressed by the dropsy. He had shut himself up, and employed a day in particular exercises of religion — fasting, humiliation, and prayer. On a sudden he obtained extraordinary relief, for which he looked up to Heaven with grateful devotion. He made no direct inference from this fact; but from his manner of telling, I [Boswell] could perceive that it appeared to him as something more than an incident in the common course of events.¹⁷³

During his last illness "it was his regular procedure to have the church service read to him, by some attentive and friendly Divine."¹⁷⁴ During this illness, Johnson's lifelong fear seems to have relaxed, and he found comfort. Dr. Brocklesby related that

for some time before his death, all his fears were calmed and absorbed by the prevalence of his faith, and his trust in the merits and propitiation of Jesus Christ. He talked often...about the necessity of faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, as necessary beyond all good works whatever, for the salvation of mankind.¹⁷⁵

Sir Joshua Reynolds recorded that

during his last illness, when all hope was at an end, he appeared to be quieter and more resigned...A few days before he died, Mr. Langton and myself only present, he said he had been a great sinner, but he hoped he had given no bad example to his friends; that he had some consolation in reflecting that he had never denied Christ.¹⁷⁶

Johnson earnestly desired that his work should serve God. He

¹⁷³Life, II, 535.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., II, 641.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., II, 645.

¹⁷⁶Life, Hill ed., IV, 477-478, n. 3.

prayed that in The Rambler he might "promote thy glory, and the Salvation both of myself and others."¹⁷⁷ He besought divine support in the labor of the dictionary.¹⁷⁸ His prayer Before Any New Study has this entreaty: "...be present with me in my studies and inquiries. Grant, O Lord, that I may not lavish away the life which Thou hast given me on useless trifles, nor waste it in vain searches."¹⁷⁹ He asked that he might "design only what is lawful and right," and that he might have "calmness of mind and steadiness of purpose," that he might "so do thy will in this short life, as to obtain happiness in the world to come."¹⁸⁰

He wanted for his friends those who were pious. "It was sufficient to tell him that a man was very pious, or very charitable, and he would at least begin with him on good terms."¹⁸¹ When Boswell told Johnson that he had become fully satisfied with the "truth of the Christian revelation," Johnson called to him "with warmth, 'Give me your hand; I have taken a liking to you.'"¹⁸²

He constantly endeavored to perfect his own conduct. When Boswell described to him an acquaintance who attended church regularly, studied

¹⁷⁷Miscellanies, p. 9.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 14-15.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 12-13. See also p. 17.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 76-77.

¹⁸¹Anecdotes, p. 63.

¹⁸²Life, I, 270.

the Scriptures, and even wrote commentary on some, but indulged himself with women, "maintaining that men are to be saved by faith alone," Johnson would put no trust in "that crazy piety."¹⁸³ He prayed repeatedly that he might have greater purity of thought,¹⁸⁴ and asked that he might be "chaste in thoughts, words and actions."¹⁸⁵ Boswell comments that Johnson's association with Savage led him "into some indulgences which occasioned much distress to his virtuous mind,"¹⁸⁶ and admits that Johnson's "amorous inclinations were uncommonly strong and impetuous. He owned to many of his friends that he used to take women of the town to taverns, and hear them relate their history."¹⁸⁷ He himself said that during the time he was neglectful of religion he "drank enough and swore enough, to be sure,"¹⁸⁸ and he told Mrs. Piozzi that the first corruption that entered his heart occurred in a dream.¹⁸⁹ Boswell believed these faults to be the cause of Johnson's fear of death and uncertainty of salvation, and quoted from Johnson's Prayers and Meditations passages illustrative of his sincere distress and penitence.

¹⁸³Ibid., I, 678.

¹⁸⁴Miscellanies, pp. 19, 24, 26, 28, 29, 31, 46, 49, 58, 60.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁸⁶Life, I, 112.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., II, 630.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., II, 493.

¹⁸⁹Anecdotes, p. 16.

'O Lord, let me not sink into total depravity; look down upon me, and rescue me at last from the captivity of sin.... Almighty and most merciful Father, who hast continued my life from year to year, grant that by longer life I may become less desirous of sinful pleasures, and more careful of my eternal happiness.'¹⁹⁰

Johnson's conscience was even more troubled, however, by his idleness, and, in my opinion, his conviction that he had wasted too much of his life was chiefly responsible for his fear of death. Help against idleness is the most frequent request he made; he petitioned again and again to be forgiven the time he had misspent.¹⁹¹ He kept resolving to apply to study and labor diligently,¹⁹² and to avoid laziness.¹⁹³ Among the most frequent of his resolves is the resolution to rise early.¹⁹⁴ Perhaps this desire was a result of the statement of Law that "he that has not so small a degree of it [mortification], as to be able to be early at his prayers, can have no reason to think that he has taken up his cross, and is following Christ."¹⁹⁵ However, it seems more probable that his persistent endeavor to rise early was simply a corollary to his self-reproach for idleness. He partially explained his great concern for early rising in his statement,

During the usual times of Meditation, I considered the Christian Duties under the three principles of Soberness; Righteous-

¹⁹⁰Life, II, 630-632; see Anecdotes, pp. 36, 37, 49.

¹⁹¹Miscellanies, pp. 7, 13, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 37, 40, 42, 43, 46, 64, 73, 90, 93, 98.

¹⁹²Ibid., pp. 25, 27, 29.

¹⁹³Ibid., pp. 25, 26, 29, 40, 95, 97.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 17, 25, 29, 32, 33, 40, 43, 48, 54, 59, 60, 95.

¹⁹⁵Law, p. 165.

ness; and Godliness; and purposed to forward Godliness by the annual perusal of the Bible; Righteousness by settling something for Charity; and Soberness by early hours.¹⁹⁶

Much as he resolved, however, he succeeded in only one half year of his life in rising early.¹⁹⁷

He made similar resolves to study religion and read the Bible¹⁹⁸ and to go to church,¹⁹⁹ but he was never satisfied with his own performance. In 1755 he resolved to study religion;²⁰⁰ ten years later he found himself "very ignorant of religion."²⁰¹ His inability to fulfill his good intentions to his own satisfaction probably accounts for his warning to Boswell not to use vows: "they will sometime leave a thorn in your mind, which you will, perhaps, never be able to extract or eject."²⁰² A vow is "a snare for sin."²⁰³

No saint, however, in the course of his religious warfare, was more sensible of the unhappy failure of pious resolves, than Johnson. He said one day, talking to an acquaintance on this subject, 'Sir, Hell, is paved with good intentions.'²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁶Miscellanies, p. 61.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 67. See also Tour, p. 299.

¹⁹⁸Miscellanies, pp. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 40, 43, 59, 95, 97.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 25, 26, 27, 40.

²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 17.

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 39.

²⁰²Life, I, 347.

²⁰³Ibid., II, 270. See Miscellanies, p. 25, n. 2.

²⁰⁴Life, I, 591.

He consoled himself once with a comment on the inability of men in general to keep resolutions,²⁰⁵ but he reproached himself repeatedly, writing, "I have resolved...till I am afraid to resolve again";²⁰⁶ "I have made no reformation, I have lived totally useless, more sensual in thought and more addicted to wine and meat";²⁰⁷ "I have now spent fifty years in resolving, having from the earliest time almost that I can remember been forming schemes of a better life. I have done nothing, the need of doing therefore is pressing";²⁰⁸ "I have made few improvements. Since my resolution formed last Easter I have made no advancement in knowledge or in goodness;...O God for Jesus Christ's sake have mercy upon me."²⁰⁹

Some of this self-reproach may have been just. There were, to be sure, years when Johnson did little enough. Yet when one remembers that Johnson commented on a good night's sleep as if it were the rarest of all joys,²¹⁰ that he was in constant ill health, that he contended against a constitutional melancholy,²¹¹ one cannot help being astounded that he accomplished what he did. "I lie down (said he) that my acquaintance may

²⁰⁵Miscellanies, pp. 55-56.

²⁰⁶Ibid., p. 26.

²⁰⁷Ibid., p. 28.

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 31.

²⁰⁹Ibid., p. 31. See also pp. 28, 29, 33, 58, 71-72, 78-79, 88, 94.

²¹⁰Ibid., pp. 44, 80.

²¹¹Ibid., pp. 95, 98.

sleep; but I lie down to endure oppressive misery, and soon rise again to pass the night in anxiety and pain."²¹² Yet he made no allowances for himself. Life to him was "more to be endured than enjoyed,"²¹³ yet he exacted day labor of himself. He condemned himself for idleness in the year that he published the first four of the Lives,²¹⁴ and when he had just finished the Lives, prayed that his "life...be no longer wasted in idleness."²¹⁵ Boswell seems justified in saying that "The solemn text, 'of him to whom much is given, much will be required,' seems to have been ever present to his mind, in a rigorous sense, and to have made him dissatisfied with his labour and acts of goodness, however comparatively great."²¹⁶ One must remember his inordinate fear of death and judge his self-condemnation accordingly. The super-sensitivity of his conscience further appears from the penance he did for once having refused to go to Uttoxeter-market with his father, going years later to Uttoxeter and standing bareheaded in the rain in contrition for his pride.²¹⁷ Boswell compares Johnson's statement, "My mind is unsettled and my memory confused...I have got no command over my thoughts" with the "vigorous intellect and...lively imagination" his friends found in him at that very time, and praises Johnson's "philosophic

²¹²Anecdotes, p. 81. See also Miscellanies, p. 52.

²¹³Life, I, 418.

²¹⁴Miscellanies, p. 93.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 98.

²¹⁶Life, II, 654.

²¹⁷Ibid., II, 612.

heroism...to appear in such manly fortitude to the world, while he was so inwardly distressed."²¹⁸

A very real refutation of his self-condemnation and proof of his devotion is, I think, his constant exertion in behalf of religion. He intervened vigorously in favor of the translation of the Bible into Erse, writing, "If obedience to the will of God be necessary to happiness, and knowledge of his will be necessary to obedience, I know not how he that withholds the knowledge, or delays it can be said to love his neighbour as himself."²¹⁹ When he was told that there are many sensible people without religion, he retorted at once, "Why, Sir, not sensible in that respect. There must be either a natural or moral stupidity, if one lives in a total neglect of so very important a concern."²²⁰ There is, he said, most certainly merit in religious faith. If hell could be seen, "the most licentious man would not take the most beautiful strumpet in his arms."²²¹ Bolingbroke was a scoundrel "for charging a blunderbuss against religion and morality."²²² His indignation at the decay and destruction of churches in Scotland well illustrates his constant insistence on respect for religion.²²³ He constantly guided Boswell. When Boswell left for Utrecht, Johnson sent

²¹⁸Ibid., I, 466.

²¹⁹Ibid., I, 352.

²²⁰Ibid., II, 492.

²²¹Ibid., II, 423.

²²²Ibid., I, 178, 219.

²²³Journal, pp. 5-6, 20-21, 58, 110.

him to his knees saying, "Now that you are going to leave your native country, recommend yourself to the protection of your CREATOR and REDEEMER."²²⁴ While Boswell was at Utrecht, Johnson wrote, "You will, perhaps, wish to ask, what study I would recommend. I shall not speak of theology, because it ought not to be considered as a question whether you shall endeavour to know the will of God."²²⁵ He recommended commentaries on the Bible for Boswell,²²⁶ and encouraged Jane Langton carefully to say her prayers and read her Bible.²²⁷ When Boswell wanted to go to London for Easter service at St. Paul's but could not really afford the trip, Johnson wrote him, "... we must not omit adoration for want of a temple; because we know, and ought to remember, that the Universal Lord is everywhere present."²²⁸ He reproved the Rev. Dr. Maxwell "...for saying grace without mentioning the name of our LORD JESUS CHRIST" with hope that Dr. Maxwell would in the future "be more mindful of the apostolical injunction."²²⁹ He disapproved of introducing religious discourse "without seeing whether it will end in instruction and improvement, or produce some profane jest."²³⁰ He approved neither of

²²⁴Life, I, 314.

²²⁵Ibid., I, 316.

²²⁶Ibid., II, 39.

²²⁷Ibid., II, 534.

²²⁸Ibid., I, 532.

²²⁹Ibid., I, 418.

²³⁰Ibid., II, 493.

"introducing scripture phrases into secular discourse,"²³¹ nor "of figurative expressions in addressing the Supreme Being." He believed that "Obscenity and Impiety" had "always been repressed" in his company, and Boswell agreed that "greater liberties" had "been taken in the presence of a Bishop."²³²

His genuine goodness and kindness of spirit are impressive and seem conclusive proof of a life truly devoted to God. In spite of his own uncertainty of salvation and fear of death, he was always ready to comfort and strengthen others. He wrote Dr. Lawrence after the death of Dr. Lawrence's wife, "...surely there is a higher and better comfort to be drawn from the consideration of that Providence which watches over all, and a belief that the living and the dead are equally in the hands of God."²³³ Similarly he wrote Lucy Porter, "The world passes away, and we are passing with it; but there is, doubtless, another world, which will endure forever. Let us all fit ourselves for it."²³⁴ His great charity was enough to redeem many faults had he possessed them. His home was a shelter to the needy; Mrs. Desmoulins and her daughter, a Miss Carmichael, blind Miss Williams, and Levett, the physician "useful to the poor,"²³⁵ all were sheltered there by his generosity. To Mrs. Desmoulins he gave a "half-a-guinea

²³¹Life, I, 483.

²³²Ibid., II, 552.

²³³Ibid., II, 316.

²³⁴Ibid., II, 504.

²³⁵Ibid., II, 442.

a week...above a twelfth part of his pension."²³⁶ He constantly aided his needy amanuenses, getting one "admitted a poor brother of the Charter house" and burying another and his wife at his own expense.²³⁷ Mrs. Piozzi says,

He gave away all he had, and all he ever had gotten, except the two thousand pounds he left behind...He had numberless dependents out of doors as well as in...For those people he used frequently to raise contributions on his richer friends.²³⁸

"He was not contented with giving them [the poor] relief, he wished to add also indulgence. He loved the poor...with an earnest desire to make them happy."²³⁹

He frequently gave all the silver in his pocket to the poor, who watched him, between his house and the tavern where he dined. He walked the streets at all hours, and said he was never robbed, for the rogues knew he had little money, nor had the appearance of having much.²⁴⁰

Coming home late one night, he found a poor woman lying in the street, so much exhausted that she could not walk; he took her upon his back, and carried her to his house, where he discovered that she was one of those wretched females who had fallen into the lowest state of vice...he had her taken care of with all tenderness for a long time, at considerable expense [*sic*], till she was restored to health, and endeavoured to put her into a virtuous way of living.²⁴¹

²³⁶Ibid., II, 170-171.

²³⁷Ibid., II, 127-128.

²³⁸Anecdotes, p. 70. See also pp. 78-79.

²³⁹Ibid., pp. 56-57.

²⁴⁰Life, I, 414.

²⁴¹Ibid., II, 571.

His generosity was constant: a guinea to a printer's boy he had recommended,²⁴² a half-guinea to a school boy "at a time when he probably had not another,"²⁴³ a crown to a poor girl at church in a bedgown.²⁴⁴ Practical though his views on money were, his use of it was generosity itself.

His kindness was likewise uncommon. The generosity of his attitude and conduct toward condemned criminals has already been observed;²⁴⁵ he was equally kind to others. He not only bequeathed to his servant, Francis Barber, an annuity of seventy pounds a year,²⁴⁶ but during his life sent Barber to school²⁴⁷ and concerned himself with Barber's religious instruction.²⁴⁸ "His desire of doing good was not...lessened by his aversion to a sick chamber: he would have made an ill man well by any expense or fatigue of his own."²⁴⁹ Much as he hated to be reminded of death, he comforted his mother's old servant on her deathbed.²⁵⁰ His tenderness extended even to his cat, for whom he went out himself to buy oysters lest the ser-

²⁴²Ibid., I, 567.

²⁴³Ibid., II, 171. See also ibid., I, 161.

²⁴⁴Miscellanies, p. 30.

²⁴⁵Ante, pp. 11-12.

²⁴⁶Life, II, 634.

²⁴⁷Ibid., I, 160, n. 1.

²⁴⁸Ibid., II, 646. See Miscellanies, pp. 98, 103, 104, 107.

²⁴⁹Anecdotes, p. 115.

²⁵⁰Miscellanies, p. 44.

vants, having the trouble, should take a dislike to the animal.²⁵¹ He

knew how to be merry with mean people, too, as well as to be sad with them; he loved the lower ranks of humanity with a real affection: and though his talents and learning kept him always in the sphere of upper life, yet he never lost sight of the time when he and they shared pain and pleasure in common.²⁵²

He dined with Mrs. Gardiner, the pious and charitable tallow-chandler,²⁵³ and "passed the afternoon with...calm gladness of Mind" such as he had not known in a long time.²⁵⁴ When he charged Bennet Langton to tell him sincerely in what he thought Johnson's life faulty and Langton brought a sheet of paper with texts recommending Christian charity, one cannot wonder at Johnson's indignation. Langton referred, of course, to Johnson's manner of contradicting people harshly. As Burke said, "'It is well, if when a man comes to die, he has nothing heavier on his conscience than having been a little rough in conversation.'"²⁵⁵

The testimony of those who knew him is unanimous. His conduct was "'uniformly exemplary";²⁵⁶ Mrs. Piozzi would as soon

have expected injustice from Socrates or impiety from Paschal [sic], as the slightest deviation from truth and goodness in any transaction one might be engaged in with Samuel Johnson. His attention to veracity was without equal or example.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹Life, II, 478.

²⁵²Anecdotes, p. 138.

²⁵³Life, II, 574.

²⁵⁴Miscellanies, p. 80.

²⁵⁵Life, II, 541.

²⁵⁶Ibid., II, 307.

²⁵⁷Anecdotes, pp. 142-143.

Humility was to her mind the one virtue he lacked.

All he did was gentle, if all he said was rough...no mean or even slightly culpable action will...be found, to produce and put in the scale against a life of seventy years, spent in the uniform practice of every moral excellence and every Christian perfection, save humility alone....Lowly toward God, and docile towards the church; implicit in his belief of the gospel, and ever respectful towards the people appointed to preach it; tender of the unhappy, affectionate to the poor, let no one hastily condemn as proud, a character which may perhaps somewhat justly be censured as arrogant.²⁵⁸

Toward other men, he was, indeed, not humble, speaking always as one with authority, but in private before his God he owned his faults. There is no pride in his prayers. Consider for example how he says: "Almighty and most merciful Father, I now appear in thy presence, laden with the sins, and accountable for the mercies of another year";²⁵⁹ "Almighty God...look down with pity on my sinfulness and weakness";²⁶⁰

Almighty God, merciful Father, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, but wouldest that all should be saved, have mercy upon me. As thou hast extended my life, encrease my strength, direct my purposes, and confirm my resolution, that I may truly serve Thee, and perform the duties which Thou shalt allot me.²⁶¹

With Boswell, "...we cannot but venerate in Johnson one of the most exercised minds that our holy religion hath formed."²⁶² Johnson was perhaps

²⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 141-142.

²⁵⁹Miscellanies, p. 49.

²⁶⁰Ibid., p. 60.

²⁶¹Ibid., p. 69.

²⁶²Life, I, 204.

over-loyal to the Established Church, but he retained a common sense view of most questions of doctrine, being tolerant of other faiths, generous toward the fallen, and impatient of scruples. Though in spirit he was excessively gloomy and though he was practical rather than emotional in his faith, no man was more genuinely devout. The conduct of his life - all he thought and said and wrote and did - was truly devoted to God.

CHAPTER III

THE PERSONAL RELIGION OF THOMAS GRAY

Too poor for a bribe, and too proud to importune;
He had not the method of making a fortune;
Could love, and could hate, so was thought somewhat odd;
No very great wit, he believed in a God.
A place or a pension he did not desire,
But left church and state to Charles Townsend and Squire.¹

So Gray humorously and aptly described himself. This paper will examine the nature of Gray's belief "in a God," the extent to which his religious nature was responsible for his withdrawal from the world and for his failure to produce any quantity of work, and the man's essential integrity.

Gray's genuinely religious nature is perhaps most easily seen from the sort of belief he opposed. He pardoned irreligion in no one, because it took away "the best consolation of man without substituting anything of equal value in its place."² Atheism to Gray was "a little too much, too shocking to rejoice at." He was sick at it in the French authors "and hated them for it."³

"No very great wit, he believed in a God" and was decidedly impatient with the great wits who did not. Rousseau, Voltaire, and Hume alike aroused his ire. He set Rousseau's religious discussions "all at

¹Thomas Gray, "Gray on Himself," The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray, edited by John Bradshaw (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), p. 84. Future references will be given as Poetical Works.

²Correspondence of Thomas Gray, edited by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1935), III, 1289. Future references will be given as Correspondence.

³Ibid., II, 907.

nought" and wished "they had been omitted" from Émile.⁴ He regarded the Lettres Écrites de la Montagne as "a weak attempt to separate the miracles from the morality of the Gospel"⁵ and was convinced that Rousseau "deserved to be burnt, at least that his book did."⁶ Voltaire Gray detested.⁷ "He must have a good stomach," Gray wrote Walpole, "that can digest the Crambe recosta of Voltaire. Atheism is a vile dish, tho' all the cooks of France combine to make new sauces to it."⁸ Gray requested Norton Nicholls not to visit Voltaire while Nicholls was abroad, because "every visit to such a man signifies."⁹ David Hume Gray always regarded as "a pernicious writer" who had "continued all his days an infant, but one that unhappily" had "been taught to read and write."¹⁰ "He thought him likewise an unprincipled sceptick."¹¹

Similarly Gray was hostile to a materialistic viewpoint. He wrote

⁴Ibid., II, 806.

⁵Ibid., II, 859.

⁶Ibid., II, 856.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., III, 1175.

⁹Ibid., III, 1289. Lest Gray seem too intolerant, it should perhaps be noted that he termed Voltaire "that inexhaustible, eternal, entertaining Scribber," who was of "some use in the world" since it was owing to him that Jean Calais, a Protestant merchant falsely accused of strangling his son to prevent his changing religion, was declared innocent and his family granted reparation. Ibid., II, 840.

¹⁰Ibid., III, 1141.

¹¹Ibid., III, 1289.

his friend Stenhewer:

I am as sorry as you seem to be, that our acquaintance harped so much on the subject of materialism...because it was plain to which side of the long-debated question he inclined. That we are indeed mechanical and dependent beings, I need no other proof than my own feelings; and from the same feelings I learn, with equal conviction, that we are not merely such.¹²

Gray had known many

who, while they thought they were conquering an old prejudice, did not perceive they were under the influence of one far more dangerous; one that furnishes us with a ready apology for all our worst actions, and opens to us a full license for doing whatever we please.¹³

Gray combatted not only those who did not believe in a God; he combatted those who did, but whose belief seemed to him dangerous. He dissuaded Norton Nicholls from reading Butler's "Analogy";¹⁴ he disapproved "the Spirit" of Middleton's books.¹⁵ In Gray's opinion Lord Shaftesbury gained vogue because:

First, he was a Lord; 2dly, he was as vain as any of his readers; 3dly, men are very prone to believe what they do not understand; 4thly, they will believe any thing at all, provided they are under no obligation to believe it; 5thly, they love to take a new road, even when that road leads no where; 6thly, he was reckoned a fine writer, and seemed always to mean more than he said.¹⁶

¹²Ibid., II, 582.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., III, 1293.

¹⁵Ibid., I, 328. According to the Rev. Whitwell Elwin, "Gray," Some Eighteenth Century Men of Letters (London: John Murray, 1902), II, 476, "the spirit which he [Gray] disapproved was the covert scepticism that pervades the miscellaneous writings of Middleton."

¹⁶Correspondence, I, 583.

He found Soame Jenyns' A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil a "little wicked book" full of nothing "but absurdity."¹⁷

Gray's "Essay on the Philosophy of Lord Bolingbroke" attacks with considerable feeling Bolingbroke's denial of our knowledge of the moral attributes of God. "We adore him," says Gray,

not because he always did in every place, and always will, exist; but because he gave, and still preserves to us our own existence by an exertion of his goodness. We adore him, not because he knows and can do all things, but because he made us capable of knowing and of doing what may conduct us to happiness.¹⁸

The intelligence of God must surely "be directed, not only to the good of the whole, but also to the good of every individual of which that whole is composed."¹⁹

Gray's own faith appears, as it were, by indirection in this essay.

He concludes:

In vain, then, does my Lord attempt to ridicule the warm but melancholy imagination of Mr. Wollaston in that fine soliloquy: 'Must I then bid my last farewell to these walks when I close these lids, and yonder blue regions and all this scene darken upon me and go out? Must I then only serve to furnish dust to be mingled with the ashes of these herbs and plants, or with this dirt under my feet?'...No thinking head, no feeling heart...but must have made the same reflection,

¹⁷Ibid., II, 499.

¹⁸Thomas Gray, "Essay on the Philosophy of Lord Bolingbroke," Essays and Criticisms, edited by C. S. Northup (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1911), p. 7.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 9.

comments Gray. He continues with a fine irony,

He [Bolingbroke] will tell you, that we, that is, the animals, vegetables, stones, and other clods of earth, are all connected in one immense design...and that we were not made for ourselves, but for the action: that it is foolish, presumptuous, impious, and profane to murmur against the Almighty Author of this drama, when we feel ourselves unavoidably unhappy. On the contrary, we ought to rest our head on the soft pillow of resignation, on the honorable rock of tranquillity; secure, that, if our pains and afflictions grow violent indeed, an immediate end will be put to our miserable being, and we shall be mingled with the dirt under our feet, a thing common to all the animal kind...Such is the consolation his philosophy gives us, and such the hope on which his tranquillity was founded.²⁰

From the indignation with which Gray rejects Bolingbroke's "consolation," one senses the depth of his own faith.

Gray's loyalty to the Established Church, then, seems beyond question. He hated and despised atheism; he regarded materialism as a false and dangerous doctrine; he opposed deistic views. But he had no hostility toward members of other faiths. "As to the Jews (tho' they do not eat pork) I like them because they are better Christians than Voltaire," he wrote to Walpole.²¹ When Gray and Walpole were in Italy, Gray wrote West, "I believe I forgot to tell you, that we have been sometime converts to the holy Catholic church,"²² and while the remark is obviously not to be taken seriously, it does suggest Gray's complete freedom from fanatical

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

²¹ Correspondence, III, 1175.

²² Ibid., I, 130.

sectarianism.²³ Interestingly, in Gray's humorous "Proposals for printing by Subscription...The Travels of T: G: Gent:" we find, "He goes to Geneva. his moral antipathy to a Presbyterian, & the cure for it."²⁴ The antipathy is clearly not deep seated. Most revealing is Gray's note: "The innocence, the humanity, the cheerfulness, and the unaffected intrepidity of Socrates...will shew him [the reader] a soul, which, if it were not so, at least deserved to be immortal."²⁵ Gray, though a staunch supporter of religion, does not appear to have been overly interested in doctrinal differences. Theology does not seem to have been important to him.

Gray believed, indeed; he would tolerate no question of that fact;²⁶ but despite his insistence on his belief and his hostility toward any destructive view, he did not discuss the tenets of his faith. He wrote, with his characteristic ease, "As to the Soul, perhaps they may have none on the Continent; but I do think we have such things in England,"²⁷ but he never discussed the question seriously. Nicholls believed Gray liked Wollaston's "Religion of Nature;"²⁸ Martin finds Gray influenced by Locke, and believes

²³See also Correspondence, I, 217; II, 539-540.

²⁴Ibid., I, 140.

²⁵Thomas Gray, The Works of Thomas Gray in Prose and Verse, edited by Edmund Gosse (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1885), IV, 4. Hereafter references to this edition of Gray's works will be given as Gosse.

²⁶When Gray himself was once accused of atheism, he not only wrote to the offender, Dr. Whalley, "partly to laugh at, & partly to reprove him for his Malice," but showed the letter to several who had heard the remark. Correspondence I, 302.

²⁷Ibid., III, 1175.

²⁸Ibid., III, 1293. See ante, pp. 55-56.

Gray wished "un Dieu sûr et logiquement démontré."²⁹ But from the evidence of Gray's writings, I am inclined to think that for Gray the matter was beyond and above logic.

Undemonstrative and reserved as Gray was, his religion seems to have been none the less essentially a matter of the heart. When he first saw the Alps, he wrote of them, "Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff, but is pregnant with religion and poetry. There are certain scenes that would awe an atheist into belief, without the help of other argument."³⁰ Gray himself was profoundly moved, writing

...here on pathless rock or mountain height,
Amid the torrents' ever-echoing roar,
The headlong cliff, the wood's eternal might,
We feel the Godhead's awful presence more
Than if resplendent 'neath the cedar beam
By Phideas wrought, his golden image rose.³¹

Gray's deep and true religious feeling appears most clearly in his letters to his friends in their time of trouble. Leslie Stephen comments that Gray "could rarely cast aside his reserve, or forget his academical dignity enough to speak at all; but when he does speak he always shows that the genuine depth of feeling underlies the crust of propriety."³²

²⁹Roger Martin, Essai Sur Thomas Gray (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 261.

³⁰Correspondence, I, 128.

³¹R. E. Warburton's translation of Gray's "Alcaic Ode," found in John Beresford, "The Author of the Elegy," Edinburgh Review, CCXLIV (July, 1926), 129. Stopford A. Brooke writes in Theology in the English Poets (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1926), p. 32: "We know that both Gray and Collins were religious men, but there is not a trace in their poetry of a religious feeling connected with Nature." That Gray did associate religious feeling with nature is apparent.

³²Sir Leslie Stephen, "Gray and His School," Hours in a Library (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1909), III, 126.

Upon the death of Nicholls' uncle, Gray wrote:

He who best knows our nature (for he made us, what we are) by such afflictions recalls us from our wandering thoughts & idle merriment, from the insolence of youth & prosperity, to serious reflection, to our duty & to himself: nor need we hasten to get rid of these impressions; Time (by appointment of the same Power) will cure the smart, & in some hearts soon blot out all the traces of sorrow; but such as preserve them longest (for it is left partly in our own power) do perhaps best acquiesce in the will of the Chastiser.³³

Similarly, on the death of Mason's father, Gray wrote to Mason:

I have seen, what you describe, & know how dreadful it is; I know too, I am the better for it. we are all idle & thoughtless things, & have no sense, no use in the world any longer than that sad impression lasts, the deeper it is engraved, the better.³⁴

And when Mason's wife lay dying, Gray wrote:

If the last struggle be over: if the poor object of your long anxieties be no longer sensible to your kindness, or to her own sufferings: allow me...to sit by you in silence, & pity from my heart not her, who is at rest; but you, who love her. may He, who made us, the Master of our pleasures, & of our pains, preserve & support you!³⁵

Such letters need little comment. As Phelps says, no one can read Gray's letters "without admiring the man; he is so sensible and so genuine...his sympathy for the sorrows of others is as full of depth as

³³Correspondence, III, 935-936.

³⁴Ibid., I, 384. See also Gray's letter to his mother on the death of his aunt, ibid., I, 325, and his letter to Walpole on the loss of Walpole's mother, ibid., I, 67.

³⁵Ibid., III, 953.

it is free from gush."³⁶ Gray's complete trust in his God is self-evident.

As one would expect, Gray appears to have been completely without fear of death. Pain was to him "the only thing that makes death terrible";³⁷ the dead are at last "easy and happy" with "more occasion to pity us" than we them.³⁸ Gray is capable at times of almost longing to be with the dead;³⁹ before his own death "he expressed not the least uneasiness at the thoughts of leaving this world."⁴⁰ The last four lines of Mason's epitaph on his wife were written by Gray, and perhaps best express his serene outlook:

Tell them tho' 'tis an awful thing to die,
'Twas e'en to thee, yet the dread path once trod
Heaven lifts its everlasting portals high,
And bids the pure in heart behold their God.⁴¹

It need scarcely be said that prayer was important to Gray. Though we have for him no written record of prayers such as we have for Johnson, adequate evidence appears in his simple comment, "Poor Mrs. Bonfoy (who taught me to pray) is dead"⁴² Tovey believes that Gray rejected Rousseau mainly because Rousseau found prayer illogical and impertinent, pointing

³⁶William Lyon Phelps, Selections from the Poetry and Prose of Thomas Gray (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1894), p. xxx.

³⁷Correspondence, I, 381.

³⁸Ibid., I, 325.

³⁹Ibid., I, 202.

⁴⁰Ibid., III, 1274.

⁴¹Ibid., III, 1294.

⁴²Ibid., II, 866.

out that immediately after dismissing Rousseau's discussions summarily, "Gray goes on to hope that Wharton is not weary of family prayers."⁴³

Gray's belief in God, then, is amply demonstrated, both from the negative evidence of the sort of belief he opposed and from the positive evidence of the comfort he gave his friends. If, as I think it is, the truest religious spirit be a spirit of humble trust and acceptance, of submission to the will of God, Gray has this spirit in fullest measure. "I hope and trust," he wrote his mother, "you will support yourself with that resignation we owe to him, who gave us our being for our good, and who deprives us of it for the same reason."⁴⁴ Such trust is beyond logic, beyond argument. No wonder Gray did not discuss the tenets of his belief!

It is hard to say to what extent Gray's genuinely religious nature was responsible for his tendency to withdraw from the world, but certainly his rejection of the world's values was at least supported by his religious sense. His refusal to seek patronage or to attempt to earn money from his writing may have been largely a matter of pride, but his conscience supported his pride. As early as 1741, when Gray was only twenty-five, he composed his "Alcaic Ode," which was written in the album of the Fathers at the Grand Chartreuse. Already Gray was retreating from worldly struggle:

⁴³Duncan C. Tovey, The Letters of Thomas Gray (London: George Bell and Sons, 1909), p. xiv. See Correspondence, II, 866 and II, 841.

⁴⁴Ibid., I, 325.

If meet the homage of thy votary seem,
Grant to my youth - my wearied youth - repose.

But if, though willing, 'tis denied to share
The vow of silence and the peace I crave,
Compelled by fate my onward course to bear
And still to struggle with the toilsome wave:

At least, O Father, ere the close of life
Vouchsafe, I pray thee, some sequestered glen,
And there seclude me, rescued from the strife
Of vulgar tumults and the cares of men.⁴⁵

"I am well persuaded St. Bruno was a man of no common genius," Gray wrote to West, "...and perhaps should have been a disciple of his, had I been born in his time."⁴⁶ He had learned from that "schoolmistress, Experience" whose lessons "imprint themselves in the very heart" "a love of truth and detestation of every thing else."⁴⁷

To this instinctive inclination of Gray's to detest everything but truth must be added the influence of his studies in Plato. "The Pembroke library registers record twelve different borrowings" between 1743 and 1756, and as Jones says,

We can detect the philosopher's influence in Gray's life-long search for truth in the bypaths of learning...His remarks on the sixth book of the Republic seem to sum up his own calm life: 'The love of truth is the natural consequence of a genius truly inclined to philosophy. Such a mind will be little inclined to sensual pleasures, and consequently will be temperate, and a stranger to avarice and to illiberality.' Plato's favorite point might easily become his own, 'that philosophy alone is the parent of virtue, the discoverer of those fixed and unerring principles, on which the truly great and good man builds his whole scheme of life, and by which he directs all his actions, and that consequently the

⁴⁵Beresford, p. 129.

⁴⁶Correspondence, I, 128.

⁴⁷Ibid., I, 181-182.

philosopher is greater than the artist or the statesman. Such thoughts are more significant than the parallel passages or borrowings. They indicate a depth of character.⁴⁸

It may seem that I am confusing religion and philosophy. But Gray, orthodox as he was and deeply religious as he was, was also unusually philosophical. Like Plato, he was convinced "that virtue must be built on knowledge, not on that counterfeit knowledge which dwells only on the surface of things...but on the knowledge which is fixed and settled on certain great and general truths, and on principles as ancient and unshaken as nature itself, or rather as the author of nature."⁴⁹ And so he pursued his studies and let the world go its way.

Gray has been severely taken to task for his failure to accomplish more,⁵⁰ and many explanations have been offered for his lack of productivity. I cannot help feeling that Gray's seeming selfishness was at least partially the outcome of his philosophical-religious outlook. Had he lived in the Middle Ages, he would have been a monastic, equally unconcerned that the world profit by his existence, equally concerned with the pursuit of knowledge and virtue. "As to posterity," he once asked, "what has it done to oblige me?"⁵¹

When Walpole belittled philosophy, Gray rose to its defense. Phi-

⁴⁸William Powell Jones, Thomas Gray, Scholar: The True Tragedy of an Eighteenth-Century Gentleman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1937), pp. 66-68.

⁴⁹Gosse, IV, 199-200.

⁵⁰See Elwin, "Life and Works of Gray," Quarterly Review, XCIV (Dec., 1853), 22: "It was the self indulgence, which is the dark stain upon his career, that kept him inactive."

⁵¹Correspondence, II, 566.

losophers in Greek times

did not then run away from society for fear of its temptations: they passed their days in the midst of it: conversation was their business: they cultivated the arts of persuasion, on purpose to show men it was their interest, as well as their duty, not to be foolish, and false, and unjust; ...they showed by their life that their lessons were not impracticable; and that pleasures were no temptations, but to such as wanted a clear perception of the pains annexed to them.⁵²

Gray himself was not often tempted. "I find myself," he wrote,

still young enough to taste the sweets of praise (and to like the taste too) yet old enough not to be intoxicated with them. To own the truth, they give me spirits, but I begin to wonder, that they should hurt any body's health, when we can so easily dash them with the bitter salutary drop of misery & mortality, that we always carry about with us.⁵³

Gray's sense of the falsity of the world's standards of values was profound. In his notes on Plato's De Republica, Gray comments, "A fine image is drawn of the ordinary life of mankind, of their sordid pursuits, and of their contemptible passions."⁵⁴ He mocks Mason's worldliness none too gently, writing:

You are welcome to the land of the Living, to the sunshine of a Court, to the dirt of a Chaplain's table, to the society of Dr Squire, & Dr Chapman. have you set out, as Dr Cobden ended, with a sermon against adultery? or do you, with deep mortification & a christian sense of your own nothingness, read prayers to Pr:^{ss} Em:Y while she

⁵²Correspondence, I, 262-263.

⁵³Ibid., II, 461.

⁵⁴Gosse, IV, 265.

is putting on her smock?⁵⁵

The worldliness of the church is mocked savagely in "Tophet":

Thus ~~E~~tough looked; so grinned the brawling fiend,
While frightened prelates bowed and called him friend;
I saw them bow, and while they wished him dead,
With servile simper nod the mitred head.
Our mother-church, with half-averted sight,
Blushed as she blessed her grisly proselyte;
Hosannas rung through hell's tremendous borders,
And Satan's self had thoughts of taking orders.⁵⁶

In Gray's estimation:

How vain the ardour of the crowd,
How low, how little are the proud,
How indigent the great!⁵⁷

Gray queries, "What is grandeur, what is power?" and answers, "Heavier toil, superior pain." The best reward on earth is "The grateful memory of the good."⁵⁸ "The paths of glory lead but to the grave," and Gray scorned them. Of himself he wrote:

Yet shall he mount and keep his distant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,
Beneath the Good how far - but far above the Great.⁵⁹

Martin says that Gray "aurait voulu être un Socrate,"⁶⁰ and he is perhaps right. Certainly Gray seems to have desired "to look down...with

⁵⁵Correspondence, II, 522.

⁵⁶Poetical Works, p. 95.

⁵⁷"Ode on the Spring," Poetical Works, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁸"Ode for Music," ibid., p. 57.

⁵⁹"The Progress of Poesy," ibid., p. 20.

⁶⁰Martin, p. 269.

disregard on human life and on death, the end of it."⁶¹

Gray was only too aware of the evils of earthly existence. He had no such rosy vision of life as had James Thomson, but wrote with complete sincerity:

Man's feeble race what ills await!
Labour, and Penury, the racks of Pain;
Disease, and Sorrow's weeping train,
And Death, sad refuge from the storms of Fate!⁶²

Similarly, in his "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," he foresees that each boy will have his share of suffering, for "all are men, condemned alike to groan."⁶³ "I wish to God," he wrote, "that no good Man, or even no good Christian, had ever known what despair was: but I fear they have too often to their own destruction. Providence may have interposed to prevent it, but whether it does always interpose, only that Providence can tell."⁶⁴

His own life, quiet and uneventful as it seems, was for that very reason, perhaps, the more difficult. "It is indeed for want of spirits," he wrote Wharton in 1758, "...that my studies be among the Cathedrals, and the Tombs, and the Ruins. To think, though to little purpose, has been the chief amusement of my days; and when I would not, or cannot think, I dream."⁶⁵ As early as 1735 he had written West,

⁶¹Gosse, IV, 248.

⁶²"The Progress of Poesy," Poetical Works, p. 16.

⁶³Ibid., p. 10.

⁶⁴Correspondence, II, 539.

⁶⁵Correspondence, II, 565-566.

When you have seen one of my days, you have seen a whole year of my life; they go round and round like the blind horse in the mill, only he has the satisfaction of fancying he makes a progress, and gets some ground; my eyes are open enough to see the same dull prospect, and to know that having made four-and-twenty steps more, I shall be just where I was.⁶⁶

Matthew Arnold quotes from Gray's diary: "'Insomnia crebra, atque expurgiscenti surdus quidem dolorus sensus; frequens etiam in regione sterni oppressio, et cardialgia gravis, fere sempiterna.'" ⁶⁷

Yet Gray did not rebel. In "Hymn to Adversity" he reminds us all that we learn virtue only by suffering: adversity frightens "Folly's idle brood" and leaves us "leisure to be good." He asks that adversity

The generous spark extinct revive,
Teach me to love and to forgive,
Exact my own defects to scan,
What others are, to feel, and know myself a Man.⁶⁸

In "Ode on the Pleasures arising from Vicissitude" he finds that

The hues of Bliss more brightly glow,
Chastised by sabler tints of woe;
And blended form, with artful strife,
The strength and harmony of life.⁶⁹

Like a good philosopher, Gray reconciled himself to actuality. "I can tell you," he wrote Mason,

⁶⁶Ibid., I, 34.

⁶⁷Matthew Arnold, "Thomas Gray," The English Poets, edited by T. H. Ward (London: The Macmillan Company, 1897), III, 311. For other expressions of Gray's low spirits see Correspondence, I, 49; III, 1117.

⁶⁸Poetical Works, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 82.

that one, who has far more reason, than you (I hope) will ever have, to look on life with something worse than indifference, is yet no enemy to it, and can look backward on many bitter moments partly with satisfaction & partly with patience, and forward too on a scene not very promising with some hope & some expectation of a better day.⁷⁰

To Wharton Gray wrote chidingly:

I am much concern'd to hear the account you give of yourself, & particularly for that dejection of spirits, w^h inclines you to see every thing in the worst light possible, and throw a sort of voluntary gloom not only over your present, but future days, as if even your situation now were not preferable to that of thousands round you, & as if your prospect hereafter might not open as much of happiness to you, as to any Person you know. The condition of life perpetually instructs us to be rather slow to hope, as well as to despair.⁷¹

Gray's acceptance of actuality none the less left him only partially satisfied with his existence. "A life spent out of the World," he wrote Mason, in the letter from which I just quoted, "has its hours of despondence, its inconveniences, its sufferings, as numerous, & as real (tho' not quite of the same sort) as a life spent in the midst of it."⁷² He congratulated Walpole on his happiness, writing: "The receipt is obvious: it is only, Have something to do; but how few can apply it!"⁷³ Again: "to find oneself business...is the great art of life; & I am never so angry, as when I hear my acquaintance wishing they had been bred to some poking profession... as if they could not go, unless they were wound up." Yet Gray knew and felt what they meant by this complaint: "it proves that some spirit, something

⁷⁰Correspondence, II, 561.

⁷¹Ibid., II, 570-571.

⁷²Ante, n. 70.

⁷³Correspondence, II, 508.

of Genius...is required to teach a Man how to employ himself."⁷⁴ Though he found himself business, he wished that he accomplished more. "I can not brag of my spirits, my situation, my employments, or my fertility," he wrote Mason. "the days & the nights pass, & I am never the nearer to any thing but that one, to w^{oh} we are all tending. yet I love People, that leave some traces of their journey behind them, & I have strength enough to advise you to do so, while you can."⁷⁵

Gray knew well enough the duty "to be of any use in the world."⁷⁶ Yet because a public life involved "being in a certain degree dependent" upon men who already are of consequence and because these men might make "ill use of his humility," his ambition gave place "to a reasonable pride," and he applied "to the cultivation of his own mind" his abilities.⁷⁷ One may feel that such "a private happiness"⁷⁸ is not consistent with a real regard for the best interests of humanity as a whole, "but let it be considered," as the Rev. Mr. Temple puts it,

t hat Mr. Gray was, to others, at least innocently employed; to himself, certainly beneficially...his mind was enlarged, his heart softened, his virtue strengthened; the world and mankind were shewn to him without a mask; and he was taught to consider every thing as trifling, and unworthy of the attention of a wise man, except the pursuit of knowledge and practice of virtue, in that state wherein God hath placed us.⁷⁹

⁷⁴Ibid., II, 666.

⁷⁵Ibid., II, 579.

⁷⁶Ibid., I, 168.

⁷⁷Ibid., I, 169.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets (London: Oxford University Press [The World's Classics], 1936), II, 479.

Whether or not Gray's religious spirit lies, in part at least, beneath his lifelong pursuit of knowledge, it manifests itself clearly indeed in his personal character. Despite his failure to take his duty to posterity seriously, Gray's uncompromising morality commands respect. In his notes on Plato's Euthyphro, Gray commented:

The intention of the dialogue seems to be, to expose the vulgar notions of poetry, founded on traditions unworthy of the divinity, and employed in propitiating him by puerile inventions and by the vain ceremonies of external worship, without regard to justice and to those plain duties of society, which can alone render us truly worthy of the deity.⁸⁰

Gray took the "plain duties of society" seriously. As Matthew Arnold put it,

Seriousness, character, was the foundation of things with him; where this was lacking he was always severe, whatever might be offered to him in its stead....Even where crying blemishes were absent, the want of weight and depth of character in a man, deprived him, in Gray's judgment, of serious significance.⁸¹

Norton Nicholls, who knew Gray well, wrote of him:

Ability, talents, genius, the highest acquisitions of science, & knowledge were in his opinion of little account compared with virtue which he often used to quote to me from Plato is nothing but 'the exercise of right reason.' - I remember in the early part of my acquaintance with him saying that some person was 'a clever man' - he cut me short & said 'Tell me if he is good for anything?'⁸²

What Gray "admired in Plato was not his mystic doctrines...nor his sophistry but his excellent sense, sublime morality."⁸³ Gray felt that "admir-

⁸⁰Gosse, IV, 103.

⁸¹Arnold, III, 309.

⁸²Correspondence, III, 1288.

⁸³Ibid., III, 1295.

ation is a word, that has no place between two people, that ever mean to come together. besides...there is but one thing in life, that deserves it. & that is not Poetry."⁸⁴ I can only hazard the guess that that one thing is character. Gray wished to think well of Pope, because "it is for the Interest even of that Virtue, whose Friend he profess'd himself, & whose Beauties he sung, that he should not be found a dirty Animal... it is not from what he told me about himself that I thought well of him, but from a Humanity & Goodness of Heart, ay, & Greatness of Mind, that runs thro his private Correspondence."⁸⁵ He felt that Balguy, the Prebend of Winchester, had "much improved since he had his residence there, freer & more open, & his heart less set upon the Mammon of unrighteousness."⁸⁶ He admired Madame de Maintenon's letters for their "Marks of a noble Spirit...of Virtue, & unaffected Devotion."⁸⁷ Socrates, if not immortal, deserved to be so.⁸⁸

The standards by which Gray judged others were those by which he acted. He refers humorously to himself as a "Sinner,"⁸⁹ but there is no evidence of his conduct's ever being other than upright. He comments of the French, "Another thing is, there is not a House where they don't play,

⁸⁴Ibid., II, 475.

⁸⁵Ibid., I, 229-230.

⁸⁶Ibid., II, 579.

⁸⁷Ibid., I, 369.

⁸⁸Ante, p. 57, n. 25.

⁸⁹Correspondence, II, 464.

nor is any one at all acceptable, unless they do so too...a professed Gamester being the most advantageous Character a Man can have at Paris,"⁹⁰ and one senses his quiet disapproval. As Gosse says, Gray was essentially a Puritan at heart.⁹¹

"That he was charitable, for his means, is also to be taken for granted, though he was the last man to boast of it," says Gamaliel Bradford.⁹² "Remember," Gray wrote Nicholls, "that Honesta res est laeta paupertas. I see it with respect, & so will every one, whose poverty is not seated in their mind. there is but one real evil in it (take my word, who know it well) & that is, that you have less power of assisting others."⁹³ "Mason enumerates among his good qualities that he was an economist without avarice, and when his circumstances were at the lowest gave away sums which would have done credit to an ampler purse."⁹⁴

Gray complained gently, "It is a foolish Thing, that one can't only not live as one pleases, but where & with whom one pleases, without Money. Swift somewhere says, that Money is Liberty; & I fear money is Friendship too & Society, & almost every external Blessing."⁹⁵ One accepts readily Gray's lines for his own epitaph:

⁹⁰Ibid., I, 105.

⁹¹Edmund Gosse, Gray (New York: Harper and Brothers, [n.d.]), p. 27.

⁹²Gamaliel Bradford, "Thomas Gray," Bare Souls (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924), p. 75. But see post, p. 73, where Gray says of himself, "Large was his bounty."

⁹³Correspondence, III, 941.

⁹⁴Elwin, "Life and Works of Gray," p. 23.

⁹⁵Correspondence, I, 255.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,
 Heav'n did a recompence as largely send;
 He gave to misery all he had, a tear,
 He gained from Heav'n ('twas all he wished) a friend.⁹⁶

Along with his moral integrity and generosity, Gray's tender heart-
 edness seems evidence of his quality of spirit. One cannot forget his
 writing Nicholls that he had discovered "a thing very little known, wch
 is, that in one's whole life one can never have more than a single
 Mother."⁹⁷ During the illness of his aunts, he expected for a time to
 have to pass some years "in a house with two poor bed-ridden Women, a
 melancholy object, & one that in common humanity" he could not avoid.⁹⁸
 He writes Chute,

How could you say that I design'd to hurt you, because I
 knew you could feel? I hate the thoughts of it, & would not
 for the world wound any thing, that was Sensible. 'tis true,
 I should be glad to scratch the Careless, or the Foolish, but
 no armour is so impenetrable, as Indifference & Stupidity, and
 so I may keep my Claws to myself.⁹⁹

"Probably the trait in Gray's character most natural in the author of the
 'Elegy,' " says Bradshaw, "is his sympathy for the sufferings of others,
 his 'sensibility' ...to know and feel another's woe."¹⁰⁰ The letters of
 consolation to his friends which I have already quoted from are perhaps

⁹⁶"Elegy Written in a Country Church-Yard," Poetical Works, p. 48.

⁹⁷Correspondence, III, 926.

⁹⁸Ibid., II, 572.

⁹⁹Ibid., I, 204.

¹⁰⁰The Poetical Works of Thomas Gray, p. lix.

the best illustration of Gray's tenderness.¹⁰¹

Gray wrote of himself, "as to Humanity, you know my aversion to it; ^{wh} is barbarous & inhuman, but I can not help it. God forgive me."¹⁰² He was too fastidious a man to love humanity indiscriminately, but "he was a man likely to love much where he loved at all."¹⁰³ Those he loved returned his affection full measure.

The tributes of those who knew him speak most clearly of his moral force. Young Victor de Bonstetten, whom Gray instructed, wrote his father, "les Français raisonnent quelquefois bien et de Patrie et de Vertu, mais quand M. Gray m'en parlait je sentais des pèlitations, j'étais ému comme j'avais entendu la voix d'un dieu."¹⁰⁴ "His reserve, his delicacy, his distaste for many of the persons and things surrounding him in the Cambridge of that day," says Matthew Arnold, "...have produced an impression of Gray as being a man falsely fastidious, finical, effeminate." Arnold rightly sets against this view Norton Nicholl's letter to his mother on hearing of Gray's death:

You know that I considered Mr. Gray as a second parent, that I thought only of him, built all my happiness on him, talked of him for ever, wished him with me whenever I felt any uneasiness. To whom now shall I talk of all I have seen here? Who will teach me to read, to think, to feel? I protest to you that whatever I did or thought had a reference

¹⁰¹ Ante, pp. 58-59.

¹⁰² Correspondence, I, 420.

¹⁰³ Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, II, 479.

¹⁰⁴ R. W. Ketton-Cremer, Thomas Gray (London: Duckworth, 1935), p. 116.

to him. If I met with any chagrin, I comforted myself that I had a treasure at home; if all the world had despised and hated me, I should have thought myself perfectly recompensed in his friendship.

As Arnold says, "Testimonies such as these...are called forth by qualities of soul."¹⁰⁵

These are the letters of Gray's pupils and friends; let us look at the letter of his associate and friend, Dr. Brown. Writing to Wharton, Brown said of Gray, "The thoughts I have of him will last, and will be useful to me the few years I can expect to live."¹⁰⁶ And Gray's friend the Rev. Mr. Temple knew him as "a good man...a man of virtue and humanity."¹⁰⁷

In the analysis of a recent critic,

Gray's character had its faults, most of them trivial. He was proud, haughty in a feminine ...way, and perhaps too contemptuous toward superficiality...His intimate friends loved him. Although he lacked energy, his intellectual and moral purposes were lofty; he looked on life with serious earnestness, and he was pure in heart. It may be truly said that he was a good man.¹⁰⁸

Gray's personal religion, like that of most of us, is virtually inseparable from his manner of living and from his qualities as a person. Certainly his belief "in a God" was an important part of his life - so much so that he constantly objected to any attempt to undermine or contro-

¹⁰⁵Arnold, III, 307-308.

¹⁰⁶Correspondence, III, 1275.

¹⁰⁷Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, II, 478.

¹⁰⁸Phelps, p. xvi.

vert religious belief. However, he had little interest in purely theological questions, for his religion was one of implicit faith and trust. Motivated at least in part by his religious spirit, Gray rejected a worldly career and worldly rewards and devoted his life to the pursuit of knowledge and virtue. Always upright in character himself, he judged others by moral standards and in the lives of his friends was a moral force. Let us leave him as he asks:

No farther seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,
(There they alike in trembling hope repose,)
The bosom of his Father and his God.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹"Elegy Written In A Country Church-Yard," Poetical Works,
p. 48.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERSONAL RELIGION OF JAMES THOMSON

Born the son of a Presbyterian minister, and himself trained for the ministry, Thomson in his earliest poems expresses a completely orthodox acceptance of revealed religion.¹ Thomson's religious views, however, evolved as Thomson matured, so that he became the most individual of the five poets I am studying. In this paper I shall examine his opinions on religious questions, his religious spirit, and his ethical teachings and actual conduct.

In the development of his religious opinions, Thomson seems to have been influenced by Shaftesbury and by Newtonian science. As early as his fourteenth year, he was strongly influenced by Shaftesbury, for his poem "The Works and Wonders of Almighty Power," composed then, has been shown to be virtually a transcription of passages from Shaftesbury's Moralists.² His future development contrasts oddly with such lines as

Ah! my loved God! in vain a tender youth
Unskilled in arts of deep philosophy,
Attempts to search the bulky mass of matter;

¹James Thomson, "A Complaint on the Miseries of Life," "Hymn on the Power of God," "A Pastoral Between Thirsis and Corydon upon the Death of Damon," "Upon Happiness," The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, edited by J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1908), pp. 488-491, 497-501. All future references to Thomson's poetry will, unless otherwise stated, be to this edition, and only title and line references will be given. For short poems, title and page will be given.

²Herbert Drennon, "The Source of James Thomson's 'The Works and Wonders of Almighty Power,'" Modern Philology, XXXII (August, 1934), 33-36.

To trace the rules of motion; and pursue
The phantom Time, too subtile for his grasp!

...

Teach me with humble reverence to adore
The mysteries I must not comprehend.³

Thomson was later in The Seasons to attempt "to search the bulky mass of matter" and to explain the mysteries.⁴

During his years at the University of Edinburgh and later, Thomson became "an ardent student of the natural philosophers and philosophic divines,"⁵ and came to have a deep faith in the scientific method.⁶ This faith altered his religious views profoundly.

Most noticeable in the poems of Thomson's maturity is the almost complete lack of any reference to Christian revelation. In The Seasons, Liberty, and The Castle of Indolence combined, there are no more than a half-dozen passages that refer even vaguely to Christian doctrine.⁷ These are however, in my opinion, enough to show that Thomson never actually denied Christian revelation but simply, as his interest turned to proofs

³"The Works and Wonders of Almighty Power," pp. 483-484, ll. 13-17, 38-39.

⁴C. A. Moore, "Shaftesbury and Ethical Poets in England," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XXXI (1916), 285, suggests that Thomson took all his theology from Shaftesbury. Herbert Drennon, "James Thomson's Contact with Newtonianism and His Interest in Natural Philosophy," Publications of the Modern Language Association of American, XLIX (March, 1934), 71-80, adequately disproves this suggestion.

⁵Ibid., p. 76.

⁶Herbert Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," Englische Studien, LXX (1935-36), 359.

⁷"Spring," ll. 242-243; ibid., ll. 309-314; "A Hymn," ll. 74-75; Liberty, IV, ll. 283-284; and The Castle of Indolence, I, I; II, XXXIX.

derived from reason, found it of less importance. There is no evidence in Thomson's works that Thomson felt that there was any conflict between his views and traditional beliefs. If he had, he would hardly have written even these few passages, especially not the lines with their obviously Christian connotations, "for the Great Shepherd reigns, and his unsuffering kingdom yet will come."⁸ Because of the absence of specific references to Christian revelation, most critics have assumed that Thomson therefore did not accept it.⁹ This seems to me an unwarranted assumption. Thomson may well be accused of having become increasingly indifferent to the claims of revealed religion, but that he denied it seems an overstatement.

Much of the difficulty, I suspect, has been caused by Lyttelton's attempt to convince himself that Thomson "died a Christian." "Had he lived longer," Lyttelton wrote, "I don't doubt but he would have openly professed his faith...but his mind had been much perplexed with doubts."¹⁰ Thomson's writings, however, do not disclose these doubts, but indicate

⁸"A Hymn," ll. 74-75.

⁹See G. C. Macaulay, James Thomson (London: Macmillan and Co., 1908), p. 82, "There is no evidence of an acceptance of revealed Christianity"; also John Campbell Shairp, On Poetic Interpretation of Nature (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1878), pp. 202-203: "If there is nothing in the 'Seasons' inconsistent with Christian truth, there is little or nothing that directly affirms it." See also C. A. Moore, p. 284, and W. J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), V, 305. On the other hand, William Bayne, James Thomson (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, and Ferrier, [n. d.]), pp. 40-41, believed that Thomson "was not...troubled by any sort of misgiving of a doctrinal kind; his religious faith was, upon the whole, perfectly orthodox." Thomson, in my opinion, was neither "perfectly orthodox" nor a non-believer.

¹⁰Macaulay, p. 73.

that he was completely untroubled by questions of free will or predestination, of evil in the universe, of the nature of the soul. He tended to simplify and exclude doubts, believing in a personal God, in prayer, in a future life. Religion, he thought, should be "rational and free,"¹¹ but "irreligion to the ruling gods" was always joined "with an inhuman heart and brutal manners."¹² Philosophic and rational in his views, Thomson valued "liberty of mind" and felt creeds to be "soul-enslaving."¹³

No one doctrine, he thought, could have a monopoly on religious truth. Edward and Eleonora is in its entirety an attempt to show "what fatal ills from blind devotion flow." True religion is "even to error kind."¹⁴ Selim, the Mohammedan ruler, explains:

since by ruling Wisdom (who unweigh'd,
Unmeant, does nought) men are so various made,
So various turn'd, that in opinions, they
Must blindly think, or take a different way;
In spite of force, since judgment will be free;
Then let us in this righteous mean agree;
Let holy rage, let persecution cease;
Let the head argue, but the heart be peace;
Let all mankind in love of what is right,
In virtue and humanity, unite.¹⁵

Because of its history of persecution and tyrannic rule, its

¹¹Liberty, IV, l. 562.

¹²James Thomson, "Sophonisba," The Works of James Thomson, edited by Patrick Murdoch (London: A. Strahan, 1788), I, iv, p. 157.

¹³Liberty, II, ll. 247-248.

¹⁴James Thomson, "Edward and Eleonora," The Works of James Thomson, edited by Patrick Murdoch (London: A. Strahan, 1788), Prologue, p. 239. Cf. Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, I, 101, Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum.

¹⁵Ibid., V, iv, p. 306.

"soul-enslaving" creeds, Thomson frequently attacks the Catholic church. "From priestly darkness sprung the enlightening arts of fire, and sword, and rage, and horrid names" which destroyed "liberty of mind."¹⁶ The Catholic Middle Ages were controlled by "cleric pride," "holy slander," "persecuting zeal," "idiot Superstition," and "Ignorance." "Pure plain devotion" was turned "to a solemn farce; to holy dotage virtue, even to guile."¹⁷

Thomson emphatically disliked creeds; in his eyes, man learns best of God by listening to the voice of nature.¹⁸ In nature, he finds a "sense of powers exceeding far his own."¹⁹ "The informing Author in his works appears"²⁰ and

By swift degrees the love of nature works,
And warms the bosom; till at last, sublimed
To rapture and enthusiastic heat,
We feel the present Deity.²¹

Nature's is an "all-instructing page."²² The poet observes how "Nature swarms with life; one wondrous mass of animals, or atoms organized," and

¹⁶Liberty, II, ll. 246-251.

¹⁷Ibid., IV, ll. 48-99. See also ibid., IV, ll. 726-730, 903-909.

¹⁸"Autumn," l. 1302 ff.

¹⁹"Summer," l. 1242.

²⁰"Spring," ll. 859-860.

²¹Ibid., ll. 899-902.

²²"Summer," ll. 192-196.

the sight leads him to "zealous praise" and "hymns of holy wonder."²³

The Deity discovered in nature is in no sense mechanistic. As Drennon points out, Thomson apparently tried consciously to avoid "the idea of a world subject to mechanical laws,"²⁴ for while in the 1727 edition of "Summer" Thomson referred to the world as a poised and perfect machine, in the 1744 edition he had altered the line to read: "such the all perfect Hand that poised, impels, and rules the steady whole."²⁵ Divine Providence

that ever-wakening Eye,
Looks down with pity on the feeble toil
Of mortals lost to hope, and lights them safe
Through all this dreary labyrinth of fate.²⁶

Galesius tells Coriolanus:

There is a power
Unseen, that rules th' illimitable world,
That guides its motions, from the brightest star,
To the least dust of this sin-tainted mold.²⁷

Empires rise and fall at His nod;²⁸ storms are hushed at His command.²⁹
When "blind mortals wander thro' the deep of comfortless despair," God

²³Ibid., ll. 287-351.

²⁴Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," p. 365.

²⁵"Summer," ll. 39-42, n. Shairp, p. 204, seems in error in saying that Thomson has no "sense of the relation of the creation to the Creator other than that which the somewhat mechanical conception of a maker and a machine supply."

²⁶"Winter," ll. 1020-23.

²⁷James Thomson, Coriolanus (Dublin: John Exshaw, 1767), ll, v, p. 19.

²⁸"Summer," ll. 1602-03.

²⁹Ibid., ll. 1239-40; "Winter," ll. 197-200.

leads them back into His light.³⁰

Thomson tries repeatedly to express the relationship of the Deity to the world. He is the "Source of Being"³¹ who

boundless spirit all
And unremitting energy, pervades,
Adjusts, sustains, and agitates the whole.
He ceaseless works alone, and yet alone
Seems not to work.³²

He is "eternal never-resting soul"

By whom each atom stirs, the planets roll;
Who fills, surrounds, informs, and agitates the whole.³³

He is "the eternal cause, support, and end of all."³⁴ He is immanent in the world, "ever present, ever felt."³⁵ Gloster, in Edward and Eleanora, venerates the Holy Land, saying

Those sacred hills,
Those vales, those cities, trod by saints and prophets,
By GOD himself, the scenes of heavenly wonders,
Inspire me with a certain awful joy.
But the same GOD, my friend, pervades, sustains,
Surrounds and fills this universal frame;
And every land where spreads his vital presence,
His all-enlivening breath, to me is holy.³⁶

³⁰Edward and Eleanora, III, 11, p. 270.

³¹"Spring," l. 556. In the 1728-38 editions, "Mighty Being"; in the 1744 edition, "Source of Beings."

³²Ibid., ll. 853-857.

³³The Castle of Indolence, II, XLV II. See also "Summer," ll. 41-42; "To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton," ll. 142-143; "A Hymn," ll. 107-113, n.

³⁴"Summer," l. 191.

³⁵"A Hymn," l. 105.

³⁶Edward and Eleanora, I, iii, p. 247.

While the Deity is immanent in the world, he is not to be identified with it. Thomson, while close to pantheism, seems to avoid it.³⁷ Nature is a grand revelation; a study of it reveals the various attributes of God,³⁸ but nature and God are not one and the same. Drennon points out that changes in the 1727, 1739, and 1744 editions of "Summer" show that Thomson was consciously avoiding the idea of pantheism. In the various editions Thomson speaks of the scientist Boyle's seeking the great Creator through, in, and amid his works.³⁹ "If Thomson were not wrestling with the problem of how best to state God's relation to the world-order, then one can hardly see why he tinkered with the original passage."⁴⁰ Moreover, Thomson completely dropped from the 1744 edition of "Spring" a passage of twenty-one lines in which God and nature were most closely identified,⁴¹ and altered similar lines in "Summer" in the various editions so that finally there was no possibility of a pantheistic interpretation.⁴²

³⁷Leon Morel, *James Thomson, Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1895) p. 359, thinks that Thomson "flotte entre la notion d'un Dieu providentiel et celle d'une substance infinie inhérente aux choses elles-mêmes." However, I am more nearly agreed with Bayne, p. 17, and with Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," p. 366. Both believe that Thomson did not hold a pantheistic view of God.

³⁸"A Hymn," ll. 1-20.

³⁹"Summer," ll. 1556-58 and n.

⁴⁰Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," pp. 366-367.

⁴¹"Spring," ll. 860-861, n. p. 50.

⁴²"Summer," ll. 95-96. See also the various changes in ibid., l. 1747.

God once walked with man;⁴³ he is still the "Universal Soul of heaven and earth" "Who with a masterhand hast the great whole into perfection touched";⁴⁴ he is

that all-quickening sun
Whence every life in just proportion draws
Directing light and actuating flame.⁴⁵

Thomson's Deity, immanent, omnipresent, yet not identical with the created world, is a God of loving goodness. Edward, fatally poisoned cries:

And oh! eternal Providence, whose course,
Amidst the various maze of life, is fix'd
By boundless wisdom, and by boundless love,
I follow thee, with resignation, hope,
With confidence and joy; for thou art good,
And of thy rising goodness is no end!⁴⁶

Thomson in the closing "Hymn" in The Seasons expressed his faith in the lines previously mentioned:

Bleat out afresh, ye hills; ye mossy rocks
Retain the sound; the broad responsive low,
Ye valleys raise; for the Great Shepherd reigns,
And his unsuffering kingdom yet will come.⁴⁷

Unquestionably this is not the Old Testament Jehovah, the God of wrath and vengeance, whose name Thomson so consciously avoids.⁴⁸ However,

⁴³"Autumn," ll. 1350-51.

⁴⁴"Spring," ll. 556-560.

⁴⁵"To The Memory of The Right Honorable The Lord Talbot," ll. 21-23.

⁴⁶Edward and Eleonora, II, i, p. 257; see also II, iv, p. 267.

⁴⁷"A Hymn," ll. 72-75. Ante, p. 79n. 8.

⁴⁸Only in one of his juvenile poems, Upon Happiness, does Thomson use the name "Jehovah." In The Seasons, he consistently avoids it, using such terms as "Almighty Father," "Parent Power," "Eternal Providence."

Thomson's conception of God is closely akin to the New Testament God of love and mercy.

This was no vague Deity to Thomson but a living, present power who could be addressed in prayer. Prayer, the appeal to the "all-ruling arbiter of human fate,"⁴⁹ composes the soul "to inward harmony."⁵⁰ It may be an expression of gratitude,⁵¹ or it may be an appeal for support and guidance.⁵² Thomson in The Seasons repeatedly addressed his God in petition:

O teach me what is good! teach me Thyself!
Save me from folly, vanity, and vice,
From every low pursuit; and feed my soul
With knowledge, conscious peace, and virtue pure.⁵³

or in praise:

Hail, Source of Being! Universal Soul
Of heaven and earth! Essential Presence, hail!
To thee I bend the knee; to thee my thoughts
Continual climb.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Thomson was sure that there was to be life after death. His belief seems founded solely on the teachings of nature and reason, but it is a firm belief.⁵⁵ It appears most clearly, perhaps, in his letters. In April, 1748, after the loss of his pension from the

⁴⁹James Thomson and David Mallet, Alfred, A Masque (London: A Miller, 1751), III, iv, p. 47.

⁵⁰Ibid., I, vii, p. 16.

⁵¹Ibid., III, vi, p. 50; Edward and Eleonora, III, ii, p. 270.

⁵²Ibid., IV, ii, pp. 183-184; Sophonisha, I, iv, p. 158.

⁵³"Winter," ll. 217-221; see also "Summer," ll. 1602-19.

⁵⁴"Spring," ll. 556-571; see also "Summer," ll. 185-191.

⁵⁵See Courthope, V, 306; Macaulay, p. 82.

Prince of Wales and after the marriage to another of Miss Young, whom he had been courting, he wrote Paterson, "Let us have a little more patience, Paterson; nay, let us be cheerful; at last all will be well, at least all will be over--here I mean: God forbid it should be so hereafter! But as sure as there is a God, that will not be so."⁵⁶

Letters to Cranstoun and to his sister are even more assured. He wrote Cranstoun, "There is, and I am persuaded of it, I triumph in it, another life after this, which depends as to its happiness on our virtue."⁵⁷ To his sister he wrote, with obvious tenderness for her beliefs, "But she [another sister who had died] is happy, while we must toil a little longer here below; let us however do it cheerfully and gratefully, supported by the pleasing hope of meeting yet again on a safer shore."⁵⁸

His poetry likewise expresses his faith in the life to come. Especially interesting are the lines in his memorial poem to Newton:

Now he wanders through those endless worlds
 He here so well descried, and wondering talks
 And hymns their Author with his glad compeers.
 O Britain's boast! whether with angels Thou
 Sittest in dread discourse, or fellow-blessed,
 Who joy to see the honour of their kind;
 Or whether, mounted on cherubic wing,
 Thy swift career is with the whirling orbs
 oh look with pity down
 On human kind, a frail erroneous race!

...

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 69.

⁵⁷ Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," p. 370.

⁵⁸ Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, II, 374.

While in expectance of the second life
 When time shall be no more, thy sacred dust
 Sleeps with her kings, and dignifies the scene.⁵⁹

At the conclusion of "Winter," Thomson looks forward to "The second birth of heaven and earth" and justifies present injustices by the expectation that all will be righted in the next world —

The storms of wintry time will quickly pass,
 And one unbounded Spring encircle all.⁶⁰

In Liberty he pictures heaven, where

the King of Nature, in full blaze,
 Calls every splendor forth; and there his court,
 Amid ethereal powers, and virtues, holds:
 Angel, archangel, tutelary gods,
 Of cities, nations, empires, and of worlds.

But he abandons the attempt:

But sacred be the veil that kindly clouds
 A light too keen for mortals; wraps a view
 Too softening fair, for those that here in dust
 Must cheerful toil out their appointed years.⁶¹

Thomson was not altogether sure what life in the next world would be like, but he was sure that it would be.

Moreover, Thomson seems to have had some notion of supernatural beings about him in this world. He refers several times to guardian

⁵⁹"To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton," ll. 187 ff.

⁶⁰"Winter," ll. 1063-69.

⁶¹Liberty, III, ll. 556-564. See also his more conventional "On The Death of His Mother" and his "Epitaph on Miss Elizabeth Stanley," The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, pp. 434-436, 456.

spirits,⁶² and imagines that

A thousand shapes or glide athwart the dusk
Or stalk majestic on...
A voice, than human more, the abstracted ear
Of fancy strikes--'Be not of us afraid,
Poor kindred man! thy fellow creatures, we
From the same Parent-Power our beings drew,
The same our Lord and laws and great pursuit.
Once some of us, like thee, through stormy life
Toiled tempest-beaten ere we could attain
This holy calm, this harmony of mind!⁶³

Also he suggested that "a friend, when dead, is but removed from sight" and still keeps "wonted converse."⁶⁴

Thomson had a most interesting belief that the future life would involve continued growth.⁶⁵ He commented on the Pythagorean doctrine of trans-migration of souls:

Delightful truth!
Had he beheld the living chain ascend,
And not a circling form, but rising whole.⁶⁶

"A spirit...transmigrates, by Thomson's theory, to successively higher forms in the scale of being, rising toward infinite perfection."⁶⁷ In

⁶²"Summer," ll. 527-537; Alfred, A Masque, III, vi, p. 58; The Castle of Indolence, I, XLVII.

⁶³"Summer," ll. 538 ff. See also "Autumn," ll. 1030-36.

⁶⁴"On the Death of Mr. William Aikman, The Painter," The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, pp. 443-444. See also "Ode," ibid., p. 423.

⁶⁵For a full discussion of this theory, see G. R. Potter, "James Thomson and the Evolution of Spirits," Englische Studien, LXI (1926-27), 57-65.

⁶⁶Liberty, III, ll. 44-70.

⁶⁷Potter, pp. 61-62.

1735, he wrote Dr. Cranstoun: "This, I think, we may be sure of, that a future state must be better than this; and so on through the neverceasing succession of future states, every one rising upon the last, an everlasting new display of infinite goodness."⁶⁸ This idea occurs frequently in Thomson's poetry, his alterations in the various editions of The Seasons tending to bring it out ever more clearly.⁶⁹

Obviously, such being his beliefs, he would have no fear of death. Believing he could not go

Where universal love not smiles around,
Sustaining all yon orbs and all their sons;
From seeming evil still educing good,
And better thence again, and better still,
In infinite progression,⁷⁰

he could write naturally of "death the good."

Eternal Goodness reigns; be this our stay;
A subject, for the past, of grateful song,
And for the future, of undrooping hope.⁷¹

The most noticeable characteristic of all this thinking of Thomson's is its optimism: the world is a revelation of the goodness of God, and we can expect greater revelations in the next world. He exhorts his readers to praise God:

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 59.

⁶⁹"Spring," ll. 374-378; "Summer," ll. 333-336, 581-584, 1800-05; "Winter," ll. 605-608; "A Hymn," ll. 111-116; The Castle of Indolence, I, XLVII; I, LXIII.

⁷⁰"A Hymn," loc. cit.

⁷¹James Thomson, "Liberty," The Poetical Works of James Thomson (New York: Thomas Crowell and Co., [n. d.]), n., pp. 198-199. See also Sophonisba, I, ii, p. 152; I, iii, p. 153; V, vii, p. 223, and James Thomson, Agamemnon (London: A. Millar, 1738), V, ix, p. 71.

let zealous praise ascend,
 And hymns of holy wonder, to that Power,
 Whose wisdom shines as lovely on our minds,
 As on our smiling eyes his servant sun.⁷²

Through the love of nature, man is to "taste the joy of God to see a happy world!"⁷³ "Devotion...adores the Hand divine,"⁷⁴ and swells "responsive to...knowledge." The poet asks of Newton:

could he
 Whose piercing mental eye diffusive saw
 The finished university of things
 In all its order, magnitude, and parts
 Forbear incessant to adore that Power
 Who fills, sustains, and actuates the whole?⁷⁵

Thomson's religious spirit, unquestionably, was optimistic and untroubled. If, as Leslie Stephen says, "the great stimulant of religious emotions is a profound sense of the evils of human life,"⁷⁶ Thomson's religious views and consequently his religious emotions must be judged underdeveloped. Like Emerson, Thomson seems to have had no sense of sin or of evil, no fear of his own unworthiness, no real awareness of the awful tragedies of life. The characters in his plays occasionally seem to sense a little of the misery of the world, as the

⁷²"Summer," ll. 338-341. See also ibid., ll. 1233-43; "Autumn," ll. 169-171; "A Hymn," ll. 37-49.

⁷³"Spring," ll. 902-903.

⁷⁴Alfred, A Masque, I, vii, p. 21.

⁷⁵"To the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton," ll. 137-143.

⁷⁶Sir Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1902), I, 170.

Hermit warns Alfred that "the human race are sons of sorrow born: and each must bear his portion."⁷⁷ Clytemnestra thinks "on the sudden Turns of Fate...on Fortune's sad Reverses" and comments:

Oft when blind Mortals think themselves secure,
In height of Bliss, they touch the Brink of Ruin.⁷⁸

Alfred bows "with humblest resignation" to heaven's will;⁷⁹ Edward insists on submission to fate.⁸⁰ But affliction teaches noble lessons,⁸¹ and one who has never known ill fortune has never known his own virtue.⁸² The knight in The Castle of Indolence advises:

Then patient bear the sufferings you have earned,
And by these sufferings purify the mind.⁸³

In "Winter" Thomson reminds "the gay licentious proud" of those who "pine in want" or "drink the cup of baleful grief, or eat the bitter bread of misery," and terms life "one scene of toil, of suffering, and of fate,"⁸⁴ but the reader can never feel that Thomson's sense of the evils of life is profound. Thomson is too convinced of the infinite perfectibility of the world, too sure that in the future

⁷⁷ Alfred, A Masque, II, ix, p. 39. See also the episode in "Winter," ll. 276-317, of the rustic lost in the snowstorm.

⁷⁸ Agamemnon, I, vii, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Alfred, A Masque, I, vii, p. 17.

⁸⁰ Edward and Eleonora, II, iv, p. 264.

⁸¹ Alfred, A Masque, I, vii, p. 17.

⁸² Ibid., I, ii, p. 9.

⁸³ The Castle of Indolence, II, LXXII.

⁸⁴ "Winter," ll. 322-351.

They know the comet that terrifies the crowd "kindly bent to work the will of all-sustaining love."⁹⁰ Similarly, meteors throw the crowd into panic, but "the man of philosophic eye and inspect sage" simply is "inquisitive to know the causes and materials."⁹¹ Philosophy's task is

to gaze
Creation through; and, from that full complex
Of never-ending wonders, to conceive
Of the Sole-Being right, who spoke the word,
And Nature moved complete.⁹²

Thomson's was not a sense of the inexplicable mystery of the universe, but a conviction that by pure reason "the enlightened few" could reach God.⁹³

While Thomson's views seem more comfortable than profound, while his spirit borders on complacency, his ethical teaching was that of a kindly, well-intentioned man. Moore calls Thomson "the first humanitarian poet in English,"⁹⁴ and certainly Thomson pled earnestly for a variety of causes. He protested against caging birds⁹⁵ and against steaming bees from the hives and killing them to obtain their honey.⁹⁶ Fishing

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹"Autumn," ll. 1103 ff.

⁹²"Summer," ll. 1784-88; see also "Winter," ll. 572-587.

⁹³See Drennon, "Newtonianism in James Thomson's Poetry," pp. 357-361.

⁹⁴Moore, p. 281.

⁹⁵"Spring," ll. 710-713.

⁹⁶"Autumn," ll. 1189-94.

with worms and then removing the well-swallowed hook, to Thomson, gave "harsh pain and horror to the tender hand."⁹⁷ He seems to anticipate the vegetarians in his protests against the slaughter of domestic animals.⁹⁸ The hunt to him was a "falsely-cheerful, barbarous game of death";⁹⁹ war "the madness of mankind."¹⁰⁰ He praises the work of "the generous hand" who "searched into the horrors of the gloomy jail,"¹⁰¹ and encourages philanthropy, writing that a day gone by is

A sight of horror to the cruel wretch
Who, all day long in sordid pleasure rolled,
Himself an useless load, has squandered vile,
Upon his scoundrel train, what might have cheered
A drooping family of modest worth.¹⁰²

The greatest of all virtues, according to Thomson, is benevolence —

That virtue known
By the relenting look, whose equal heart
For others feels as for another self.¹⁰³

He praises "love of human race; the large ambitious wish to make them blest,"¹⁰⁴ the desire "in the service of mankind to be a guardian god

⁹⁷"Spring," ll. 388-393.

⁹⁸Ibid., ll. 340 ff.

⁹⁹"Autumn," ll. 383-384.

¹⁰⁰"Summer," l. 732. See also Coriolanus, II, i, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰¹"Winter," ll. 359-361.

¹⁰²"Summer," ll. 1636-40.

¹⁰³Liberty, IV, ll. 486 ff.

¹⁰⁴"Autumn," ll. 1018-23.

below."¹⁰⁵ "Devotion to the public" is "the noblest passion," a sort of "moral gravitation" in which "an active flood of universal love must swell the breast," for "from sordid self shoot up no shining deeds."¹⁰⁶

Man's great task is to control his passions by reason. Most of Thomson's plays illustrate "the ruins of the noble mind when from calm Reason Passion tears the sway."¹⁰⁷ Masinissa ruins himself because of his passion for Sophonisba; Clytemnestra cannot save herself from the effects of her folly with Aegisthus; Tancred and Sigismunda love fatally. Masinissa comments:

What dreadful havoc in the human breast
The passions make, when unconfin'd, and mad,
They burst unguided by the mental eye,
The light of reason.¹⁰⁸

Clytemnestra asks bitterly why humans are "form'd one Contradiction," with such "unequal Conflict between slow Reason and impetuous Passion."¹⁰⁹ "Real glory springs from the silent conquest of ourselves";¹¹⁰ "calm reason's holy law" is the "voice of God within the attentive mind."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵Sophonisba, II, ii, p. 166. See also Agamemnon, II, ii, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶Liberty, V, ll. 221 ff. See also Sophonisba, V, ii, p. 215.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., V, ix, p. 229.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., I, v, p. 160.

¹⁰⁹Agamemnon, I, i, p. 3. See also Edward and Eleonora, V, iii, p. 300.

¹¹⁰Sophonisba, V, ii, p. 219.

¹¹¹"Winter," ll. 439 ff.

Man has only to

Let godlike reason from her sovereign throne
Speak the commanding word I will! and it is done.¹¹²

The Africans are an "ill-fated race" because they lack

The godlike wisdom of the tempered breast;
Progressive truth, the patient force of thought;
Investigation calm, whose silent powers
Command the world; the light that leads to Heaven.¹¹³

Thomson cannot say enough for virtue. "There breathes a felt Divinity in Virtue...whose very Silence speaks";¹¹⁴ "the purest joys outwell" from virtue's fount.¹¹⁵ Loss of life is nothing to loss of virtue;¹¹⁶ a virtuous soul is superior "to all the power of fortune";¹¹⁷ virtue is man's "guide to happiness on high."¹¹⁸ Liberty's kingdom can be founded only on public virtue;¹¹⁹ religion without virtue is "a yoke to tame the stooping soul."¹²⁰

¹¹²The Castle of Indolence, II, LXII.

¹¹³"Summer," ll. 875-880. See also ibid., ll. 1602-13.

¹¹⁴Agamemnon, I, i, p. 4.

¹¹⁵The Castle of Indolence, I, XXXVI.

¹¹⁶Edward and Eleonora, I, vi, p. 253.

¹¹⁷Coriolanus, II, i, p. 15.

¹¹⁸"Winter," ll. 1039-49.

¹¹⁹Liberty, V, ll. 93-103.

¹²⁰Ibid. See also James Thomson, "Tancred and Sigismunda," The British Theatre (London: Longman, Hurst, Reese and Orme, 1808), XIII, 24-25; also Edward and Eleonora, IV, ii, pp. 283-284; Sophonisba, III, i, p. 175; Agamemnon, III, ii, p. 40.

Thomson's ethical teachings accord well with his views of the universe. By reason man can discover God and understand his ways; by reason all evil is to be overcome. Man has only to exert his godlike reason to attain moral perfection. His confidence that all is well and is steadily becoming better obviates, for Thomson, any great necessity to act. Lacking Johnson's sense of the terrible evil of this world and lacking the great moralist's profound humility, Thomson could scarcely be expected to have tried earnestly, as Johnson did, to better either himself or his world. He would naturally, as one of "the enlightened few," join in the humanitarian movement, but he would be no crusader.

Johnson himself found Thomson's benevolence to be "fervid" but not "active," writing that Thomson "would give on all occasions, what assistance his purse would supply; but the offices of intervention or solicitation he could not conquer his sluggishness sufficiently to perform."¹²¹ Other critics have found this judgment unnecessarily harsh, and have defended Thomson. Macaulay writes, "Human suffering always moved his sympathy, and he was ever ready to do what lay in his power to relieve it."¹²² No great evidence of "active" benevolence can be mustered, however. Thomson "exerted himself vigorously in favor of the aged Dennis, for whom a benefit performance at the Haymarket took place on December 18th, 1733."¹²³ He wrote Paterson on

¹²¹Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, II, 375.

¹²²Macaulay, p. 81; see also Bayne, pp. 108-109.

¹²³Macaulay, p. 36.

behalf of one Mr. James Smith, "searcher in St. Christopher's," adding, "if we are not to oblige one another, life becomes a paltry, selfish affair."¹²⁴ He wrote Ross, asking Ross to advance to his sisters twelve pounds on his account to "set them a-going" in a shop and promising to send them goods from time to time.¹²⁵ All this, however, is scarcely "active" benevolence, in the sense that Johnson's care of the street walker was active benevolence. Thomson, like most of us, practiced less well than he preached. He was too happily convinced of the goodness of God and the perfectibility of man to exert himself strenuously.

Johnson further criticized Thomson for indolence, speaking of his "sluggishness" and "idleness,"¹²⁶ and again others have risen to Thomson's defense.¹²⁷ Undoubtedly Johnson's criticism was harsh, for one tends to condemn most strongly in others the weaknesses one fights in oneself, but nevertheless, it appears fundamentally just. Thomson's poems and plays are evidence that in the course of a lifetime he accomplished a fair amount of work, but it is, after all, not a tremendous amount. He did not have Johnson's great conscience troubling him, though that he recognized the dangers of indolence well appears from The Castle of Indolence.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 67.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 42.

¹²⁶Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, II, 375.

¹²⁷Macaulay, p. 79; Bayne, p. 97.

Thomson's personal habits are open to criticism for more reasons than his indolence. "He loved the society of his friends, and in their company he was sometimes tempted to an excessive indulgence. His decent housekeeper, Mrs. Hobart, dreaded the appearance of Quinn at Richmond... because he made her master drink too much."¹²⁸ Lady Hertford wrote Mrs. Knight in September, 1742, "He turns Day into Night, and Night into Day, and is..never awake until after Midnight, and I doubt has quite drown'd his Genius."¹²⁹ Johnson's statement that Thomson "took more delight in carousing with Lord Hertford and his friends than assisting her ladyship's poetical operations"¹³⁰ has been adequately disproved,¹³¹ but evidently Thomson had his failing.¹³²

But these seem his greatest weaknesses. Blessed with a naturally good disposition, Thomson seems to have been unruffled and happy. When his watch was stolen, his only comment was, "I am glad they took it. It was never good for anything."¹³³ Macaulay quotes from Murdoch's Life of Thomson, "He took no part in the poetical squabbles which happened in his time, and was respected and left undisturbed by both sides. He would

¹²⁸Macaulay, p. 80.

¹²⁹Helen Sard Hughes, "Thomson and the Countess of Hertford," Modern Philology, XXV (May, 1928), 461.

¹³⁰Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, II, 368.

¹³¹Hughes, "Thomson and the Countess of Hertford," pp. 440-459; also Helen Sard Hughes, "Thomson and Lady Hertford Again," Modern Philology, XXVII (May, 1931), 468-470.

¹³²Compare "Autumn," ll. 530-569.

¹³³Macaulay, p. 9.

even refuse to take offense when he justly might, by interrupting any personal story that was brought him, with some jest or some humorous apology for the offender. Nor was he ever ruffled or discomposed, but when he read or heard of some flagrant instance of injustice, oppression, or cruelty."¹³⁴ When his publisher, Millar, took a considerable loss on Liberty, Thomson intended to annul the bargain he had made with Millar. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that he ever did fulfill his intention.¹³⁵

After Thomson's death, Murdoch wrote Forbes, "We have lost our old, tried, amiable, open and honest-hearted Thomson...whom we found ever the same delightful companion, the most faithful depository of our inmost thoughts, and the same sensible, sympathising adviser."¹³⁶ His friends inscribed on his memorial tablet that the greatest pain he had ever given was that caused by his death.¹³⁷ Lyttelton, who so distressed himself over the state of Thomson's doctrinal beliefs,¹³⁸ wrote, "As to the heart of a Christian, he always had that, in a degree of perfection beyond most men I have ever known."¹³⁹

Thomson appears then as a good-natured, kindly man, easy-going

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 80.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 38.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 72.

¹³⁷Bayne, p. 104.

¹³⁸Ante, pp. 79-80.

¹³⁹Macaulay, p. 73.

and optimistic. Caught up in the rationalistic movement of his day, he followed with keen interest new scientific developments, believing they would provide the open sesame to all mysteries. His conception of God as perfect wisdom and goodness, his belief in continuous growth in the life to come, his happy faith in the powers of reason left him serene and untroubled. Confident that life on earth was steadily improving and that man could simply by governing his passions achieve a perfect world, Thomson lacked a deep sense of the evils of life. His views cannot be called profound; they in no very apparent way altered the course of his life; he lived very much as he pleased. Yet his sunny disposition and kindly heart win one's admiration and affection, and one envies him his untroubled spirit.

CHAPTER V

THE PERSONAL RELIGION OF EDWARD YOUNG

It is difficult for me to deal fairly with Edward Young. Despite the passage of time, one can read the work of Johnson or Gray or Thomson with pleasure; even that of Shenstone one can read with moderate interest. But the present-day student can read most of Young's work only with effort, and then is either bored or irritated. Nevertheless I shall attempt to do Young justice, and shall, in that attempt, examine, first, his actual life; second, his theology; and third, his quality of spirit.

Young's actual life is chiefly impressive for his long and rather fruitless efforts to secure either patronage or preferment. His first poem, An Epistle to the Right Honorable George Lord Lansdowne, was written in an effort to secure "the sweets of office";¹ his second, The Last Day, was fulsomely dedicated to Queen Anne; The Force of Religion; or Vanquished Love was similarly dedicated to the Countess of Salisbury.² Other poems made appeals to Addison and to the Lord Chancellor, the Earl of Macclesfield,³ but all Young's efforts "to secure a patron by poetic courtiership" failed. By his thirty-fifth

¹Henry C. Shelley, The Life and Letters of Edward Young (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1914), p. 22.

²Ibid., pp. 27-29.

³Ibid., pp. 31, 38.

year Young had bettered his worldly prospects only by an annuity of £100 which the Duke of Wharton had settled on him.⁴

Hence, Young made a new bid for "gold as well as glory."⁵ In 1718 his first play, Busiris, King of Egypt, was presented, followed two years later, on April 18, 1721, by The Revenge,⁶ dedicated in its printed version to the Duke of Wharton.⁷ About this time the Duke settled a second annuity of £100 on Young, and in 1722 at the Duke's desire, Young unsuccessfully contested the parliamentary election at Cirencester. According to the report of a law suit of 1740, in which Young tried to collect the annuities and also a bond for £600 in consideration of his expenses in the election, Young gave up two livings in the gift of his college "on the promise made by the said Duke of serving and advancing him in the world."⁸ George Eliot comments: "It is clear...that lay advancement, as long as there was any chance of it, had more attractions for Young than clerical preferment."⁹

Wharton's patronage, however, proved of little worth. The law suit makes clear that Young's expenses in contesting the election

⁴Ibid., pp. 39-40.

⁵Ibid., p. 40.

⁶Ibid., pp. 43, 51.

⁷Ibid., p. 59.

⁸Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁹George Eliot, "Worldliness and Other-Worldliness," Essays (Boston: Aldine Book Company, [n. d.]), p. 15.

were never paid, and that his annuities fell into arrears. In 1726 Wharton left England, himself "hopelessly in debt," and Young's means were "reduced to his All Souls fellowship."¹⁰ That Young was seriously in need of money appears from his anxiety, expressed in a letter to Lady Mary Wortley Montague, as to the success of his third play, The Brothers.¹¹ His situation was improved, however, by a grant from the crown made on May 3, 1726, of an annual pension of £200 retroactive from Lady Day, 1725.¹²

By 1726, moreover, Young had decided upon a career that offered greater security than did his uncertain income from his poems and plays. In the summer of that year he withdrew The Brothers from rehearsal and began to read for holy orders.¹³ By the next summer he had been ordained.¹⁴ Certainly, his reason for this step seems to have been mainly a desire for a settled income. He was nearly forty-three years old; his grant from the crown might or might not be renewed at the King's death.¹⁵ The motive is understandable if not too admirable.

¹⁰Shelley, p. 66.

¹¹Ibid., p. 65.

¹²Ibid., p. 90.

¹³Ibid., pp. 66, 94.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 95.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 93-94.

Young's efforts to secure preferment, however, did not cease, especially as for a time he was "a clergyman without a benefice."¹⁶ His first published sermon, A Vindication of Providence, was dedicated to Queen Caroline;¹⁷ Ocean was prefaced by an Ode to the King.¹⁸ Perhaps in recognition of his attentions, his pension was renewed, and he was appointed on April, 1728, as a chaplain to the King. But still, he had no benefice.

Consequently, late in 1729 or early in 1730, Young wrote to Mrs. Howard, the King's mistress:

Madam -- I know his Majesty's goodness to his servants, and his love of justice in general, so well, that I am confident if his Majesty knew my case, I should not have any cause to despair of his gracious favour to me.

Abilities.

Good manners.

Service.

Age.

Want.

{ Suffering
and for his Majesty.
Zeal

These, Madam, are the proper points of consideration in the person that humbly hopes his Majesty's favour.

As to Abilities, all I can presume to say, is that I have done the best I could to improve them.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁷Edward Young, A Vindication of Providence: or a True Estimate of Human Life. In Which the Passions are Considered In a New Light. Preached in St. George's Church Near Hanover-Square, Soon After the Late King's Death (London: Henry Lintot, 1747), pp. [1-iv].

¹⁸Shelley, p. 98.

As to Good Manners, I desire no favour, if any just objection lies against them.

As to Service, I have been near seven years in his Majesty's, and never omitted any duty in it. Which few can say.

As for Age, I am turned of fifty.

As for Want, I have no manner of preferment.

As for Sufferings, I have lost £300 per annum by being in his Majesty's service....¹⁹

Shelley comments that Young always believed himself older than he was, but that what he meant by saying he had been in the King's service seven years and had lost £300 a year by it is completely inexplicable.²⁰

Young's benefice came in the end through the Warden and Fellows of his own college, All Souls, Oxford, who in July of 1730 "presented him to the rectory of Welwyn in Hertfordshire."²¹ That Young, or at least his friends, had ambitions for still greater things appears from his humorous rejoinder in a letter written in 1739 to a John Williams, then travelling abroad. In half-apology for some serious remarks, Young writes:

But why this sermon? To show myself qualified for the deanery or mitre you so kindly wish me. But these are long in coming. If in your travels you pick up a little vacant principality, it would do as well; I am as qualified for it, and as likely to succeed in it.²²

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 100-101.

²⁰Ibid., p. 102.

²¹Ibid., p. 107.

²²Ibid., p. 111.

Young's further efforts for preferment Shelley charges to the influence of the poet's friend, the Duchess of Portland.²³ Certainly, Young's letters to the Duchess show that she must have been eager for his advancement. In June, 1743, Young wrote: "As for the advice your Grace gives me about preferment, I take it with all my heart. What God Almighty is pleased to give I shall receive with the greatest gratitude, nor shall I repine at what He is pleased to deny."²⁴ In September of that year he wrote similarly concerning a passage in Seneca: "I take his meaning to be, that he is a fool that is seeking preferment at my time of day, and that success, should I have it, would only convince me that it deserved not so much trouble in the pursuit."²⁵

Nevertheless, Young was far from adverse to exertions on his behalf. In February, 1744, he was eager to secure a promise from her Grace's cousin quickly, for "a promise is like money, it carries interest, and the sooner it is procured, the richer in hope we should be."²⁶ In 1745, he himself secured an interview with the Duke of Newcastle, from whom he did not receive great encouragement. Mr. Roberts, secretary to Henry

²³Ibid., p. 199. See also John William Mackail, Studies of English Poets (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926), pp. 132-133. Mackail agrees in blaming "the ill-advised pressure" of Young's friends and "some weakness of his own in yielding to them."

²⁴Shelley, pp. 162-163.

²⁵Ibid., p. 167.

²⁶Ibid., p. 174.

Pelham, however, gave Young the assurance that "if your Grace [the Duchess of Portland] would be so kind as to persist in your kind pressing" in Young's favor, "it must necessarily succeed."²⁷ Young's final Night Thought was inscribed to the Duke of Newcastle, and twice in 1746 Young wrote the Duke importunate letters. The second of these appeals, dated July 4, 1746, reads:

If the multiplicity of your Grace's high affairs could permit your Grace to reflect, how severe it is for one of very long service and known attachment to his Majesty, after promises from those that hold them most sacred, and after all methods taken to recommend himself to your Grace's patronage, the intercession of friends, and his own attempts in letters which boast your constant favour...could, I say, your Grace one moment reflect how severe it is to be thrown far backward in my hopes, I am confident from your Grace's known equity and humanity, you would compassionate the case of...Your Grace's most Obedient and humbly devoted Servant.²⁸

Two more letters to the Duke show beyond doubt Young's own eagerness for advancement.²⁹

When the Duke of Newcastle had failed to advance him, however, Young wrote his friend the Duchess of Portland:

I will no longer set my thoughts on a pinnacle of the temple, to take a view of the glories of the world, lest I fall down and worship him to whom they belong; nor do I, Madam, take this resolution altogether out of regard to that motive which ought to determine me to it; but out also of mere human, secular prudence, for I find that expectation, in a point of this nature, hurts me much more than despair.³⁰

²⁷Ibid., p. 188.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 201-202.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 212-215.

³⁰Ibid., p. 213.

Still, as late as 1758, Young's hopes were once more awakened by a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had "'long wondered that more suitable notice'" of Young had not been taken.³¹ Nevertheless, no post was to come until January, 1761, when Young was made clerk of the closet to the dowager Princess of Wales.³² The coveted bishopric was never to become his.

Beyond this long history of effort for preferment, little in Young's life is noteworthy. According to Pope, Young passed "'a foolish youth, the sport of peers and poets'" and was "'without common sense'" though he had "'a very good heart.'"³³ That Young's youth was not altogether "foolish" appears from the anecdote in which Tindal, the atheist, is supposed to have said he could answer the arguments of the other boys at Oxford because he knew "'whence they have their arguments...but that fellow Young is continually pestering me with something of his own.'"³⁴ Some slight reflection on Young's integrity perhaps appears from the fact that he began a courtship of Mrs. Judith Reynolds so soon after his wife's death that he wished it kept secret "lest it become known...sooner than it is decent."³⁵ Likewise some natural doubt about his integrity arises

³¹Ibid., p. 247.

³²Ibid., p. 262.

³³Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets, II, 417.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵H. T. Swedenberg, "Letters of Edward Young to Mrs. Judith Reynolds," Huntingdon Library Quarterly, II (Oct., 1938), 89.

from the fact that he may have been party to a not altogether honest publicity stunt of Edmund Curil's.³⁶

The most serious criticism of Young's character comes from the Rev. Mr. John Jones, his curate. Young paid Jones only £20 a year, certainly not a generous stipend, and Jones grew increasingly discontented. After three years of service, according to Jones's diary, Jones drew up a solemn remonstrance, was promised favors, and thereupon styled Young a "'benevolent and respected superintendent.'" Two years later, however, the promises not having been kept, Jones resigned, and Young, in order to keep him, hinted at leaving him a legacy and finally raised his salary to £45. Young also signed an agreement to pay the rent on Jones's house in Bedfordshire, an agreement he later, with failing memory, denied he had made.³⁷ At the height of their differences, Jones characterized Young thus:

'A haughty and imperious disposition: Stateliness and Pride: high opinion of one's own work and writings:...making every aim and action to centre in self: disregard of Truth, Justice and Common Honesty in many instances: unfair, mean and sneaking dealings...amazing parsimony and penuriousness... self-willed; obstinate...very domineering over his inferiors: a narrow and contracted way of thinking...affected grandeur but attended with mean actions...'

and much more to the same effect.³⁸ Since the Rev. Mr. Jones evidently

³⁶George Sherburn, "Edward Young and Book Advertising," Review of English Studies, IV (Oct., 1928), 414-417.

³⁷W. R. Hughes, "Dr. Young and His Curates," Blackwood's Magazine, CCXXXI (May, 1932), 630-631.

³⁸Ibid., p. 626.

nursed violent resentments, having left similar portraits of Young's housekeeper, Miss Hallow, and of Fletcher, the local lawyer, too much weight can not be attached to his account.³⁹ After all, the Rev. Mr. Jones did withdraw his resignation and remain until after Young's death - no doubt, in expectation of his legacy!

Nearly everything else that is known of Young's life is to his credit. According to an early biographer,

Dr. Young rose betimes, and engaged with his domestics in the duties of morning prayer. He is said to have read but little He was moderate in his meals, and rarely drank wine, except when he was ill; being...unwilling to waste the succours of sickness on the stability of health. After a slight refreshment, he retired to rest early in the evening....He lived at a moderate expense, rather inclined to parsimony than profusion....⁴⁰

He was evidently very earnest in his work. "'Preaching one day at the Chapel Royal before George II, and observing him extremely inattentive, he raised his voice very much; and finding that ineffectual, he burst into tears.'⁴¹ He obtained a gift of a Bible for his altar and inquired of Richardson how to provide himself with a handsome pair

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 627-628.

⁴⁰ Edward Young, The Works of Edward Young, D. D. Author of Night Thoughts, revised and corrected by himself (London: F. C. and J. Rivington, et. al., 1813), I, xix-xx. This will be referred to as Works.

⁴¹ Shelley, p. 99.

of gilt candlesticks.⁴² Greeted one wild, stormy evening by the remark that it was a dreadful night, he answered, "No, Sir, it is a very fine night. The Lord is abroad!"⁴³ In his garden he had an alcove with a bench "so well painted in it, that at a distance it seemed to be real; but upon a nearer approach the deception was perceived, and this motto appeared: INVISIBILIA NON DECIPIUNT."⁴⁴ Likewise, on the outside wall of the summer house was inscribed, "Ambulantes in horto audiebant vocem Dei"; and in reference to a brook by which it is situated, 'Vivendi recte qui prorogat horam,' &."⁴⁵

Young urged Richardson to publish Clarissa "for the sake of the profane, to whom it may be the greatest charity"⁴⁶ and inquired, "Are not virtue and religion your point of view?"⁴⁷ In Young's opinion, "...he that does most good is the best author,"⁴⁸ and his own writings fairly shriek to heaven of his intent to do good. From The Last Day to Resignation his message was the same: remember death and live for

⁴²"One Hundred and Fifty Letters Between Dr. Edward Young, Author of Night Thoughts, and Mr. Samuel Richardson, Author of Clarissa, Grandison, &," The Monthly Magazine; or, British Register, XXXVII (December, 1814), 432-433. Hereafter, this will be referred to as "Letters." Correct volume, date, and page of The Monthly Magazine will be given.

⁴³Shelley, p. 92.

⁴⁴Young, Works, I, xix.

⁴⁵Boswell, Life of Johnson, II, 421.

⁴⁶"Letters," The Monthly Magazine, XXXVII (May 1, 1814), 328.

⁴⁷Ibid., XXXVI (Dec. 1, 1813), 420.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 419; see also ibid., XXXIX (April 1, 1815), 230.

eternity. His satires were intended as an instrument of morality,⁴⁹ and his great work, the Night Thoughts, sang of "immortal man"⁵⁰ and had for its theme the death of a Christian.⁵¹ Resignation was specifically designed as consolation for the widow of Admiral Boscawen.⁵² Though Young published few actual sermons, one leaves his writing with the conviction that everything he wrote was a sermon in disguise.

Though Mr. Jones may not have been well paid, Young was capable of both great and small generosity. When in 1753, he finally allowed the performance of The Brothers, he promised the receipts to the Society for propagating the Gospel. Since the receipts were only £400, however, Young kept them and gave the society a thousand guineas.⁵³ "I myself love pleasure as much as any man," he wrote Richardson; "could I have given myself a greater by disposing of the same sum to a different use, I should have done it."⁵⁴ Moreover, two months after he had

⁴⁹See Young's preface to "Love of Fame, the Universal Passion," in Edward Young, The Poetical Works of Edward Young (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, [n. d.]), II, 58. This will be referred to as Poetical Works.

⁵⁰"Night I," Poetical Works, I, 19.

⁵¹See Horace O'Connor, "Addison and Young's 'Conjectures,'" Modern Language Notes, XXXV (January, 1920), 24-26, and Horace O'Connor, "The Narcissa Episode in Young's 'Night Thoughts,'" Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XXXIV (1919), 144.

⁵²Shelley, p. 269.

⁵³Ibid., p. 71.

⁵⁴Ibid.

made his will, Young gave £1,500 in old South Sea Annuities to endow a school in Welwyn for "educating, clothing, and apprenticing the necessitous children of the parish."⁵⁵ By his will he bequeathed £200 to the Rev. Mr. Jones, whose temper, one hopes, was thus placated; £1000 to Mrs. Hallows, his housekeeper; £50 to All Souls College; £50 each to a nephew and a cousin; £100 to his successor for repair of the chancel and the parsonage house; £5 apiece to "the four poorest housekeepers of Welwyn"; £10 each to his four servants; and the residue to his son.⁵⁶

With respect to his lesser generosity, one finds him sending Richardson five guineas for the sister of a Mr. Grover, who Richardson had said was "too regardless of money to leave her very happy in that particular."⁵⁷ He requests this same friend to inquire of a surgeon the effect of tar water on cancer, for he has recommended tar water to a lady with a cancerous breast and wishes advice "in this very compassionate case."⁵⁸

The notebook of a visitor to Welwyn speaks of that "'truly good man, the Rev. Dr. Edward Young. Such a tide of praises, applauses, and sincere wishes, that are poured out here by all Ranks and Degrees, as gratitude for Benevolence of Heart and the liberality of his Hand, exceeds all example.'" Likewise Dr. Hildesley, afterwards Bishop of Sodor

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 259.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 256-259.

⁵⁷"Letters," The Monthly Magazine, XXXVII (May 1, 1814), 330.

⁵⁸Ibid., XXXVII (March 1, 1814), 142. See also ibid., XLII (Nov, 1816), 331, and XLIII (May, 1817), 328.

and Man, who was Young's neighbor at Hitchin for twenty years "testifies 'that he is the most modest, the most patient of contradiction, and the most informing and entertaining I ever conversed with:'"⁵⁹

Examination of Young's actual life, then, reveals his decidedly worldly interests and ambitions and his eminent respectability. Though his life was not what a reader of the Night Thoughts might have imagined, there are few stones to be thrown.

An account of Young's life, however, does not altogether prepare one for the strict conformity of his theological views to the doctrines of the Established Church. Young's exposure to "high" life and to theatrical circles seems in no way to have affected him. His faith in the Christian revelation he reiterates and reiterates, not only in his published sermons but in his letters and poems. In 1764 he wrote to his friend George Keats, "...such is the nature of Christianity that the plan of it could not possibly have entered into the mind of man; secondly, if it had entered it could not possibly have been received by mankind, without a supernatural interposition in its favour."⁶⁰ According to Nathaniel Cotton's report of a conversation with Young, Young's faith in Christ was founded on two considerations: the fact that "the fall of man, the redemption of man, and the resurrection of man, the three cardinal articles of our religion, are such as human ingenuity could never have invented; therefore, they must be divine." Moreover, "If the Prophecies have been fulfilled (of which there is abundant demonstration) the Scrip-

⁵⁹W. R. Hughes, p. 625.

⁶⁰Shelley, p. 278.

ture must be the word of God; and if the Scripture is the word of God, Christianity must be true.'⁶¹

Miss Bliss's article, "Young's Night Thoughts in Relation to Contemporary Christian Apologetics,"⁶² shows how the Night Thoughts parallels in argument the usual apologetics in defense of religion. The poem expresses the ideas and arguments common to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century defense of religion, and, according to Miss Bliss, owed its popularity at least in part to the fact that Young "was giving poetical expression to the theories that were felt to be vital in the religious life of the time."⁶³ Boswell's comment in praise of the Night Thoughts supports Miss Bliss's point. "To all the other excellencies of Night Thoughts," said Boswell, "let me add the great and peculiar one, that they contain not only the noblest sentiments of virtue, and contemplations on immortality, but the Christian Sacrifice, the Divine Propitiation...solemnly and poetically displayed..."⁶⁴

"Even in the first five Nights," says Miss Bliss, "...Young is opposing the contemporary libertinism, formalism in religion, separation of morality and religion, and deism." The last four Nights are devoted to

⁶¹Ibid., p. 280.

⁶²Isabel St. John Bliss, Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, XLIX (March, 1934), 37-70.

⁶³Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁴Boswell, Life of Johnson, II, 377-378.

a defense of the doctrine of immortality.⁶⁵ Young's straw man, Lorenzo, for whose conversion the arguments of the poem are presented, is in various passages simply a libertine, a deist, an advocate of Shaftesbury's theory of ridicule, and an atheist.⁶⁶ "In attempting to defend revelation against the deist objectives," says Miss Bliss,

Young, like the other apologists, finds arguments based on reason less applicable than in defending natural religion. He does not indeed resort to argument at all, but merely asserts and reasserts with feeling and emotion that the teachings of revelation are true, that salvation is only through Christ, and by the ardent recital of details of the Crucifixion and Resurrection, of the miracles of the Old Testament, and the account of the Last Day, seeks to win the emotional support of his readers against deism.⁶⁷

Young's concluding apostrophe to the Trinity may have been intended to show that "on the great Trinitarian controversy of the period Young was on the side of orthodoxy."⁶⁸

Young had little patience with attempts to found faith purely on reason without regard for revelation, though he so often stresses his belief that reason leads to an acceptance of revelation⁶⁹ that he sometimes seems to reflect the influence of the Christian deism so prevalent in his

⁶⁵Bliss, p. 37.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 55.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 70.

⁶⁹See "The Centaur Not Fabulous," Works, III, 220: "...faith is entirely the result of reason"; "Night IV," Poetical Works, I, 87: "Reason pursu'd is faith," "Reason...demands our first regard," and ibid., p. 88: "Reason the root, fair faith is but the flower." See also Works, III, 237, 270.

day.⁷⁰ "Fallible ratiocination," said he, "should not be made the grounds of faith, whose proper basis is infallible testimony. Nor is it longer faith the while it rests on that, for when I believe, not so much what is revealed, as what my own reason pronounces to be true; I believe not God, but myself."⁷¹ "The more seemingly incredible is the matter in which we believe, the more respect we show" to God and the more acceptable is our faith.⁷²

Hence Young clearly followed the Christian apologists of his day.⁷³ Nevertheless, to my mind, his theology seems more than necessarily narrow and harsh. Young's God is the "eternal Judge," the "Great Sov'reign."⁷⁴ Granted he is also "Thou most indulgent, most tremendous pow'r! Still more tremendous for thy wondrous love!" but "A God all mercy, is a God unjust."⁷⁵

⁷⁰Mackail, p. 129, declares that Young "fluctuates between rationalistic Deism and doctrine, little, if at all, removed from that of the Methodist revival." Walter Thomas, Le Poète Edward Young: Etude Sur Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1901), p. 436, stresses the importance of reason as a basis for Young's faith.

⁷¹"The Centaur Not Fabulous," Works, III, 234.

⁷²Ibid., III, 231. See also ibid., p. 227.

⁷³Young borrowed Bishop Gastrell's Moral Proofs of the Certainty of a Future State in 1743 while he was working on the Night Thoughts (Shelley, pp. 167-168). Thomas, pp. 438-440, 442, 450, shows how closely Young's arguments follow those of Butler's Sermons. According to Paul Van Tiegham, "Young et Ses 'Nuits,'" Le Preromantisme (Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1930), p. 35, Young drew on the Spectator, Tatler, and Guardian for his ideas.

⁷⁴"The Last Day," Poetical Works, II, 20; ibid., p. 22.

⁷⁵"Night IV," Poetical Works, I, 63; ibid., p. 70.

Some of the epithets by which Young addresses his deity are strange. Such appellations as "great philanthropist,"⁷⁶ "Glorious Architect,"⁷⁷ "immortal King,"⁷⁸ "patron God"⁷⁹ give me the feeling that Young's God more nearly than anything else resembles the English monarch.⁸⁰

Moreover, any sense of God in nature seems lacking. Despite the praise of the heavens in "Night IX," Young does not seem to have a real sense of the immanence of God. He "considers nature the handiwork of the 'stupendous Architect,' and therefore nature serves as a sort of intermediary to teach the ways of God to man. The handiwork of God is considered as a set of symbols for man, and is taken as proof of man's immortality."⁸¹ But as Van Tiegham observes, "Il ne donne pas l'impression de ce ciel étoilé: il en fait état pour son argumentation, plutôt qu'il ne l'admire, qu'il ne le sent."⁸²

Young's religion seems for the most part negative. In his opinion, virtue and religion amounted to little more "than curbing the natural

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 89.

⁷⁷"Night IX," Poetical Works, I, 287.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 338.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 341.

⁸⁰Eliot, p. 54, comments that "the God of the 'Night Thoughts' is simply Young himself, 'writ large.'"

⁸¹Harry H. Clark, "A Study of Melancholy in Edward Young," Modern Language Notes, XXIX (March, 1924), 195.

⁸²"Young et Ses 'Nuits,'" p. 30. See also Eliot, pp. 44-46.

tendencies of our perverse hearts."⁸³ "Evils fly so near and so thick about us...that we should aim at little more than the negative good here, and positive in another scene. Escape here, and enjoyment hereafter."⁸⁴

For Young, the great incentive to virtue is a system of rewards and punishments. "Virtue is true self-interest pursu'd";⁸⁵ "In self-applause is virtue's golden prize."⁸⁶ "Virtue's recompense" in this world is doubtful;⁸⁷ consequently it is sure in the life to come. Young answers Lorenzo's question, "'Has virtue, then no joys?'-- Yes, joys dear bought"⁸⁸ that only a reward beyond the grave would make one struggle for. Were there no rewards, "Sense! take the rein; blind passion! drive us on."⁸⁹ Young seems to have lacked any lively sense of an innate, intrinsic value in goodness apart from reward or punishment.

Punishment, moreover, is to be eternal; God knows "that we are--immortal,...that therefore we must suffer, or enjoy, fo[r] ever!" "How deep..and deplorable is their mistake," said Young, "who presume to sin because God is so good; when God is so good purely because he knows that

⁸³Shelley, p. 58.

⁸⁴"Letters," The Monthly Magazine, XXXVI (Dec. 1, 1813), 421.

⁸⁵"Night VII," Poetical Works, I, 164.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 165.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 166.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 168.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 185.

presumption will be their ruin?"⁹⁰

Moreover, Young was intolerant of any position other than his own, and condemned both Catholicism and Methodism. When his friend Williams was in Italy, Young wrote:

I hope you have nothing of Rome about you but that noble feature [the Roman nose]; if you have, post away to his Holiness. No man makes more Protestants than the Pope, or more saints than the devil, when either of them is thoroughly known; for truth and virtue have no better friends upon earth than a near inspection and intimate acquaintance with the deformity and madness of their opposites.⁹¹

Narcissa in "Night III" is denied Christian burial by the "ungodly... zeal" of Catholics, "nurst in blind infallibility's embrace," who deny "the charity of dust, to spread o'er dust! a charity their dogs enjoy."⁹²

Likewise Young was opposed to the non-conforming Protestants. His, he said, was an age "of riots and distress...of public poverty and private accumulation; of new sects in religion and new sallies in sin; and every other contradiction to common sense."⁹³ His man of good character, Eusebius, "starts not at a masquerade; nor thinks cards the books of the devil."⁹⁴ When Young waxes eloquent on the subject of the dignity of man, he defends his "rapture" by saying:

⁹⁰"The Centaur Not Fabulous," Works, III, 340-341. Compare Johnson's suggestion that punishment might in time be ended, ante, p. 14.

⁹¹Shelley, p. 113.

⁹²Poetical Works, I, 49.

⁹³"The Centaur Not Fabulous," Works, III, 235.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 279.

It is the close, frequent and feeling inspection of those interiora of man's sublime condition, as immortal, and redeemed, that is the highest cordial of human joy, and the richest mine of human thought: a mine dug deep by few!... None without it can be filled with the light and comfort of the Holy Ghost. This, O ye Methodists! gives the real new birth: this enters man in quite another world.⁹⁵

And the inscription on the parish clock of Welwyn, "inaugurée de son vivant," read "'Prosperité à l'église établie et nul encouragement à l'enthousiasme.'"⁹⁶

In Young's defense, Thomas points out "les tendances philosophiques en Angleterre à cette époque, l'exemple de penseurs éminents et l'exagération du rôle que l'on prêtait alors en matière religieuse à la raison et au calcul."⁹⁷ Nevertheless, compared with the views of either Johnson or Gray, who were equally good Anglicans, Young's position seems harsh and to reveal a fundamental narrowness of mind.

Young's theological narrowness seems symptomatic of spiritual weakness. Though Young's spiritual quality is more debatable than that of any other poet I have studied, perhaps four characteristics are discernible: Young's lifelong attempt to secure preferment despite his insistence that the things of this earth are worthless indicates a fundamental worldliness; in the light of his letters and life his love of melancholy seems to have been at least partially assumed for effect; his lack of real sympathy parallels his tendency to be self-righteous and

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 358.

⁹⁶Thomas, p. 451.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 452.

and self-satisfied; his religion is lacking in real depth.

The sycophancy of the dedications of Young's poems and his persistent efforts to secure worldly advancement, while not, I suppose, radically inconsistent with a really religious life, are radically inconsistent with Young's written advice to others. He was not above the worst sort of flattery;⁹⁸ he clearly desired earthly rewards. Yet again and again he insists that all earthly pleasures and ambitions should be rejected for thoughts of death and immortality. The Night Thoughts is one long argument to persuade poor Lorenzo to turn from the things of this world to those of the next. The Centaur Not Fabulous makes a similar case in prose. In The Brothers, the King protests;

Kings of their envy cheat a foolish world:
Fate gives us all in spite, that we alone
Might have the pain of knowing all is nothing.⁹⁹

A Vindication of Providence: or, A True Estimate of Human Life is entirely devoted to an exposition of how all the earthly aims, ambitions, desires, and passions of men lead only to unhappiness. Summarizing the work, Young says:

We have passed the several Orders, Ages, Aims, Relations, Constitutions, Tempers, Passions, with the four great Impulses of Mankind, and have found but one Report through these several Stages of our Course; the various Witnesses concur, and bring in a full Verdict against the Happiness of Human Life. They declare that all Mankind is united by Misery...as by...the Grave, to which it leads.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸See "On the Late Queen's Death," "The Installment," "Ocean: an Ode," Poetical Works, II, 152-156, 305-317.

⁹⁹"The Brothers: A Tragedy," Works, III, 117.

¹⁰⁰Young, A Vindication of Providence, pp. 60-61.

Naturally the question of Young's sincerity arises. Several critics have seen in his writing the "sour grapes" and bitterness of a disappointed man.¹⁰¹ Thomas attempts to defend Young from the charge of insincerity, finding him simply "trop sensibles aux influences venues du dehors,"¹⁰² but Young's own words seem to indicate that some, at least, of his insistence upon the worthlessness of earthly rewards rose from his own failure to win them. These lines seem to me to reveal his rationalization of his disappointments:

I've been so long remember'd, I'm forgot.
 An object ever pressing dims the sight,
 And hides behind its ardour to be seen.
 When in his courtiers' ears I pour my plaint,
 They drink it as the nectar of the great;
 And squeeze my hand, and beg me come to-morrow
 Refusal! canst thou wear a smoother form?

...

Alas! ambition makes my little less;
 Embitt'ring the possess'd: Why wish for more?¹⁰³

Miss Bowen is perhaps as fair as it is possible to be, saying:

Nor is there any reason to doubt that his copious eloquence in the cause of Christianity...was sincere; nor to undervalue his belief in the immortality of the soul because he

¹⁰¹ See Van Tiegham, p. 35; Eliot, pp. 13, 20, 39, 42-43; Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, II, 363; Marjory Bowen, "Edward Young, LL. D., Poet, 1683-1765," Essays By Divers Hands Being the Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom, new series, vol. VIII, edited by Lawrence Binyon (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1928), pp. 72-73.

¹⁰² "Le Poète Edward Young," p. 317.

¹⁰³ "Night IV," Poetical Works, I, 64.

was careful of the comforts of the body; nor to doubt his faith in the next world because he was solicitous of a good place in this. He appears to have had a passion for preaching as another of his age might have had a passion for collecting coins or growing tulips, and to have found the propounding of moral axioms more absorbing than the most agreeable of pleasures.¹⁰⁴

Still she finds "the note of regret, of envy...of malice" running through the Night Thoughts,¹⁰⁵ and I believe that one can only conclude that Young's motive for much of his insistence on the importance of the next world and the unimportance of this was his disappointed earthly ambition.

The question of Young's sincerity arises also with respect to his melancholy. At the beginning of "Night I," Young pictures himself as despondent and sorrowful:

I wake, emerging from a sea of dreams
Tumultuous; where my wreck'd desponding thought,
From wave to wave of fancied misery,
At random drove, her helm of reason lost.

...

The day too short for my distress; and night,
Ev'n in the zenith of her dark domain,
Is sunshine to the colour of my fate.¹⁰⁶

In "Night V" he dives "for precious pearl in sorrow's stream" and feels his "spirits fail."¹⁰⁷ According to Young this is a world "Where the inhabitants are not differenced by Happiness and Misery; but only by the

¹⁰⁴Bowen, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., pp. 72-73.

¹⁰⁶Poetical Works, I, 4.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., I, 99.

different Degrees, and various Colours of Misery Universal."¹⁰⁸ Erixine, heroine of The Brothers, exclaims:

Know, my Demetrius, joys are for the gods;
Man's common course of nature is distress:
His joys are prodigies; and, like them, too,
Portend approaching ill.¹⁰⁹

Clark, who analyzed Young's melancholy carefully, concluded that Young's theory of original genius

is the key to practically the whole of Young's philosophy.... For the most part, it accounts for his disdain of the world, 'the beaten road'; for his love of solitude, 'the remote'; for his love of 'excursion' by means of the untrammelled imagination; and for his flight from genuine spiritual activity to emotional revery under the stars.¹¹⁰

Young, says Clark, "thought there was something distinctive--and therefore superior--in his midnight watches."¹¹¹

Though much of the grief expressed in the Night Thoughts is undoubtedly genuine, I am inclined to suspect that Young's picture of himself as a man of sorrows is in part an outgrowth of his desire to be

¹⁰⁸ A Vindication of Providence, p. 61.

¹⁰⁹ Works, III, 197.

¹¹⁰ Clark, pp. 198-199. See Young's "Conjectures on Original Composition," The Art of Literary Criticism, edited by Paul Robert Lieder and Robert Withington (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, [c. 1941]), p. 283; "All eminence, and distinction, lies out of the beaten road; excursion, and deviation, are necessary to find it; and the more remote your path from the highway, the more reputable."

¹¹¹ Clark, p. 194.

different. His love of composing at night,¹¹² his alcove and sundial with their inscriptions¹¹³ impress me as ways of drawing attention. The fact that within a very short time after his wife's death Young was courting again¹¹⁴ seems to contradict any very profound melancholy; the considerable literary exaggeration involved in his account of the three deaths he mourns in the Night Thoughts suggests the clever artist rather than the heartbroken man. Young states that the three deaths occurred "ere thrice yon moon had fill'd her horn,"¹¹⁵ whereas that of Narcissa, generally believed to be his stepdaughter Elizabeth, occurred four years earlier than that of Lucia, Young's wife, or that of Philander, probably Young's friend Tickell.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, Young pictures Narcissa as denied a legal burial and secretly buried, whereas his stepdaughter was buried with all due ceremony in the cemetery reserved for Protestants at Lyons.¹¹⁷

The cheerful tone of Young's letters to the Duchess of Portland and to his friend Richardson reveals his genuinely social nature and makes him seem a far more attractive person than the gloomy figure of the Night Thoughts and A Vindication of Providence. In these letters, even when he

¹¹²Shelley, pp. 16, 282.

¹¹³Ante, p. 113.

¹¹⁴Ante, p. 110.

¹¹⁵"Night I," Poetical Works, I, 10-11.

¹¹⁶See Shelley, pp. 146-147; Thomas, pp. 147-157.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 154.

is most serious Young's tone is not melancholy. For example, he writes to Richardson:

...since the things of this life from their mixture, repetition, defectiveness, and, in age, short duration, are unable to satisfy, we must aid their natural by a moral pleasure, we must season them with a spice of religion to make them more palatable [sic]; we must consider that 'tis God's will that we should be content and pleased with them.¹¹⁸

He tells the Duchess of Portland that "of God Almighty's manifold blessings to mankind His afflictions are the greatest;...Heaven suffers nothing to happen to man but what is for his temporal or eternal welfare."¹¹⁹

The fact that Young's son informed Boswell and Johnson that though his father was "too well-bred" a man to be gloomy in company, he was always melancholy when alone seems, on the other hand, to indicate that Young's melancholy was natural and sincere.¹²⁰ Certainly Young was a disappointed man, who seems to have been sorry for himself and such sorrow can, indeed, lead to a sincere enough gloom. Perhaps what I object to is that in his writings he seems to have cultivated his woes.

Young's effort to seem a man apart goes hand in hand with his egoism. He seems to have lacked real sympathy for others and to have been self-righteous and self-satisfied. His cry of sorrow in the Night Thoughts is always personal; Van Tiegham contrasts the spirit of Young's poem with "la bienveillance" and "la sympathie pour l'humanité" of

¹¹⁸"Letters," The Monthly Magazine, XXXVII (May 1, 1814), 139.

¹¹⁹Shelley, p. 128.

¹²⁰Boswell, Life of Johnson, II, 421.

Thomson's Seasons.¹²¹ Young claims that he mourns "for millions,"¹²² but there is little evidence in his work of a real compassion for mankind. Mankind is to be scolded and lectured because it is not virtuous; it is not to be pitied. Young wrote his friend the Duchess: "The highest character that can be given of a human creature is: 'A being with a feeling heart,'"¹²³ but the superior tone in which he berates Lorenzo and the "centaur" is not indicative of such a heart. The simple fact that he denied his son admission to his home, forgiving him only on his [Young's own] deathbed and then still refusing to see him is again not indicative of such a heart.¹²⁴

As Clark observes, "It is a commentary on Young's egoism that he evidently had no question as to his fitness for eternal bliss, for he awaits with much anticipation the 'day for which all other days were made,'¹²⁵ while he exclaims about the rarity of salvation."¹²⁶ Most of mankind he condemns to eternal punishment with something like satisfaction. The sinner is "justly doomed to pour eternal groans" while "the favour'd of their Judge, in triumph move."¹²⁷

¹²¹"Young at Sea 'Nuits,'" p. 36.

¹²²"Night I," Poetical Works, I, 11.

¹²³Shelley, p. 141.

¹²⁴Ibid., pp. 280-281.

¹²⁵"Night IX," Poetical Works, I, 268.

¹²⁶"A Study of Melancholy," p. 198.

¹²⁷"The Last Day," Poetical Works, II, 33-34.

Johnson's profound humility finds small echo in Young. What he suffers during illness, he regards "as necessary discipline; and humbly" hopes "it may be some small expiation of great offences" being "bound in reason to consider it as a blessing, if God grants...the grace of patience and resignation under it."¹²⁸ But of a real sense of unworthiness he had none.

Young has frequently, moreover, a rather unpleasant self-satisfaction. No one else has treated the passions as he treats them in A Vindication of Providence;¹²⁹ he is "not conscious of the least malevolence to any particular person" in the characters of his satire.¹³⁰ He is sure he has set his subject "in the strongest light";¹³¹ the reader "may wish a clue were wanting to find the meaning."¹³²

Young propounds a truism as if it were a remarkable discovery, writing Richardson:

'I shall be with you on Monday next, God willing. That God willing, who this moment sets a thousand Agents at work for my Sake, of wh. [sic] I know nothing, though they are all within me; & shd any one of ym cease to work, it wd prove my instant Death. I mean ye Animal Functions. You know how merry shd I make ye World, shd they hear me say,--'If it please God, I will rise from my Seat,'--'I will open my

¹²⁸Shelley, p. 244.

¹²⁹Page 27.

¹³⁰"Preface," "Love of Fame," Poetical Works, II, 58.

¹³¹"The Centaur Not Fabulous," Works, III, 377.

¹³²Ibid., p. 271.

Mouth'...So ignorant are our Wise ones both of God & Man.
And now, Sr wh is ye most respectable Being, a Monarch on
his Throne, or a Beggar's Brat at ye Breast, whose Ignor-
ance is not its Crime?'¹³³

Again he begins pontifically: "A full and strong conviction of the vanity
of the present, and of the importance of the future, is, I think, the
most complete notion of human wisdom," and ends - by recommending tar
water!¹³⁴

One can only conclude that Young's religious life lacked real
depth. His thinking is full of contradictions, for he loved paradox, but
something is obviously faulty when life is a struggle--in which resignation
is the supreme virtue, and when Good reigns--but there is only evil vis-
ible in the world. One suspects that a desire for effect has superseded
real thought. "Peut-être s'est-on trompé," says Thomas, "en le prenant
pour un philosophe émérite, pour un profond théologien, et n'est-il tout
au plus qu'un poète exprimant avec force sa pensée fugitive."¹³⁵

Clark finds that

Young's religion is for the most part hollow: he tends to substi-
tute passive emotional revery under the midnight skies for active
spiritual meditation--spiritual idleness for spiritual activity--
while at the same time he disdains the world where he might have
found happiness.¹³⁶

Moreover, Clark has "a lingering suspicion that his [Young's] interest in

¹³³Helen Sard Hughes, "A Letter to Richardson from Edward Young,"
Modern Language Notes, XXXVII (May, 1922), 314.

¹³⁴"Letters," The Monthly Magazine, XXXVII (May 1, 1814), 141.

¹³⁵"Le Poète Edward Young," p. 457.

¹³⁶Clark, p. 135.

religion is not principally for its religious values, but rather because it offers a 'fairyland of fancy' where his expansive imagination may 'wander wild'...¹³⁷ There can be little doubt," according to Clark, "that the quest of novelty and imaginative expansion plays a large part in his love of religious broodings."¹³⁸

Young's spiritual quality, consequently, does not impress one greatly. Taken in combination with his persistent effort for worldly preferment and his narrow and harsh theological views, Young's spiritual stature is far from impressive. Fundamentally worldly in interests, not altogether natural in behavior, self-centered and self-satisfied, Young seems to approximate the man of the world he so delighted in condemning.

¹³⁷See Young's "Conjectures," p. 287.

¹³⁸Clark, pp. 195-196. See also Stephen, II, 363; and William Hazlitt, "Preface and Critical List of Authors from Select British Poets," The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, edited by A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London: J. M. Dent and Company, 1902), V, 375. For a most violent condemnation of Young's thinking see Eliot, especially p. 32.

CHAPTER VI

SHENSTONE'S PERSONAL RELIGION

Shenstone's religion I am tempted to term the religion of good taste. Religion in the full meaning of the term does not seem to have been an important factor in Shenstone's life, and one reason for its unimportance was, I believe, Shenstone's preoccupation with aesthetic interests. He purchased "Gerard upon Taste" and wrote his friend Richard Graves that he considered it an important subject, "for surely it is altogether unquestionable that taste naturally leads to virtue."¹ "Virtue," furthermore, "should be considered as a part of taste";² it is "nothing more than a notion consonant to the system of things. Were a planet to fly from it's [sic] orbit, it would represent a vicious man."³ When Shenstone writes Graves that he finds "substantial happiness...in an urn, a seal, a snuff-box, an engraving, or a bust,"⁴ he reveals, I suspect, his true nature.

Gentility was important to Shenstone. When Graves took orders, Shenstone wrote:

The chief aversion which some people have to orders is, what I fancy you will remove in such as you converse with. I take it

¹William Shenstone, Letters of William Shenstone, edited by Duncan Mallam (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1939), p. 378. Future references will be given as Letters.

²William Shenstone, "Of Men and Manners," The Works in Verse and Prose of William Shenstone, Esquire (London: J. Hughes, 1765), II, 205. Future references to selections from The Works will give only title of the selection, volume and page.

³"Of Men and Manners," II, 205.

⁴Letters, p. 46.

to be owing partly to dress, and partly to the avowed profession of religion. A young clergyman, that has distinguished his genius by a composition or two of a polite nature, and is capable of dressing himself, and his religion in a different manner from the generality of his profession, that is without formality, is certainly a genteel character.⁵

Persons "of vulgar minds,...with whom 'tis in vain that yr mind is furnish'd if yr walls are naked" were to be avoided, for "one loses much of one's Acquisitions in virtue by an Hour's converse with such as Judge of merit by Money &."⁶ Merit to Shenstone meant good taste, gentility, elegance.

Shenstone's "A Prefatory Essay on Elegy" admirably illustrates his peculiar mixture of virtue and good taste. "The most important end of all poetry is to encourage virtue."⁷ The elegy "should...tend to elevate the more tranquil virtues of humility, disinterestedness, simplicity, and innocence: but then there is a degree of elegance and refinement, no way consistent with these rural virtues."⁸ "If it should happen to be considered," he concludes,

as an objection with others, that there is too much of a moral cast diffused through the whole; it is replied, that he [Shenstone himself] endeavoured to animate the poetry so far as not to render this objection too obvious; or to risque excluding the fashionable reader: at the same time never deviating from

⁵Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁶Ibid., pp. 245-246.

⁷The Works, I, 18.

⁸Ibid., I, 19.

a fixed principle, that poetry without morality is but the blossom of a fruit tree.⁹

Shenstone's genius was for the moral and refined.

Shenstone's great concern for the genteel and elegant tempers all his conduct. He was by no means, however, a slavish follower of fashion. "Better be ridiculed for an awkward peruke," he wrote, "than be attacked on the score of morals; as one would rather be pulled by the hair, than stabbed to the heart."¹⁰ He had himself been ridiculed for wearing his own hair instead of a wig;¹¹ he was entitled to his pride on the score of morals. He objected to an epilogue which Cibber spoke, "in which he does not only make a bare confession, but an ostentation of all his follies...to a considering man there is something strangely disagreeable, to hear a scandalous life recommended by one of his age and as much satisfaction shewn in the review of it as if it had been a perfect galaxy of virtues."¹² He wrote, presumably to his young relative Tom Saunders,¹³ who was entering the navy,

As the best means...of promoting your Interests, you will need to concern yourself little further, than to deserve well; and this by an uniform Course of Diligence and Sobriety, by the

⁹Ibid., I, 26.

¹⁰"Of Men and Manners," II, 205.

¹¹Marjorie Williams, William Shenstone: A Chapter in Eighteenth Century Taste (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers Limited, 1935), p. 11.

¹²Letters, p. 14.

¹³Ibid., p. 333, n. 1.

strictest Attention to Honour and your Duty, and by a Conduct entirely free from all Artifice and Disguise.¹⁴

To a certain Miss M--, he wrote of "Parties of Pleasure":

...these Parties too often are hazardous; the mind once indulged in them, is apt to covet them too often; they are sometimes the Means of drawing a Female into improper Company; they encroach on Means and Time, neither of which, probably, can with Propriety be bestowed; they have their Source in Dissipation, are continually attended with Hazard, and too often end in the Worst of Mischiefs.¹⁵

He was similarly careful in his own conduct, though he was no Puritan. "Outwardly," says Marjorie Williams, "Shenstone was an orthodox eighteenth century churchman, somewhat afraid of the enthusiasm of the Methodists, of whom he speaks a little disparagingly.... He was a regular churchgoer at his own home, and at Ullenhall, when staying with Lady Luxborough."¹⁶ He stayed at Cheltenham to hear Mr. B-- preach a morning sermon, and commented on the regrettable poverty of country curates, which he thought "beneath the Dignity of the Profession."¹⁷ He borrowed from Lord Dudley sermons to read, and asked Graves had he seen the sermons on the Martyrdom and on the Fast-day, advising him, if he read either, to read the first.¹⁸ He even suggests that a set of sermons might be composed on the ordinary virtues extolled in classic

¹⁴Ibid., p. 333.

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 433-434.

¹⁶Williams, op. cit., pp. 133-134.

¹⁷Letters, p. 61.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 19.

writers, one to "be calculated for each season of the year; illustrating the wisdom, the power, and the benevolence of Providence."¹⁹

His relationship with "that very religious Tyrant our Parson,"²⁰ however, was not happy. In 1747 he wrote to Lady Luxborough, "The inhabitants of our Parish have presented our Parson at the Visitation; on which Occasion, I have given myself the generous Air of observing a strict Neutrality--in other Words, I am a Person unconcerned."²¹ About two years later, Shenstone lost the use of a much valued path through a neighbor's coppice because of advice the parson had given, whereupon he wrote to Lady Luxborough, "The Parson has renew'd his quarrel wth me which will probably last for Life."²² What the quarrel had been about is never revealed, but that the ill feeling continued is clear from his writing nearly a year later that

our Parson...attack'd last Sunday a most Noble & renowned Captain; in ye midst of his Sermon; taxing him wth snorting & sneezing to ye great scandal of him & his Congregation; comparing him to a Beast y^t perisheth; even to a Hog....At other times he has condescended to attack his neighbour Parson's Children of about four years old & under, telling them they were damn'd for being seen out of Doors on a Sunday & not reading in the Bible. Nay, at other times he hath stoop'd so low as to pun from his Pulpit; making Hales-owen and Hell's own to be in his opinion synonymous terms.²³

¹⁹"On Religion," II, 256-257.

²⁰Letters, p. 211.

²¹Ibid., p. 87.

²²Ibid., p. 163.

²³Ibid., pp. 211-212. Hales-owen is the village near the Leasowes.

Perhaps these comments are evidence that Shenstone attended church; however, one could hardly blame him if, with such dislike for his Parson, he did not!

On the whole, Shenstone's conduct seems simply that of a well-meaning, fairly average man. "I go to plays but seldom," he wrote his friend Richard Jago in 1742," because I intend no more to give countenance to the pit."²⁴ However, he continued to enjoy the theater moderately, for in 1744 he wrote, again to Jago, that the danger of pick-pockets was "of some weight in the opposite scale" when he was disposed to go to the playhouses oftener than he ought.²⁵ He had "a violent aversion to card playing" and was glad to find Graves gave cards "so little quarter."²⁶

If he can be said to have had a real fault in conduct, it would seem to have been his inability to live within his income. His poem to "Oeconomy" shows how sorely this troubled him, as does his exclamation, "What a pleasure it is to pay one's debts!"²⁸

Shenstone's difficulties with "oeconomy" seem to have resulted from his natural kindness, his desire to do good, and his indolence.

²⁴Ibid., p. 36.

²⁵Ibid., p. 71.

²⁶Ibid., p. 216.

²⁷The Works, I, 272-294.

²⁸"Egotisms," II, 143.

"The truth is," he once wrote to Graves, "my affairs are miserably embroiled, by my own negligence, and the non-payment of tenants. I believe I shall be forced to seize on one next week for three years and a half's rent, due last Lady-day; an affair to which I am greatly averse, both through indolence and compassion."²⁹ He could "no more than Brutus 'wring from the Hard Hands of Peasants their vile Trash by any Indirection' or even by all the Methods that are strictly legal."³⁰ He complains in "Elegy XXV" "how much his benevolence suffers on account of his humble fortune,"³¹ and states that

He wish'd for wealth, for much he wish'd to give;
He griev'd that virtue might not wealth obtain.³²

Yet he did not sufficiently desire money to sacrifice either his leisurely, pleasant way of life or his integrity. He had "the independence to decline an offer of two hundred pounds, delicately made by William Pitt, for improvements about the Leasowes."³³ He hoped that were he to take an annuity under Sir Robert Walpole, Jago's father would "write something to confirm me in my integrity, and to make me prefer him, and you, and

²⁹Letters, p. 118.

³⁰Ibid., p. 105.

³¹The Works, I, 102 ff.

³²"Elegy III," I, 35; see also "Egotisms," II, 141-142.

³³Alice Hazeltine, A Study of William Shenstone and of His Critics (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta, 1918), p. 24.

honesty, to lace, brocade, and the smiles of the ladies."³⁴

Though handicapped by his limited fortune, Shenstone had a real desire "of being somewhat more beneficial" in his sphere.³⁵ Miss Hazeltine quotes Graves as saying in his Recollections that Shenstone was "'never so happy as when he could do any little service to his relations, his friends, or his neighbors, by his advice, his influence, or even his purse, as far as his slender income would permit.'"³⁶ He befriended the cobbler-poet James Woodhouse, to whom Miss Hazeltine attributes the anonymous poem Shenstone: or the Force of Benevolence, dedicated: "'The man I celebrate was not a lord, but he was virtuous; his worldly possessions were not mighty, but he had humanity....Benevolence was his bosom's chiefest tenant.'"³⁷

Indeed, kindness seems one of Shenstone's "most attractive characteristics....On the back of one of Dodsley's letters to Shenstone, dated 28 June, 1756, is the pencil draft of a letter from the poet to Mr. Milward, in which the latter is asked to do his best for a certain Mary Rice who 'has a number of Children, and One whom I would recommend to L^d Foleys Hospital.'"³⁸ Shenstone was ready to acknowledge his "Share

³⁴Letters, p. 17.

³⁵Ibid., p. 152.

³⁶Hazeltine, pp. 15-16.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 16-18. See also Marjorie Williams, William Shenstone and His Friends (The English Association, Pamphlet No. 84, Great Britain, 1933), pp. 12-13.

³⁸Ibid., p. 12.

of y^e Obligation."³⁹ For another of his neighbors, Mr. Green, an excise man, he wrote a letter of recommendation;⁴⁰ to "an emaciated pale young woman, evidently in the last stages of consumption," he lent a key to his walks, "as she delighted in them."⁴¹ He revised and corrected Joseph Giles's poetry;⁴² he was of major assistance to Thomas Percy.⁴³

His neighbors accused him of lenity and of screening a robber because he failed to prosecute a man found stealing fish from his pond.

"It is true," Shenstone wrote,

I would rather have given more than the Value of them, to have prevented my finny Friends being disturbed...it is also as true, that, in my first Warmth, on the Report that the Fellow had bruised the poor Creatures to Death against the Stumps and Roots of Trees, I could not only have delivered him over to Justice, but have been almost induced to become myself his Punisher; but when that Warmth submitted to cool Reflection, I felt it impossible to resist his A gument, of having a Wife with five Children at Home, and not a Doit to procure them a Meal.⁴⁴

One smiles at his tender sympathy for the fish, but remembers his injunction: "One should not destroy an insect, one should not quarrel with a dog, without a reason sufficient to vindicate one through all the courts

³⁹Letters, p. 337, n. 2.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 334.

⁴¹Williams, William Shenstone and His Friends, p. 12.

⁴²Williams, William Shenstone: A Chapter in Eighteenth Century Taste, p. 95.

⁴³Irving Churchill, "William Shenstone's Share in the Preparation of Percy's Reliques," Publications of the Modern Language Association of America, LI (Dec, 1936), 960-974.

⁴⁴Letters, pp. 430-431.

of morality."⁴⁵ It was a maxim with him "to admit of an easy reconciliation with a person, whose offence proceeded from no depravity of heart." Even when it did so, his intent was "to forego, for my own sake, all opportunities of revenge: to forget the persons of my enemies as much as I was able, and to call to remembrance, in their place, the more pleasing idea of my Friends."⁴⁶

So far as Shenstone's ethics and conduct go, then, his ethics seem to have been the ethics of good taste, and his conduct that of a kindly, well-intentioned man. His poetry was written to inspire virtue; his conduct was orthodox--he is open to no criticism on grounds of irreligion. However, there is little if any evidence in either his ethics or conduct that Shenstone was motivated by religious feeling. In fact, he seems to lack the religious motive.

One's impression of Shenstone as "elegant and amiable"⁴⁷ but lacking in religious depth is substantiated when one searches his letters and writing for evidence of interest in theological questions and discovers virtually a "total lack of theological opinion."⁴⁸ Dodsley wrote of

⁴⁵"On Men and Manners," II, 240. Nevertheless, it should be remarked that Shenstone himself was guilty of the sport of coursing. Letters, pp. 68-69.

⁴⁶"Egotisms," II, 144.

⁴⁷A. R. Humphreys, William Shenstone: An Eighteenth-Century Portrait (Cambridge: The University Press, 1937), p. 121.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 21.

Shenstone that "though he had the most awful notions of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God,...in his private opinions he adhered to no particular sect, and hated all religious disputes."⁴⁹ Never is there the slightest evidence of any interest in or concern for supernatural sanctions. Nor does Shenstone show much interest in the efforts of the deists to base faith on pure reason. Religious questions, by and large, simply did not concern him.

"Perhaps," said Shenstone, "we should not pray to God to keep us stedfast in any faith; but conditionally, that it be a right one."⁵⁰ Peasants, he knew, could be happy at death in the assurance of salvation, but "a person of distinguished parts and learning has no such advantages; friendless, wavering, solitary, and, through his very situation, incapable of much assistance."⁵¹ But Shenstone's great lack, to my mind, is his unawareness of the need of assistance. Like the deists, he believed that all is well in this best of all possible worlds. Like Thomson, he lacked a profound sense of the evil of the world.⁵² To Shenstone, it "was obvious that God, who created the world, intends the happiness and perfection of the system he created."⁵³

⁴⁹"Preface," I, 6.

⁵⁰"On Religion," II, 255.

⁵¹Ibid., II, 262-263.

⁵²See Letters, p. 185.

⁵³"Of Men and Manners," II, 214.

All that man need do is to be virtuous, and all will be well. "To the virtuous deed a train of pleasing sweets succeed";⁵⁴ "virtue makes us happy daily, and removes the fear of death from our lives,"⁵⁵ though that fear is perfectly natural and is necessary for the preservation of the individual.⁵⁶ "Deviation from received opinion" cannot be called sin; "if it appear that a man's opinion has happened to misplace his duty...he will, perhaps, appear guilty before none, beside an earthly tribunal."⁵⁷

Much beyond this happy complacency, Shenstone seems incapable of going. "The best notion we can conceive of God," he reflects, "may be, that he is to the creation what the soul is to the body."⁵⁸ "What is man," he asks, "while we reflect upon a Deity, whose very words are works; and all whose works are wonders."⁵⁹ But of any relation of man with God he seems incognizant. "Prayer is not used to inform, for God is omniscient: not to move compassion, for God is without passions: not to shew our gratitude, for God knows our hearts. -- May not a man, that has true notions, be a pious man though he be silent?"⁶⁰ This statement alone, it seems to me, shows Shenstone's inadequate realization of the spiritual life. One who

⁵⁴"The Progress of Taste," I, 209.

⁵⁵"On Religion," II, 257.

⁵⁶"Of Men and Manners," II, 214.

⁵⁷"On Politics," II, 135.

⁵⁸"On Religion," II, 265.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

does not pray has abandoned all effort to discover the will of God for himself. Shenstone once wrote John Scott Hylton, "Let me beg y^r Prayers as for a Person troubled in Mind, Body, & Estate,"⁶¹ so that he was perhaps not totally incognizant of the value of prayer, but his appreciation of it seems, to my mind, shallow. Shenstone felt that

we cannot discover the designs of our Creator. We should learn then of brutes to be easy under our ignorance, and happy in those objects that seem intended, obviously, for our happiness: not overlook the flowers of the garden, and foolishly perplex ourselves with the intricacies of the labyrinth.⁶²

This may be wisdom; it seems evasion.

Occasionally, Shenstone shows a slight interest in a controversial question. He opposed the idea that God punishes societies as a whole, arguing that while

it is, indeed, true that human vengeance must act frequently in the gross...it does not appear so evident, that an omniscient and omnipotent Being, who knows the secrets of all hearts, and is able to make a distinction in his punishments, will judge his unhappy creatures by these indiscriminate and imperfect laws.⁶³

He speculates briefly on the question of a general versus a particular Providence, saying that "it seems no unworthy idea of Omnipotence, perhaps, to suppose he at first constituted a system, that stood in no need either of his counteracting or suspending the first laws of motion."

⁶¹Letters, p. 337.

⁶²"On Writing and Books," II, 176-177.

⁶³"On Religion," II, 260-261.

"But after all," he continues,

the mind remains; and we can shew it to be either impossible, or improbable, that God directs the will? Now whether the divine Being occasions a ruin to fall miraculously, or in direct opposition to the ordinary laws of nature, upon the head of Chartres-- or whether he inclines Chartres to go near a wall whose center of gravity is unsupported, makes no material difference.⁶⁴

He fancies the allusion to a tree's falling "will hardly countenance" the "presumption" of divines, who "understanding this text too literally, pretend, by a little interposition in the article of death, to regulate a person's everlasting happiness."⁶⁵

Shenstone's scorn for the sycophant, however, is truly admirable. "It is not now," he writes with some bitterness, "'We have seen his star in the east,' but 'We have seen the star on his breast, and are come to worship him.'"⁶⁶ Likewise he scorns the rich man who, "adjoining to his country-seat, erects a chapel, as he pretends to God Almighty, but, to his own vain-glory; furnishes it with luxurious conveniences, for prayers that will never be said. The poor man kneels by his bedside, and goes to Heaven before him."⁶⁷ Shenstone at least was without sham in his religion.

⁶⁴Ibid., II, 266.

⁶⁵Ibid., II, 255.

⁶⁶Ibid., II, 258.

⁶⁷Ibid., II, 256.

If Shenstone may ever be said to be intolerant, he was toward Roman Catholicism. In his opinion, "The pope's wanton excommunications; his capricious pardon of sins; his enormous indulgences, and other particulars of like nature, shew that (whatever religions may practice cruelty) it is peculiarly the church that makes a jest of God Almighty."⁶⁸

The schoolmistress

would oft deplore
 The times, when truth by popish rage did bleed;
 And tortious death was true devotion's need;
 And Simple faith in iron chains did mourn,
 That nould on wooden image place her creed;
 And lawny saints in smould'ring flames did burn:
 Ah! dearest Lord, forefend, thilk days should e'er return.⁶⁹

His poem "The Ruin'd Abby; or, The Effects of Superstition" is chiefly remarkable for its intolerance toward the Roman religion. He condemns the abbey:

These were thy haunts, thy opulent abodes
 O superstition! hence the dire disease,
 (Ballanc'd with which the fam'd Athenian pest
 Were a short head-ach, were the trivial pain
 Of transient indigestion) siezed mankind.
 Long time she rag'd, and scarce a southern gale
 Warm'd our chill air, unloaded with the threats
 Of tyrant ROME.⁷⁰

The one emotion Shenstone ever expresses that might be termed a religious feeling is that of gratitude. "I often think seriously," he wrote his friend Graves,

⁶⁸Ibid., II, 259.

⁶⁹"The Schoolmistress," I, 325.

⁷⁰The Works, I, 297. See also "Elegy XXI," I, 87.

that I ought to have the most ardent and practical gratitude (as the Methodists choose to express themselves) for the advantages that I have: which, though not eminently shining, are such, to speak the truth, as suit my particular humour, and consequently deserve all kind of acknowledgement. If a poet should address himself to God Almighty, with the most earnest thanks for his goodness in allotting him an estate that was over-run with shrubs, thickets, and coppices, variegated with barren rocks and precipices, or floated three parts in four with lakes and marshes...to my apprehension, he would be guilty of no absurdity.--But of this I have composed a kind of prayer, and intend to write a little speculation on the subject; this kind of gratitude, I assuredly ought to have, and have.⁷¹

Again he writes, "I have great reason to be thankful for more happiness than I deserve."⁷² Since Shenstone felt that, "Of all the moral Virtues, Gratitude is sure the most beautiful,"⁷³ he at least meets his own standards.

The only other emotion discoverable is a rather philosophic acceptance of life. After his brother's death he wrote Graves,

I know but too well that I discovered upon the occasion, what some would call, an unmanly tenderness; but I know also, that sorrow upon such subjects as these is very consistent with virtue, and with the most absolute resignation to the just decrees of Providence.⁷⁴

He admonished Lady Luxborough: "Evils there are in y^e world which affect individuals, & also societies; but which are, no doubt, connected with y^e good of the Whole, & must remain as long as that Whole continues."⁷⁵

⁷¹Letters, p. 56.

⁷²Ibid., p. 376.

⁷³Ibid., p. 4.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 251.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 185.

He had so "settled a notion of the proportionate mixture of pleasure and pain in this life" that he expected "one to succeed the other as naturally as day and night."⁷⁶ "Our existence here," he believed, "is at least one part of a system."⁷⁷ Shenstone accepted the world as it is without questions and without complaints.

Beyond this gratitude and philosophical outlook, I can find little trace of anything that can be called evidence of spirituality. Shenstone cultivated his ferme ornée; he wrote and rewrote his letters to his friends; he achieved a certain social success. But the quality of his conduct, his thinking, his spirit, is not memorable. He was a man of taste first and foremost; apparently it was not good taste to be greatly concerned about the salvation of one's soul. Shenstone, at least, seems for the most part to have taken his spiritual welfare for granted.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 113. See also pp. 31-32, p. 91.

⁷⁷"Of Men and Manners," II, 193.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to arrive at an understanding of the personal religion of Johnson, Gray, Thomson, Young, and Shenstone individually. It may be well, in conclusion, to draw together the separate threads.

In theology Johnson was found to adhere closely to the doctrine of the Established Church, but to retain, nevertheless, a tolerant and common sense view of most questions of doctrine. His position is perhaps best defined as sensible: he was tolerant of other doctrines, generous toward the fallen, impatient with scruples. Upright in conduct, holding himself as an example for others, he had an unmistakable desire to serve God. Yet his spirit seemed excessively gloomy; his fear of death and dread of his own unworthiness of salvation almost morbid. Otherwise practical rather than emotional in his religion, one misses in Johnson what William James has described as the second birth.¹ Perhaps because of his distrust of "enthusiasm," he never won his way to a serene trust in God.

Gray, while reserved and uninclined to speak out on matters of religion, seems also to have been a sincerely religious man. He rebuked sharply those who attempted to controvert religious belief, and, motivated at least in part by religious spirit, devoted his life to the

¹The Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 165, 187-188.

pursuit of knowledge and virtue. Blessed with implicit faith and trust in God, upright in character, Gray, like Johnson, commands admiration and respect.

By contrast with Johnson and Gray, the other men seem superficial. Thomson was a good-natured, kindly man, easy-going and optimistic, who drifted from the Calvinistic faith into which he was born, becoming largely indifferent to the claims of revealed religion. Interested in new scientific developments, believing in the powers of reason to conquer human shortcomings, Thomson had a rosy-visions faith in human perfectibility and no real sense of the power of evil. His religious optimism left him free to live as he pleased, untroubled by doubts as to the salvation of his soul.

Young is to me a perplexing figure. He was completely orthodox in his theology, insisting on the necessity for a belief in revealed religion and in the fulfillment of the prophecies; he was eminently respectable though decidedly worldly in his interest and conduct; yet he seems to lack any real spirituality. His theology seems narrow and harsh; and his spirit worldly, eager for place and applause, self-centered and self-satisfied. No doubt perfectly sincere in his theological beliefs, he seems, nevertheless, to have used his religious beliefs as a means of bettering himself in the world.

Shenstone, finally, seems to have been for the most part indifferent to religion. A practicing Anglican, he had faith of a sort, but no discoverable interest in questions of theology; his conduct seems simply that of a well-meaning, kindly man. First and foremost a man of

taste, with a happy faith that one had only to be virtuous for all to be well, he was on the whole unconcerned by religious matters.

It is interesting to note that in theology four of the five men were practicing Anglicans, while Thomson was a deist. None was either agnostic or atheistic. Shenstone was virtually indifferent to theological questions; Gray was relatively untroubled about them, though he rebuked sharply those who attacked the position of the church. Young alone seems really narrow in theological outlook; his attitude toward Catholicism and toward sinners reveals by contrast Johnson's essential breadth of view.

In the conduct of their lives, all five men were reasonably good citizens and good Christians. Johnson and Gray alone, however, give one any sense of a sustained aspiration toward the good life. Gray's withdrawal from the world and pursuit of knowledge and virtue was perhaps motivated largely by a fastidious pride, but it was seconded, certainly, by conscience. In Johnson, the voice of conscience is even louder. Johnson definitely wished his daily life to be pleasing in the sight of God, his work to be acceptable to God.

Finally, in spiritual quality, only Johnson and Gray really command respect. Shenstone's strongest religious emotion seems to have been a mild sort of gratitude; Thomson's optimism lacks profundity; Young seems worldly and shallow. Gray had the quiet serenity and complete trust in God that Johnson lacked, but Gray seems fundamentally to have been more philosophical than religious in spirit. Johnson and Johnson alone impresses one as having both a fully developed moral

sense and a deep spiritual awareness.

Obviously, the five men have little in common. Yet at least two movements of the period seem to have concerned them all. The first, deism, drew active opposition from Johnson, Gray, and Young, and support from Thomson. The Anglicans opposed the deists' disregard for revealed religion and their assumption that the revelation of God in the natural world was sufficient for religious proofs, whereas Thomson found his greatest inspiration in the deity revealed in nature. Secondly, the group have a common bond in their hostility toward "enthusiasm." The four Anglicans especially distrusted and suspected religious emotion. In this distrust, I believe, lies a great part of the reason that the greatest of them failed to achieve a real sense of union with the divine. Perhaps I am in error, but I agree with William James that "feeling is the deeper source of religion."² Religious experience does not lie in the province of the reason, and the unwillingness of the eighteenth century to accept religious feeling as respectable is, in my opinion at least, responsible in part for the final limitations of these men in both their religion and their poetry.

²The Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 431.

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