

**FAMOUS BLUE-STOCKINGS**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

BEHIND THE VEIL. Illustrated by AUSTIN  
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MRS. MONTAGU

FROM AN ENGRAVING AFTER THE PORTRAIT BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A.

# FAMOUS BLUE-STOCKINGS

BY  
ETHEL ROLT WHEELER

WITH SIXTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

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# CONTENTS

PROEM: THE AGE OF THE BLUE-STOCKINGS . . . . .	I
THE BLUE-STOCKING . . . . .	16
MRS MONTAGU . . . . .	28
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ OF THE <i>BAS BLEU</i> . . . . .	63
MRS DELANY . . . . .	78
PRECURSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES OF THE BLUE-STOCKINGS . . . . .	105
MRS THRALE (PIOZZI) . . . . .	117
CARDS AND CONVERSATION . . . . .	143
MRS VESEY . . . . .	157
THE SQUARING OF THE CIRCLE . . . . .	178
MRS CHAPONE (HESTOR MULSO) . . . . .	189
THE BLUE-STOCKINGS IN PICTURES . . . . .	210
FANNY BURNEY (MADAME D'ARBLAY) . . . . .	222
BLUE-STOCKING COTERIES . . . . .	246
ELIZABETH CARTER . . . . .	263
THE BLUE-STOCKINGS IN THE GARDEN . . . . .	286
HANNAH MORE . . . . .	299
THE BLUE-STOCKINGS AND FEMININE OCCUPATIONS . . . . .	320
CONCLUSION . . . . .	332
INDEX . . . . .	341



## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

MRS MONTAGU . . . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
From an engraving after the portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.	
	FACING PAGE
THE NOSEGAY MACCARONI (LORD VILLIERS) . . . . .	4
From the Maccaroni Magazine, 1772.	
SAMUEL JOHNSON . . . . .	62
From an engraving after the painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds, P.R.A.	
MRS DELANY . . . . .	78
From the painting by John Opie, R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery.	
QUEEN CHARLOTTE . . . . .	102
From the painting by Thomas Gainsborough, R.A., at South Kensington.	
MADAME GEOFFRIN . . . . .	110
From the portrait by Chardin in the Musée de Montpellier. Photo : Braun, Clement & Co.	
JULIE DE L'ESPINASSE . . . . .	114
From a water-colour sketch by Carmontelle in the Musée de Chantilly.	
MRS THRALE . . . . .	118
From the drawing by George Dance, R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery.	
THRALE PLACE: AFTERWARDS KNOWN AS STREATHAM PLACE . . . . .	124
From an engraving by Ellis dated 1787.	
SAMUEL RICHARDSON READING THE MANUSCRIPT OF SIR CHARLES GRANDISON TO HIS FRIENDS . . . . .	192
After a coloured drawing by Miss Highmore.	



THE LADY'S LAST STAKE (Mrs Thrale when a young girl sat as model for the Lady)	214
After the painting by Hogarth.	
VAUXHALL GARDENS	217
From a caricature by Thomas Rowlandson.	
MISS BURNEY (MADAME D'ARBLAY)	222
From a portrait by Edward Burney.	
ELIZABETH CARTER	264
From the painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence, P.R.A., in the National Portrait Gallery.	
HANNAH MORE	299
From an engraving by A. Halbert after the picture by Opie in 1786.	
MRS MONTAGU'S HOUSE IN PORTMAN SQUARE, SHOWING CHIMNEY SWEEPS DANCING BEFORE IT	328
From the water-colour by T. Hosmer Shepherd in the British Museum.	



# FAMOUS BLUE-STOCKINGS

## PROEM

### THE AGE OF THE BLUE-STOCKINGS

**H**OW shall we account for the fascination exercised by the Eighteenth Century? Scholars recently living moved so familiarly along its ancient streets that the present seemed but a phantom beside that past reality. Its magnetism still draws us—its voices still call: what is the secret of its lure?

There are, of course, certain obvious replies. The Eighteenth Century is near enough for us to understand it; it has left behind peculiarly intimate records, and but few wild flights or puzzling speculations disturb its homogeneous life. Its sameness of philosophy, its rigidity of characteristic, circumscribe it within a traversable compass, which compass is marked out in minute detail. It has, furthermore, definite and unmistakable insignia, special properties of costume. We can walk the streets of Eighteenth-century London, and listen to the conversation of its citizens, and visit its pleasure gardens, and attend its assemblies with a satisfaction afforded by no other age. The people we meet are solid flesh and blood; no misty gaps leave blanks

in our reconstruction of the town; and the talk, clear and distinct, flows on without any tantalising breaks, without any sudden darts into an impossible empyrean.

But this is only to say that the Eighteenth Century is extraordinarily accessible: and we do not necessarily wish to pass through a door because it happens to be open. We should soon weary of peeping in if it were merely the pageant that drew us—the mere curiosity of this artificial world of powders and patches, with its sedan-chairs swinging along under the creaking sign-boards, and its bewigged and besatined beaux. There must be the attraction of deeper, of stronger qualities, if we are to be induced across the threshold.

Such qualities the Eighteenth Century possesses. And first we would name the robust, underlying vitality of the age—intensity of life, that most thrilling of all qualities, which in its higher manifestations makes great thought, great art, great literature, and which, even on the lower planes, works obscurely towards some nobler end. So the vitality of the Eighteenth Century, concerning itself chiefly with material things, exhausting itself on trifles, and worshipping physical prowess in its least admirable forms, yet stimulated the great intellectual blossoming of the succeeding era.

Eighteenth-century England seems to have felt an access of new vigour, following after the exhaustion of the civil wars, and quickened by the

military successes on the Continent and by the breaking away from French influence. Much of this vitality was ugly in its effects, because material in its manifestations—how ugly, how full of zest is shown by the caricatures of Gillray and Rowlandson. This is the century of the cult of the prize-fighter, of the zenith of cock-fighting, of hard drinking and hard gaming. Horace Walpole writes (1770): "The gaming at Almack's, which has taken the *pas* of White's, is worthy the decline of our Empire. The young men of the age lose five, ten, fifteen thousand pounds of an evening there." And Hannah More relates how, the very first time certain magnificent gambling rooms in St James's Street were opened, "the enormous sum of sixty thousand pounds was lost!" This is the century when "destructive breakfastings" at "Ranelaghs of all sorts" were followed by days consumed in disorderly riots, until, as Mrs Carter tells us, in 1752 a bill was introduced into the House to restrain the opening of such places until five in the afternoon. The superabundant energy of the age "exuberated into all manner of excesses and pranks—into a rage for amusement, a mad pursuit of that "well-dressed, pale-faced, racketting hag, Diversion," into an extravagance of dress which equals the amazing fashions of Richard II.'s day. The memoirs of the time, and of the Blue-Stockings in particular, shed many interesting sidelights on the prevailing follies. We find Mrs Carter

censuring, in 1772, the "artificial nosegays" worn by the "macaroni gentlemen." She is severe. "Such a composition of monkey and demon as at one half of the day appears to be studying all the tricks of the most trifling and contemptible foppery, and in the other is raving and blaspheming at a gaming-table, must be an aggregate of all the follies and all the crimes that a worthless head and a profligate heart can collect from all parts of the globe."

Mrs Delany and Hannah More inveigh against the high head-dresses and other "foolish absurdities."

Mrs Barbauld writes: "Your waist must be the circumference of two oranges, no more. You must erect a structure on your head, gradually standing to a foot high, exclusive of feathers, and stretching to a penthouse of most horrible projection behind, the breadth from wing to wing considerably broader than your shoulder, and as many different things in your cap as in Noah's ark."

But, as a matter of fact, this extravagance of fashion was, like many of the other excesses, largely the result of high spirits; and high spirits are consistent with the most sober common-sense. It may safely be said that no other century has been so distinguished by this admirable if uninspiring quality. Common-sense in every department of life—common-sense in marriage, common-sense in religion—this was the ideal aimed at and generally achieved. Now though it must be confessed that a surfeit of common-sense may be rather

a stodgy diet, yet after some of the bubble-sustenance of the present era, it has a wholesome and grateful taste. The sound common-sense of the Eighteenth Century undoubtedly appeals strongly to us in certain moods. We who have supped on wild honey and strange berries, and even, it may be, on heaven-sent manna, yet return gladly at times to the homely rice-pudding, on which nourishment the Eighteenth Century thrived. It is eminently soothing to pass for a while into this "whatever is, is right" atmosphere; to be in the company of people who are thoroughly satisfied with life as it is; people practical and kindly, often witty and sometimes wise; people undisturbed by dark gusts of passion, by riotous imaginings, by aching aspirations; people inimical to emotion of every sort, since emotion is fatal to the goddess whom they serve, the goddess of common-sense.

Common-sense divorces love from marriage, and spirituality from religion. In a century dominated by common-sense, marriage is a question of calculation, and religion a question of morals. Now morals can be treated of as effectively by the layman as by the cleric; and as the clergy were indifferent and corrupt, the task of preaching was undertaken *con amore* by the majority of the writers of the time. Never was so didactic a period of literature! With Addison, a gentle chider of manners and morals, and Swift, flaying the age with the



scalpel of his unsparing satire at the beginning of the century, and Hannah More at the end, writing her *Strictures on the Manners of the Great*; and in the middle the heroic figure of Dr Johnson—heroic in spite of all its blemishes and peculiarities—castigating contemporary vices and follies, and leaving behind him in his *Prayers and Meditations*, the record of a soul, pious and sincere, struggling ceaselessly to fulfil the very practical duties that life laid upon him. Even Wesley and Whitfield combated Sin rather than Scepticism, and dwelt on the moral rather than on the spiritual side of religion. The Blue-Stockings, too, generally speaking, advocated and practised the doctrine of Salvation by Works. And so to this age belong various experiments in philanthropy—the Foundling Hospital opened in 1741, Sunday schools and infant schools established later in the century, records of charitable institutions and private charity—above all, under the last head, the record of what Macaulay so unforgivably calls Dr Johnson's "menagerie"—composed of those blind and unhappy and outcast creatures with whom Dr Johnson shared his home, giving them, not merely a roof, but respect and affection, and bearing uncomplainingly with their temper and their ingratitude.

Thus the Eighteenth Century has a call for the heart as well. Humanity beat strong under all its frippery, and it possessed something of that larger tolerance, that deeper pity, that wider benevolence,

which are stimulated only by an effort to relieve the sufferings and ignorance of others.

And yet as vitality without ideality led to the Spleen, the Vapours, the Hyp—those vague Eighteenth Century complaints which fill so large a portion of the memoirs: so religion without spirituality induced in some temperaments a gloom so profound that it tended to madness. We think of Johnson himself, and his periods of darkness; we think of Cowper's grave "where happy saints may weep amid their praying." Are we to put down the melancholy of the devout in this century solely to disease? Is it not possible to suppose that the spirit, prisoned in too rigid barriers, pined for a larger and more radiant air? In order to be sane, it is true, we must keep warm touch with humanity; but there are some natures that cannot be sane unless they touch the stars as well.

We have next to inquire why this particular century, whose fascination we have been endeavouring to analyse, was chosen to witness the birth of the Blue-Stockings, and to see for a brief period, the Salon established in England. We have suggested that the Eighteenth Century was a vital century, a human century in all senses of the word, its distinguishing quality of common-sense, which made it practical, didactic, satisfied,—blossoming on rare occasions into the surpassing flower of wisdom. Animation, sympathy, delight in one's immediate surroundings—these are the essence of

social life. Moreover, the Eighteenth Century was a time of leisure, of prosperity, of expansion, a time when the middle class was slowly building itself up into a solid force. By 1750 the monarchical struggles that had rent England in twain were settled once and for all, and Sir Robert Walpole had assured to the nation, by hook or by crook, a quarter of a century of peace. Leisure gave opportunity for the cutting and polishing of personality; prosperity allowed scope for the setting of the gem in brilliant entertainment. The cult of self terminated, on the one hand, in the Beau, on the other, in the Wit—both social types, and both types peculiar to this stage of our history; and in the evolution of the Wit, conversation became an art, and correspondence, literature. A shrewd criticism of life, a clever criticism of books, were the points whence talkers started quarry for their arrows. There was a complete absence of intense preoccupation, which drives the mind back upon itself; there was no glamour of love or of nature or of religion, to mesmerise and make solitary; the ease and lightness of social intercourse had never to be broken by abysses of too serious or too profound speculation. Under these favourable conditions the Salon came to its fruition, and Conversation was enthroned Goddess of Society.

[ In innumerable memoirs and volumes of correspondence the carefully cultivated self of the Blue-Stockings lies prisoned in an intricacy of words.



If we have the patience to plunge into these volumes, and to remain almost passive in their depths, the aroma of personality slowly frees itself, and through the leisured self-revelations of the writers themselves, and through the leisured portraits of them by their friends, we get very near the springs of being. This essence has, of course, to be enmeshed in a cage of facts, or it will evaporate altogether; and it is hard to make a framework frail and yet secure enough to contain the wit of Mrs Montagu, the charm of Mrs Delany, the sympathy of Mrs Carter, the sensitiveness of Fanny Burney, the "uncommon good sense" of Mrs Chapone, the "sylphery" of Mrs Vesey, the vivacity of Mrs Thrale, and the noble energy of Hannah More. The epigram must lack the flash of living eye that gave it point; the sensitiveness must want the delicate blush that lent it living bloom. But these women were so much alive that the imagination, though it misses the final details of portraiture, can at least see them sweeping by in the robes they wore, brushing with their skirts most of the great figures of the time. The swish of their satins and silks made a considerable noise in the ears of their contemporaries, and the age has generally been acclaimed one of extraordinary women.

In proof whereof, let us take the general testimony of certain representative men—of Burke, of Dr Johnson, of Dr Burney, of Horace Walpole.

Burke, writing to Fanny Burney, in praise of *Cecilia*, says, "In an age distinguished by producing extraordinary women, I hardly dare to tell you where my opinion would place you amongst them." Horace Walpole would have Hannah More admitted into that Fifteenth Century Paradise of Ladies—the "Cité des Dames." Dr Johnson, having dined at Mrs Garrick's in the society of Mrs Carter, Hannah More and Miss Fanny Burney, exclaimed, "Three such women are not to be found; I know not where I could find a fourth, except Mrs Lenox, who is superior to them all."<sup>1</sup> *Boswell*: "Might not Mrs Montagu have been a fourth?" *Johnson*: "Sir, Mrs Montagu does not make a trade of her wit; but Mrs Montagu is a very extraordinary woman; she has a constant stream of conversation, and it is always impregnated; it has always meaning." Then there are those verses that appeared in the *Herald* newspaper, almost certainly the composition of Dr Burney. The writer begins by affirming that it is women's fame, and not women's shame that should be proclaimed: and he proceeds to name the illustrious women of the time. The verses are doggerel, but the criticism is not inapt:

"Hannah More's pathetic pen

Painting high th' impassioned scene;

<sup>1</sup> Her best remembered work is the "Female Quixote," describing the adventures of a young lady who sees the marvellous and romantic in every encounter. Dr Johnson seems to have been one of the few in his appreciation of Mrs Lenox's talents and virtues.

Carter's piety and learning,  
 Little Burney's quick discerning ;  
 Cowley's neatly pointed wit  
 Healing those her satires hit ;  
 Smiling Streatfield's iv'ry neck,  
 Nose and notions—à la Grecque !  
 Let Chapone retain a place,  
 And the mother of her Grace  
 Each art of conversation knowing  
 High-bred, eloquent Boscawen ;  
 Thrale, in whose expressive eyes  
 Sits a soul above disguise,  
 Skilled with wit and sense t' impart  
 Feelings of a generous heart.  
 Lucan, Leveson, Greville, Crewe ;  
 Fertile-minded Montague,  
 Who makes each rising wit her care  
 And brings her knowledge from afar !  
 Whilst her tuneful tongue defends  
 Authors dead and absent friends ;  
 Bright in genius, pure in fame,  
 Herald, haste, and these proclaim !”

The roll of names has been quoted in full, and of these, eight at least have survived to this day as distinct personalities ; six are studied separately in the following pages, and we shall have occasion to refer again to most of the other ladies named.

If we are to follow Mrs Chapone's method, and memorise our subject by appropriate adjectives—(Egypt, *the nurse and parent of arts and superstitions* ; Persia, *shocking despotism and perpetual revolutions* ; Ancient Greece, *freedom and genius* ; Scythia, *hardiness and conquest*)—we shall find

characteristics more distinctive implied in the female administration planned out by Dr Johnson. Our Blue-Stockings are to hold the following places:—

CARTER—for Archbishop of Canterbury ;  
 MONTAGU—First Lord of the Treasury ;  
 MRS CHAPONE—Preceptor to the Princes ;  
 HANNAH MORE—Poet Laureate. . . .

“ ‘And no place for me?’ cried Mrs Thrale.

“ ‘No, no,’ replied Dr Johnson, ‘you will get into Parliament by your little silver tongue, and then rise by your own merit.’

“ ‘And what shall I do?’ exclaimed Fanny Burney.

“ ‘Oh, we will send you for a spy, and perhaps you will be hanged!’ rejoined the Doctor, with a loud laugh that a French writer has compared to that of a rhinoceros.”

The consideration in which women were held is also evidenced by that scheme for a paper to be conducted entirely by women, the *Feminiad*, anticipating by over a century the idea of *La Fronde*. But it took shape only in the fertile brain of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Maria Edgeworth’s father, and never reached fruition.

Thus, as a testimony to the merit of the Blue-Stockings and the importance of the movement, we have the sincere admiration of Burke, the half-mischievous homage of Johnson, the cultured

allusions of Horace Walpole, and the ready courtesy of Dr Burney. There are many other tributes besides. Further testimony of the notice that the Blue-Stocking excited is afforded by the cognomens she was given, frequently of classic origin. We have Montagu Minerva, the Queen of the Blues, the Mæcnas of Hill Street; Streatham's Hebe, Mrs Thrale, the dispenser of Ambrosia to Johnson; Sappho, the appellation bestowed by Lord Lyttleton on Mrs Carter; anyone more unlike Sappho it is impossible to conceive. "Pretty Fanny" is Dr Johnson's name for Fanny Burney, and "Saint Hannah" Horace Walpole's name for Hannah More. Among her friends Mrs Vesey is universally known as "The Sylph." Testimonials these, however fantastic, however exaggerated, however tinged with ridicule, to Intellect, to Grace, to Beauty, to Goodness: and in some cases, to a genuine friendship that had very little admixture of gallantry. Indeed, the sincerity of its friendships is another quality by which the Eighteenth Century wins us; friendships principally between men and men in the first half, and principally between women and women in the second half, of which latter friendships these pages will afford much evidence.

The Blue-Stockings we have chosen to study were all probably acquainted with one another. A newspaper paragraph of 1781—a little incorrect, as newspaper paragraphs were even apt to be then—



states that "Miss Burney, the sprightly writer of the elegant novel *Evelina*, is now domesticated with Mrs Thrale in the same manner that Miss More is with Mrs Garrick, and Mrs Carter with Mrs Montagu." But the ladies so coupled, though not permanently living under one roof, were bound by ties of intimacy and affection. Mrs Carter, whose attachments were strong and lasting, was also the friend of Mrs Chapone and of Mrs Vesey: while Mrs Vesey and Hannah More were linked in tender association. Mrs Delany, who belongs to an older generation, knew Mrs Montagu well, and was thrown into familiar contact with Fanny Burney.

Into the circle of these ladies' lives many other illustrious personages pass, besides Johnson and Burke and Horace Walpole. The tragic figure of Dean Swift briefly crosses our sight; Garrick appears, in his gayest and most kindly mood; Wesley, writing ardent epistles that contain unconscious admiration for his correspondent; Cowper with his graceful verses immortalising Mrs Montagu's feather-hangings. The painters are here, too, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Hogarth: George III. and Queen Charlotte are present for a space of time on the stage. Outside events find only a faint echo in these annals: thus the Rebellion of '45 gives Mrs Montagu's husband the opportunity of saying that he discovers in her the spirit of a Roman lady; Mrs Thrale's house in the Borough

is threatened during the Gordon Riots ; and the French Revolution favours the marriage of Fanny Burney by impelling the *Emigrés* to England. But indeed, it is not on the political but on the social side that the record left by the Blue-Stockings is so rich : we may learn in minute detail the life of the times, find out what people thought, what they talked of, what they wrote of ; discover how they passed the day, surprise their occupations, their amusements, the hours of their meals, and of what these meals consisted : and all the while be in the company, sometimes delightful, sometimes soothing, but always pleasant, of women distinguished in their own age, the vigour of whose personality has survived down to the present day.

## THE BLUE-STOCKING

WORDS have histories as well as nations and individuals. Some are born to greatness, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. Some put off their purple for beggar's robes, or linger in the intermediate stage of the suburban drawing-room. The history of the word *Blue-Stocking* happens to be one of considerable interest, and contains elements of both tragedy and farce. It has been acclaimed with homage; it has been pelted with ridicule. As we think upon its varying fortune, its life-history shapes itself before our eyes; and personifying the word *Blue-Stocking*, we see it pass through the stages of its career in a kind of vision.

Out of a misty origin the word *Blue-Stocking* emerged about the year 1756 luminous, aristocratic, two-sexed: It bore the light of learning, and this was enshrined in a crystal lamp of wit which threw forth radiance on every hand. Wit was the medium through which its learning played—wit, which is a social quality, and which creates social centres. So the word *Blue-Stocking* walked freely abroad with lively step, debonair, self-confident, attracting by Its effulgence other wandering lights until all over London there were little corruscations of



brilliance. Such was the word *Blue-Stocking* in the days of Its glorious youth ; a force at once social and intellectual, not solitary but gregarious ; studious largely with the object of shining in intercourse, and as happy burning the midnight oil of the closet as the waxlights of festivity. But evil was to befall this fantastic word which we are embodying for the moment as a personality. First the lamp of crystal cracked a little, and the light of learning burned a trifle smoky. So early as 1781 It glimpsed the enemy that was to bring about the eclipse of all Its glories, for in that year the first shadow of another word, *Pedantry*, threw a dimness over Its robes—*Pedantry*, which divorces Wit from Learning, which divorces Humour from Learning, and when Wit and Humour are gone, Vanity, Opiniation, Egoism take their place. At the first hint of this ominous accusation some of the more sensitive votaries of the word *Blue-Stocking* took alarm, and fled incontinent ; and the mockers who had been kept at a distance by Its dazzle now drew hesitatingly forward, with sly jests at the cracked globe and the dimming flame. As the shadow of the word *Pedantry* darkened, and the crowd pressed closer, the fear of ridicule grew on the unfortunate *Blue-Stocking*, and at last, at the end of the century, It fled from the haunts of gay society and sought unfrequented ways. Solitary, outcast, shunned by the world and shunning the world, the word *Blue-Stocking* underwent a

period of cruel exile. The briers tore off Its jewelled singing-robcs, a harsh wind blew through the tattered garments, and Its hair grew longer and longer, as the word became more and more identified with the image of woman. Then the crystal lamp of wit split suddenly in two, leaving the flame of learning burning bright but unprotected in an uncongenial air. The word *Blue-Stocking*, that had sought the wilds as a hermaphroditic It, two-sexed, emerged, one-sexed, a She, the radiance, the beauty, the charm of personality, lost under the blackness of that dire reproach of *Pedantry*. Out of the wreck of the sparkling and embroidered past She has saved but one possession—a possession that was little more than an accessory then, but which is now her only treasure—the possession of learning. Next comes the time when the *Blue-Stocking* accepts the changed conditions; she binds up her hair neatly and plainly; indifferent to the graces of dress, her only object is to make the useful and the sensible subserve the higher preoccupations; indifferent to the opinion of the world, she pursues her studies in the quiet of her own chamber. Who can prophesy her future adventures? Her neatness may wear into shabbiness, and her shabbiness decline into hopeless poverty: or there may be yet a great destiny before her—an emergence into a new splendour, intellectual or social. Her future is mere speculation.

But her past as described above is no mythical history ; it can be attested in most of its particulars by documentary evidence. These documents we proceed to cite.

The birth of the word *Blue-Stocking* is wrapped, as we have already hinted, in obscurity. Before its advent the term "*Wit*" was used to connote that combination of intellectual and social qualities afterwards embraced by *Blue-Stocking*. Fanny Burney, for instance, speaks at different times of Mrs Delany, of Soame Jenyns and others as belonging to the "old wits." The Eighteenth Century had a useful word for "*Wit*" used in a derogatory sense—"Witling"—he who carried his wit to excess, to absurdity. The witling has little weight, and is reckless in his shooting. "People of real merit and sense hate to converse with witlings," says Mrs Montagu, "as rich merchant ships dread to engage privateers, they may receive damage, and can get nothing but dry blows." It appears from the same lady that the witlings had several affectations in common with the *Précieuses Ridicules*. She writes in 1754: "Mr Godschall's house is generally full of poetic misses, who are addressing each other by the names of Parthenia, Araminta, etc., with now and then a little epistle to Strephon or Damon. I was uneasy when they were at home, for fear they should enter into the précieuse character of Mrs Godschall." These affectations inspired an English play, *The Witlings*, written, curiously

enough, by one unacquainted with Molière's *Femmes Savantes*. This comedy of Fanny Burney's belongs to the year 1779; condemned by Dr Burney, and by the Burney mentor, Mr Crisp of Chessington, it never saw the light, and no copy of it now exists. "The fatal knell, then, is tolled, and 'down among the dead men' sink the poor *Witlings*," writes Fanny Burney. We are inclined to resent the summary shipwreck of this play, which, even if unworthy to sail the high seas of literature, might have afforded some valuable treasure-trove for this and cognate studies. Both critics seem to have been far too much concerned with the possible effect of failure on the sensitiveness of the author. The only salvage consists in these few lines of Fanny Burney's: "So good-night, Mr Dabbler! Good-night, Lady Smatter, Mrs Sapiant, Mrs Voluble, Mrs Wheedle, Censor, Cecilia Beaufort, and you, you great oaf, Bobby!"<sup>1</sup>

"Wit" and "Witling" were a convenient pair of words; it is unfortunate that "Blue-Stocking" had to serve indifferently as a synonym for either.

Now we have to try and explain the extraordinary application of the word *Blue-Stocking*, to a certain set of wits and to a certain intellectual and social movement.

<sup>1</sup> This system of nomenclature, deriving from allegory, was very popular in Restoration and subsequent comedy. Congreve, in *The Double Dealer*, has Foresight and Scandal and Tattle and Lady Plyant. We all remember Croker in *The Good-Natured Man*, and Sir Benjamin Backbite and Lady Sneerwell in *The School for Scandal*.

Blue stocking, worsted, implies morning dress, unconventionality, as opposed to black-stocking, silken hose, evening dress, ceremony. On this point, at least, almost all contemporary evidence is agreed. But considerable conflict prevails as to who was the originator of the *mot*, and who the wearer of the historical blue stockings. The most popular version connects the inception of the word with the grandson of Bishop Stillingfleet—one Benjamin Stillingfleet—a botanist of note, an athlete who had in his youth made the ascent of Mont Blanc, a poet, a philosopher. "His dress was remarkably grave," says Boswell, "and in particular it was observed that he wore blue stockings." Boswell, indeed, is the most ardent adherent of the Stillingfleet derivation; he makes Stillingfleet's intellectual attainments give importance to the mere accident of his dress. "Such was the excellence of his conversation, that his absence was felt as so great a loss, that it used to be said, 'We can do nothing without the *blue stockings*,' and thus by degrees the title was established." Sir William Forbes, in his *Life of Beattie*, supports this view.

As to the invention of the *mot*, it is ascribed more particularly to Mrs Montagu or one of her circle, and to Mrs Vesey. The first mention of the word "Blue-Stocking" occurs in the year 1756, when Stillingfleet was staying at Mrs Montagu's country house, Sandleford. A friend, writing jestingly to Mrs Montagu, says: "Monsey swears he



will make out some story of you and him before you are much older ; you shall not keep blew stockings at Sandleford for nothing." Dr Monsey was an admirer of Mrs Montagu's. To him she writes, 1757 : " I assure you our philosopher (Stillingfleet) is so much a man of pleasure, he has left off his old friends and his blue stockings and is at operas and gay assemblies every night." The connection between Blue-Stocking and Philosophy is here closely indicated. Madame d'Arblay attributes the saying to the " well-known, yet always original, simplicity " of Mrs Vesey. " Don't mind dress. Come in your blue stockings," she is reported to have remarked to Stillingfleet.

Mrs Carter's nephew and biographer refuses to accept the Stillingfleet origin on the ground that Stillingfleet died in 1771, long before the assemblies assumed the Blue-Stocking designation. He substitutes " the mistake of a distinguished foreigner," who was told that dress was so little regarded at these functions that he might come in his blue stockings. This, we are informed, was Mrs Carter's own explanation of the matter ; more important, it is the one put forward by Hannah More, the historian of the movement, in the advertisement to her poem *Bas Bleu*. This poem was not published till 1786, but it was handed about in manuscript many years before.

Another version ascribes the derivation to a different source. Madame de Polignac, one of the

leaders of French Society, following the fashion in Paris at the time, appeared at Mrs Montagu's assembly wearing blue stockings, and, according to this account, her example was eagerly followed by English ladies of importance. Although Lady Crewe, herself a "Blue-Stockinger," offers this explanation, and although we feel that a feminine origin is more appropriate to the term than a masculine one, yet this view has not sufficient ground to support it against the evidence already quoted. When all is said, we have to admit that the Blue-Stockings of the worthy Benjamin Stillingfleet remain the heraldic badge of those assemblies, at which, according to the very masculine account of Mr Boswell, "the fair sex might participate in conversation with literary and ingenious men, animated by a desire to please."

The Blue-Stocking, then, is now born, a member of intellectual and indeed of fashionable society, from the very first belying its implication of morning dress. Stillingfleet's blue stockings seem to have been the single exception in a coterie characterised by silk stockings and diamonds; and that this exception should have imposed the name, has been a source of considerable confusion.

The term was at first used indifferently for men or women—"We can do nothing without the blue stockings," says Boswell, meaning Stillingfleet. Hannah More, too, writes in 1788 of Dr Blagdon: "A new blue stocking and a very agreeable one":

and both men and women compose the dramatis personæ of the *Bas Bleu*. The very fact that the word was so equivocal in origin and so misleading in meaning, made it appropriate to the pun, the conceit, the quip, the crank. Mrs Chapone writes to Miss Burney: "If you will give me your company next Thursday evening, you will meet Pepys, Boscawen, etc., so you may put on your blue stockings,"—*i.e.* come prepared for intellectual conversation. All kinds of tricks, both grammatical and fantastical, were played upon the word *blue*, signifying *learned*. Fanny Burney writes of "a whole tribe of blues with Mrs Montagu at their head"; she invents this "epithet of blueism." Hannah More speaks of there being at a party "everything delectable in the blue way," and Boswell tells us that the lively Miss Monckton "used to have the finest *bit of blue* at the house of her mother, Lady Galway." Mrs Piozzi gives a new turn to the phrase in 1789, when smarting under the persecution she had received on account of her marriage: "Charming Blues! blue with venom, I think . . ." But, as was perhaps to be expected, the most ingenious conceits come from the pen of Horace Walpole. The connoisseur writes in these words describing a Blue-Stocking meeting "in imitation of Mrs Vesey's Babels:" "It was so blue, it was quite mazarin blue." Not only *blue*, but *stockings* suggests to him an image. Writing to Hannah More in 1784, he says: "When will



you *blue-stocking* yourself, and come amongst us? Consider how many of us are veterans; and though we do not trudge on foot according to the institution, we may be out at heels—and the heel, you know, Madam, has never been privileged.”

The first connection of Pedantry with Blue-Stocking occurs in 1781. Mrs Thrale writes in her diary *Thraliana*: “We met the Smelts, the Ords, and numberless *blues* there (at Webber’s drawings of the South Sea rarities), and displayed our pedantry at our pleasure.” She has taken no alarm yet; but Horace Walpole, writing in 1788, is aware that there are mockers abroad. “For me, though I am numbered among the blue stockings, my stockings are so very thin, that not a thread aches at the laugh at them.” In the very same year the more sensitive Fanny Burney begins to shiver at the cold wind of criticism. To some extent at least, the word Blue-Stocking had now become synonymous with Pedant: and Fanny Burney, once proud of the name—“Who would not be a blue-stocker at this rate?” (1780)—in 1788 emphatically disowns it: “I am always ready enough to enter into any precaution to save that pedantic charge.”

Thus the Blue-Stocking, whose birth is recorded in 1756, felt in 1788 the first shadow of her doom. We intend to confine ourselves to the history of the Blue-Stocking in her youth and her prime, the Blue-Stocking who, because of her intellectual and

social gifts, or because of her literary achievements, was a hostess or a member of the Blue-Stocking coteries. Our objective is, therefore, the latter half of the Eighteenth Century, concentrating in the years between 1770 and 1785. We shall follow the modern usage of the word *Blue-Stocking* and devote our attention principally to the *women* of the movement.

There are three famous Blue-Stocking hostesses to study, Mrs Montagu, Mrs Thrale, and Mrs Vesey. Certain contemporary records give to other ladies an equal eminence. Hannah More, for instance, substitutes the Hon. Mrs Boscawen for Mrs Thrale as wearer of the triple crown—a judgment which Boswell would have eagerly endorsed. Instead of Mrs Boscawen, Wraxall puts Mrs Ord. But generally speaking, Mrs Montagu, Mrs Vesey, and Mrs Thrale are the accepted leaders of the movement. Mrs Montagu was acclaimed by Dr Johnson, “Queen of the Blues,” and her parties were generally allowed to eclipse all other lights. To frequent them “was to drink at the fountain-head,” says Lady Louisa Stuart. Mrs Thrale, according to Fanny Burney, had long been set up as a rival candidate to Mrs Montagu for colloquial eminence, and each of them thought the other alone worthy to be her peer. As to Mrs Vesey, the third famous hostess, “she dreamed not of any competition”; but to her Hannah More dedicated her poem the *Bas Bleu*, thus assigning to her

the first place. By means of this poem, and other contemporary verse and prose, we have chosen for examination the lives of some of the most famous guests and friends of these hostesses—women distinguished in various walks in life, and particularly in literature, education, and philanthropy: Mrs Hannah More,<sup>1</sup> whose least claim is to be the chronicler of the movement; Mrs Elizabeth Carter, the translator of *Epictetus*; Mrs Chapone, author of *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*; Fanny Burney, the creator of *Evelina*; and Mrs Delany, the friend of Swift, who, though born in 1700, lived to see the birth, the brilliance, and the decline of the Blue-Stocking assembles.

The title *Mrs* was universally adopted by unmarried ladies in this century when they reached middle life. Mrs More and Mrs Carter were unmarried.

## MRS MONTAGU (1720-1800).

“**B**EAUTY, Wit, Wisdom, Learning, and Virtue united (to say nothing of Wealth).” So runs the grandiloquent tribute paid by Lord Lyttleton to Mrs Montagu.

These terms evince the extravagance of an admirer ; but contemporary records fall little short of them in enthusiasm. Dr Johnson, before his quarrel with Mrs Montagu, calls her “Minerva cast in Virtue’s mould.” “She is not only the finest genius, but the finest lady I ever saw,” writes Hannah More. The Earl of Bath said she was the most perfect being created—an opinion endorsed by Edmund Burke. To her virtue, to her wit, to her wealth, there is universal testimony. But in learning she was inferior to Mrs Carter ; in social gifts, “the art of kneading the mass well together,” to Mrs Vesey ; in charm to Mrs Delany. By what qualities did she obtain her undisputed position as “Queen of the Blues”—how did she manage to capture so securely the imagination of her time ?

It is not enough to be a lady of excellent capacities ; in order to achieve a wide renown, these must have effective display. Two traits in Mrs Montagu’s character contributed to this end ;

her tireless vivacity, which kept her intellectual gifts continually flashing before men's eyes, and her love of magnificence, which provided a stately setting for her personality. Her extreme restlessness of mind and body earned her in early years the nickname of "Fidget"; her nervous energy preyed upon her physical frame, so that in later life she became not only Mrs Montagu "the witty," but Mrs Montagu "the lean." Yet despite this excessive liveliness, the quintessence of her personality as distilled from the memoirs, is distinction; which, combined with wit, gives a rare and impressive charm. A large fortune sustained her love of magnificence. She moves across spacious and arresting backgrounds—the furniture, the decoration of the rooms in which she entertained have come down to us in ample description, and the fine house she built for herself still stands in Portman Square (No. 22). Those who did not share in her lavish hospitality were struck by her picturesque charities; every Mayday she gave a feast to the boy chimney-sweepers on the lawn in front of her town house. Of these annual feasts we shall speak in more detail later on.

Mrs Montagu's Wit, Mrs Montagu's Wealth—these were the two undisputed possessions which enabled her to assume the rank of "Queen of the Blues."

Lord Lyttleton, in his eulogium, has shown us the fair side of the medal—though there are other



qualities that might be engraven upon it—benevolence, and constancy in friendship ; but the medal has a reverse. However, its worst feature, perhaps, is vanity—a love of display, a desire to shine, a willingness to accept flattery. When we consider Mrs Montagu's upbringing and career, it seems that such defect in character was almost inevitable.

Mrs Montagu's early training, as well as her natural disposition, fitted her for the position she was afterwards to enjoy as acknowledged leader of cultivated society. From her very babyhood her intellect was unnaturally stimulated by the admiration of parents and relatives, and her own ardour of nature made her only too eager to excel. Her childhood and girlhood held in germ, and even in flower, the qualities that were to give her fame later on among her contemporaries.

Elizabeth Robinson (afterwards Mrs Montagu) was born in 1720 at York. Her father had estates in Yorkshire, and when Elizabeth was seven her mother inherited the property of Coveney, in Cambridgeshire, and of Mount Morris, near Hythe. The family moved first to Cambridgeshire, and then to Kent, where most of Elizabeth's early life was spent.

She was a child of uncommon sensibility and acuteness of understanding, as well as of great beauty. When she was at Cambridge, Dr Middleton, the author of the *Life of Cicero*, who was her grandmother's second husband, "was in the habit of requiring from her an account of the learned



conversations, at which in his society, she was frequently present." Her father was proud of the distinguished notice she excited, and endeavoured in every way to stimulate her quickness. He himself was a man of social disposition, of excellent conversational powers, and of great artistic gifts—indeed we are told that he excelled most of the professed artists of his day in landscape. Married at the age of eighteen, he felt himself obliged, in the interests of his twelve children, to spend most of his time in the country. And there he was constantly afflicted with the Hyp, which may be regarded, in some sense, as the Eighteenth Century designation for boredom. When the dulness became unbearable, he would burst into invective, or order Elizabeth to put a double quantity of saffron in his tea—saffron being a specific against low spirits. The tedium of existence, as well as pride in his daughter's powers, led Mr Robinson to encourage her vivacity in every way.

In her girlhood she had a large capacity for enjoyment, and the frequent visits to Bath, to Tunbridge Wells, to London, together with the entertainments provided by the countryside, quite satisfied her desires. She was as fond of dancing as if a "tarantula had bit her," and we read of balls, of expeditions to towns eight miles off to see a play, supper at the inn afterwards, and coach overturns on the way home—all described with

exceeding zest in letters to her friend, afterwards Duchess of Portland. Elizabeth had become acquainted with this friend, Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley, six years her senior, on her visits to Cambridge, "noble, lovely little Peggy," as Matthew Prior had once called her.

"My noble, lovely little Peggy,  
Let this my First Epistle, beg ye  
At dawn of morn and close of even  
To lift your heart and hands to heaven."

Lady Margaret married the Duke of Portland in 1734, and Elizabeth remained her lifelong friend. The friendship of the Duchess of Portland with Mrs Delany was even more intimate.

These early letters of Elizabeth Robinson are remarkable. They display an unusual degree of observation, and are vivid with fertility of fancy. When she was only twelve years old she wrote in this style: "This Cambridge is the dullest place, it neither affords anything entertaining or ridiculous enough to put into a letter. Were it half so difficult to find something to say as something to write, what a melancholy set of people should we be who love prating!"

At fourteen her imagination took wing, so that we find her, with reference to a letter that a footman had forgotten to post, expressing herself thus:—

"If my letter were sensible, what would be its mortification, that, instead of having the honour

to kiss your Grace's hand, it must lie confined in the footman's pocket, with greasy gloves, rotten apples, mouldy nuts, a pack of dirty cards, and the only companion of its sort, a tender epistle from his sweetheart 'tru till Deth.'"

Of her pen she writes in 1739:—

"It has given flight to as much foolishness as when it was in the wing of a goose, but it sings its last so melodiously one would imagine it was taken from a swan."

These extracts are culled almost at hazard.

In her youth her appearance is thus described: she had brown hair and blue eyes of peculiar animation and expression, with dark high-arched eyebrows, and a brilliant complexion. She was of the middle stature and stooped a little, says her nephew, "which gave an air of modesty to her countenance, in which the features were otherwise so strongly marked as to express an elevation of sentiment befitting the most exalted condition." Her brother Matthew, who was seven years older than herself, after praising her delightfulness in company, speaks with even greater esteem of her powers of study and thought, and adds that except the tribe of her lovers, she has no more assured admirer of her person and her accomplishments.

In 1742, at the age of twenty-two, Elizabeth married Edward Montagu, cousin of that Edward Wortley Montagu who had for wife the lively Lady Mary. Edward Montagu was twenty-nine

years older than his wife. He was a gentleman of Yorkshire, possessed of great wealth, Member of Parliament for Huntingdon, and an eminent mathematician, who maintained a character of high integrity in public and in private life. She had for him, as he for her, a deep regard and esteem, but her heart remained untouched throughout life by love in its romantic sense. To her cousin William Freind, who married them, she writes: "I have the honour and happiness to be made the guest of a heart furnished with the best and greatest virtues, honesty, integrity, and universal benevolence, with the most engaging affection to everyone who particularly belongs to him. No desire of power, but to do good; no use of it, but to make happy." When Mrs Montagu offers to join her husband in the North at the time of the 1745 Rebellion, he writes in reply of the love and honour and affection he has always had for her, and adds that he now adores her for her greatness of mind shown in a letter which might have well become a Roman lady. Mrs Montagu shared in her husband's political life, and in all his concerns; he always consulted her on any matter of importance. But he did not join in her social interests; he was a man of many occupations, and we all know the immuring tendency of mathematics. It was not until after his death in 1775 that Mrs Montagu gave her most splendid entertainments. Her little boy was born in 1743, but to her great

sorrow he died of convulsions when teething. In 1758 Mr Montagu received a large accession of fortune by the death of a relative, and we find Mrs Montagu writing to Mrs Carter: "I thought in fortune's as in folly's cup still laughed the bubble joy; but though this is a bumper, there is not a drop of joy in it, nor so much as the froth of a little merriment. . . . In about a week we shall set out for the North, where I am to pass about three months in the delectable conversation of stewards and managers of coal-mines, and this, by the courtesy of avarice, is called good fortune . . . while in truth, like poor Harlequin in the play, I am acting a silly part *dans l'embarras des richesses*."

This strikes a note which seems peculiarly modern in our present age of sick hurry and divided aims. And in a letter to the Hon. Mrs Boscawen, Mrs Montagu writes of going to so many shops to buy what she did not want, to so many houses to visit people she did not care for, to so many places to learn news she was not interested in, that for herself and her friends no hours remained. "What," she goes on, "is the antidote or cure of the fatal poison of this city tarantula, so much worse than that of the fields, as the dancing is constant, and the giddiness perpetual, and not to be cured by a reasonable degree of exercise; for we continue this figure-dance in regular confusion till Holbein's universal partner takes us by the hand."



Indeed Mrs Montagu possessed in a considerable degree the modern temperament, with its excessive nervous energy, its craving for excitement, and its consequent periods of lassitude and exhaustion. She was fond of the country, and admired its beauties; in a letter to Lord Lyttleton we meet with an appreciation quite unusual in that century. She describes a magnificent sunset seen on a journey into Berkshire, and then tells how she "watched the rising of every star till the whole heaven glowed with living sapphires; then I chose to consider them no longer separately as glowing gems, but lost myself in worlds beyond worlds, and system beyond system; till my mind rose to the great Maker of them all . . .!"

But despite her devotion to reading, she soon wearied of the country—"mirth here is reckoned madness, gaiety is idleness, and wit a crying sin," she writes. Country society is constantly brought under the lash of her satire; and of the people of Yorkshire she says that they "are drunken and vicious, and worse than hypocrites, profligates; I mean more offensive, and I know not whether less pernicious. It is wonderful to see people so little admirable so much admired"; which remark gives rise to this characteristic reflection, "Censure is bitter indeed, but it is a wholesome bitter, like wormwood, that preserves the wary breast from the infection and contagion of corrupt and vicious times." The country, however, gave leisure for



the cultivation of her mind and of her friendships, which could hardly have ripened in the pressure of London life.

Before we come to the assemblies at which Mrs Montagu shone as queen, let us consider for a moment her claim to the title of "blue stocking" on its intellectual side. Six volumes of her correspondence are available for examination, two published in 1810, two in 1813, and two in 1906, with additional matter. These six volumes contain her letters up to 1760 only, but some letters of a subsequent date appear in Dr Doran's volume on Mrs Montagu. A great deal of material remains as yet unedited. The published correspondence, however, affords ample evidence of Mrs Montagu's character, tastes and occupations, and of her learning and critical gifts.

Her letters written before she was twenty-three are remarkable for their powers of visualisation, of conceiving character and consequence, powers which did not develop with maturity or she might have rivalled the novelists of her day. Her imagination, over-stimulated in youth, instead of gaining strength, flagged, and finally sank to earth, though indeed her entertainments continued to hold something of its vivid colouring. In her letters the old fertility of fancy became as time went on somewhat too prolix ; prolixity is, indeed, the sin of her correspondence. "I can spin a thread so long as it seems neither to have end nor beginning, which

serves to give my gentle correspondents an idea of eternity." Clever sayings still abound, witty comments, apt parallels, but they have the dryness of hard intellect, and her relation of political events is marked by an extreme tenuity. She herself is painfully aware of the decline in her "picture-drawing faculty." In 1760 she writes to Lord Lyttleton of the time when her mind "was incessantly forming landscapes or history pieces, real portraits or grotesque forms," and she goes on: "If any person had then advertised for a companion to travel through the deserts of Siberia or Africa, I would have recommended my imagination to them as one which would show cities where even a cottage did not appear, or, like Moses' wand, would bring a river from a rock. . . . But from a painter this poor mind is sunk into a mere journalist."

Her early letters hold in solution her *Essay on Shakespeare*, and contain the germ of her three *Dialogues of the Dead*. They show an unusual intimacy with Shakespeare's work, the quotations are unhackneyed and apposite, and now and again we get the very cadence of his phrases. . . . "I fell into a vexation, and from thence into a chagrin, and from thence into a melancholy. . . ." It is clear that she was not merely acquainted with the poets, but that she had absorbed something of their poetry. When her sister was attacked by small-pox, Elizabeth was sent to a retired farmhouse for

better security, and she writes, "As to the master of this house, he is indeed to a tittle Spenser's meagre personage called Care." In an amusing skit sent to the Duchess of Portland, in which she feigns herself dead with grief at not hearing from her friend, she dates from "Pluto's Palace of darkness visible." "Pluto inquired into the cause of my arrival, and upon telling him it, he said *that* lady had sent many lovers there by her cruelty. . . . I went to Ixion for counsel, but his head was so giddy with turning, he could not give me a steady opinion. . . . Tantalus was so dry he could not speak to be understood. . . ." Her *Dialogues of the Dead* were undoubtedly elaborated from this.

Her reading was wide and pursued with enthusiastic interest. She was acquainted with Latin, and knew the Greek classics through translation, often Italian; as a girl we find her expatiating with eagerness on the characters of Cicero and Atticus; as a woman we listen to her discussing with acumen the choruses in Sophocles. She was well-read in English literature; there is a passage in her letters in which she uses the little read play, *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, in most apt illustration. Dr Young says, in his *Letter on Original Composition*, that genius is but a needle, and learning a bottle of hay, and so it must be long and diligently sought. "The Doctor was so positive in his assurance," writes Mrs Montagu, "that I set about seeking for my genius; and as I had bottled very little hay,

hoped to find it presently ; but I am no nearer the matter. Alas ! what good would it do me if I should find it, as Gammer Gurton does her needle, in the last act of the drama." Sir Philip Sidney provokes her flippancy, and causes her to reveal a characteristic attitude of mind. "Surely it is a pity two such excellent geniuses in Queen Elizabeth's days as Spenser and Sir Philip should write only of such feigned and imaginary beings as faeries and lovers. . . ." She revels in absurd parodies of Sidney's style. Contemporary literature, both English and French, is passed under review ; her remarks on *Clarissa Harlowe* are sound, and Voltaire early became the object of her attack. Her criticisms are not brilliant, nor suggestive, nor profound, but honest and sensible, the fruit of a cultivated mind. Her reading embraced a liberal education in literature, and in her case it stimulated, instead of stifling, her social gifts. The knowledge she gained became immediately available for what she calls the "sal volatile of lively discourse"—ready for immediate application to men and things. And so we find Gilbert West writing to her :—

"I much approve, therefore, of your diligence in furnishing your magazines with large stores of ammunition of all sorts for conversation from authors of various kinds ; among which, as your victories will give occasion to many rejoicings, I hope you will not fail to provide a good quantity

of French squibs and crackers; you had, if you have not wasted it, a sufficient store of wildfire of your own."

Here is a snatch of conversation between Dr Johnson and Mrs Thrale on Mrs Montagu, as reported by Fanny Burney:—

*Mrs Thrale*: Certainly she is the first woman for literary knowledge in England, and if in England, I hope I may say in the world.

*Dr Johnson*: I believe you may, madam. She diffuses more knowledge in her conversation than any woman I know, or indeed, almost any man.

Mrs Montagu's *Essay on Shakespeare* should serve as the final touchstone of her learning.

She tells us in her Introduction that two motives impelled her to write this essay—her great admiration for Shakespeare's genius, and her still greater indignation at the treatment he had received from a French wit—namely, Voltaire, who called his tragedies monstrous farces, and attributed barbarism and ignorance to the nation for admiring him.

The centuries succeeding Shakespeare's death had treated Shakespeare's plays as acting plays, with scant reverence—Dryden himself made garbled versions of them, and Colley Cibber's "adaptions" have become the proverbial type of grotesque travesty. The commentators, however, approached the subject in a more becoming spirit. The general tendency of their criticism was to do full justice to the natural genius or "intuition" of



Shakespeare, and to attribute his many and glaring defects to the rudeness and immaturity of his age. Dryden, in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), Nicholas Rowe in his *Preface to the Works* (1709), Pope in his *Preface* (1725), Warburton in his *Edition* (1747), Dr Johnson in his *Preface* (1765)—all these critics, with widely varying acumen, support this view. On the other hand, Shakespeare was violently attacked, notably in 1674, for his violation of the Rules of Aristotle, especially for his neglect of the Unities of Action, Place and Time. To this attack Dr Johnson made a sound and conclusive defence ; but Voltaire thought well to revive the charge, and press it home with all the vigour of his pen.

Such was the state of Shakespeare commentary when Mrs Montagu wrote her *Essay*, published in 1769. She brought one qualification to her task beyond that of previous commentators ; she was just a little sensitive to those gusts of fresh and intoxicating air which were beginning to blow out of the future. This is proved by her unconventional appreciation of the spontaneity of Scotch songs . . . “to me it seems there are no love-verses that seem suggested by the heart and softened in the language like some Scotch songs. I cannot put Petrarch and all his stars, suns and moons in competition with them, when they do but attempt to describe their mistress ‘like a lily in a bogie.’” She could stray, too, with delight, from



the trim parterres of contemporary literature into the wild scenery of Macpherson's *Ossian*—"I hear Lord Marchmont says our old Highland bard is a modern gentleman of his acquaintance; if it be so, we have a living poet who may dispute the *pas* on Parnassus with Pindar and the greatest of the ancients." In the Vale of Glencoe, it is not the thought of the Massacre, but the thought of Ossian that moves her. "I wish'd Ossian would have come to us and told us a tale of other times. However, imagination and memory assisted, and we recollected many passages in the very places that inspired them. I staid three hours listening to the roaring stream, and hoped some ghost would come on the blast of the mountain and show us the three grey stones erected to his memory." And so the exquisite order and neatness of Corneille's drama, with all its delicately adjusted mechanisms, failed to make entire appeal to her; she saw too clearly the working of the machinery. She remarks that it is easy enough to preserve the unities where the drama consists in a mere series of conversations. Indeed, she carries her reprisal boldly into the enemies' camp, and her defence of Shakespeare's genius resolves itself largely into an attack on the French drama as represented by Corneille. Her indignation against Voltaire gives that faint touch of passion which is enough to vitalise the essay.

She uses the comparative method—always an effective one. Shakespeare is ranged against Cor-

neille on the one side and the Greeks on the other. She draws analogies from the Elizabethan dramatists, especially Ben Jonson. The most interesting section of her work, "On the Præternatural Beings," contains a capable and suggestive survey of the use of the Supernormal in ancient and modern drama. Her most remarkable passage deals with the Celtic traditions which have been conveyed down from antiquity through the Druid and through the bard—traditions which animated the general scenery of nature "by a kind of intelligence"—"the reader will easily perceive what resources remained for the poet in this visionary land of ideal forms." In these days when we pride ourselves on our sensitiveness to the Celtic Renaissance, it comes as a shock to find a paragraph like the following in this brown-leaved Eighteenth Century tome: "That awe of the immediate presence of the Deity, which, among the vulgar of other nations, is confined to temples and altars, was here diffused over every object. The Celt passed trembling through the woods and over the mountain, and near the lakes, inhabited by these invisible powers; such apprehensions must indeed—

Deepen the murmur of the falling floods,  
And shed a browner horror on the woods;

give sadder whispers to every whisper of the animate or inanimate creation, and arm every shadow with terror."

Voltaire, whom she disliked as a dangerous free-thinker, laid himself open to attack as a careless translator of Shakespeare's works. On this point, and others equally vulnerable, she strikes home with much sureness and dexterity. But Voltaire's loud-voiced proclamation of Shakespeare as an inspired barbarian, which swelled under provocation to a denunciation of him as an "intoxicated savage," was not to be drowned by her lady-like protest; though a translation of part of her Essay into French five years later, and a new translation of Shakespeare's works, the two first volumes of which appeared in 1776, did much to shake Voltaire's standing as a critic of English literature. It was in Paris in 1776 that Mrs Montagu made the following famous retort, various versions of which are given in the Memoirs of the day. Voltaire, in a letter to d'Argental, had spoken of Shakespeare's works as an "énorme fumier." Mrs Montagu, alluding to Voltaire's unscrupulous borrowings from our dramatist, remarked, "ce malheureux fumier avait engraisé une terre ingrate."

Unfortunately Mrs Montagu's Essay is chiefly remembered by Dr Johnson's pronouncement upon it—a pronouncement wholly unfair, since Dr Johnson had not read all the book. Sir Joshua Reynolds said, in conversation, of the essay: "I think that Essay does her honour," to which Johnson replied: "Yes, sir; it does *her* honour, but it would do nobody else honour. I have, indeed, not read it all.

But when I take up the end of a web, and find it packthread, I do not expect by looking further to find embroidery." Such conclusion is, of course, absurd, since many writers are remembered merely by reason of a little embroidery worked upon a web of packthread—we follow page after page of dun-coloured web for the sake of reaching some brilliant glint of intellect, some remote flash of soul. Such illumination is, indeed, not to be found in this essay, but had Dr Johnson pursued his reading of it, he would possibly have modified his opinion as to the universality of the packthread, and allowed that there were some strands of fine silk woven in with the uniformity—good sense, insight into character, a clear and balanced judgment.

Cowper's opinion of the *Essay on Shakespeare* was very high. Writing in 1788 to Lady Hesketh, he says, "The learning, the good sense, the sound judgment, and the wit displayed in it, fully justify not only my compliment, but all compliments that either have been already paid to her talents, or shall be paid hereafter."

Mrs Montagu also contributed three Dialogues to Lord Lyttleton's *Dialogues of the Dead*, which volume perhaps suggested Walter Savage Landor's *Imaginary Conversations*. Mrs Montagu's dialogues are between—Hercules and Cadmus; Mercury and Mrs Modish; Plutarch, Charon, and a Modern Bookseller. They lack a certain lightness of touch, essential to the success of such trifles,

and the satire is somewhat obvious; but they are well written. In the Second Dialogue, Mrs Modish, a fashionable lady, describes to Mercury how her time is occupied. Here is her description of *bon ton*: "It is the child and the parent of jargon. It is—I can never tell you what it is; but I will try to tell you what it is not. In conversation it is not wit; in manners it is not politeness; in behaviour it is not address; but it is a little like them all. It can only belong to people of a certain race, who live in a certain manner, with certain persons, who have not certain virtues, and who have certain vices, and who inhabit a certain part of the town." The Third Dialogue reads peculiarly modern,—it is an attack on the contemporary taste in literature; the Bookseller explains to Plutarch that he cannot sell Plutarch's *Lives* or other such works; what people want is the *Lives of the Highwaymen*.

It is a little piquant to find this fashionable lady satirising ladies of fashion, this writer of erudite essays so severe on the tendencies of literature. It is the more piquant when we glance at the contemporary verdict on Mrs Montagu, which does not allow her the quality of aloofness, of removing herself above the turmoil and looking at it dispassionately. In all the pen portraits that have been left of her, she stands as a self-conscious centre round which her world revolves. There is a little vanity in her attitude, a little effort in her



brilliance. Let us pass now from the lady in her boudoir to the lady in her salon, and inquire what qualifications were possessed by Mrs Montagu to queen it as the leader of the intellectual society of her day.

"Beauty, Wit, Wisdom, Learning and Virtue united (to say nothing of Wealth)." Mrs Montagu's was the "beauty" of fragility combined with extraordinary animation. To her devotees she was "a hothouse plant, fine and rare, but incapable of enduring the cold of our climate if you are not housed the first day that the white frosts come in" (Lord Lyttleton, 1760). Fanny Burney describes her in 1778 with more particularity but with less fervour. "She is middle-sized, very thin, and looks infirm; she has a sensible and penetrating countenance, and the air and manner of a woman accustomed to being distinguished, and of great parts. Dr Johnson, who agrees in this, told us that a Mrs Hervey, of his acquaintance, says she can remember Mrs Montagu *trying* for this same air and manner. . . . Nobody can now impartially see her and not confess that she has extremely well succeeded." The enthusiastic Hannah More gives us a much kinder picture. . . . "Her form (for she has no *body*) is delicate even to fragility; her countenance the most animated in the world; the sprightly vivacity of fifteen, with the judgment and experience of a Nestor."

Of her Learning we have already spoken, and



her Virtue needs no support. Her Wit and Wisdom, which are so abundantly manifested in her correspondence, lie hidden to-day under its prolixity; but from contemporary evidence we know that these qualities shone conspicuously in her conversation.

We have thus made the full circle of Mrs Montagu's virtues as enumerated by Lord Lyttleton, and they certainly give her many striking advantages in the social sphere. But if we are to know Mrs Montagu as a woman, we must take into account the verdicts of less prejudiced critics. It is significant to note that severe as these sometimes are, they nearly always introduce a tribute to Mrs Montagu's gifts of intellect or natural endowments.

So eager was Mrs Montagu's desire for admiration, so extreme was her susceptibility to praise, that no flattery was too gross for her acceptance. Lady Louisa Stuart, grand-daughter of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, speaking of her brother-in-law, Lord Macartney, says: "I have heard him laugh peal upon peal as he reported behind Mrs Montagu's back the fine speeches he had made, or intended to make her, bringing in (would you believe it?) Venus as well as Minerva, extolling the personal charms of a woman old enough to be his mother, and one who, to do her justice, was quite free from the weakness of wishing to disguise her age. . . . But when the laugh was over he

would conclude with, 'After all, though, she is the cleverest woman I know ; meet her where you will, she says the best thing in the company.' ” Indeed, those who most deplored her affectations, were willing to admit her real merits. The Hon. Mrs Boscawen writes to Mrs Delany : “ The sketch you gave me of Madame *de Montagu* n'est que trop ressemblante, and much I *fear* that she will never be Mrs Montagu an English woman again ! I wish she would learn by heart her friend, Mrs Chapone's, *Chapter of Simplicity*, which surely is a better thing than egotism or boasting, or affectation of any kind ; but how *little temptation* has she to *affect* anything, when she has *such* natural endowments ! But so it is, and I own I apprehend qu'elle reviendra de ces courses tout à fait gâtée.” Here is Mrs Delany's own comment on Mrs Montagu's *Room of Cupidons*, in Montagu House, Portman Square. It “ was opened with an assembly for all the foreigners, the literati, and the macaronis of the present age. Many and sly are the observations how such a genius at her *age* and so *circumstanced* (Mrs Montagu was now a widow) could think of painting the walls of her dressing-room with bowers of roses and jessamines entirely inhabited by little Cupids in all their little wanton ways, is astonishing ! . . . ”

This leads us to a consideration of Mrs Montagu's wealth, which enabled her to indulge in these fancies, and which, according to Lady Louisa

Stuart, was the mainspring of her success. At the very lowest estimate Mrs Montagu is said to have had a fortune of ten thousand a year. "Together with a superabundance of vanity," writes Lady Louisa Stuart, "vanity of that happy, contented, comfortable kind, which being disturbed by no uneasy doubts or misgivings, keeps us in constant good humour with ourselves and consequently with everything else—she had quick parts, great vivacity, no small share of wit, a competent portion of learning, considerable fame as a writer, a large fortune, a fine house, and an excellent cook. Observe the climax, for it is not unintentional, the cook may be the only one of the powers I have enumerated who could carry on the war singlehanded."

The Room of Cupidons was not Mrs Montagu's only remarkable decorative achievement. There was the famous Chinese Room at her house in Hill Street, which was lined with painted paper of Pekin, and furnished with Chinese vases. The curtains were Chinese pictures in gauze, and the chairs Indian fan-sticks with cushions of Japan satin painted. With regard to this room Mrs Montagu writes to her cousin, the Rev. Mr Freind, "Sick of Grecian elegance and symmetry, or Gothic grandeur and magnificence, we must all seek the barbarous gaudy goût of the Chinese; and fatheaded Pagods and shaking mandarins bear the prize from the first works of antiquity; and

Apollo and Venus must give way to a fat idol with a sconce on his head. You will wonder I should condemn the taste I have complied with, but in trifles I shall always conform to the fashion."

Mrs Montagu built for herself Montagu House, in Portman Square (now No. 22, the residence of Viscount Portman). It was begun in 1781 from designs by James (Athenian) Stuart, who, adopting Johnson's metaphor, addresses Mrs Montagu as "Montagu-Minerva." The house contained other famous rooms beside the Room of Cupidons—the "Feather" Room, and the "Great" Room. The Feather Room stands as the apotheosis of feather work, so popular with the ladies of the day. Its feather hangings were of Mrs Montagu's own making, and occupied nearly ten years to complete. There are frequent demands in Mrs Montagu's letters for half an ounce of French partridge feathers, or half an ounce of the best dyed yellow feathers, or the neck and breast feathers of the Michaelmas Goose. "Pray has not the macaw dropped some small blue or yellow feathers?" she writes to a friend. There was a period when feather work ranked as an exquisite art; witness the feather mantles of the Incas; and Mrs Montagu's Feather Room remains the most elaborate attempt of modern times to revive this art. The poet Cowper, who had heard of the project through his cousin, Lady Hesketh, writing in 1788, describes the hangings thus:—

“The birds put off their every hue  
To dress a room for Montagu.  
The peacock sends his heavenly dyes,  
His rainbows and his starry eyes ;  
The pheasant, plumes which round enfold  
His mantling neck with downy gold.  
The cock his arch'd tail's azure show,  
And river-blanced the swan his snow.  
All tribes beside of Indian name  
That glossy shine or vivid flame  
Where rises and where sets the day,  
Whate'er they boast of rich or gay,  
Contribute to the gorgeous plan,  
Proud to advance it all they can.  
This plumage neither dashing shower  
Nor blasts that shake the dripping bower,  
Shall drench again or discompose,  
But, screen'd from every storm that blows,  
It boasts a splendour ever new,  
Safe with protecting Montagu.”

In 1790 Hannah More describes another room in Montagu House. She writes that Mrs Montagu is “fitting up the great room in a superb style, with pillars of verd antique, and had added an acre to what was before a very large town garden.” This “Great” Room has ceilings painted by Angelica Kauffmann.

But in spite of its scale and splendour, the house as a whole gave to so critical an observer as Horace Walpole no impression of ostentation. He writes, “Instead of vagaries, it is a simple, noble edifice. When I came home I recollected that though I had thought it so magnificent a house,



there was not a morsel of gilding. It is grand, not tawdry, nor larded and embroidered and pomponned with shreds and remnants, and *cliquant* like all the harlequinades of Adam."

Enough of the setting: what of the qualities of the hostess?

A hostess may excel in one of two directions. She may attract people by the magnetism of her personality, and hold them by her conversation, her beauty or her charm; or she may have the faculty of creating an atmosphere in which her guests reveal themselves; in which case the success of her assemblies will depend less upon the sparks she emits and more upon the sparks she evokes. Mrs Montagu belonged to the first class of hostess: she gave freely of herself, but it depended entirely upon chance whether her guests chose to exert themselves. They remained individual units, a mere mechanical combination, for Mrs Montagu lacked the magic to fuse the heterogeneous mass into chemical unity. She had no power of directing conversation into fertile channels, she possessed no divining rod that would lead her instinctively to fresh springs of thought among her guests. She laboured at times under the sense that she was the slave and not the master of conversation. Nevertheless her conversational talents were "of a truly superior order," to quote Madame d'Arblay, "strong, just, clear, and often eloquent. Her process in argument, notwithstanding an earnest



solicitude for pre-eminence, was uniformly polite and candid. But her reputation for wit seemed always in her thoughts, marring their natural flow and untutored expression." Mrs Thrale sums her up more trenchantly, "brilliant in diamonds, solid in judgment, critical in talk." We may add also Dr Johnson's tribute: "Mrs Montagu is *par pluribus*. Conversing with her you may find variety in one."

Almost all people of note and distinction frequented her assemblies,—authors, critics, artists, orators, lawyers, clergy, tourists, travellers, to quote the comprehensive list of Lady Louisa Stuart, who adds that Mrs Montagu made entertainment for all ambassadors, sought out all remarkable foreigners, especially if men of letters; nay, she occasionally exhibited a few of the very fine exclusive set themselves. Garrick recited at her parties: we read of his doing the dagger scene from Macbeth, and King Lear's maledictions on his daughters. Lady Louisa Stuart gives the best account of Mrs Montagu's curious practice of arranging her guests in a circle, a method which we will describe more fully later on.

The same acute critic tells how there gathered about Mrs Montagu a horde of toad-eaters—toad-eaters from interest and toad-eaters from vanity; but that even these did not flatter so inordinately as the somewhat ignorant but worthy people whose admiration for Mrs Montagu was genuine.

Mrs Montagu's most lavish period of entertainment began after the completion of her house in Portman Square. Horace Walpole tells us that she gave a splendid inaugural breakfast to "seven hundred persons on opening her great room and the room with the hangings of feathers." Up to 1796 she received royally—royalty too, for the Queen and six Princesses breakfasted with her in 1791. Two hundred or three hundred guests were frequently present at her breakfast parties. Mrs Montagu gave, besides, two or three great dinner-parties a week.

And yet entertaining so miscellaneous, and on so lavish a scale, Mrs Montagu found leisure for a sincere cultivation of friendship. Her letters to Mrs Carter display perhaps more feeling than any of her other writings. Her cold and unromantic nature made her friendship with men safe and agreeable, and the gallantry of the phrases they addressed to her were no more than the convention of the day. Mr Montagu was no doubt as fully assured of his wife's Roman virtue, as of her Roman fortitude; and her train of admirers allowed themselves to boast of their devotion, because they knew themselves absolutely secure. Dr Monsey writes cheerfully to Lord Lyttleton that the Earl of Bath is fall'n desperately in love with one who seems not insensible of his passion; and adds—"I think 'tis time for you and I to look about us, for an Earl is better than a Baron or a

quack doctor. . . . Now there are three fools of us."

Of these "three fools" Lord Lyttleton evinces the most tender regard for Mrs Montagu in his letters to her; he displays a sympathetic thoughtfulness for all details concerning her welfare; her delicacy of health evidently made strong appeal to him. The Earl of Bath shows reliance upon her tact and right feeling; he asks her to negotiate a delicate matter, whereby a piece of silk or damask may be sent to Mrs Carter, "to make her fine when she comes to Tunbridge," in such a manner as shall not wound her susceptibilities. The Doctor, lively if not grotesque in conversation, and sometimes coarse in speech, seems to have been the most genuinely attached to her. Mrs Montagu discriminates cleverly between the characters of the Earl of Bath and of Dr Monsey in the following passage:—

"His Lordship's talents, like colours in the prism, formed of the brightest rays, are so well arranged and so happily mingled, that though strong and vivid, they never pain the sight. The Doctor's understanding is like Harlequin's coat, gay, not only from the different colours that compose it, but from the heterogeneous jumble in which they lie, running at once from black to white, from red to blue."

A word must be said concerning Mrs Montagu's relationship with Dr Johnson. We have seen how

highly he praises her conversational powers—the variety of her range of subject—the knowledge she diffuses ; and at the same time how he depreciates somewhat unjustly her *Essay on Shakespeare*. His behaviour to her throughout is marked by a like inconsistency.

Between Dr Johnson and Mrs Montagu kindly feeling existed in the beginning. Mrs Montagu awarded to Johnson's works this very high tribute : "That were an angel to give the *imprimatur*, Dr Johnson's works were among those very few which could not be lessened by a line."

When she showed him some plates that had belonged to Queen Elizabeth, he told her "that they had no reason to be ashamed of their present possessor, who was so little inferior to the first." In the profile portrait of Mrs Montagu, painted by James Barry, there is, curiously enough, a resemblance to the Tudor Queen—it shows the same keenness of intellect—it suggests the same coldness of disposition.

After Mr Montagu's death, Mrs Montagu gave Mrs Williams, the blind poetess, who lived under Dr Johnson's roof, an annuity of £10 a year ; and in 1775 we find Dr Johnson writing to Mrs Montagu in this strain : "All that the esteem and reverence of mankind can give you has been long in your possession, and the little that I can add to the voice of nations will not much exalt ; of that little, however, you are, I hope, very certain." He

was flattered by the attentions she paid him. After a splendid entertainment at which many celebrated literary persons were present, Dr Maxwell asked him if he were not highly *gratified* by his visit. "No, Sir," said he, "not highly *gratified*; yet I do not recollect to have passed many evenings with *fewer objections*." Less grudgingly he wrote to Mrs Montagu: "The favour of your service can never miss a suitable return but from ignorant or thoughtless men; and to be ignorant of your eminence is not easy, but to him who lives out of reach of the public voice."

But on occasion he criticised her in a very different strain. If he praised her benevolence he attacked her vanity, suggesting that though she knew very little Latin, and no Greek, "she is willing you should think she knows them." Beattie suggests that Johnson was jealous of her conversational renown, and of her position as Queen of the Blue-Stockings. "Mrs Montagu has more wit than anybody," Beattie writes, "and Johnson could not bear that anyone should be thought to have wit but himself." Johnson began to speak of her unkindly even before the definite quarrel took place.

The occasion of the quarrel arose out of Johnson's *Life of Lord Lyttleton*. Lyttleton was one of Mrs Montagu's most intimate friends. Mrs Carter speaks of his "integrity, simplicity and gentleness"; and Thomson in the "Seasons,"—this is no



mere "poetical" tribute in Touchstone's sense of the word—praises his warm benevolence of mind and honest zeal unwarped by party rage. To Mrs Montagu he was "the most sincere and amiable friend, the best instructor, the noblest example, the director of my studies, the companion and guide of all my literary amusements." Now in the *Life*, Dr Johnson adopts a patronising tone that could not fail to be offensive to Lyttleton's friends. With regard to the *Dialogues of the Dead* he speaks of "poor Lyttleton" returning his acknowledgments "with humble gratitude,"—"acknowledgments either for flattery or justice." He says of Lyttleton's *History of Henry II.*, that it was "published with such anxiety as only vanity can dictate." It is small wonder that Mrs Montagu's extreme indignation was aroused by these implications.

Horace Walpole writes that "Mrs Montagu and her Mænades intended to tear him (Johnson) limb from limb for despising their moppet, Lord Lyttleton." When Mrs Montagu and Dr Johnson chanced to be present at the same assembly, they kept apart "like the East from the West." On one occasion they met at Mrs Thrale's, and Fanny Burney describes the encounter to Mr Cambridge:—

"‘And how did Mrs Montagu herself behave?’

"Very stately indeed at first. She turned from him very stiffly, and with a most distant air, and without even curtsying to him, and with a firm



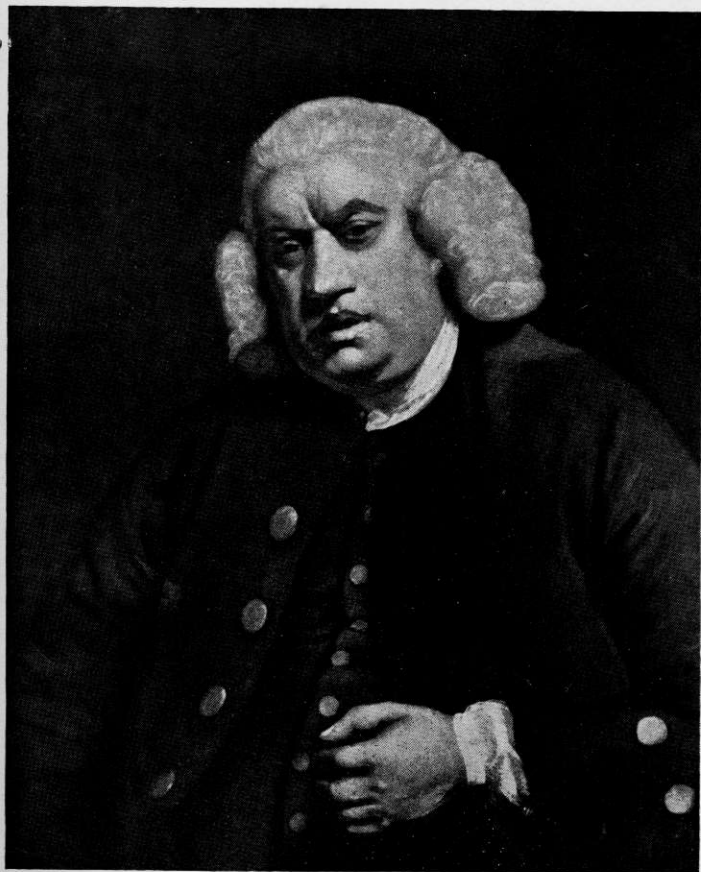
intention to keep to what she had publicly declared—that she would never speak to him more! However, he went up to her himself, longing to begin! and very roughly said: ‘Well, Madam, what’s become of your fine new house? I hear no more of it.’”

But though forced to answer on this occasion, Mrs Montagu did not abandon her policy; and in 1781 Johnson remarks with a measure of soreness: “Mrs Montagu has dropped me. Now, Sir, there are people whom one should like very well to drop, but would not want to be dropped by.”

This quarrel—involving unfortunately no altercation as Horace Walpole laments—provided delightful gossip for society in general, and for Horace Walpole and his friend William Mason in particular. These two had a recent cause for resentment against Dr Johnson on their own account by reason of his attitude towards Gray. Mason has a mind, he says, to weave the squabble into a Mock Epic, in which Mrs Montagu shall enact Queen Ashtaroth, and Dr Johnson Dagon. But this particular Lampoon never got written.

How little did these correspondents realise that Johnson was to be the familiar through future ages, not only of the man in the study, but of the man in the street; while their personalities, and the personalities of most of their contemporaries, and the personality of Mrs Montagu, were to be double-locked away from the world, opening only to the

infrequent keys of culture or research. Horace Walpole's Letters, of course, will survive as literature at its raciest; but who reads—who will ever read—Mrs Montagu? Yet her correspondence shows abundantly that quality by which she is principally distinguished—the quality of Wit—a quality rare in England, which established her queenship amid the hostesses of the day. Separated from its gorgeous framework, her wit yet scintillates out of the dim brown pages of worm-eaten volumes—still lives by the vitality with which Mrs Montagu created for herself in her own day, a name, a reputation, and a throne.



SAMUEL JOHNSON

FROM THE PAINTING BY SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS, P.R.A.



## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ OF THE *BAS BLEU*

A MOVEMENT often goes by unperceived, because its elements are so dispersed that they cannot be apprehended. This is especially the case in an ephemeral movement passing over society. A few intellectual reunions—a few splendid entertainments—these are the commonplace of almost every age. Some sympathetic force is needed to crystallise the dispersed elements, to bring the specialising characteristics into proper focus, to concentrate the nebulous vapour into a star. Such sympathetic force was supplied to the Blue-Stocking movement by Hannah More in her poem *Bas Bleu*. Her crystal is perhaps not without flaw, her focus gives a slightly blurred picture, her star is not of the first magnitude—at least in our eyes. But we must remember Dr Johnson's opinion of her poetry in general. When poetry became the topic at a dinner-party at which both he and Hannah More were present, "Hush, hush," he remarked, "... it is talking of the art of war before Hannibal." We must also remember his opinion of the *Bas Bleu* in particular: "There was no name in poetry," he said, "that might not be glad to own it." Though to-day the eagerness



to claim its authorship would be no doubt considerably lessened, and though this "most powerful versificatrix in the language" no longer commands the homage of our literary dictators, yet the *Bas Bleu* survives as the microcosm of a little world unique in our literary history ; as the record of a movement, brilliant, transient, that attracted most of the principal figures of the age ; as a burning-glass, drawing to a point a number of vagrant lights, and including them in one frame.

The Dramatis Personæ of the *Bas Bleu* are but few in number. They fall roughly into two divisions, the chief characters of the Drama and the Guests at Mrs Vesey's.

Let us consider the chief characters first. Most important come the three great hostesses : Mrs Vesey, to whom the poem is addressed ; Mrs Boscawen, a lady of considerable note in her day ; and Mrs Montagu. Mrs Thrale Hannah More ignores altogether.

"The vanquish'd triple crown to you,  
Boscawen sage, bright Montagu  
Divided fell ; your cares in haste  
Rescued the ravag'd realms of Taste. . . ."

Next follow Mrs Montagu's trusty lieutenants, Lord Lyttleton, William Pulteney, Earl of Bath, and Mrs Elizabeth Carter. The ties that united these three and Mrs Montagu in bonds of friendship have already been mentioned, and further instances are quoted in Mrs Carter's life. Horace

Walpole is also named here, but we will put him in the "Guests at Mrs Vesey's" caste as he appears there again.

"And *Lyttleton's* accomplished name  
And witty *Pulteney* shar'd the fame;  
The Men not bound by pedant rules  
Nor Ladies *Précieuses Ridicules*;  
For polish'd *Walpole* show'd the way  
How wits may be both learn'd and gay;  
And *Carter* taught the female train  
The deeply wise are never vain. . . ."

The Hon. Mrs Boscawen's name was quoted, it will be remembered, in the *Herald* verses—"high-bred, elegant Boscawen." She was the wife of Admiral Boscawen—a lady at once "polite, learned, judicious and humble." Boswell gives her the palm over every other lady for certain qualities . . . "if it be not presumptuous in me to praise her, I would say that her manners are the most agreeable, and her conversation the best, of any lady with whom I ever had the happiness to be acquainted." There are stray letters of hers in various collections of correspondence—clever—one had almost said "smart"—letters, thickly interlarded with French idiom and phrase. Mrs Boscawen is famous for her friendships: we may quote part of an epistle, *Sensibility*, addressed by Hannah More to this lady, since it mentions certain Blue-Stockings in addition to those already named:—

"Yours is the bliss, and Heav'n no dearer sends,  
 To call the wisest, brightest, best, your friends,  
 And while to thee I raise the votive line,  
 O, let one grateful own these friends are mine :  
 With *Carter* trace the wit to Athens known,  
 Or view in *Montagu* that wit our own ;  
 Or mark, well pleas'd, *Chapone's* instructive page  
 Intent to raise the morals of the age. . . .  
*Delany*, too, is ours ; serenely bright  
 Wisdom's strong ray, and virtue's milder light ;  
 And she who bless'd the friend and grac'd the page  
 Of Swift, still lends her lustre to our age.  
 Long, long protract thy light, O Star benign !  
 Whose setting beams with added lustre shine."

And now, with the help of the *Bas Bleu*, and of *Sensibility*, let us muster the ladies of our Blue-Stocking company before the imagination, and try to fancy how they looked and how they bore themselves. Let us call them from the shades to take part in a little pageant on our behalf. We shall play the part on this occasion of the small gossip, the fashion journalist, the purveyor of items that may give local colour to the groups, the chronicler of costume, triumphant if we can obtain for the inquiring reader any particulars as to cost of material, or minor details of this kind.

We will suppose that Mrs Boscawen has made her exit, and we have in the caste Mrs Vesey, Mrs Montagu (with the Earl of Lyttleton and the Earl of Bath in attendance), Mrs Carter, Hannah More herself ; and strayed out of the poem of *Sensibility*, Mrs Chapone and Mrs Delany. Mrs Thrale and

Fanny Burney have not been granted entrance into Hannah More's hierarchy, but the caste is not complete without them, and we must open to them the stage-door.

Shall we peep first into the Green Room, where the ladies are attiring themselves, and examine the elaborate *batterie de toilette* described so deliciously in the *Rape of the Lock* :—

“ Each silver vase in mystic order laid.  
Here, robed in white, the nymph intent adores  
With head uncovered, the cosmetic pow'rs. . . .  
This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,  
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.  
The tortoise here and elephant unite  
Transformed to combs, the speckled and the white.  
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,  
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, billets-doux.”

We must remove the last two items from the toilet-table. The Bible is sacred to the ladies present, and they do not countenance billets-doux. Powder and patches and paint and rouge, however, are in great request; we may be very sure that Mrs Thrale is employing these because she was obliged to continue the rouge into old age, owing to its discolouration of her skin. Mrs Delany and Mrs Montagu would have little use for cosmetics, on account of the brilliance of their complexions; and rouge would not well become little Burney's brown-toned skin, which must have been very fine in texture, for she possessed, in common with Mrs

Delany, an extreme *facilité à rougir*. Burke told Hannah More that at eighty-eight Mrs Delany "blushed like a girl." Perhaps Mrs Carter and Mrs Chapone despised to some extent the fashion; we certainly read of Mrs Carter wearing her hair dressed flat, when high headdresses were in vogue.

We will imagine Mrs Montagu before her marriage, having just come from the Plunge Bath in Marylebone—recommended to her for her headaches—a fearsome ordeal, which caused terror in her friends. Private baths in the Eighteenth Century were not so much a luxury as an impossible ideal. There were public baths, it is true—the Plunge Bath at Marylebone above mentioned—baths at the watering-places, especially the famous ones at Bath itself, where there was a regular promenade for bathers. We read of jappanned bowls floating on the waters before the ladies filled with perfumes, essences, oils, and other toilet accessories. That old stoic, Horace Walpole, was a firm believer in cold water. "My great nostrum is the use of cold water inwardly and outwardly on all occasions, and total disregard of precaution against catching cold. A hat, you know, I never wear; my breast I never button, nor wear greatcoats, etc. I have often had the gout in my face (as last week) and eyes, and instantly dip my head in a pail of cold water, which always cures it, and does not send it anywhere else." But he and Lord Monboddo, who advocated fresh air as well as the monkey-descent theory, were in



this respect notable exceptions to their age. When Elizabeth Robinson went to stop with the Duke and Duchess of Portland at Bulstrode, their place in Buckinghamshire, and desired to continue the bath treatment, it was found that the bathing tubs were so out of order "we have not yet been able to make them hold water, but I hope next week they will serve the purpose." Since we are supposing Elizabeth Robinson to have just come from the Plunge Bath, she must not wear any of those magnificent clothes in which she afterwards delighted—brilliant with diamonds and radiant with ribbons—her slender beauty, tending to leanness, is better suited in a simpler costume.

We imagine Mrs Carter drinking a cup—perhaps several cups—of tea. She also suffers from headaches, and adopts an equally arduous, but more agreeable method of cure, long country walks, generally in the early morning. The athletic woman was of course an anomaly in this age; though Mrs Thrale does tell us—with some inconsequence—that Lady Sarah Bunbury "was a cricket player and ate beefsteaks upon the Steyne at Brighthelmstone" (Brighton). As Mrs Carter stands sipping her tea, we feel that, strict as she is, provincial as she is, she has perhaps more sympathy of understanding than any other lady present—a quickness of intuition that passes through the outside trappings direct to the core. See with what tenderness she looks at Mrs Vesey!

There is love and admiration and pity in her glance. If she surprises a beautiful sight in nature, she longs for Mrs Montagu to share the joy with her; and her friend, Mrs Chapone, does not possess more good sense, more kindly humour.

Fanny Burney is the last to be ready; there are little alterations, final stitches. And now, since all are dressed, ring up the curtain and let the procession pass before us.

First comes Mrs Vesey. We have but scant material for a reconstruction of her appearance; no details but those ugly ear-trumpets that Fanny Burney describes as hanging to her wrists and slung about her neck. The sweetness, the simplicity, the originality of her nature appear to have made her friends forget to describe both her looks and her clothes. And yet we know her better than almost any lady of the group. The very vagueness of outline is appropriate to this ethereal being, this sylph who seems to have strayed in a fit of absent-mindedness into the Eighteenth Century, which is so alien to her, and which yet welcomed her so kindly. For lack of information we will vision her clad in the "newest colour"—one suitable to her nationality—that "truly fashionable silk" described by Hannah More, "a *soupçon de vert*, lined with a *soupir étouffée et bradée de l'espérance* . . . *espérance* in the new language of the times means rosebuds."

Strange contrast, Mrs Vesey, to the clear-cut,

definite personality of her friend Hannah More, whose dark eyes shine diamond keen; strange contrast, Mrs Vesey's life, to the practical ardour out of which Hannah More built so notable a monument. Hannah More loved splendour in her youth, and had herself painted in emerald earrings; but we will choose her to be in more characteristic attire. Her dress shall be of Quaker plainness, though about her shoulders she wears a yellow richly-embroidered shawl. A pretty net cap is tied under her chin with white satin ribbon. She passes before our eyes, patient, energetic, incredibly occupied, belonging to this Eighteenth Century company by her enthusiasm for its ideals, by her sympathy with its conventions: and yet the precursor of a new epoch.

All eyes are turned on the next figure in the procession. She enters with an air of distinction, stooping a little; her blue eyes have peculiar animation, and her brown hair is looped back from her forehead over a cushion. Mrs Montagu wears her "new pink silver negligée trimmed, too, with silver fort galament," in which she was told she looked "à merveille." There is no lady in all England whose conversation enjoys so high a reputation: "put on your blue-stockings," for the feast of intellect is to begin.

"Parson Carter's daughter" follows next. She shall come plainly dressed in that sober-coloured silk or damask that the Earl of Bath had wished

so delicately conveyed to her—a figure in no way remarkable but for the nobility and goodness shining out of her face. She carries her knitting in a bag on her arm, for though she is the most learned of all the Blue-Stockings, it is as a listener, rather than as a talker, that she excels.

Little difficulty is there in picturing the grace and stateliness of Mrs Delany, with her charming figure, her fair and curling hair, her brilliant complexion, and her dove's eyes. The spirit of all that is best in the Eighteenth Century seems to reside in her; its perfect adjustment of means to ends; the fragrance of its decorum; the delicate employment of its leisure. Her dress must be described in detail—dress was evidently another art in which her exquisite taste shone. Indeed, her excellence in this was such that at one of the Drawing Rooms the Queen “commended my clothes.” Mrs Delany's letters are full of minute descriptions of petticoats embroidered in gold and silver and chenille and coral; we learn that “hoops are made of the richest damask, trimmed with gold and silver, and cost fourteen guineas a hoop,” together with many other interesting particulars of costume. Domestic particulars, too; Mrs Delany is an advocate of drugs strange to our ears. An infallible recipe for ague is a spider, put into a goose-quill, well sealed and secured, and hung about the neck. For a cough she recommends two or three snails boiled in barley water or tea-water. Lady Llan-

over, who edits Mrs Delany's letters, is a believer in the medicinal virtue of spiders and their webs ; the web rolled into a pill and swallowed is good, she asserts, in cases of certain fevers. But to return to Mrs Delany in her social aspect : we will picture her in the dress that she wore at a wedding in 1734 . . . "a brocaded lute-string (glacé silk), white ground, with great ramping flowers in shades of purples, reds and greens. I gave thirteen shillings a yard ; it looks better than it describes, and will make a show. I shall wear it with dark purple and gold ribbon, and a *black hood* for decency's sake."

Mrs Chapone we must have in her ardent enthusiastic girlhood, strenuous, argumentative, emotional. We see her as she appears in Miss Highmore's drawing of Richardson reading the manuscript of *Sir Charles Grandison* to his friends in the grotto of his house at North End, Hammer-smith. Her round face, which is shaded by a broad-trimmed hat, has sweetness and intelligence, and the drawing does not bear out the general report of her ugliness. She wears a dark dress, cut low, with a white V-shaped front let in, a white frill-work borders the top of her dress, while a dark cloak is clasped at the neck.

In what costume shall we picture Mrs Thrale—short, plump, and brisk, who now arrives upon the scene—Mrs Thrale of the blue expressive eyes, the amazing vivacity, and the almost cloying sweet-



ness? Shall we have her in that dark gown of purple silk shot with green, which made Dr Johnson exclaim, "You little creatures should never wear those sort of clothes. . . . What! have not all insects gay colours?" Shall we show how she followed this advice by asking her to don that wonderful costume of her middle age—"a tiger-skin shawl lined with scarlet, and *only* five colours upon her headdress—on the top of a flaxen wig, a bandeau of blue velvet, a bit of tiger ribbon, a white beaver hat and plume of black feathers?" Rather will we require her to make her entrance in richer, more dignified attire, wearing that Court-dress, magnificent and not heavy, which was copied in a Spitalsfield loom from a dress brought by Captain Burney from the South Sea Islands, and trimmed, as Mrs Thrale wrote to Fanny Burney, "with grebe skins and gold to the sum of £65—the trimming alone."

Fanny Burney shall appear before us in the guise of her early youth, at the moment, perhaps, of her greatest charm—the moment when she is meditating *Evelina*: when life has still its sting of freshness, its tonic of variety. She comes in with piquant timidity, looking hither and thither with her quick-discerning but short-sighted green eyes. She is dressed for masquerade, "a close pink Persian vest . . . covered with gauze in loose pleats, and with flowers, etc., etc.: a little garland or wreath of flowers on the left side of my head."



Fanny Burney is never very definite about clothes ; she seems to have been over-fastidious in her toilette to the point of worry, and to have dismissed the subject with a feeling of relief when she turned to her pen. But this fancy costume is fitting to the happy blossoming time of Fanny Burney's life—it is a dress Evelina might have worn ; and surely the delicate, sensitive figure is not unlike Evelina herself.

And what about the husbands of these ladies ? For out of the company only two are unmarried. Are they to be included in the *Bas Bleu* procession ?

Mr Thrale must certainly appear, for he was as much responsible for the entertainments as his wife, and quite as important a personage at them. Mr Vesey, perhaps, should be allowed on the scene for a moment ; so social a being must surely sometimes have attended his wife's parties, and we know he had intellectual ambitions and friends of worth. Hannah More, however, does not see fit to mention him, though her poem is addressed to his wife. As to Mr Montagu, his mathematics, his Parliamentary duties, his coal-mines occupied him wholly. We would like to have had dear old Dr Delany of the company, and the brave General d'Arblay ; but it was during her widowhood that Mrs Delany gave those select little dinners that link her with the *Bas Bleu* movement, and the d'Arblays were too poor to entertain either in England or in France. Then the

shadowy Chapone died ten months after marriage. In England, as in France, speaking generally, there is no recognised niche for the husband in the Salon.

All this while the "Guests at Mrs Vesey's" are patiently waiting in the wings. But we have claimed "Place aux Dames!" for the guests are all of them men. They are attired in classic nomenclature worthy of their dignity and pursuits. We have *Roscius*, enacted by Garrick; *Maro* performed by William Mason the poet, friend of Horace Walpole, biographer of Gray, author of the *English Garden*, patron of Brown, the landscape gardener; we have *Cato*, bodied in the mighty form of Dr Johnson; the part of *Hortensius* undertaken by Burke, who is here represented again as giving up to a party what was meant for mankind. Walpole plays Horace, and Sir William Weller Pepys, *Lælius* :—

" Here *Roscius* gladden'd every eye.  
Why comes not *Maro*? far from town  
He rears the Urn to Taste, and *Brown* ;  
Plants cypress round the Tomb of *Gray*,  
Or decks his *English Garden* gay. . . .  
Here rigid *Cato*, awful sage !  
Bold censor of a thoughtless age,  
Once dealt his pointed moral round,  
And, not unheeded, fell the sound. . . .  
Here once *Hortensius* lov'd to sit  
Apostate now from social wit !  
Ah ! why in wrangling senates waste  
The noblest parts, the happiest taste ?

Why Democratic Thunders wield  
And quit the Muses' calmer field ?  
Taste thou the gentler joys they give  
With *Horace* and with *Lælius* live."

Other important individuals, not named in this catalogue, have prominent parts, and will appear at the fitting moment ; and the crowd of "supers" is legion. "Supers" are only called upon to enact one simple emotion ; the *Bas Bleu* "supers," with striking originality, lay emphasis on virtues unusual in their calling. Hannah More enumerates them thus :—

" Here sober Duchesses are seen  
Chaste wits, and Critics void of spleen ;  
Physicians fraught with real science,  
And Whigs and Tories in alliance ;  
Poets fulfilling Christian duties,  
Just Lawyers, reasonable Beauties,  
Bishops who preach, and Peers who pay  
And Countesses who seldom play ;  
Learn'd antiquaries, who from college  
Reject the rust, and bring the knowledge ;  
And hear it *age*, believe it *youth*  
Polemics, really seeking truth. . . ."

So, having mustered our company, we must drop the curtain and take up the drama of each individual player separately.

## MRS DELANY (1700-1788)

OFF the great beaten highways of Art there are to be found certain little bye-paths and tracts which have been trodden by a few feet only; corners where artists have experimented in some new material, or cultivated some special skill in craftsmanship. In most cases the power of producing such works, unconnected with the main movement, died with the inventor, or with his immediate disciples. One might mention as examples the wax pictures which attained to such perfection in the Sixteenth Century; one might instance the paper-mosaics of Mrs Delany, now in the Print Room at the British Museum.

“Ingenious” paper mosaics, Austin Dobson calls them: and under the influence of this adjective we go to see them, expecting something of curious contrivance, something of patient industry, something of purely local interest. The description of them—plants cut out in various coloured papers and pasted on a black background—sounds crude and inartistic: and we discount contemporary praise of these *Flora* by supposing them a fashion of the day. So with a mind wholly unprepared, we open the portfolios, and the



MRS. DELANY

FROM THE PAINTING BY JOHN OPIE, R.A. IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY





beauty that meets the eye comes with a sense of shock.

For these are examples of exquisite artistry ; flower-pictures as bold, as delicate, as harmonious as a beautiful painting, perfect in grouping and in perspective. Yet they achieve an effect outside the power of the painter by reason of the fact that the plants are necessarily ever so little raised above the level of the flat,—that the veinings of the leaves and the petals of the blossoms, and even the ridgings of the stalks are superimposed, so giving a solidity, a depth of thickness, a rotundity not to be attained by means of paint. Then the texture of fine paper seems to suggest more subtly than paint the thin transparency of bloom. This is especially the case where white bloom is represented: the elder blossom, for instance, is not a dead mass of white, but a frail intricacy of vivid lights and pale shadows ; pear-blossom, narcissus, thrown on this dark background have the radiance of life. The vitality of all the plants is indeed amazing—the sap seems to be mounting in the juicy stalks, and the seed of the groundsel is poised for flight. The common wild flowers are perhaps to be regarded as the most perfect specimens of Mrs Delany's art ; her medium does not admit of absolute success in such flowers as the rose, or in large fruits.

How, in such a medium, she can have attained to results of such loveliness, is quite incomprehensible. It is true that she got her papers from a

great variety of sources ; she asked ship captains to bring her home specimens from China and the East, she obtained from wall-paper manufacturers spoiled pieces in which the colours had run, producing extraordinary and unusual tints. But this hardly lessens the wonder. Each separate plate has its separate and harmonious varieties of green ; each flower its myriad delicacies of tinting.

But when we have done full justice to the extraordinary artistic gifts of the *Flora*, we have still to admit the claims of the remarkable botanical knowledge displayed, and the marvel of craftsmanship. Sir Joshua Reynolds and all the best judges admitted her work to be unrivalled in perfection of outline, accuracy of shading and perspective, harmony and brilliancy of colouring ; while, at the same time, her plants were the admiration of botanists such as Sir Joseph Banks and Dr Solander. Indeed, Sir Joseph Banks used to say that Mrs Delany's representations of flowers "were the *only* imitations of nature he had ever seen from which he could venture to describe botanically any plant without the least fear of committing an error." As to the craftsmanship, to have cut these bold curves *by eye alone*, these leaf-edges delicate as a hair, these gossamer seed-balls, and to have combined them into so perfect a whole, demands the sureness of inspiration.

In Horace Walpole's *Anecdotes of Painting*, of which he sends Mrs Delany a new edition,

we find the following account of the paper mosaics :—

Mrs Delany, who “was a lady of excellent sense and taste, who painted in oil, and who, at the age of seventy-four, *invented* the art of paper mosaic, with which material (coloured) she executed in eight years within 20 of 1000 various flowers and flowering shrubs, with a *precision and truth unparalleled.*”

Failing eyesight alone caused her to desist in a labour, the joy of which she expresses in verses pasted in the first volume of the *Flora* :—

“Hail to the happy hour ! when fancy led  
My pensive mind this flow’ry path to tread ;  
And gave me emulation to presume  
With timid art to trace fair nature’s bloom :  
To view with awe the great creative power  
That shines confess’d in the minutest flower ;  
With wonder to pursue the glorious line  
And gratefully adore the Hand Divine !”

Mrs Delany was an amateur in the best sense of the word ; she worked for sheer love of her art, without any ulterior motive. Erasmus Darwin did her a ludicrous injustice—which he afterwards corrected—in his description of the Flora in *The Botanic Garden*. His account suggests the work of the amateur in the more degraded sense of the word—work composed of inharmonious material, inartistically combined. He speaks of “silken flowers” and flaxen tendrils bent round “wiry stems”—

“ Moss creeps below, and flaxen fruit impends,  
Cold Winter views among his realms of snow  
Delany's vegetable statues blow. . . . ”

This is glaringly inaccurate. For Mrs Delany was an artist, not only in paper mosaic, and in crayons, and in oils, and in needlework—but in Life. She knew how to adapt exquisitely her means to her ends, how to subdue herself to delicate harmony with her surroundings. In her the Eighteenth Century breathes and thrills to its finest flower—she exemplifies its best ideals, fulfils its highest aspirations. She walks amid all its conventions with the freedom of an initiate, gracious and confident, and by men and women alike she is hailed as its most perfect prototype.

She had the power of inspiring ardent enthusiasm from youth to extreme old age. Her friendships were intimate and lasting, and her friends have left us pen-pictures of her appearance and characteristics, inspired by devoted attachment and shaped in terms of fervid eulogy. Mrs Montagu, who knew her from early years, expresses her admiration with happy extravagance. In 1742 Mrs Montagu wrote to Mrs Donnellan, “ As for Pen (Mrs Delany) she is not a daughter of Eve, but of the collateral branch of Enoch, who walked as an angel before the children of men. She is a perfect seraphim, all fine music and pure spirit.” And in 1747, when Mrs Delany was forty-seven years old—she was born in 1700—Mrs Donnellan speaks of “ the

bloom she still enjoys, the modest sprightliness of her eyes, the shining delicacy of her hair, the sweetness of her smile, and the pleasing air of her whole countenance."

If Mrs Montagu values Mrs Delany for her spiritual intellect, and Mrs Donnellan praises her beauty ; it is by her perfection of high breeding that Edmund Burke believes she will be remembered through the ages. He is reported to have said of her that :

"She was a *truly great* woman of fashion, that she was not the woman of fashion of the *present age*, but that she was the *highest bred woman in the world*, and the woman of fashion of all ages ; that she was high-bred, great in every instance, and *would continue* fashionable in all ages."

And when we add Dean Swift's testimony to her simplicity and candour, we have certainly material for a delicate and charming portrait.

" . . . A pernicious error prevails here among the men," he writes in 1734, "that it is the duty of your sex to be fools in every article except what is merely domestic, and to do the ladies justice, there are very few of them without a good share of that heresy except upon one article, that they have *as little* regard for *family business* as for the improvement of their minds !

"I have had for some time a design to write against this heresy, but have now laid those thoughts aside, for fear of making both sexes my enemies ;



however, if you will come over to my assistance, I will carry you about among our adversaries, and dare them to produce *one instance* where your *want of ignorance* makes you affected, pretending, conceited, disdainful, endeavouring to speak like a scholar with twenty more faults objected by themselves, their lovers, or their husbands. But I fear your case is desperate, for I know you never laugh at a jest before you understand it . . .”

A compliment worth deserving truly, which gives us the master-key to Mrs Delany's character.

The qualities for which her contemporaries praise her are qualities that make the charm of women through all the ages. But her contemporaries were unconsciously more prone to admire her, because she possessed, as well, traits of character linking her distinctively with her century. To begin with, she confined herself to practising arts accounted purely feminine; and in the second place, she always manifested a strong devotion for the goddess Propriety.

Mrs Delany's artistic enterprise was of the most varied character. She was a painter of considerable ability, doing copies of the Old Masters both in crayons and in oils; she had extraordinary skill in needlework of every sort, making her own designs, and often taking her needlework pictures direct from nature. The Eighteenth Century presses more closely upon us when we read of the other arts in which she excelled. We seem to see the

time, very far off, haloed in an opaque radiance of shell-work. For Mrs Delany made shell cornices, shell candelabras, and shell lustres which we cannot help feeling would be an anomaly in any room except one specially built for them. She executed chimney-boards, too, that excited much praise, figures (often Etruscan) and Arabesques cut out in coloured papers and laid on a black ground. Mrs Delany tells of many other crafts that employed the leisure of the ladies of her time. She writes of the Duchess of Portland's daughters turning ivory, and of the Duchess herself making "a bunch of barberis turned in amber," and an ear of barley, "the corns amber, the stalk ivory, the beard tortoiseshell." Spinning, too, was still in fashion, and Mrs Delany in her later life presented to Queen Charlotte a spinning-wheel with an inscription in verse.

Now it is clear that Mrs Delany's gifts might well be regarded in the light of mere graceful accomplishments. The undoubted originality which she brought to bear upon the work was unresented because kept within strictly defined limits. She never came into competition with men, and therefore remained inoffensive; she never exhibited; her pictures were painted as gifts for her friends or for the adornment of her own house; and the chief purpose served by her talents was to endear her further to those who knew her, and to add a zest and a beauty to her life. And here we have one secret of the admiration she aroused.

Another secret is to be found in her worship of Propriety. None of her contemporaries offered up incense in its honour with a more perfect grace than Mrs Delany. The very term Propriety savours of the Eighteenth Century; to-day it wears an old-fashioned aspect and seems skimpy with the primness of musty didactic tomes. But to Mrs Delany Propriety represented something stabler than convention, something wider than correctness—she seems to have regarded it rather as a fine and exquisite sensitiveness to unwritten laws which had their remote roots in the eternal verities. The homage, often unconscious, which she paid to propriety, established a harmonious relation between herself and her environment, so that we see her moving with graceful adaptability through every circumstance of her life. Neither did this worship of hers confine her to a narrow groove. Her interests and affections were wide, and her outlook upon life tolerant. She was to some extent a critic of men and manners, and her letters are full of good-humoured allusions to contemporary idiosyncracies. Elizabeth Robinson, in a letter dated 1740 to Mrs Donnellan, writes: “I take Penny (Mrs Delany) too from *her business of doing good in this world*, to her *speculative employment of despising its vanities*.”

So it is that we find frequent allusion in Mrs Delany's correspondence to the extravagant fashions of the day, “the hoops of enormous size,” and the

"vast winkers to their heads" which make people look like "blown bladders." "Ye wasp-waisted ladies" give occasion for her to expatiate on the "folly (indeed *wickedness*)" of "strait lacing." She describes a dress worn by Lady Huntingdon at the Prince of Wales' birthday party, 1739,—“ Her petticoat was black velvet embroidered with chenille, the pattern a *large stone vase* filled with ramping flowers that spread almost over a breadth of the petticoat . . . it was a most laboured piece of finery, the pattern much properer for a stucco staircase than the apparel of a lady—a mere shadow that tottered at every step she took under the load.” It is curious to reflect that the wearer of this dress was the foundress of the Huntingdonian sect of Methodists. Gaming, too, gives cause for Mrs Delany's strenuous disapproval—“ A vice of such deep dye at present,” she calls it, “ that *nothing within my memory comes up to it!* The bite is more malignant than that of a mad dog, and has all the effects of it.” The vast sums lost by ladies are peculiarly galling to her. “ It mortifies my sex's pride to see women *expose themselves* so much to the contempt of men, over whom I think, from nature and education, if they were just to their own dignity, they have so many advantages.”

But of necessity, the Woman of Propriety is opposed to new ideas, which threaten the established order; and Rousseau appeared to Mrs Delany dangerous. In 1766, when Rousseau was

in England writing his *Confessions*, Mrs Delany's brother became acquainted with the reformer, and to her niece Mrs Delany writes : " I am glad you have seen *the Rousseau*, he is a genius and a curiosity, and his works extremely ingenious, . . ." but she goes on to add, " under the *guise and pomp of virtue* he does advance very erroneous and unorthodox sentiments." The following quotation is significant of Mrs Delany's honesty, and of that curious but very general attitude which considers it a virtue to keep the mind locked up in the darkness of a little room.

" I own I am not a fair disputant on this subject from my own knowledge of his works, as I avoid engaging in books from whose *subtlety* I might perhaps receive some prejudice, and I always take an alarm when *virtue in general terms is the idol*, without the support of *religion*, the *only* foundation that can be our security to build upon."

Dr Johnson was Mrs Elizabeth Carter's favourite author ; we will not do Mrs Delany the injustice of saying that she preferred above all others, Mrs Chapone ; yet Mrs Delany could write, with reference to the " Letters on the Improvement of the Mind," " I know of no book for a young person (next to the Bible) more entertaining and edifying if read with due attention." In her seventy-eighth year Mrs Delany wrote an Essay on Propriety for the future use of her grand-niece, then six years old.



“. . . Do not, my dear child, be startled at the awful word *advice*, for I only mean to recommend to your intimate acquaintance a lady who will guard you against the want of it. . . . This friend I present to your regard is never presuming, pert, or conceited, but humble, modest, and unaffected, attentive to everything that can improve her understanding or polish her manners. . . . All her votarys so truly respect, and are so sensible of her value, that they never forsake her. Her name is Propriety.”

Mary Granville, afterwards Mrs Delany, was born in 1700 of good family, but at the death of Queen Anne her father experienced a reverse of fortune, retired to the country, and became partially dependent on the bounty of his elder brother, Lord Lansdowne. When Mary was seventeen Lord and Lady Lansdowne asked her to spend the winter with them at their country seat, Longleat, and there she met and was compelled to marry an elderly Cornish gentleman named Pendarves. As her second husband, Dr Delany, puts it: “She was sacrificed to family interest, to which she was prevailed upon to submit through the *tyranny of kindness* (as she herself used to express it), and her unlimited generosity of her love towards that family.” In 1740 Mrs Delany wrote an autobiography under feigned names for her lifelong friend, the Duchess of Portland, in which she tells how she saw Gromio



(Mr Pendarves) for the first time after he had spent a long rainy day on horseback, "... the poor, old, dripping, almost drowned Gromio was brought into the room, like Hob out of the well, his wig, his coat, his dirty boots, his large unwieldy person and his crimson countenance were all subjects of great mirth and observation to me." She describes him later on as "altogether a person more disgusting than engaging."

Her married life was unhappy; her husband, though fond of her, was of a jealous, sullen disposition, and later when his fortunes became impaired he was hardly ever sober, and frequently had to be led by two servants to bed at seven or eight o'clock in the morning.. .

In 1724 Mr Pendarves died, leaving his wife only a few hundred pounds a year. During the first five years of her widowhood, she was courted by a young nobleman, Lord Baltimore, by whom she appears to have been greatly attracted. But, unaccountably, after declaring that he had loved her for five years, he left her, and almost immediately married another. An admirer of a different stamp was found in John Wesley, with whom, at this time, she had a correspondence. He was then twenty-eight years of age, and did not begin field preaching till four years later. His biographer, Mr Tyerman, is clearly of opinion that if Mrs Pendarves had not gone to Ireland, she might have married the leader of Methodism.

In 1731 she and her friend, Mrs Donnellan, were invited to stay with the sister of the latter, Mrs Clayton, wife of the Bishop of Killala. For this expedition Mrs Pendarves bought "a gown and petticoat; 'tis a very fine blue satin, sprigged all over with white, and the petticoat facings and endings brodered in the manner of a trimming wove in the silk. This suit of clothes cost me sixteen pounds."

The visit to Ireland proved eventful. Mrs Pendarves met her future husband, Dr Delany, afterwards Dean of Down; and at his house Dean Swift.

One of the most interesting studies of the Eighteenth Century is the relationship of its beautiful or brilliant women to its famous men. In no other age have men seemed to depend so exclusively for their inspiration on the incense of women's admiration, and in no other age have women been so flattered by condescending correction of their ignorances and by good-humoured tolerance of their weaknesses and foibles. To make the situation bearable, it was necessary for the men to have considerable advantage in years over the women, and this also contributed to the purely intellectual character of the bond. Though, *indeed, even girls preferred for their husbands men* who had reached a sober maturity; Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, in spite of her father's opposition, insisted on marrying the grave Wortley

Montagu, many years older than herself; Elizabeth Robinson chose Edward Montagu, her senior by twenty-nine years; and Mary Granville, forced at the age of seventeen into union with a man of fifty-nine, took as her second husband Dr Delany, who had had sixteen years more experience of life. Love matches were regarded as standing a little outside the bounds of propriety—as showing an inadvisable abandonment of the established restraints; and while Gallantry played a conspicuous part in every detail of daily intercourse, Romance was regarded as a tramp out of a wild and undesirable world, whose rough attire, smelling of the fields, made him unfit for presentation in any drawing-room. The friendships between men and women of this century, though expressed in phrases of the most grandiloquent adoration, were, as a rule, marked by perfect decorum. Dr Johnson alternately bullied and petted his hosts of worshippers, who gained a reflected glory from his lofty condescension; and Mrs Pendarves was flattered that Dean Swift should deign to correct her English and to approve her method of writing and expression.

“The Dean of St Patrick’s was there,” she writes of one of the Dublin parties, “*in very good humour*; he calls himself ‘my master,’ and corrects me when I speak bad English or do not pronounce my words distinctly. I wish he lived in England; I should not only have a

great deal of entertainment from him, but improvement."

Here is her description of Dean Swift:—

"Swift is a very *odd companion* (if that expression is not too familiar for so extraordinary a genius); he talks a great deal and does not require many answers; he has infinite spirits, and says abundance of good things in his common way of discourse."

The correspondence between Mrs Pendarves and Dean Swift after she had left Ireland is of much interest. On her side there is a self-consciousness, an effort at fine writing, which is entirely absent from all her other letters. We fancy her brooding over her sheet of paper to find phrases, labouring to be sprightly, yet tormented with uncertainty as to how her efforts will be received. His letters are written in a like inflated style, but to him we feel that the style is natural; his is the practised pen that has been taught to gallop straight, and to take walls and hedges and ditches without hesitation. The mentor is strong in these letters, but it is the mentor in a gracious and playful mood; yet they are already overshadowed by the pathos of the coming tragedy—the shadow of the approaching cloud that is to dim one of the most brilliant intellects of the age.

Pathetic reading these letters of Dean Swift's make, with their complaints of giddiness and deafness. "I am grown sickly, weak, lean, forgetful,

peevish, spiritless," he writes. He speaks, too, of his poverty, and the luxuries that have now become a necessity to him. . . . "I cannot make shifts to lie rough, and be undone by starving in scanty lodgings, without horses, servants, or conveniences, as I used to do in London." But here is a sentence that has the ring of genuine regard and something of the old spirit :—

"Well, madam, pray God bless you wherever you go or reside! May you be ever as you are, agreeable to every Killala curate and Dublin dean, for I disdain to mention temporal folks *without* gown or cassock."

Dr Delany had evidently made a strong impression upon Mrs Pendarves. She liked him from the first. "His wit and learning were to me his meanest praise," she writes in 1740; "the excellence of his heart, his humanity, benevolence, charity, and generosity, his tenderness, affection, and friendly zeal, gave me a higher opinion of him than of any other man I had ever conversed with." She alludes to him several times in her letters to Dean Swift. In April, 1743, Dr Delany made a proposal for her hand, having married and lost his wife since Mrs Pendarves was in Ireland; and they were married that year.

After her second marriage, Mrs Delany lived, during the greater part of her husband's life, in Ireland, at Holly Mount, near Down, and at Delville, a mile from Dublin, a tiny property



which had been laid out by Dr Delany himself. Everything was on a scale of extreme minutiae, as witness these lines on Delville in its early days, attributed to Swift, but probably written by Sheridan :—

“You scarce upon the borders enter,  
Before you're at the very centre.  
A single crow can make it night  
When o'er your farm she takes her flight:  
Yet, in this narrow compass, we  
Observe a vast variety ;  
Both walks, walls, meadows and parterres  
Windows and doors and rooms and stairs. . . .”

A razor, the rhyme goes on, would shave both you and your meadow, and as for the walk about your kitchen garden, “a snail creeps round it in a minute. . . .”

“In short, in all your boasted seat,  
*There's nothing but yourself that's great !*”

The Lord Lieutenant and Lady Chesterfield visited the Delanys at Delville in 1745.

Her second marriage appears to have been very happy. All the allusions to Dr Delany show him as a man of charm and sweetness. “In his imagination I could perceive the *poet*,” Mrs Montagu writes, “in his reflections the *philosopher*, and in both the *divine*.” His love for his wife is well exemplified in a “portait” of her which he wrote, figuring her under the feigned name of Maria. It was intended



for publication in a paper of his, *The Humanist*, which ran to fifteen numbers; but Mrs Delany would not allow its appearance in print. Like a true lover, Dr Delany begins by extolling Maria's gifts of mind and her qualities of heart, and only afterwards dilates on the charms of her appearance.

"With a person finely proportioned she had a most lovely face of great sweetness, set off with a head of fair hair, shining and naturally curled; with a complexion which nothing could out-do or equal, in which, to speak in the language of poets, 'the lilies and the roses contended for the mastery.' Her eyes were bright—indeed, I never could tell what colour they were of, but to the best of my judgment they were what Solomon called "*dove's eyes*"; and she is almost the only woman I ever saw whose lips were scarlet, and her bloom beyond expression. The sweetness arising from united graces was guarded by a dignity which kept all admirers in awe, insomuch that she was the woman in the world to whom the fine description of Solomon could best be applied: '*Fair as the moon! clear as the sun! but terrible as an army with banners.*'"

Though somewhat ecclesiastic in tone, there is a genuine ring about this portrait of Dr Delany's, a power of sympathy and a freshness which makes us feel that, despite his years (he was seventy-three when he wrote the above), the Doctor was never old.

Delany was an intimate friend of Swift's, and

after Swift's death he defended his friend against certain imputations in the *Observations* he (Delany) published upon Lord Orrery's *Remarks on Swift*. Midway between the two books—Delany's showing the more favourable, and Orrery's the less favourable, aspect of Swift's character—Dr Johnson suggests the truth may lie.

With regard to the Irish of that time, Dr Johnson has a significant saying: "The Irish mix better with the English than the Scotch do; their language is nearer to English, as a proof of which they succeed very well as players, which Scotchmen do not. Then, sir, they have not that extreme nationality which we find in the Scotch." This has the shallowness of many of Johnson's observations, but it tends to show that the prejudice against the Irish was not so strong as the prejudice against the Scotch.

Dr Johnson was ardent in his desire for the study of the Gaelic. Writing in 1757 to Charles O'Connor, author of "Dissertations on the History of Ireland," Dr Johnson says: "I have long wished that the Irish language were cultivated. Ireland is known by tradition to have been once the seat of piety and learning; and surely it would be very acceptable to all those who are curious either in the original of nations, or the affinities of language, to be further informed of the revolution of a people so ancient and once so illustrious."

Mrs Delany does not appear to have remarked

any striking contrast between the Society of Dublin and the Society of London. She seems, however, to have derived more enjoyment from the reunions at Delville when she was first in Ireland, than from any of the assemblies in London before or after. "I recollect no entertainment with so much pleasure as that what I received from that company." Travelling in Ireland, she comments on the fact that London fashions have penetrated to remote parts of County Down: "The dairymaids wear large hoops and velvet hoods instead of the round *tight petticoat* and *straw hat*, and there is as much *foppery* introduced in the *food* as in the *dress*—*the pure simplicity of ye country is quite lost!*" However, she describes in another place the extreme poverty of the Irish peasants: "The poverty of the people as I have passed through the country has made *my heart ache*; I never saw greater appearance of *misery*; they live in great extremes, either *profusely* or *wretchedly*."

One of Mrs Delany's chief claims to remembrance is that at that early date she did all in her power to promote Irish industries. Anticipating the action of Lady Aberdeen, who founded the Irish Industries Association in 1886, Mrs Delany succeeded in making Irish poplins fashionable at the Vice-Regal Court. "On the Prince of Wales' birthday," she writes in 1745 (when every lady was bound to wear an entirely new costume), "there appeared at Court a great number of Irish stuffs. Lady Chesterfield

was dressed in one, and I had the *secret satisfaction* of knowing myself to have been the cause. . . . The poor weavers are starving, all trade has met with a great check this year." We read also that Mrs Delany fitted up a little room at Delville, hung it with blue-and-white paper, "and intend a bed of blue-and-white linen—*all Irish manufacture*" (the italics are hers). She followed the Irish fashion of having a harper attached to her house, Holly Mount, near Down, "who plays a great variety of tunes very well ; he plays to us at our meals and to me whilst I am drawing." She must have known something of Irish harpers, for she mentions Carolan's lines—Carolan, the last of the native Irish bards whose compositions gave celebrity to their author. He died in 1738. In the Eighteenth Century the bardic system in Ireland finally broke up with all its minute and intricate rules established by age-long precedent ; and in the new freedom a whole flock of Gaelic lyrics found wing, whose singing makes, according to Dr Douglas Hyde, the most happy period of Gaelic literature. But of this movement Dublin and Mrs Delany seemed wholly unaware. Yet Gaelic was to make its first fiercely-disputed entry into English but a little later on in Macpherson's translation of Ossian.

Dr Delany died at Bath in 1768, and Mrs Delany returned to London. No period of her life is more attractive than her long widowhood. She was now sixty-eight ; she had a house in London where she

entertained, the Thatched House, St James's Street, which stood on the site of the present Conservative Club. Here she gave receptions and delightful small dinner-parties. Then she spent long visits at Bulstrode with her friend the Duchess of Portland—Bulstrode, in Buckinghamshire, "that melancholy monument of Dutch magnificence" as Horace Walpole calls it.

Mrs Delany is acclaimed by Fanny Burney one of the "old wits," and her parties were emphatically of the Blue-Stocking order—they were parties organised for intellectual conversation. Judging from Mrs Delany's character, and her own expressions on the subject, we conclude that the conversation was more harmonious, more graceful, more perfect within narrow limits than that at most of the other assemblies. Fireworks and the "towering sublime" were alike antipathetic to Mrs Delany. She preferred the "salutary gentle dew of common sense." Yet she lacked neither wit nor learning. She was indeed possessed of a considerable amount of scientific knowledge. Her extraordinary grasp of botany has already been referred to, and she collected fossils and studied mineralogy with some thoroughness. She writes from Bulstrode, "I cannot tell you how busy I have been in examining the varieties of stalactites, selenites, ludus helmontii, etc.," and she also made careful drawings of the crystalline forms of minerals. But she pursued her scientific studies, as she pursued her artistic enter-



prise, for sheer delight ; and in her old age her gaiety of spirit is as attractive as her capacity for devotion, her sweet dignity and her vitality. We find her extemporising riddles for the amusement of her friends, or writing doggerel to do pleasure to her beloved grandniece, whom she practically adopted when the child was seven. No wonder her contemporaries loved her. On first meeting her Hannah More describes her as "a living library of knowledge ; and time, which has so highly matured her judgment, has taken very little from her graces or her liveliness."

Mrs Walsingham writes her some graceful verses on her eightieth birthday, and Mrs Chapone addresses her in this exalted strain :—

"Give me leave then . . . to entreat you to *communicate the secret* of preserving *all* the ingenious *warmth of heart*, all the *sensibility and generosity of youth* with *all the dignity and prudence* which belong to age. . . ."

Mrs Delany's relations to George III. and Queen Charlotte were those of close personal friendship.

It was at Bulstrode that she met the King and Queen. They were in the habit of coming over frequently from Windsor to see the Duchess of Portland (now the Dowager Duchess), arriving sometimes informally after six, the King driving the Queen "in a low chaise with a pair of white horses"—sometimes in state in the middle of the day.



The King always distinguished Mrs Delany by his particular attention, fetching chairs for her, and placing a screen before the fire that her eyes might not suffer by the glare. Mrs Delany's brother, Bernard Granville, had been a friend of Handel's, and possessed a fine MS. collection of Handel's music : the King in his own hand wrote to Mrs Delany asking if he might see certain of the volumes, and the whole thirty-eight were sent for his inspection. Of the Queen Mrs Delany writes, " Her manners are most engaging ; there is so much dignity and affability blended, that it is hard to say whether one's respect or love predominates." Charlotte seems to have had a genuine affection for Mrs Delany, and a strong admiration for her chenille-work and her paper mosaic work. On one occasion the Queen put into her hands a most beautiful pocket-case of white satin worked with gold spangles, fitted with knives, scissors, bodkins, etc., and containing a letter in the Queen's hand. She gave Mrs Delany a lock of her hair ; and there are many letters in terms as affectionate as the following :—

" My dearest Mrs Delany,

" If coming to me will not fatigue your spirits *too* much, I shall receive you with open arms, and am

" Your affectionate friend,

" CHARLOTTE."



QUEEN CHARLOTTE

FROM THE PAINTING BY THOMAS GAINSBOROUGH, R.A., AT SOUTH KENSINGTON



After the death of the Duchess of Portland in 1785, the King and the Queen presented Mrs Delany with a house at Windsor, now in the possession of Mr A. C. Benson. "But," to quote Lady Llanover, the editor of her correspondence, "with that delicate consideration which characterised all their actions towards her, they gave at the same time £300 a year . . . and to prevent even the *appearance* of a pension . . . the Queen used regularly to bring her the half year's amount in a pocket-book when she made her a visit at this house." The King and the Queen visited Mrs Delany almost daily, and here Fanny Burney's momentous meeting with Royalty took place.

Mrs Delany made the acquaintance of Fanny Burney in 1783 through the offices of Mrs Chapone at Mrs Delany's house in St James' Place. Fanny Burney writes of Mrs Delany: "She is still tall, though some of her height may be lost; not much, however, for she is remarkably upright. She has no remains of beauty in feature, but in countenance I never but once saw more, and that was in my sweet maternal grandmother. Benevolence, softness, piety and gentleness are all resident in her face. . . ."

Mrs Delany's connections by descent very much resent the attitude of Fanny Burney to Mrs Delany in her Diary, and especially the imputation that Mrs Delany had been supported by the Duchess of Portland, and that Fanny Burney had helped Mrs

Delany to sort her letters and papers. Such gushing sentences as the following in the Diary would very conceivably irritate Mrs Delany's relatives : "Soothing Mrs Delany—sweet soul—folded me in her arms and wept over my shoulder . . . the sole satisfaction of my present life, which consists in the time it allows me to spend with this earthly angel."

In no relation of life was Mrs Delany's exquisite sense of Propriety better exemplified than in her attitude towards Royalty. She allowed herself to feel the sincerest gratification at the marks of esteem and regard that were conferred upon her, but she bore herself with a perfect dignity, and with a most just sense of what was fitting. Her estimate of the King and Queen was perhaps a little biassed, but it was neither servile nor fawning. It was the judgment of a loyal subject eager to see only what was good.

Mrs Delany died in 1788.

## PRECURSORS AND CONTEMPORARIES OF THE BLUE-STOCKINGS

HANNAH MORE is bold in her heraldry. The *Bas Bleu* are sprung from no unworthy stock. She does not stop to prove the descent, but merely indicates with a sweep of the hand the intellectual royalty of the race. Whose, think you, were the first *Bas Bleu* parties? Those of Aspasia at Athens,

“Where Socrates unbending sat  
With Alcibiades in chat. . . .”

With whom else of noble rank can the Blue-Stockings claim kin? With what other famous entertainments shall they trace connection? With the feasts of Lucullus, which were distinguished by—

“*Scipio's* lucky hit  
Pompey's *bon mot* or *Cæsar's* wit!  
I shall not stop to dwell on these,”

the poetess goes on,

“But be as epic as I please  
And plunge at once *in medias res*. . . .”

We will not stop to dwell on these either. It is, in fact, wiser to be a little vague in drawing such



far-stretching genealogical trees. Our lines are perhaps a trifle fanciful until we come down to the Seventeenth Century; here, indeed, we stand on firmer ground, but Hannah More does not show at all the same eagerness to acknowledge relationship with her more immediate and more certain ancestors; indeed, she goes out of her way to speak with unkindness of the Hôtel Rambouillet, that mother of Salons, which flourished in the reign of Louis XIV. and inaugurated a social power in France, lasting well into the Nineteenth Century. The reproach that Hannah More brings against the Hôtel Rambouillet is characteristic of her century and of England. She complains of an assembly whose *raison d'être* was brilliance, wit, the frothy essence of intellect, that it lacked common sense and simplicity. Perhaps it was a too strong infusion of this somewhat ponderous ingredient of common-sense that made our social admixture so much heavier than that of our neighbours. But Hannah More preferred the English recipe:—

“ Oh! how unlike the wit that fell,  
    *Rambouillet!* at thy quaint hotel;  
Where point, and turn, and équivoque,  
Distorted every word they spoke!  
All so intolerably bright  
Plain common-sense was put to flight. . . .  
No votive altar smok'd to thee  
Chaste Queen, divine Simplicity!  
But forc'd conceit, which ever fails,  
And stiff antithesis prevails. . . .”

These are hard sayings of a Salon that drew like a magnet the great men of a great age—that numbered Bossuet, Molière, Pascal, Corneille, Fénelon, Boileau, Racine, La Rochefoucauld, Bourdaloue, and Madame de Sévigné among its guests. Yet the enthusiasm for learning and for wit that flamed in Seventeenth-century France is remembered to-day chiefly by the absurdities of its most foolish disciples. Hannah More's *Bas Bleu* has not conferred immortality upon these, but Molière's delightful comedy, *Les Femmes Savantes*. The learning of these ladies consists in an unbounded enthusiasm for Greek, of which they know nothing, and for "poetry" of the most doggerel description. They are so fastidious about the purity of language that they dismiss their servant for a solecism, and want the notary to refine his legal terms. Learned ladies, it seems, suppose that every man who approaches them is in love with them; the supposition of all others most calculated to make them ridiculous. But Molière, being a genius, is not unjust. He makes the domestic sister quite as disagreeable and spiteful as the learned one; and the cowardly husband, whose opinions on marriage he can only get expressed through the mouth of the dismissed Martine, is a more despicable character than the lofty Philaminte, his wife. One can imagine that Molière himself enjoyed the inconsistencies of Clitandre's Speech on Women :—

“ . . . J’aime que souvent, aux questions qu’on fait,  
 Elle sache ignorer les choses qu’elle sait ;  
 De son étude enfin je veux qu’elle se cache  
 Et qu’elle ait du savoir sans vouloir qu’on le sache.”

But, indeed, the view expressed in these lines was seriously held by the majority of men and women in the Eighteenth Century. Does not that shrewd observer of men and things, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, say with reference to the education of her grand-daughter, “The second caution to be given her (and which is most absolutely necessary) is to conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness ; the parade of it can only serve to draw on her the envy and consequently the most inveterate hatred of all he and she fools, which will certainly be three parts in four of all her acquaintances.” Here we find the germ of Carlyle’s much quoted dictum.

The Salon flourished for a brief period in Eighteenth-century England : it attracted most of the chief personages of the age ; it captured contemporary imagination. But the Salon in Eighteenth-century France was an institution of far greater power and influence ; no mere accessory to life, but life itself ; an element of mental and emotional intoxication, seething with new ideas, stimulating wild speculation, possessing all the graces of that old régime, the most polished in the world, and playing delicately for decades with strange impossible

theories as if they were bubble-balls, instead of deadly bombs that were to shatter in one vast devastation all this frail beauty of autumn-coloured decay.

For it is always autumn in Eighteenth-century France—the France preceding the Revolution—the France of the Salons. Or if late summer as sometimes pictured by Watteau, it is a summer threatened by the gloom of destroying thunder-cloud. But autumn is the prevailing emotion—the Salons themselves are dim with autumn's dull gold, the chairs reflect glints of a brighter ore, the tapestries are faint with cinnamon tones. We feel the haze of autumn, in which individual hues gain soft colour and distinction; we are aware of a wit that has lost its grosser elements, and is refined to the keenest point, just before the verge of shrivelling; we recognise that combination, so peculiar to autumn, of misty bloom and crackling sharpness,—the purple and violet exhalations that conceal a slow decay and the tenuous brittle glory that precedes death. True, there is the vigour of a fresh life underneath,—the fuel, Decay, “quicken the fires of renewal”—but it needs the seer to remember the future spring in the pause of this autumnal hush. It is to the past spring that our eyes turn :—

“Light loves that woke with spring  
This autumn afternoon  
Beholds meandering  
Still to the strains of Spring.”

It is easy to imagine the edged perfections, the

quick surprises, the brilliant contrasts, the subtle tints and the smouldering passions stimulated by this heavy overcharged atmosphere, which subdued into harmony with its own pale magnificence all fierce speculations and violent theories, as the autumn subdues in its primrose-coloured copses the black and red of spotted bramble-leaf. Eighteenth-century England, exuberant and coarse with vigour—a little clumsy even with excess of life—verging upon riotous self-consciousness—could not hope suddenly to develop a wit produced by centuries of selection, or to reveal a brilliance of conversation that was the consummation of infinite leisure, or to bring forth out of its homely common-sense, a birth of imagination, fantastic, daring, various, that, like the genius in the Arabian tale, was to take gigantic shape of reality and change the world. We have already seen that a shrewd criticism of life, and a sober criticism of books, formed the staple of English conversation, diversified by sagacious, witty, and apposite sayings. The didactic element, too, was also always in the background. We may indeed roughly put the difference between French and English conversation in the Eighteenth Century under a physical symbol by contrasting two characteristic figures of the age—the bulky form of Dr Johnson—him of the robust sense and sledge-hammer moral pronouncements, with the thin delicate wiriness of Voltaire, poignant in wit, polished to attenuation, his





MADAME GEOFFRIN

FROM THE PORTRAIT BY CHARDIN IN THE MUSÉE DE MONTPELLIER





shining quicksilver spite dancing through all his work.

The homely thistle, sturdy and spiky, indifferent as to soil, does not require cultivation: but the rare hot-house plant must have the most delicate care. The French Salonières expended extraordinary pains on the nurture of their Salons—it was Madame Geoffrin who invented the striking saying, “Il ne faut pas laisser croître l’herbe sur le chemin de l’amitié.” The French hostesses thought no trouble too great for the end of retaining old friends, and attracting and attaching new ones. They had sympathy to give—overflowing, abundant; sympathy—intellectual, emotional; sympathy—that was to be counted upon all hours of the day, every day of the year, for years successively: for fashionable life centred in the capital, and Paris was France. We English gave no such heart-whole devotion to our Salons. They were never over here the centre and the source of life; they hardly interrupted the daily routine. The Blue-Stocking hostesses were largely absorbed by other interests and responsibilities; Mrs Vesey spent most of the year near Dublin; Mrs Montagu had several country houses and her coal mines to attend to; Mrs Thrale was constantly at Bath and other watering-places. English society lived, as now, a great portion of the year in the country, and ties had to be re-knotted at frequent intervals with consequent little roughnesses. It was impossible, with so many interrup-

tions, to have those flowing and unbroken intimacies and friendships that characterised the French Salons, those confidences and understandings born of the fulness of time : social intercourse in England was necessarily more haphazard and spasmodic.

The power of the French Salon was no doubt largely due to its stability ; for its habitués the doors always stood open. Here came the philosophers, the poets, the painters, the writers, the encyclopædists ; later on, to Madame Roland, the politicians ; later still, to Madame Récamier, the worshippers of her beauty. Here men met on neutral ground, flashing theory and epigram ; controlled by the pervading sweetness, or the happy tact, or the gay sanity of the ruling spirit—the hostess. No need here for artificial arrangement of guests, for circles, and squares, and triangles—devices adopted in England—no need for visible effort, for mental strain : the grouping was spontaneous, the conversation bubbled up easy as a fountain, and an unparalleled social instinct fused into harmony worn-out France and the France to come. “I saw the old moon yesternight with the young moon in her arms” ; so we vision the French salons ; the old power, all unknowing, nursing the new power ; an effete world paling before a fresh light.

The English Salon was too much hedged in by convention to be an influence in forming thought. Not only politics, but a large number of other

subjects were considered unsuitable for polite conversation. The English Salon was narrower in outlook than her sister in France; less wide in sympathy, less permanent in appeal; the English Salon lacked also the final graces of the French Salon, the heritage of the past. The English Salon was more awkward, more self-conscious, more middle-class; but, on the other hand, its fame was unsullied. The lives of the Blue-Stockings were so much above reproach that they could make themselves ridiculous by condemning Mrs Thrale for her second marriage. In France the case was very different.

Society in France was corrupt to its core, and hardly one of the great ladies but was touched, and in most cases with justice, by the breath of scandal. There was Madame Geoffrin, indeed, pure in reputation, who, though of bourgeois extraction, kept a salon of European celebrity by her exquisite gift of sympathy. But in the case of a Madame de l'Epinay, half her charm consisted in her wanton irresponsibility; and in the case of a Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, fame counted not at all beside a personality so brilliant, so passionate, so tender. Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, it will be remembered, was companion to the blind Madame du Deffand, and used to hold a little rival salon under her employer's roof in her famous "Chambre du Derrière," while her employer slept. Horace Walpole, for whom Madame du Deffand in her

old age had so passionate and pathetic an affection, is the only Englishman who appears to belong of right to this brilliant society. Does not this picture of him seem a picture out of ancient France? Letitia Hawkins tells us that Horace Walpole was not so much tall as *long*, slender to excess, with hands and complexion of a most unhealthy paleness. "His eyes were remarkably bright and penetrating, very dark and lively. . . . He always entered a room in that style of affected delicacy which fashion had then made almost natural—*chapeau bas* between his hands, as if he wished to compress it, knees bent, and feet on tiptoe, as if afraid of a wet floor. His dress was most usually in summer a lavender suit, the waistcoat embroidered with a little silver or white silk, partridge silk stockings and gold buckles, ruffles and frill of lace."

In Eighteenth-century France laxity of morals did not shock: whereas in England, the reputation of women, though not of men, was scrupulously regarded—a distinction commented on by the wise old Mrs Delany. "The minutest indiscretion of a woman," she says, "though occasioned by men, never fails of being enlarged into a notorious crime; but men are to sin on without limitation or blame. A hard case! Not the restraint we are under,—for that I extremely approve of,—but the unreasonable licence tolerated in the men." Fanny Burney was greatly attracted by



JULIE DE L'ESPINASSE

FROM A WATER-COLOUR SKETCH BY CARMONTELE IN THE MUSÉE DE CHANTILLY





two Frenchwomen who visited England, and who sought her out with much flattering assiduity—Madame de Genlis and Madame de Staël; but at the first rumour touching their good name, Fanny Burney with much fluttering and heart-burning, felt herself obliged to withdraw from their acquaintance. Fanny Burney's attitude is typical of her time and nation.

Another striking contrast between the French and English salons lies in the fact that the French salons were almost exclusively attended by men, whereas in England the sexes freely intermingled. In essentials, therefore, the constitution of social intercourse was different. The French salons were ruled by one bright particular star, who attracted and subtly dominated her guests, a situation more romantic and dangerous, less natural and healthy than in this country.

A contemporary, Wraxall, asks in his *Memoirs*, whether the literary society of London could enter into any comparison with the society that met in the apartments of Madame du Deffand and of Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse. He concludes, "neither in the period of its duration, nor in the number, merit, or intellectual eminence of the principal members could the English society be held up on any parity with that of France." This is the inevitable conclusion; and we may add other points of superiority belonging to contemporary French society that Wraxall has not

given in detail ; greater brilliance of conversation ; sharper keenness of wit ; wider reach of idea ; stronger dazzle of personality.

But in the English Salon we breathe a purer atmosphere ; we meet women not less kind, perhaps, but more sterling in worth ; women who cannot talk so well, because they have devoted themselves to interests other than talk ; women capable of friendships with women that are more than alliances ; women who have come into closer grip with life because the cleavage between the aristocracy and the people in England is not so absolute ; women more narrow, but more restful ; rigid, conventional, provincial even, but honest, and with a stern sense of duty. Their charm owed nothing to sophistication—their wit was largely mother-wit, and their wisdom was grounded on experience.

The English Blue-Stockings cannot rival their contemporaries overseas in intellectual and social gifts : but they are good to live with.

## MRS THRALE (PIOZZI)

WHEN first we try to shape the figure of Mrs Thrale before our imagination, the dust of obscure controversies veils the view. Two successive outbursts of windy violence, thick with imprecation, blur her outline: the one raised by her second marriage (with Signor Piozzi), the other by her *Anecdotes of Dr Johnson*, which started the "Bozzi and Pozzi" controversy, as Horace Walpole irreverently calls it—the controversy between herself and Boswell on the subject of the dead doctor. Her biographers are so busy in defending her from misinterpretation, in disavowing a false woman, that the real woman has difficulty in emerging. As to contemporary evidence, we have to make a composite portrait of her mainly out of the *couleur de rose* water-colour of Fanny Burney, the grudging and unsympathetic sketch of Boswell, and her own contradictory jottings.

By sheer force of personality she detaches herself from the obscuring veils; with an *éclat* of vivacity she bursts through the dusts of controversy. She stands before us drawn in definite lines, hardly softened by that sweetness so generally attributed to her.

Not only her "expressive eyes," but her whole face is alive with character. "I never was handsome," she is reported to have said in old age, "I had always too many strong points in my face for beauty." Fanny Burney gives this detailed account of her appearance on the occasion of Mrs Thrale's visit to Dr Burney: "Mrs Thrale is a pretty woman still, though she has some defect in the mouth which looks like a cut or scar; but her nose is very handsome, her complexion very fair; she has the *embonpoint charmant*, and her eyes are blue and lustrous. She is extremely lively and chatty, and showed none of the supercilious or pedantic airs, so freely, or rather so scoffingly, attributed to women of learning and celebrity."

"She is extremely lively and chatty." In these words, perhaps, lie the final secret of Mrs Thrale's social success.

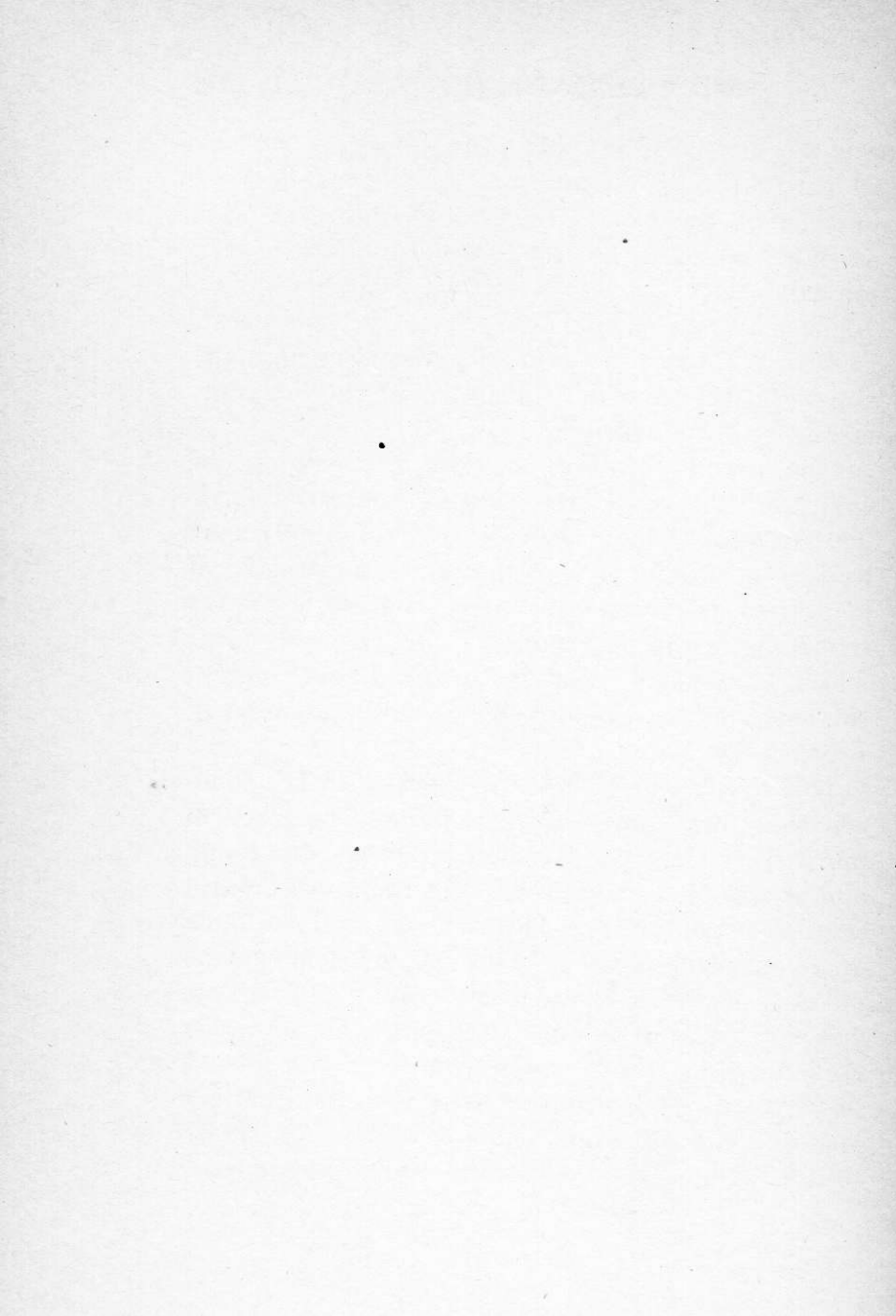
Her vivacity is different in type to the vivacity of Mrs Montagu, more impulsive, more unself-conscious. Mrs Montagu, fragile in build, nervous in temperament, was spurred to mental activity, partly by restlessness, partly by ambition; Mrs Thrale, "short, plump, and brisk," as Boswell describes her, more robust in health, more philosophical in disposition, was lively through sheer exuberance of spirits. This difference is accounted for, not only by disposition and by physical temperament, but by race. Mrs Montagu was an Englishwoman, reserved by nature, to whom self-expression



MRS. THRALE

FROM THE DRAWING BY GEORGE DANCE, R.A., IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY





was a greater effort ; Mrs Thrale was a Welsh-woman, with the spontaneity, the nimbleness of intellect of the Celt. She talked more, as well as more unguardedly, than Mrs Montagu. Her tongue, in fact, was apt to run away with her. Says Johnson: "She is the first woman in the world, could she but restrain that wicked tongue of hers ; she would be the only woman, could she but command that little whirligig."

Her friends attribute to her a sweetness of character that must have gone far towards amending her unrestrained speech. "Mrs Thrale seems to have a sweetness of disposition that equals all her other excellencies," Fanny Burney is always repeating in varying words. Dr Johnson says: "Mrs Thrale is a sweet creature, and never angry ; she has a temper the most delightful of any woman I ever knew."

It is by reason of their friendship with Dr Johnson that the Thrales have a permanent place in our literary history. At their house at Streatham, and at their house in London, a room was appropriated entirely to the Doctor's use, and he came and went as he pleased. During the last seventeen years of his life a considerable portion of his time was spent at Streatham Place—"an elegant villa six miles from town"—then regarded as a residence in the country. For the suburbs, with their curious local life, did not exist. There was no Mr Smith of Surbiton, no Mr Podmore of Stoke Tootington ;

and Mrs Thrale was called "Streatham's Hebe," as one might speak of Highland Mary or St Bridget of the Isles.

At Streatham Place the Doctor enjoyed, not only luxurious surroundings and the peace of a well-ordered household, but the close friendship of its master, and the thoughtful sympathy of its mistress. He was more than an honoured guest, he was an intimate; and Fanny Burney, who has given us the most vivid picture of Johnson at Streatham, shows how his rugged personality softened under these kindly influences, restful to him physically, soothing to him morally, stimulating to him intellectually.

Thrale was the dominant power at Streatham Place. Indeed, Mrs Thrale's husbands are unusually conspicuous in her life.

As we already noticed, Mr Montagu, absorbed in Parliamentary duties, aloof in mathematical regions, left the stage entirely to his wife; the adoring Dr Delany yielded Mrs Delany space and precedence in reverence of love; an Irishman of a very different type, Mr Vesey, allowed "the Sylph" to follow her own bent through sheer indifference. But Thrale, by impetus of wealth, of personality, by his own valuation of himself, assumed as of right the principal place in the foreground. Mr and Mrs Thrale figure together during his life as host and hostess. He is as important a factor in the entertainment as she is. As to Mrs Thrale's

second husband, Piozzi, modest and retiring as he was, the scandal of their marriage forced him into fierce publicity, and Mrs Piozzi, in pride and self-justification, felt bound to keep him prominently to the front.

Mr Thrale was a solid man, materially, mentally, and physically. He was a man of riches and position, by trade a brewer ; he represented Southwark three times in Parliament ; Streatham Place was maintained with much splendour, and he kept a pack of hounds at Croydon. Boswell describes him as "tall, well-proportioned and stately"; but as a man of property himself, Boswell feels it necessary to make some justification for the position of consequence occupied by a brewer. "In this great commercial country it is natural that a situation which produces much wealth should be considered as very respectable ; and no doubt honest industry is entitled to esteem." It is evident that the indissoluble union between wealth and respectability was as prominent a tenet in the Eighteenth, as in the Twentieth, Century. Boswell, however, sees certain dangers incident in this belief. "But perhaps the too rapid advances of men of low extraction tends to lessen the value of that distinction by birth and gentility which has ever been found beneficial to the grand scheme of subordination." The "grand scheme of subordination" view of life, which made Boswell a defender of the Slave Trade, is now largely discredited ; other

more deadly perils of money-worship, undreamed of by Boswell, have manifested themselves ; yet the amazing belief that wealth involves respectability is to-day as rampant as ever. Dr Johnson was a consistent defender of luxury ; but he does on one occasion accuse Mrs Thrale of the "insolence of wealth": because she sneered at his proposal to have Mr Boswell and his lady on a visit at his house.

Mrs Thrale, thirteen years after her marriage, gives an interesting picture of her husband's appearance and character. We quote from her diary, "Thraliana," extracts from which have appeared in print. "Mr Thrale's person is manly, his countenance agreeable, his eyes steady and of the deepest blue ; his look neither soft nor severe, neither sprightly nor gloomy, but thoughtful and intelligent ; his address is neither caressive nor repulsive, but unaffectedly civil and decorous. . . . ." She goes on to say that he is fond of money, but fond of liberality too, —that he is willing to give generously and to spend fashionably—that he is tranquil, moderate, and has an easiness of temper that makes him exceedingly comfortable to live with. In a word, she draws him in middle life as exemplary, but unlovable : awakening no affection in wife or children or servants. In early manhood he had the manners and led the life of a gay man of the world ; his marriage was one purely of convenience ; Mrs Thrale, who brought with her a fortune of at least

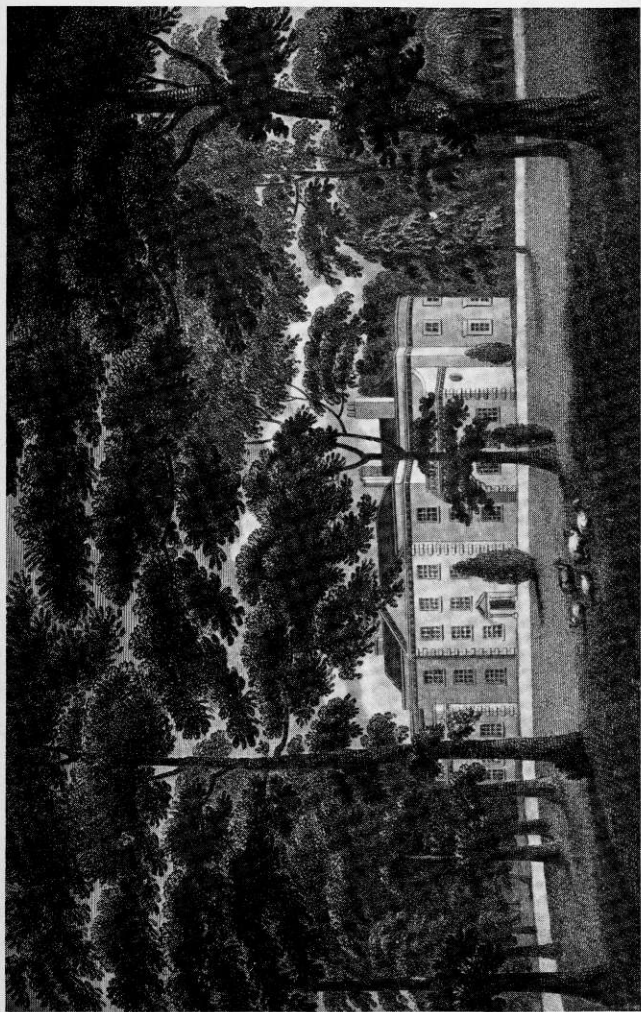
£10,000, and came of a good Welsh family, was, according to her own account, the only lady of the many he approached willing to take up her town residence in the Borough (Southwark) where the brewing business was carried on. Thrale was also a man of culture, and reckoned among his friends many of the intellectual giants of the day. Johnson had a great opinion of his friend's attainments and capacities, and the Doctor gave this interesting dictum on the finality of Thrale's remarks. "Pray, Doctor," said a gentleman to Johnson, "is Mr Thrale a man of conversation, or is he only wise and silent?" "Why, Sir, his conversation does not show the *minute* hand, but he generally strikes the hour very correctly." Thrale was one of the few men of sufficient personality to check the Doctor's outbursts. "There, there, now we have had enough for one lecture, Dr Johnson, we will not be upon education any more till after dinner if you please," he would say. The Doctor helped Thrale to select the books for the library at Streatham Place—the room that contained the famous collection of Sir Joshua Reynolds' portraits, known as the Streatham gallery. Mrs Thrale and her eldest daughter were in one piece over the fire-place at full length. Mr Thrale was over the door leading to his study, and above the bookcases there were pictures of Dr Johnson, Burke, Dr Goldsmith, Garrick, Dr Burney and Sir Joshua Reynolds himself. Such a collection surely is unique in the



annals of English art ; to possess such a circle of distinguished friends, and their portraits all painted by the hand of one great master, argues a rare combination of culture, of opportunity, and of wealth. This collection was sold by Mrs Thrale herself (then Mrs Piozzi) in 1816 when she was in need of money. The room is easily constructed in imagination, and when we vision within its walls the Thrales, Dr Johnson "talking Ramblers," the Burneys, and Mrs Montagu, we seem to have a microcosm of one section of Eighteenth Century life.

Streatham Place was a delightful residence. The house was three-storied, white, and very pleasantly situated in a fine paddock. It stood on the southern side of the lower common between Streatham and Tooting, and was pulled down in 1863. The grounds were well laid out with high-walled kitchen gardens, ice-houses and pineries ; and they were of such extent that a wall of nearly two miles bordered the shrubbery encircling them. We read of cattle, of poultry, of dogs being kept. The library was frequently used as a breakfast-room ; the parlour in which dinner-parties were held had prints of Hogarth on the walls ; the saloon was hung with sky-blue.

The part assigned to Mrs Thrale amid these spacious opportunities for hospitality was to be an ornament of intellectual worth—"a fountain of perpetual flow," as indeed Miss Seward reported her. With that curious insight which characterises



THRALE PLACE; AFTERWARDS KNOWN AS STREATHAM PLACE

FROM AN ENGRAVING BY ELLIS DATED 1787



her estimate of her husband Mrs Thrale says: "With regard to his wife, though little tender of her person, he is very partial to her understanding." It is a puzzling and significant fact that despite all the charm and sweetness of disposition dwelt on by her friends, Mrs Thrale never succeeded in gaining the affection of this husband, nor of her children.

Mr Thrale's partiality for his wife's understanding was so great that he refused to allow her any part in domestic affairs: these were to be left exclusively to the housekeeper and the cook. Even Dr Johnson half resented Mrs Thrale feeding the chickens when she might have been cultivating her mind. Her exclusion from the kitchen and the larder is a curious example of the fallacy that the domestic and the intellectual are inimical: had Mrs Thrale been a woman less vivacious in disposition and less spontaneous in intercourse, her character would undoubtedly have suffered from so unnatural a limitation.

As it was, however, she quite fulfilled all that was expected of her. She was well read and well-educated, but more important, she was exquisitely apt at quotation and quick at impromptu. Dr Johnson told Miss Seward that Mrs Thrale had more colloquial wit than most of our literary women. Her springs of conversation never ran dry. Writing in 1819, when she was nearly eighty, Mrs Piozzi says: "My bag of tales, alias bagatelles, never seems exhausted in pleasant company." If she

did not "diffuse knowledge," she certainly diffused good temper, and her nimbleness of wit was stimulating. She was inclined at times, however, to fall into sentimental exaggeration which passed the decorum even of a sentimental age. Writing to Fanny about *Cecilia* she says: "My eyes red with reading and crying, I stop every moment to kiss the book, and to wish it was my Burney. 'Tis the sweetest book, the most interesting, the most engaging. . . ."

Very apt was Dr Johnson's remark to her on one occasion: "I know nobody who blasts by praise as you do, for wherever there is exaggerated praise everybody is set against a character."

Mrs Thrale knew French, Italian, Spanish, Hebrew and a little Latin, but no Greek; and thereby hangs a rather pathetic story. Thrale became deeply enamoured in later life of the beautiful Sophy Streatfield—she of the "ivory neck, nose and notions—à la grecque. . . ." the finished coquette who could cause her tears to flow at will without reason—an exhibition very popular at Streatham Place. To Mrs Thrale the sharpest sting seemed to lie in the fact that S.S. (as she was familiarly called) possessed superior scholarship. Thrale remarked with reference to some lines quoted by his wife: "Miss Streatfield could have quoted those lines in Greek." Mrs Thrale adds: "His saying so piqued me, and piqued me because it was true. I wish I understood Greek!"

The Thrales entertained largely and variously, both at their house in the Borough, and at Streatham. Contemporary memoirs contain records of house-parties, of intimate and formal dinner-parties, and of assemblies.

We can form some conception of the magnificence of the dinners from the account given by the Rev. Dr Thomas Campbell :—

“ *First Course*, soups at head and foot, removed by fish and a saddle of mutton.

“ *Second Course*, a fowl they call galena at head, and a capon larger than some of our Irish turkeys at foot.

“ *Third Course*, four different sorts of ices, pineapple, grape, raspberry, and a fourth ; in each remove there were, I think, fourteen dishes. The two first courses were served on massy plate.”

At Streatham Place Dr Johnson was in his element. Here he found the society of “the learned, the witty, and eminent in every way, who were assembled in numerous companies.” Here he lived for sixteen or seventeen years with the Thrales on terms of closest intimacy. Thrale he respected and liked ; for Mrs Thrale he seems to have had a feeling of stronger admiration and affection than for any other lady of his coterie. From her in the happy times he received delicate untiring attention ; she gave him the bright responsive appreciation he so longed for ; she met his marvellous gusts of speech with captivating wit



and womanliness. In Miss Reynolds' *Recollections* we read that Johnson used to dwell on the praises of Mrs Thrale "with a peculiar delight, a paternal fondness, expressive of conscious exultation in being so intimately acquainted with her." The memory of this bond was so poignantly alive in Sir Walter Scott's time, that when in 1829 he landed with a party of friends on the Island of Skye, and asked his friends the first thought that had come into their minds, they all confessed it had been the Latin ode addressed by Dr Johnson to Mrs Thrale from this spot.

"Through paths that halt from stone to stone,  
Amid the din of tongues unknown,  
One image haunts my soul alone,  
Thine, gentle Thrale!" (Milne's translation.)

In retrospect Mrs Thrale speaks of her long connection with Dr Johnson as a grievous burden imposed upon her by her husband: but contemporary evidence seems to show that at the time she was sufficiently well pleased by the Doctor's affection and esteem. In the early days of their acquaintance the constant presence of so notable a personage in the house conferred distinction upon it. Quick of mind, apt, well-read, the tussles of intellectual converse could not have failed in great attractions for Mrs Thrale. She writes in later years: "I really thought he could not have existed without my conversations, forsooth!" Then the

hurt of Johnson's rough reproofs must soon have been healed by his praise of the sweetness with which she bore them. Certainly she conveyed to the outer world an impression of ardent devotion. Boswell, jealous as he was of her influence, feels bound to acknowledge her as a companion satellite. "I . . . had conversation enough with her to admire her talents, and to show her that I was as Johnsonian as herself."

The following passage out of Boswell's *Life* is one of the happiest descriptions of Johnson's power, and brings Mrs Thrale and Boswell into one rare moment of agreement. Boswell finds Dr Johnson at breakfast with Mrs Thrale at her house in the Borough (1776): "In a moment he was in a full glow of conversation, and I felt myself elevated as if brought into another state of being. Mrs Thrale and I looked to each other while he talked, and our looks expressed our congenial admiration and affection for him. . . . I exclaimed to her, 'I am now intellectually *Hermippus redivivus*, I am quite restored by him, by transfusion of *mind*.' 'There are many,' she replied, 'who admire and respect Dr Johnson, but you and I *love* him.'"

Fanny Burney reports Mrs Thrale as saying to Dr Johnson: "This I can tell you, sir, without any flattery—I not only bear your reproofs when present, but in almost everything I do in your absence, I ask myself

whether you would like it, and what you would say to it."

Thrale died suddenly in 1781, and an inevitable change came over Mrs Thrale's relationship with Dr Johnson. Dr Johnson was one of the executors of the will, and both he and Mrs Thrale were plunged headlong into the business of settling the estate. She had shown herself an energetic woman on previous occasions when her husband's affairs had become involved; and now she went constantly down to the Borough, consulting, advising, superintending. "Mrs Montagu has been here; she says I ought to have a statue erected to me for my diligent attendance on my compting-house duties."

Mrs Thrale's papers contain a good deal of interesting information about the conditions of the brewery business at this time, and the money to be made in that trade. In some years, she tells us, £15,000 or £16,000 had been got; but Thrale was inclined to over-brew, and in this way brought himself to the verge of financial ruin. On one occasion Mrs Thrale and Dr Johnson tried hard to extract from him a promise to brew no more than 80,000 barrels in one winter. "If he got but 2s. 6d. by each barrel," Mrs Thrale remarks, "80,000 half-crowns are £10,000, and what more would mortal man desire than an income of ten thousand a year—five to spend and five to lay up." Beer, it is to be noted, was sold retail at 6d. a quart bottle. Besides

endangering his position by over-brewing, Thrale was induced, on the recommendation of a quack, to erect a plant costing more than £2000 for the brewing of beer "without the *beggarly elements* of malt and hops." Mrs Thrale showed plenty of energy and common-sense in face of the serious crisis brought on by the ruinous failure of the scheme: she kept the clerks from deserting their posts, and borrowed sufficient money to tide over the time of difficulty. Johnson, with his amazing self-confidence, was always ready to give the brewer technical and other advice; and so impressed Perkins, the manager, with his common-sense, that Perkins had a portrait of the Doctor hung up in the counting-house.

After Thrale's death, Johnson seems to have relished the full flavour of his responsibility as executor, and derived peculiar delight from the signing of cheques for immense sums. The glamour of finance, the adventure and scent of money-pursuit, belong in a special degree to the literature of to-day; but Johnson anticipated this romanticising of money-making, the vastness of the concern fired his imagination, and when it came to the question of selling the brewery this famous dictum is attributed to him: "We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice." The brewery was sold for the sum of £135,000 to the Quaker Barclay, who, taking the

manager into partnership, became the firm of Barclay and Perkins. As manager, Boswell informs us, Perkins used to have a salary of five hundred a year. This firm, in 1835, was the largest of its kind in the world. Mrs Thrale wrote: "I have by this bargain purchased peace and a stable fortune, restoration to my original rank in life, and a situation undisturbed by commercial jargon, unpolluted by commercial frauds, undisgraced by commercial connections."

It is clear that Mrs Thrale wished to break away entirely from the old life and from old associations—that she desired to enjoy to the full the sensation of her newly-born freedom and of her increased importance. As to Johnson, he was getting older and more exacting; his peculiarities were growing more irritating; there was no Mr Thrale to check his outbursts. It is unlikely that Mrs Thrale behaved to the Doctor with any definite unkindness, but it seems clear that she now regarded him as something of an incubus, to be shaken off as gently as possible. And Johnson suffered—suffered cruelly. It was not that his pride was hurt, as in the rupture with Mrs Montagu; it was not the violent break in a habit of life which had been delightful that moved him so profoundly; rather an affection, deep, strong, of slow growth, on which he had come unconsciously to depend, which he had believed unshakable, was threatened with



hideous decay. And now the Doctor's attentions began visibly to bore Mrs Thrale; the newspaper reports, linking her name with Dr Johnson's in possible marriage, gave her extreme irritation, and her affection for Piozzi and marriage with him caused the final breach.

It is almost inevitable that Mrs Thrale's *Anecdotes of Dr Johnson*, published after his death, should reflect her attitude of mind and appear a little disingenuous. She had to defend herself against the world's criticism of her conduct to Johnson in his later life, and at the same time to treat her subject with enthusiastic eulogy. Horace Walpole, in incisive phrase, shows the way she took out of the dilemma: "Her panegyric is loud in praise of her hero; and almost every fact she relates disgraces him." Mrs Chapone criticises the book in words almost identical. Though necessarily much of interest is recorded in the *Anecdotes* no sense of personality is conveyed. Her own description suggests a Rembrandtesque portrait: "Mine is a mere candle-light picture of his latter days, where everything falls in dark and shadow except the face, the index of the mind; but even that is seen unfavourably and with a paleness beyond what nature gave it." But instead of a portrait strong in lights and shades we have a reflection, not only pale, but dim and blurred, as if glimpsed in shallow running water.

The *Anecdotes* appeared in 1786, and the first



impression was sold out the first day. The book made a considerable noise, and created considerable controversy. Boswell, whose *Life* did not appear till five years later, entered with spirit into the fray, his chief accusation against Mrs Thrale being her inaccuracy. Squibs abounded, and the print shops were full of satiric prints. No wonder Burke should have exclaimed to Hannah More, "How many maggots have crawled out of that great body!" in reference to the numerous small scribblers who made capital out of the dead.

If her treatment of Dr Johnson during his life and after his death gave rise to furious discussion, she had to face criticism still more scathing on account of her marriage with Signor Piozzi.

It is very difficult to realise nowadays why this marriage should have been regarded with such universal opprobrium. Piozzi was a foreigner, it is true; he was a professional singer; but he was a gentleman of character and position, eminent in his profession, earning some £1200 a year, and possessing, according to Mrs Piozzi, every moral quality. "The man I love, I love for his honesty, for his tenderness of heart, his dignity of mind, his piety to God, his duty to his mother, and his delicacy to me." She wrote in 1782: "A woman of passable person, ancient family, respectable character, uncommon talents, and three thousand

a year, has a right to think herself any man's equal, and has nothing to seek but return of affection from whatever partner she pitches on." Then there was the question of her five daughters (Mrs Thrale's only son had died in 1776; she had had twelve children in all). The eldest Miss Thrale, though we read of her high character after she married Lord Keith, appears to have been an unamiable girl. Fanny Burney says: "She is reckoned cold and proud, but I believe her to be only shy and reserved." Charlotte Ann Burney writes that "Miss Thrale has taken it into her head to be civil to people this winter, I hear." It is abundantly evident that between mother and daughter little sympathy existed. There was no financial complication, since the daughters were each provided with property to the extent of £20,000. In this crisis Mrs Thrale behaved, according to her own account, with dramatic fitness. An interview took place between Piozzi, Mrs Thrale, and Miss Thrale, at which Mrs Thrale writes: "I confessed my attachment to him and her together with many tears and agonies one day at Streatham; told them both that I wished I had two hearts for their sakes, but having one only I would break it between them." The letters were delivered into Miss Thrale's keeping, and Piozzi dismissed. Mrs Thrale spent over a year of unhappiness with her daughters at Bath; and only when her decline of health

became alarming did the daughters relent. Piozzi was recalled, and the marriage took place in 1784.

In our present era of extraordinary unions, Hester Thrale's second marriage appears not merely excusable, but quite normal. The Eighteenth Century, however, has not been called the age of Reason for nothing; and the Eighteenth Century lady brought Reason very searchingly to bear—in theory at least—on the subject of marriage. The many treatises of advice to young girls inculcate, as well as a prudent consideration of material benefits, a restraint of the emotions, a mastery over the passions, a self-control which has indeed its charming side, but is carried to an extreme. As if to counter-balance the coarseness of the age, the Eighteenth Century maiden was to be cold as a mountain-nymph—her every thought and feeling were to be kept close under the dominion of the proprieties. As in modern France, stress was laid upon friendship in marriage; similarity of interests, of fortunes, and of social position were to be the main objects of desire. Hester Thrale outraged all these canons. The world chose to regard the singer as something of an adventurer, a fortune-hunter; it considered that Mrs Thrale should have remained exclusively devoted to the memory of Thrale and the interests of her daughters. But the main front of the offending was the fact that she frankly avowed she felt for Piozzi "passionate love subsisting with

uncontaminated conduct." Mrs *Frail* Piozzi, as Horace Walpole unkindly calls her—there is a character named Mrs Frail in Congreve's *Double Dealer*—the epithet Mrs *Frail* Piozzi merely sums up the general opinion that she had allowed her emotions to obtain undue sway, that she had thrown to the winds the wise restraints of decorum and abandoned everything in a whirl of passion, unseeming the dignity of her sex and state of life.

Her friends practically deserted her in this crisis. According to Mrs Carter the marriage showed "a plentiful lack of common-sense." Madame d'Arblay writes in the *Memoirs of Dr Burney*: "Her station in Society, her fortune, her distinguished education, and her conscious sense of its distinction; and yet more, her high origin—a native honour, which had always seemed the glory of her self-appreciation; all had contributed to lift her so eminently above the restlessly impetuous tribe, who immolate fame, interest, and duty to the shrine of passion, that the outcry of surprise and censure raised throughout the metropolis by these unexpected nuptials, was almost stunning in its jarring noise of general reprobation; resounding through madrigals, parodies, declamation, epigrams and irony." Mrs Piozzi was attacked with such venom that even Boswell felt enmity was being carried too far. He gives the following anecdote: Mrs Thrale having said, perhaps affectedly: "I don't want to fly," Johnson

replied, "With your wings, madam, you *must* fly ; but have a care, there are clippers abroad." Boswell makes this comment, "But have they not clipped rather *rudely*, and gone a great deal *closer* than was necessary?"

The marriage appears to have turned out a happy one. After three years in Italy the Piozzis returned to England, passing their time between Streatham, Wales, and various English Spas. Piozzi was in temperament and taste a contrast to his wife. He is described as a "quiet, civil man," modest and unaffected, obliging to his neighbours and kind to the poor. He continued passionately devoted to music, and was never able to feel himself at home in the English language or in English habits of thought. He administered his wife's affairs with prudence and economy, restored her ancestral home in the Vale of Clwyd, built Brynbella, a more convenient residence, and rebuilt and pewed the church in that neighbourhood. As to Mrs Piozzi, she retained her extraordinary vivacity, her love of entertaining, up to the very end. She kept the seventh anniversary of her second marriage at Streatham Place "with prodigious splendour and gaiety. Seventy people to dinner . . . never was a pleasanter day seen, and at night the trees and front of the house were illuminated with coloured lamps that called forth our neighbours from all the adjacent villages to admire and enjoy the diversion."



Piozzi died of gout in 1809, and after that date Mrs Piozzi resided chiefly at Bath and at Clifton. She celebrated her eightieth birthday in 1820 by a concert, ball, and supper at the Kingston Rooms, Bath, and herself opened the ball with her adopted son, Sir John Salisbury, a nephew of her husband's. In 1818 the Bishop of St Asaph describes her as a "meteor"; and Moore, who saw her in 1819, said she had "all the quickness and intelligence of a gay young woman." In 1821 she died.

"I have lost now, just lost, my once most dear, intimate and admired friend, Mrs Thrale Piozzi," writes Madame d'Arblay, "who preserved her fine faculties, her imagination, her intelligence, her power of allusion and citation, her extraordinary memory, and her almost unexampled vivacity, to the last of her existence. . . . She was in truth a most wonderful character for talents and eccentricity, for wit, genius, generosity, spirit, and power of entertainment."

Mrs Piozzi published, besides the *Anecdotes*, several works which have fallen into complete neglect. In an age dominated by the Latin idiom of Johnson she practised her doctrine that writing should be as colloquial as speech: and in her "Observations and Reflections made in the course of a journey through France, Italy and Germany (1789)," she uses idioms and familiarities of language that called down upon her from many



contemporaries the reproach of vulgarity. Mrs Carter accuses the book also of being "vexatiously dilatory." Her "British Synonymy" appeared 1794. This book aims at illustrating the distinction between synonymous terms (such as "Affection, Passion, Tenderness, Fondness, Love"; "Awful, Reverential, Solemn"; "To cry, to weep") by means of lively anecdote. It makes no pretence to accuracy, and is valueless as a contribution to science. It is, however, an ingenious pretext for a medley of tales and bagatelles from Mrs Piozzi's fertile brain. Hannah More, writing in 1787, says that the making of synonyms was an exercise of all the *beaux esprits* at Paris: so Mrs Piozzi merely elaborated a current craze. In "Retrospection" (1801) Mrs Piozzi embarked gaily on a scheme entirely beyond her powers. This book aims at giving a "Review of the most striking and Important Events, Characters, Situations and their consequences, which the Last Eighteen Hundred Years have presented to the View of Mankind." Such a book demands not only the profound knowledge of a lifetime, but the most delicate sense of proportion. The best that can be said of such a work is what we shall have to say of Mrs Chapone's scheme for learning universal history; that it implies the conception of a larger view, and involves some sense of historical continuity.

We can picture to ourselves the Mrs Thrale of Johnson's day—his "lovely Hetty, always young

and always pretty," as he calls her in an affectionate impromptu—the hostess sweet in disposition, brilliant in talk; we can visualise the Mrs Piozzi of middle age, "skipping about like a kid, quite a figure of fun, as gay as a lark," wearing the tiger-skin shawl and the white beaver hat with the black plumes previously described. We can imagine the old lady that Moore met with her irrepressible spirits and her multiple activities. But the woman who braved the world for love, and dared to challenge the conventions of her day, eludes us. Somehow, we remain cold to the "heart-fascination of Mrs Thrale." Her lines—when she dismissed Piozzi—

" . . . Call each wind to waft him over  
Nor let him linger long at Dover,  
But here from past fatigues recover  
And write his love some lines from Dover. . . ."

and so on through all the rhymes to Dover; her lines when she called him back—

"Over mountains, rivers, valleys  
See my love returns to Calais . . ."

and so on through all the rhymes to Calais;—seem ludicrously trivial in view of a great emotional crisis: her whole account of her confession of love, of her parting, savours of melodrama. But it was an age unpractised in the expression of romantic

$$\begin{array}{r} 142 \\ 147 \\ \hline 25 \end{array}$$

emotion, even when such existed ; and we cannot do Mrs Piozzi the injustice of doubting the reality of her feelings. Only, quite unreasonably, the story of her life seems to demand a more romantic figure for its heroine.

## CARDS AND CONVERSATION

THE Eighteenth Century was an Age of Talk.

The noise of Fourteenth-century London comes to us as a clatter of tools mingled with music: the hammer resounds on the wooden houses, the iron rings to the blows of the smiths, while chants innumerable from abbey and church fill the vibrating air. This noise continues into Tudor times, but with the Puritan régime a silence falls upon London; the interior life is the important life; men are men of action, and not of speech. But when we approach the Eighteenth Century, London again bubbles with sound. What a din of human voices assails our ears! It rises from those three thousand London coffee-houses, which, in 1708, formed the nucleus of social intercourse: Babble-machines, precursors of the political and the critical press; arbiters of letters and of taste, each with its habitual circle of frequenters, its own special department of discussion. Here the wits assembled, spending the greater part of the day in talk; here Dryden presided as literary dictator, and then Pope, to be followed later in a somewhat different environment by Dr Johnson. For out of the coffee-houses developed another

instrument of talk, the club, of which the "Literary Club" is the most famous example—"the Club," as it was familiarly called—Fox, Burke, Gibbon, Johnson, Goldsmith, Garrick, Reynolds, being among its members. The deafening noise from the coffee-houses now resolves itself into a certain coherence; we begin to distinguish phrases, then snatches of conversation; and realise, with almost a shock of wonder, that instead of these ephemeral words dying upon the air, they have been caught, prisoned, preserved for us in myriad volumes, that they still speak to us with something of their living accent, are still vital with something of their old force and charm. We almost hear with our own ears the utterances of Dr Johnson's profound sense and ponderous humour; we seem to listen to the actual voices of the set who surrounded him. Did ever century speak with such cultivated self-expression? was ever personality developed to the same point of social fitness?

The supreme value set upon conversation and the triumph of its achievements are witnessed in many devoted records. Conversation was more than a "vehicle of sweet communion," more than a diffuser of knowledge, more than a distinction to the individual: it was a high art, that required for its service not only the most brilliant talents, but the most exalted genius; a heroic contest that called for courage, for dash, for initiative. Boswell, the High Priest of the Cult, tells us that Dr Johnson

had habituated himself all his life to consider conversation as a trial of intellectual vigour and skill. But conversation was much more to Dr Johnson. It meant to him the excitement of the fray, the rapture of the fight, the glory of the victory. When Mrs Montagu is coming to Streatham Place, Dr Johnson cries out to Fanny Burney: "Down with her, Burney!—down with her! Spare her not!—attack her, fight her, and down with her at once! You are a rising wit, and she is at the top; and when I was beginning the world, and was nothing and nobody, the joy of my life was to fire at all the established wits! and then everybody loved to halloo me on."

Boswell has not many moments of genuine inspiration in his delightful and gigantic compendium: but conversation has the power to fan him into flame. In one moment of rapture he rises above himself, dazzles us with his sudden insight, opens up a new world. Accustomed to the interchange of trivial commonplace we feel we have never dreamed what conversation might be. Boswell has gone down to the Thrale's house in the Borough, and finds Dr Johnson at breakfast—we have already quoted the passage in full. "In a moment he was in a glow of conversation, and I felt myself elevated as if brought into another state of being." An art that could produce such an ecstasy is indeed worthy of admiration, of worship!



Conversation at the coffee-house ; conversation at the club : the conversation of the first half of the Eighteenth Century is exclusively masculine, we note. Conversation has another stage to travel before it reaches the salon and feminine society, and a formidable rival bars its way. Whist, that redoubtable power of the Eighteenth Century, has erected in its path a great pile of the "devil's picture books."

" Long was Society o'er-run  
By whist, that desolating Hun ;  
Long did quadrille despotic sit,  
That Vandal of colloquial wit,  
And Conversation's setting light  
Lay half-obsured in Gothic night."

(*Bas Bleu.*)

In Mrs Sarah Battle's, inimitable comparison between these two card-games whist and quadrille, quadrille, you remember, is described as a feast of snatches, showy and specious, with chance-started, capricious, and ever-fluctuating alliances—a game of captivation to the young and enthusiastic. But whist was the *solider* game : that was her word. The bold champions who first dared attack the giant whist with his dazzling satellites, quadrille and faro, were Dr Johnson and Mrs Chapone in *The Rambler* (1750).

The "Rambler" remarks : " At card-tables, however brilliant, I have always thought my visit lost, for I could know nothing of the company but their

clothes and their faces. I saw their looks clouded at the beginning of every game, with a uniform solicitude, now and then in its progress varied with a short triumph; at one time wrinkled with cunning; at another deadened by despondency, or, by accident, flushed with rage at the unskilful or unlucky play of a partner. From such assemblies . . . I was quickly forced to retire; they were too trifling for me when I was grave, and too dull when I was cheerful."

However secure Dr Johnson might feel in the sufficiency of conversation for men, it is evident that he thought when cards were banished it was no harm substituting other attractions besides conversation in general society. He gives this delightful piece of advice to Mrs Thrale: "I advised Mrs Thrale, who has no card-parties at her house, to give sweetmeats and such good things, in an evening, as are not commonly given, and she would find company enough come to her; for everybody loves to have things which please the palate put in their way, without trouble or preparation." Hannah More speaks of Mrs Montagu and herself as being "the two monsters in creation who never touch a card"; and Horace Walpole relates how, when he came into his title, Mrs "Epictetus" Carter wished him joy, and said, "Now, I hope you will go to the House of Lords and put down Faro."

It ought to be added, however, that Dr Johnson

regretted in after life his inability to play at cards. In the "Journal of a Tour in the Hebrides," we read: "*Dr Johnson*—I am sorry I have not learnt to play at cards. It is very useful in life; it generates kindness and consolidates society." This differs from the later view of his coadjutor in the reform, Mrs Chapone, who calls whist "that sad resource of dulness and of age." Mrs Carter was in her youth an ardent opponent of cards (1745): "For the punishment of my iniquities I was once drawn into a—what shall I call it? a drum, a rout, a racket, a hurricane, an uproar, a something, in short, that was the utter confusion of all sense and meaning, where every charm in conversation was drove away by that foe to human society, whist. . . ." In later life she did not eschew cards, but that was probably because she desired to be sociable with her neighbours, other old ladies at Deal.

Through the offices, therefore, of Dr Johnson and Mrs Chapone, who helped to form public opinion; of the hostesses, Mrs Thrale, Mrs Montagu, and Mrs Vesey, who refused to have cards at their parties; of Mrs Carter and Hannah More, among others, who aided the cause by passive resistance: we find whist overcome and exiled from one little tract of society, which gains a unique distinction by admitting conversation alone as Master of the Ceremonies. "The sole purpose of the *Bas Bleu* assemblies was conversation," says

Hannah More in the advertisement to her poem, "and they were different in no respect from other parties, but that the company did not play at cards."

The Cult of Conversation assumed different rites under the ægis of the three chief Blue-Stocking hostesses. Conversation in its most perfect form implies an equal interchange of thought. Mrs Thrale's conversation, we fancy, approximated most nearly to this standard. She had the gift of *à propos*, the instantaneous flash ; she has said and written things that rival Mrs Montagu's in cleverness : for instance, in allusion to scientific experiment, "Never was poor nature so put to the rack, and never, of course, was she made to tell so many lies." Mrs Thrale never absorbed the whole conversation, as Mrs Montagu sometimes did ; nor sank her personality in order to draw out others, which was the opposite extreme sometimes practised by Mrs Vesey. Mrs Montagu's guests came to hear her talk ; Mrs Vesey's guests came to talk themselves ; Mrs Thrale's guests came to talk to Mrs Thrale. Mrs Vesey's parties were, therefore, the most enjoyable ; Mrs Thrale's the liveliest ; Mrs Montagu's the most intellectual. Mrs Montagu was the possessor of a rich mind, which diffused knowledge ; Mrs Vesey was the possessor of a sympathetic nature, which awakened response. Midway between the two was Mrs Thrale, enjoying a measure of both these qualities. Mrs Mon-

tagu and Mrs Thrale provided intellectual fireworks for their guests — “squibs and crackers,” rockets, even catharine wheels. Mrs Vesey carried about with her a little flickering taper of friendliness that burned all manner of soft strange colours, of which the chief business was to light the torches of other minds. We shall see presently how scope was given to the special talents of these hostesses by a curious and careful arrangement of guests.

The opinion of contemporaries on the conversation of some Blue-Stocking hostesses has already been given in detail; let us hear what the Blue-Stockings have themselves to say on the subject of conversation in the abstract.

Mrs Chapone and Hannah More have both written specifically on Conversation: Mrs Chapone, an Essay, and Hannah More in her *Bas Bleu* poem, of which the sub-title is *Conversation*. Hannah More is kindled to ardour by her theme; conversation is the vehicle of friendship, the medium of instruction, “Soft polisher of rugged man, Refiner of the social plan.” Conversation is the noblest commerce of mankind, that gives knowledge circulation. It is for the joy of telling his adventures that the traveller journeys under a parching sky and dares the northern zone. But the end and object of conversation is to search the depths of moral truth, and thence produce “what tends to practice and to use,” and next, “what mends the taste and forms the mind.” She speaks well of



Books as "the mind's food, not exercise." Not only is the mind instructed and strengthened by Conversation, but from it also flows "the pure delight when kindling sympathies unite,"—it is the vehicle of "communion sweet from heart to heart."

Mrs Chapone begins her essay by condemning the "universal practice of card-playing"; but she is not nearly so enthusiastic as Hannah More on the surpassing merits of Conversation as a substitute. Even Mrs Montagu, with all her social practice, was often painfully aware of the lack of spontaneity in conversation; she realised the difficulty of raising it above a key of mediocrity, often struck by the most commonplace person present. She writes to Mrs Carter: "There is a certain visiting tone, and few dare strike above it; the most fashionable fool in the company sets the time to the key of their own voice, as the parish clerk does with a pitch pipe; and it is no matter what is the strength and power of your organs, you are to strain till you scream, or mutter till you are hoarse, as pleases the leader of the chorus."

In Mrs Chapone's essay, speaking generally, the conversations she treats of are either dull or scandalous. With characteristic scholasticism she writes that dull conversations are to be considered as useful in training the moral qualities of patience, benevolence, and self-denial; but as to scandalous conversation, this is a more dangerous method of



employing time even than card-playing. It is curious to hear through the decorous periods of this essay a faint and far away echo of the talk in the *School for Scandal*. Sheridan might have taken it as raw material to be sublimated into the flashing wit of his comedy. "Some are even shameless enough to begin their ridicule on those who have just quitted the room, and whom they have been grossly flattering," writes Mrs Chapone; which, transformed and condensed in the crucible, becomes Sir Peter Teazle's parting phrase, "I leave my character behind me." "Nothing is more disgusting," writes Mrs Chapone, "than that air of mildness and benevolence with which some ill-natured observation on the person or dress of our absent acquaintance, or some sly sarcasm, designing to obscure the brightest part of their character, is usually introduced." She proceeds to give illustrations, not without humour, but too long to quote, and we are inevitably reminded of Sheridan's Mrs Candour, "who, though she is a little talkative, everybody allows her to be the best-natured and best sort of woman in the world."

Such parallels showing how ore is refined into gold, also indicate that Mrs Chapone had the root of the matter in her—that she was gifted with keen observation, with insight into the foibles of others, and with a sense of justice. The aim of conversation is not, to the serious mind of Mrs Chapone, delight, friendly intercourse, even instruction; its

ultimate end should be the diffusion of high principles, of noble sentiments, of worthy ambitions. Is it unkind to the memory of Mrs Chapone to state here that Fanny Burney found her parties a trifle dull? that they were avoided by the young and the gay, and that the noted conversationalists who attended them were a little too much aware that they had come to improve the shining hour?

Mrs Delany, in her good-humoured but somewhat severe strictures on Blue-stocking Conversation, introduces a picture of conversation in the ideal. She is writing to the Viscountess Andover, describing a visit to Bulstrode of the learned ladies of the day:—

. . . “Here I have been some days, nay, I may say, almost every hour, entertained with a redundancy of *wit*, with the *profoundest wisdom*, with the *sublimest philosophy*, with the *greatest learning*, and knowledge of men, letters and manners, with the nicest punctilios of good breeding, and with the most elegant fancy in dress, and yet I have neither more *wit*, *wisdom*, or *philosophy*. . . . How can it be accounted for? But that my brain is petrified like a fossil, or that the overflowing of such a torrent of parts comes like a flood from the mountain on the poor humble valley, and carries all before it. I own I prefer the salutary gentle dew of common-sense: a little rill, a purling stream that fixes the thoughts, and allows of social and reciprocal conversation; but the *towering sublime*, without

being modified by the beautiful, is astonishing but not pleasing. It is like travelling always in the Alps—we wonder at its magnificence, but are shocked at the precipices and in dread of being crush'd by the impending rocks."

It is a connoisseur in Propriety who thus figures conversation under the image of a little stream flowing through a valley. Grace, charm, ease, naturalness—these are its final perfections. Conversation, according to the aristocrats of culture, has an assigned position in a carefully mapped-out scheme of life; it loses its friendly dignity if it harlequinades under too many disguises; it demands an unsuitable strain if it insists on too strict a monotony. Judged by this standard, Hannah More's ideal of conversation covers too wide and too heterogeneous a field; Mrs Chapone's ideal of conversation is cramped in too narrow and too austere a place.

That Mrs Delany's ideal was the one unconsciously striven after in general society seems proved by the fact that politics and the discussion of current events were held to be destructive of general conversation. Such subjects introduced too strenuous an element into the calm of that valley scene—disturbed its serenity with gusts of passion and clash of fight. "As politics spoil all conversations," says Hannah More, "Mr Walpole the other night proposed that everybody should forfeit half-a-crown who said anything tending to

introduce the idea either of Ministers or Opposition." Sir W. W. Pepys, who laments the death of conversation in 1799, accounts in 1809 for its extinction in the following wise : . . . "The events which are passing before our eyes are of such an interesting and gigantic nature, that it would be affectation to talk of ancient wars when everything dear to us is at stake and involved in the present." It follows that conversation occupying itself with politics or with current events was not, according to Eighteenth Century views, conversation in the best sense at all : its realism was too crude, its material too undigested. Conversation implies culture, and culture the slow ripening into a maturity of bloom and flavour. Certain abnormal minds could produce the developed fruit at all seasons, minds of amazing fecundity like Johnson's, though sometimes it was a fruit hard and a little bitter between the teeth ; but the average mind required time for its harvesting, and nourished itself largely on the past.

Eighteenth Century conditions made possible this ideal : there was leisure, there was learning, there was prosperity, all these awakening an ambition for intellectual distinction : the social element played an important part in life, and society was still small enough to respond in some degree to one dominant impulse.

The age of Conversation is over ; a myriad divided interests have broken it into allotments ; a

weedy growth of sensationalism has over-run its cultivated domains ; its votaries have scattered to lonely hill-tops ; its ancient enemy, whist, in the new guise of bridge, has once more resumed sway.

We have other occupations more thrilling ; other speculations more wide-reaching ; other interests more ecstatic. But because we have not conversation, our social life is a pretence, a blank, a mere surface convention, in which we have neither learned how to reveal ourselves, nor been taught how to reach the realities in others. When all is said, the Blue-Stockings were arbiters of an art we have lost, of a chemistry we have forgotten ; and for a brief space they achieved in England that most difficult and most desired of unions—the marriage of the Intellectual with the Social—through the offices of Conversation.

## MRS VESEY (1715-1791)

IN a letter from Mrs Montagu to Mrs Hannah More, there is an interesting passage on the subjective character of landscape. The different dispositions and different intellectual powers of the beholder not only change the colour, but also the forms of the objects, and group them in various orders. "I speak more feelingly on this subject," says Mrs Montagu, "having in the course of different summers at Tonbridge rambled over the same places with the late Lord Chatham, Mr Gilbert West, Dr Young, and our dear imaginative Vesey." She describes how the stately Gothic Castle occasioned in the statesman's mind reflections on the political conditions of a subject in the rude age in which it was built; how to Dr Young, the grave author of the "Night Thoughts," it suggested the brevity and vanity of all sublunary things; how the landscape awakened in Mr West the enthusiastic delight of a poet and the pious veneration of a philosopher; and then she comes to the impression it made upon Mrs Vesey. "Our dear Vesey, if she passed some little recess under a hedge, where gypsies had roasted the pilfered goose, or in their kettle boiled the slaughtered



lamb, conceived it to be the retreat of Oberon, where he and his elfin train kept their gay and harmless revels,

‘ And pearly drops of dew did drink  
In horn cups fillèd to the brink.’ ”

And though Mrs Vesey's parties were perhaps the most famous of all the blue-stockings assemblies, since Hannah More dedicated her poem of the *Bas Bleu* to this lady ; yet the first note to strike in approaching her is not the note of her social triumph, but of her idealistic temperament, which made the world appear an unreal and faëry place, big with vague possibilities and strange emotions.

To picture Mrs Vesey we have only contemporary evidence to go upon. From her own hand, nothing remains except a few short and scattered letters. Those who saw a great part of her correspondence to Mrs Montagu and to Mrs Carter report it as having been instinct with grace and imagination. “ They were remarkably beautiful,” says the Rev. Montagu Pennington, speaking of her letters, “ for she had a peculiar talent in describing scenery and events in language in the highest degree glowing, picturesque and unaffected.” This correspondence however appears to have been destroyed, yet no figure in our group of Eighteenth Century ladies emerges more distinct, more consistent in her inconsistencies, more deli-

cately alive, than Mrs Vesey from the old volumes of memoirs and letters that contain the sole records of her personality.

She was alien in every sense to the spirit of the age—alien, rather to the spirit of Eighteenth Century England. It was an age of Reason, of self-satisfaction ; she was a dreamer seeking in vain some ideal she could never reach. It was an age of prosaic common-sense ; she breathed habitually an air of poetry and romance. It was an age of solid faith : she was ever tormented by doubts and by questionings. An Irishwoman of the Eighteenth Century, Mrs Vesey is shown through English eyes to possess all the accepted characteristics that make the Irishwoman of to-day—from the English point of view. So typical is Mrs Vesey, in her virtues and her failings, of the English conception of an Irishwoman, that she seems the creation of a sympathetic English imagination. Nothing reveals more fully the intellectual and emotional range of the Blue-Stockings than the admiration, the love, and above all, the comprehension they were able to give to this bewildering “Sylph” out of another world.

Mrs Carter, Mrs Montagu, Hannah More, Horace Walpole : these were her friends ; all definitely, all typically English, and Mrs Vesey appears to have inspired these friends with a warmth of feeling quite foreign to the somewhat cold Eighteenth Century decorum. The mention of her in letters and memoirs

is always accompanied by a little outburst of affection. It is clear that her qualities of heart were of the most winning sort, kindness, sympathy, an absolute forgetfulness of self, generosity, hospitality. Horace Walpole's tribute to her, and to the Irish as a people, is generous and charming. It occurs in a letter to Hannah More. "Our poor friend in Clarges Street" is Mrs Vesey.

"The Irish have the best hearts in the three kingdoms, and they never blunder more than when they attempt to express their zeal and affection: the reason, I suppose, is that cool sense never thinks of attempting impossibilities; but a warm heart feels itself ready to do more than is possible for those it loves. I am sure our poor friend in Clarges Street would subscribe to this last sentence. What English heart ever excelled hers? I should almost have said equalled, if I were not writing to one that rivals her."

It is more astonishing to find that Mrs Vesey's English friends should have been able to appreciate so discriminatingly her qualities of mind—should have been able to analyse a temperament so foreign to their experience. "Your imagination," says Mrs Carter, writing in 1766, "is as lively and picturesque now, as it could have been at eighteen; and for the same reason, that you are as little engaged in the turbulent agitations, the sordid principles, and interested schemes of the world

now as you were then. These are the sullen demons which put to flight the fair forms of imagination and annihilate the refined pleasures, which never subsist but in conjunction with gentleness of disposition and simplicity of heart." It seems a little incongruous, however, to have to go for the bulk of our information about Mrs Vesey to the solid and learned Mrs Carter: though indeed Mrs Carter's letters reveal how large a measure of insight can be awakened by affection.

Mrs Carter's friendships are indeed of curious significance. Her friendship with the admirable Miss Talbot is the only one that is easily understood. Her friendship with Mrs Montagu is puzzling, but it seems to have been founded on a subtle appreciation of Mrs Montagu's more stable qualities, as is shown in the following extract from a letter to Mrs Vesey: "Our friend, you know, has talents which must distinguish her in the largest circles; but there it is impossible to discover either the beauties of her character, or the extent and variety of her understanding, which always improves on a more accurate examination, and on a nearer view." Mrs Carter's friendship with Mrs Vesey is the strangest of all to explain, and reveals a strong strain of romance in Mrs Carter's temperament. Indeed, Mrs Carter's letters to Mrs Vesey throw as much light upon the character of the writer, as upon the character of the recipient of the letters, and we need not, therefore,

hesitate to quote considerably from this correspondence. Mrs Montagu is perhaps a little flippant about the scenario of Oberon's faëry revels ; but Mrs Carter classes herself with Mrs Vesey as a visionary, treasures as a sacred memory the picture of the moon "which you kindly took so much pains to show me through the green curtain one night," and makes "ideal assignations" with Mrs Vesey, indulging in flights of fancy quite unusual to her. Mrs Vesey is on the cliffs of Snowdon, and to be near her in spirit, Mrs Carter tells us that she takes her solitary ramble "into the wildest and most unfrequented part of the country (Kent) that lay within the compass of my terrestrial abilities . . . ascending a cliff where all was uninhabited waste around me, and all blank ocean below. Here I sat me down at the corner of a little copse blasted by the sea-breezes, and took you out of my pocket." (This refers to a miniature given her by her friend.) "The broken, irregular scene around us, the tide rolling beneath, and the coast of the opposite kingdom, which was full in our view, led us to converse on that tremendous transformation of the deluged world, when the fountains of the great deep burst their enclosures, and probably disjoined the solid continent. . . ." Other reflections follow, and Mrs Carter adds, "I have told you how we passed four hours on the South Foreland, and now pray tell me what we have observed on the cliffs of



Snowdon." The starry heavens were also utilised as a meeting-place for these soaring spirits. "I am glad you are a star-gazer," writes Mrs Carter. . . . "We may take many an excursion together to the stars these clear autumnal evenings, and entirely forget the imperceptible tract between Deal (where Mrs Carter lived) and Lucan" (Mrs Vesey's home near Dublin).

Mrs Carter's sympathy with her friend extends even to sympathy with the aspirations of her friend's country. To go to a reception at Mrs Vesey's: "I made myself as Irish as possible, in wearing an Irish stuff," she tells us. She was, moreover, able to appreciate the noble and generous qualities discovered in the Irish Parliament in 1779. "Every liberal mind in England must have felt a most humiliating sense of shame at the treatment of our sister kingdom," she writes. It is more astonishing to find that the sentimentality of the Irish also appealed to her. It seems difficult to believe that Mrs Carter should have written the account of the Irish beggar, who said she knew "Squire Vesey and his lady" and poured forth a "torrent of encomiums." "The woman reiterated her praises, and I my copper, till at length she petitioned for a shift. It was very lucky that there happened to be one in my drawer, or out of pure love to Squire Vesey and his lady, there would have been some danger of my parting with that on my back." Mrs Carter humorously



adds in a subsequent letter : " My Irish beggar has visited me again this year. . . . I expect to have a regular annual visit from her, and feel some vanity in furnishing the single instance in which any of her country people ever enjoyed an English pension."

✓ Mrs Vesey's was the temperament of the dreamer. " Our Sylph can be in no danger but from ideal forms and romantic attitudes." The uproar of a stormy sea is as much adapted to the sublime of her imagination, writes Mrs Carter, as the soft murmurs of a gliding stream to the gentleness of her temper. But the dreamer is apt to become dissatisfied with prosaic conventions and material limitations; believing in an ideal perfection he wastes his energy in a vain search after it; it is the walker of the heights who has the real knowledge of the deeps. And so Mrs Carter compares Mrs Vesey with Bartholomew Coke in Ben Jonson's play of *Bartholomew Fair*.

" Like Bartholomew Coke, she always wants to get every plaything in the whole fair, she would see every place in the world at one time, and all the people in the world at one view."

Thus it came about that Mrs Vesey suffered from a perpetual restlessness of body and mind, and was unable to enjoy one object from the apprehension that something better might be found in another. Mrs Carter writes to Mrs Montagu: " There are few things, I believe, that she loves

like you and me; yet when she is with us, she finds that you and I, not being absolute divinities, have no power of bestowing perfect happiness, and so, from us she flies away, to try if it is to be met with at an assembly or an opera." Besides the restlessness, Mrs Vesey had the unpracticality of the dreamer. Mrs Carter relates a story which discovers "the goodness of her heart and the uncommon turn of her head." A sick friend, a Mrs Henry, who was staying with Mrs Vesey, had been told by the surgeon that when she was able to walk she should never venture to use crutches upon a floor, for fear of their slipping, but should be carried downstairs and use them on the gravel-walk.

"On this information up started Mrs Vesey, and said she would order the gardener immediately to gravel the drawing-room, which being near Mrs Henry's bedroom, might give her a walk whenever she pleased, without danger or trouble; and this she proposed, not in jest, but with the utmost gravity and seriousness."

Then there was that delightful coffee-pot, which Mrs Vesey invented, with neither spout nor handle, and a lid that would not open; "objections," writes Mrs Carter, "that are certainly quite nugatory: for as it is of a beautiful Etruscan form, it answers every essential purpose of a good coffee-pot—except the possibility of making coffee

in it, which is only a mere circumstance which anyone of true genius would easily overlook." Mrs Vesey not only overshot Use in her aim at Beauty, but she confused Time and Space, as is so often the case with those who live a little above the material world; and thus she frequently laid herself open to ridicule. It was to be expected perhaps that Fanny Burney should have failed to understand Mrs Vesey. Broad and even crude types appealed to her, but she was not able to sense the more subtle distinctions, the more delicate lights and shades. Consequently her attitude towards Mrs Vesey is not sympathetic, and she makes herself the chronicler of the grotesque effects produced by Mrs Vesey's bewilderment of thought.

"Mrs Vesey was as mirth-provoking from her oddities and mistakes as Falstaff was wit-inspiring. . . . She had the unguardedness of childhood, joined to an Hibernian bewilderment of ideas that cast her incessantly into some burlesque situation, and incited even the most partial, and even the most sensitive of her own countrymen to relate stories, speeches and anecdotes of her astonishing self-perplexities, her confusion about times and circumstances, and her inconceivable jumble of recollections between what had happened and what might have happened. . . . But what most contributed to render the scenes of her social circle nearly dramatic in comic effect was her deafness. L

She had commonly two or three or more ear-trumpets hanging to her wrists, or slung about her neck, or tost upon the chimney-piece or table. The instant that any earnestness of countenance or animation of gesture struck her eye, she darted forward, trumpet in hand, to inquire what was going on, but almost always arrived at the speaker at the moment that he was become, in his turn, the hearer" (*Memoirs of Dr Burney*).

This is the criticism of the complete outsider ; but it must be confessed that even Mrs Vesey's intimates did not scruple to point out to her her somewhat trying faults. A little gentle pity mingled with, and perhaps increased, their affection for her. To Mrs Carter she was an irresponsible child. "Though I have always honoured you for having the simplicity of a little child, I could, with a hearty goodwill, whip you for having its imprudence and making yourself sick with unripe fruit." This is a very favourite attitude of the English towards the Irish, occasionally galling in its assumption of superiority. Mrs Carter scolds Mrs Vesey quite freely on all manner of trivial points, on reckless bathing, on staying with Mrs Montagu till she was quite exhausted; "it is treating her as children do a clockwork toy, which they never think has diverted them long enough till they have forced and broken all the springs"; on taking draughts that do not agree with her—"by guarding against imaginary distempers you are in perpetual real danger from

misapplied and improper remedies"; besides writing to her with much energetic conviction on the subject of religion.

All this kindly-intended teaching had no other effect than to awake in Mrs Vesey's heart gratitude to her friend. The following letter was addressed to Mrs Carter to be opened after Mrs Vesey's death :—

"Accept, my dear Mrs Carter, my last thanks for the benefit and delight of your conversation. Perhaps at the time you open this box I shall have still more reason to be grateful. I leave you Mrs Dunbar's picture, and the inestimable treasure of your own letters, wishing much you would give them for the improvement of future minds. You will still be doing that good you loved upon earth, when you are removed to those happy regions where I wish I could deserve to meet you."

This letter was instrumental in inducing Mrs Carter's Literary Executor to publish her correspondence, and by this fact Mrs Vesey is no mere name to us, but passes before our eyes with something of the frail elusive sweetness and grace that she had in this world.

In Mrs Vesey's life we have a curious example of the idealistic temperament searching for satisfaction in social functions,—following the gleam in the vain hope of capturing it, from one group at an assembly to another—from one friend's to another friend's



house. It is strange to find this restless yearning of the Celt seeking, not for the Holy Grail in misty woods, or for ideal love amid the Shadowy Waters ; but for the most brilliant sallies of wit and the sharpest point of epigram in crowded salons. "Indeed," says Mrs Carter of Mrs Vesey, "she is formed for enjoyments much superior to that *foolish* world, which too much engages her mind, and leads it on by the dancing phantom of an *ignis fatuus* of pleasure, which she wearies her spirits in pursuing and which she is never able to overtake."

Mrs Vesey was born about 1715, the daughter of Sir Thomas Vesey, Bishop of Ossory. Her first husband, William Handcock, was member of the Irish Parliament, and a relation of his, Mrs Handcock, remained her devoted companion to the end. Her second husband, Agmondesham Vesey, was also a member of the Irish Parliament, and held the appointment of Accountant General of Ireland, probably from 1767. In 1776 he became Privy Councillor in Ireland. Mrs Vesey's parties were at their zenith between 1770 and 1784 : Vesey died in 1785, and Mrs Vesey in 1791.

Agmondesham Vesey stands out a clearly drawn figure in the Memoirs : from the English point of view, as typically Irish as his wife, though in another way. He would appear to have possessed considerable administrative ability. He had literary pretensions since he assisted Lyttleton in his *Life*



of *Henry II.*, and since he became, through his friendship with Burke, in 1773 a member of the Literary Club. Burke described him as "a man of gentle manners;" which drew forth this somewhat surprising interruption from Dr Johnson. "Sir," said Johnson, "you need say no more. When you have said a man of gentle manners, you have said enough." Vesey evidently possessed much charm of personality: Hannah More, writing in 1781, remarks, "I know no house where there is such good rational society and a conversation so general, so easy, and so unpretending." For this some credit must be due to the master of the house. But it appears that when we have said "a man of gentle manners" we have said not merely enough, but almost all that is to be said in his favour. To use a common Irish expression, he was one of those who "hung up his fiddle behind the door"—that is to say, he kept his sprightly music for the outer world, and put the instrument out of sight of the home-circle. He was a little over-excitable, witness his excessive eagerness about his election to "the Club." He had two couriers waiting to bring him the quickest news of his success. He had, moreover, faults of a serious kind. Mrs Carter tells us that he did not understand Mrs Vesey, and what is worse, that he neglected her. "Mere constitutional good humour, and specious civility are mighty pretty decorations of an afternoon visit, but operate very little at home, or in

the important duties of life." Mrs Carter attributes his failings not so much to any defect of morals as to a weakness of character which led him to adopt the prevailing fashion of the time. "He has many amiable qualities," Mrs Carter writes in 1774, "and would have many more if he formed his standard of action from his own mind, for I am inclined to think he is not vicious so much from inclination as from the example of the world. If it was a fashionable thing for wits and scholars and lord-lieutenants and other distinguished personages to be true to their wives, probably our friend would not have found him an unfaithful husband."

Vesey's hobby was architecture, and his treatment of their house Lucan, near Dublin, stands in the memoirs of the time as a characteristic example of his failure to understand his wife, or to consult her wishes. Lucan in its original shape, was an old castle of rambling and solemn Gothic form, exquisitely adapted to Mrs Vesey's "delightful spirit of innocent irregularity." This house Vesey "improved" in 1750, and took down in 1776 to make way for a new structure in his "correct Grecian taste"—"a mere prosaical house full of mortal comforts and conveniences, without the least particle of romance or sylphery in its whole composition." Mrs Carter waxes very indignant on this score. Writing to Mrs Vesey in 1768, when there was already talk "of demolishing this enchanting abode," she says. . . .

“It is impossible he can be so unsentimental, so unpoetical and so anti-romantic as to think seriously of committing so atrocious an action against all the powers of imagination and against you,—which all the Courts of Judicature in Europe that have any degree of true taste must allow a most sufficient ground of divorce; and it is certainly, therefore, very fit that in your stead he should take to himself some good, fat, notable Lady Bustle, as soon as he has built a four-square brick house with large comely sash-windows for her reception.”

Vesey also made considerable alterations in their first London House in Bolton Row, where most of the famous parties were held. They moved in 1780 to Clarges Street.

There are but few allusions to Vesey at his wife's parties, but undoubtedly, if he were present at them, he had the qualifications of a good host. On the other hand, one would not have imagined that Mrs Vesey's temperament would have adapted itself easily to the duties of hostess, even though all the practical arrangements were undertaken by the invaluable Mrs Handcock. This lady won the esteem of all Mrs Vesey's friends by her sober good sense and her tactful affection for the Sylph. Mrs Carter gives a characteristic picture both of herself and Mrs Handcock in the following vignette :—

“As great a luxury as I have experienced this

evening in my solitary tea, I would gladly have exchanged it, my dear Mrs Vesey, for a more social entertainment in Bolton Row, and I would have given up my uncontrolled excesses for a limited number of cups and a grave remonstrance from Mrs Handcock's prudence and sobriety between every one of them."

But the highest tribute to Mrs Handcock comes from Hannah More's pen. It was written at a time when Mrs Vesey's faculties were failing, and when her state caused her friends extreme distress. The passage contains a quotation from the "Sublime and Beautiful Burke," which appears, not only one of the loveliest things he has ever written, but one of the loveliest things that has ever been written, though perhaps the application of the phrase must be attributed to Hannah More :—

"What a blessing for Mrs Vesey that Mrs Handcock is alive and well! I do venerate that woman beyond words; her faithful, quiet, patient attachment makes all showy qualities and shining talents appear little in my eyes. Such characters are what Mr Burke calls 'the soft quiet green, on which the soul loves to rest!'"

Surely the companionship of such a woman must have helped to soothe and sweeten the whole nature of the eager, unsatisfied dreamer, and to keep her longer in touch with sane, human things.

✓ The main characteristic that distinguished Mrs Vesey's parties from others of that period was their absence of formality, and the extraordinary ease and well-being experienced by every guest. Mrs Vesey possessed two important qualifications as hostess, unselfconsciousness and sympathy ; she had a singular power of drawing out of each individual the best that was in him. Mrs Montagu undoubtedly felt it incumbent on her to be the chief luminary of her parties, to dazzle and to corruscate ; but Mrs Vesey, who had not a particle of vanity, succeeded in creating an atmosphere in ✓ which every element was able to shine. She had infinite attention to bestow upon every guest ; she made each feel himself a principal and distinguished object ; she diffused a sense of harmony, of good humour over the whole assembly. Hannah More, in the *Bas Bleu* makes allusion to the minute attention given by Mrs Vesey to the disposal of guests at a party—a question of grave experiment in this epoch, which is treated of in a succeeding chapter. Hannah More also happily compares Mrs Vesey's extraordinary gift of fusing discordant elements, to the magic of chemistry.

“ Nor only geometric art  
Does this presiding power impart,  
But chemists too who want the essence,  
Which makes or mars all coalescence,  
Of her the secret rare might get,  
How different kinds amalgamate . . . ”



The science of chemistry is used to explain the chemical combination of divers elements at her parties; the science of mathematics is invoked to describe the various shapes into which the groups coalesce. Mrs Vesey was surely mistress of a most mysterious chemistry and a most irregular mathematic—the chemistry of a unique personality, the geometry of a sympathetic intuition. She was even able to give to a crowded room a sense of margin and of space. “One would think,” said Mrs Carter, “that you stripped the souls of your company of their bodies, and left only a phantom to cover their nakedness.”

✓ This last gift was a very necessary one, for Mrs Vesey was the soul of hospitality, and asked all and sundry to her house. Any person of character was freely admitted. There was no ceremony, no cards and no supper. Indeed, Hannah More complains of the crush, and Horace Walpole of the din of her assemblies; the latter tells us how she “collects all the graduates and candidates for fame till they are as unintelligible as the good folks at Babel.”

The close of Mrs Vesey's life was clouded with gloom. Vesey died in 1785, with “his accounts for both worlds . . . unsettled.” He left his wife very inadequately provided for, and his will excited the extreme indignation of Mrs Montagu—“I will say no more of the monster, for I cannot think of him with patience,”—and of all Mrs Vesey's friends.



Mrs Vesey's grief, however, was extreme. "I find she has almost worn herself out with tears and fretting," writes Mrs Carter. "What can we say to her? The subject is delicate, as it is very probable that she retains great affection for the ungrateful husband who so ill deserved it. . ." Fanny Burney writes to Mrs Montagu with less simplicity but in the same spirit.

"I am sorry—I had almost said *surprised*—at dear Mrs Vesey's continued regret: but a heart so much framed for tenderness weighs not always the full value of what excites it, and where there is too much kindness for discrimination the scentless 'gaudy flower' or the permanent 'reviving aromatic' seem to have an equal claim upon the affections, however wide the difference of their desert."

Mrs Vesey continued to see her friends down to the year 1788; then gradually her faculties left her, and she lingered on till 1791. Her friends continued most faithful, though she no longer knew them, and strangest fact, the only one among them all whose attentions gave her the smallest pleasure was, according to Hannah More, Horace Walpole. Hannah More writes, from Cowslip Green:—

"When I sit in a little hermitage I have built in my garden—not to be melancholy in, but to think upon my friends, and to read their works and letters,

—Mr Walpole seldomer presents himself to my mind as the man of wit than as the tender-hearted and humane friend of my dear, infirm, broken-spirited Mrs Vesey. . . . My very heart is softened when I consider that she is now out of the way of your kind attentions, and I fear that nothing else on earth gave her the smallest pleasure.”

On this picture of Horace Walpole and Mrs Vesey, we close, a picture dark with one of the most terrible of tragedies, and yet relieved by something sweet, human and unexpected,—some quality of exquisite tenderness that knew how to penetrate through the veil.

## THE SQUARING OF THE CIRCLE

**B**EHOLD Conversation enthroned supreme as Goddess of the Blue-Stocking Society ; her ancient enemy, whist, driven from the gates ; her polished altars blazing with wax-lights on which altars each night votaries pour " Libations large of lemonade,"

" On silver vases loaded, rise,  
The biscuits' ample sacrifice.  
Nor be the milk-white stream forgot  
Of thirst-assuaging, cool orgeat ;  
Rise, incense pure from fragrant Tea,  
Delicious incense, worthy Thee ! "  
*(Bas Bleu).*

And now a very difficult and delicate matter has to be dealt with ; the arrangement of the offices ; the order of such rites as shall not merely minister to the letter, but shall preserve the spirit.

For conversation at its ideal is the essence of personality ; it is thought sublimated by the individual flame ; fancy bubbling up fresh and sparkling from the well of Self. The brilliance, the very continuance of conversation, depends on the most subtle conditions of atmosphere : it takes colour, inspiration from its surroundings ; and is killed by

an alien blast. Thus it follows that the social gift, the power to evoke, to stimulate, to sustain conversation in a large assembly of people, is as precious as it is rare. The ideal hostess knows intimately all her guests, and by her keen sympathy can make each contribute his special flavour to the conversation ; the ideal hostess, by happy instinct, or by careful patience, learns how to manipulate this bubbling and flaming element of conversation, and how to direct it into safe and continuous channels. In a word, the ideal hostess, like the ideal priest, can dispense with mechanical aids and relying solely upon her own initiative and intuition, can create the atmosphere in which the cult flourishes.

But the ideal hostess is, necessarily, infrequent, if not almost unattainable ; and for all except adepts, rules and regulations have to be resorted to. These rules must be framed to solve the following problem : how to give the High Priest of Conversation wise opportunities for conducting the service, and at the same time, how to make every member of the body participate in the ceremony. If the High Priest becomes too important, we are threatened by a barren formalism ; and if the congregation become too clamorous, order is overwhelmed in confusion.

To-day the cult of Conversation being extinct, we are many of us unaware of the varying rites that accompanied its worship, of the devices

employed to increase its reputation—of the elaborate precautions used to maintain its integrity. Conversation, it is true, still lingers out a doubtful existence at a dinner-table here and there; but it never attempts to force its way into At Homes, which were once its most crowded temples. These are a mere haphazard conglomeration, an often unfortuitous collection of atoms drifting without aim, without direction, hither and thither: disconnected words are tossed about like spray—the result of mere surface evolutions; and the atoms part without having experienced either the joy of social satisfaction or the stimulus of intellectual delight.

Of course, assemblies of this kind, unorganised, chaotic, existed in the Eighteenth Century as well as to-day. Take Hannah More's description of an assembly at the Bishop of St Asaph's:—

“Conceive to yourself one hundred and fifty or two hundred people met together, dressed in the extremity of the fashion; painted as red as bacchanals; poisoning the air with perfumes . . . protesting that they are engaged to ten other places, and lamenting the fatigue they are not obliged to endure; ten or a dozen card tables, crammed with dowagers of quality, grave ecclesiastics and yellow admirals; and you have an idea of an assembly.”

Of another assembly Mrs Delany writes:—

"I had a *whisper* with Mrs Boscawen, another with Lady Bute, and a *wink* from the Duchess of Portland—*poor diet* for one who loves a plentiful meal of social friendship."

Such assemblies are but the raw material of social intercourse: the material requires to be carefully sorted and refined before happy results can be obtained. Dr Burney says: "The best ingredients, however excellent they may be separately, always prove inefficient if they are not well blended; for if any of them is a little sour, or a little too bitter, —nay, or a little too sweet, they counteract each other."

But the wise choice of guests was only a small part of the problem: there remained the more important and more vexed question of their best arrangement. To this the Blue-Stockings devoted the most anxious thought and experiment—experiment, because social conversation in its best sense had never existed in England, and there were no precedents to go on, no established laws. It is therefore not surprising that the Blue-Stocking hostesses arrived at opposite conclusions as to the best arrangement of guests. Two distinct schools organised themselves, the one upholding the Method of the Circle, the other the Method of its Disintegration. Mrs Montagu headed the former, and Mrs Vesey the latter school.

It is astonishing to find what attention is paid in



contemporary memoirs to these two methods of arranging guests at parties. We have not only numerous descriptions of these methods, but interesting comparisons of their merits and defects.

Let us first examine Mrs Montagu's circle system. We read this description of it in the *Memoirs of Dr Burney*: "At Mrs Montagu's the semi-circle that faced the fire retained during the whole evening its unbroken form, with a precision that made it seem described by a Brobdignagian compass. The lady of the castle commonly placed herself at the upper end of the room, near the commencement of the curve, so as to be courteously visible to all her guests; having the person of the highest rank or consequence properly on one side and the person the most eminent for talents, sagaciously on the other." At first sight this method does not promise well. There is a rigidity of form about it, an absence of movement, a constraint, that one would have fancied fatal to anything but the monologue. But Lady Louisa Stuart, who has penned the most entertaining account of Mrs Montagu's circle, has something to say in its favour. "Everything in that house, as if under a spell, was sure to form itself into a circle or semi-circle," writes Lady Louisa Stuart, "Mrs Montagu having invited us to a very early party we went at the hour appointed, and took our places in a vast half-moon, consisting of about

twenty or twenty-five women, where, placed between two grave faces unknown to me, I sate hiding yawns with my fan, and wondering at the unwonted seclusion of the superior sex. At length a door opened behind us, and a body of eminent personages—the Chancellor, I think, and a bishop or two among them, filed in from the dining-room. They looked wistfully over our shoulders at a good fire, which the barrier we presented left them no means of approaching; then drawing chairs from the wall seated themselves around us in an outer crescent, silent and solemn as our own. . . . . There was no remedy; we must all have died at our posts, if one lady had not luckily been called away, whose exit made a gap for the wise men to enter and take possession of the fireplace.”

Lady Louisa Stuart next proceeds to an interesting philosophic dissertation on the circle:—

“A circle such as here described, though the worst shape imaginable for easy familiar conversation may be the best for a brilliant interchange of—I had nearly said snip-snap—of pointed sentences and happy repartees. Every flash being visible, every joke distinctly heard from one end to the other, the consequent applause may act like a dram upon bodily combatants, invigorating wit and provoking fresh sallies. As fitted for actors and an audience, it may likewise suit whoever has interesting anecdotes to tell and the talent of telling

them well ; or whoever can clearly and pleasantly explain something that the surrounding hearers wish to understand. If you had good luck, therefore, you might not be only greatly amused at Mrs Montagu's, but carry away much that was well worth remembering. But then, alas ! the circular form is not less convenient to proser and people who love to hear themselves talk ; so you might, on the contrary, come in for the most tiresome dissertations, the dullest long stories, the flattest jokes anywhere to be found . . ."

Hannah More, it would seem, had experience of the circle in its more wearisome form : she dwells on its tendency to give importance to commonplace, and to exclude the majority of guests from any participation in the talk :

" Where the dire *Circle* keeps its station,  
Each common phrase is an oration ;  
And crackling fans, and whisp'ring misses,  
Compose their conversation blisses. . . ."

By the circle method, therefore, conversation was an entertainment provided by the few, to which the many came as audience : and in spite of the good word that Lady Louisa Stuart has to say for the system, most of the Blue-Stocking hostesses were comically anxious to avoid the least approach to the circular form. But to Mrs Vesey especially belongs the fame of squaring the Circle.

" Small were that art which would ensure  
 The Circle's boasted quadrature !  
 See *Vesey's* plastic genius make  
 A Circle every figure take ;  
 Nay, shapes and forms, which would defy  
 All science of geometry ;  
 Isoceles, and Parallel  
 Names hard to speak and hard to spell !  
 Th' enchantress wav'd her wand, and spoke ;  
 Her potent wand the Circle broke :  
 The social spirits hover round,  
 And bless the liberated ground."

(*Bas Bleu*).

" Her fears were so great," says another writer,  
 " of the horror, as it was styled, of a Circle, from  
 the ceremony and awe which it produced, that she  
 pushed all the small sofas, as well as chairs, pell-  
 mell about her apartments, so as not to leave even  
 a zigzag path of communication free from impedi-  
 ment." We have already quoted a pathetic  
 description of Mrs Vesey going with her ear-trumpet  
 from group to group, as any particular animation  
 of countenance struck her eye, and arriving  
 generally too late to catch the jest or epigram.

Fanny Burney relates the following incident,  
 which took place at the house of a well-known  
 hostess. Lord Harcourt, speaking of the lady  
 from whose house he had just come, said :—

" " Mrs Vesey is vastly agreeable, but her fear of  
 ceremony is really troublesome ; for her eagerness  
 to break a circle is such, that she insists upon every-

body's sitting with backs one to another; that is, the chairs are drawn into little parties of three together, in a confused manner, all over the room. . .'

"Oh, I like the notion of all things," cried Mrs Cholmondeley, 'I shall certainly adopt it!'

"And then she drew her chair into the middle of our circle, Lord Harcourt turned his round, and his back to most of us, and my father did the same. You can't imagine a more absurd sight. . ."

And there are many other references in contemporary memoirs to hostesses pulling about chairs and planting people in groups with dexterous disorder.

This method obviously promoted individual initiative and encouraged variety; it allowed movement, so essential a feature in pleasant social life; it made for ease and informality. But at the same time it had defects equally obvious.

The groups were disintegrated; there was no central interest; and it was impossible for the hostess to direct or control any main stream of conversation. Horace Walpole, who had a sincere friendship for Mrs Vesey, yet calls her parties "Babels"; and with some justice, if every separate group was discussing a different topic at the same time. But contemporary evidence insists, as we have seen, upon Mrs Vesey having such gifts of personality that she was able to fuse together the



discordant elements: and after all there are no limits to the magic of sympathy.

The Square yet remains to be described—a somewhat unusual arrangement. Fanny Burney is again our authority. She has been asked to meet Soame Jenyns “an old wit” at Mrs Ord’s. She finds a room full of company seated square; that is close to the wainscot, leaving a vacancy in the middle of the apartment sufficient for dancing three or four cotillons. When she entered everyone, contrary to all present custom, stood up—as if to see the sight! . . . “They all still kept staringly upright till Mr Jenyns, who was full dressed in a court suit, of apricot-coloured silk, lined with satin, made all the slow speed in his power from the other end of the room to accost me: and he then—could he do less thus urged?—began an harangue the most elegantly complimentary. . .” Mrs Ord used also to make her guests draw their chairs round a table in the centre of the room; she was a great believer in this shape of intercourse—which, however, suggests a dinner-party without any dinner.

The Method of the Circle and the Method of its Disintegration are open to the same objection; the mechanism is too apparent. Lacking the ideal hostess, there must be certain rules and regulations; but the Blue-Stocking ones were a little too anxious, too insistent. Conversation, we fancy, does not require so cumbersome a geometry for



its support. Geometry applied to the garden robs the flowers of all their native grace ; and Conversation, the flower of Personality, becomes equally self-conscious if trained to grow carpet-wise in squares, triangles, crescents, and circles.

## MRS CHAPONE (HESTER MULSO)

(1727-1801)

WE are all familiar with Miss Pinkerton's Academy at Chiswick Mall, which, it is to be presumed, gave colour to such divers characters as Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley : though it is somewhat perplexing to explain how the same environment could have developed such conspicuous specimens of the gaudy and the scentless flower. The claims to distinction possessed by Miss Pinkerton, —that "Semiramis of Hammersmith"—were that she had been the friend of Dr Johnson and even the correspondent of Mrs Chapone herself. Mrs Chapone's name is thus singled out among educational authorities as the one best able to give "tone" to the Academy ; to impart a flavour of dignity to the curriculum, and to touch the establishment with the lustre of her reputation.

Miss Pinkerton is not alone in bracketing the names of Dr Johnson and Mrs Chapone. They are bound still more closely together in the files of *The Rambler*. Dr Johnson's choice of his few collaborators in this venture is very significant. He himself wrote all *The Rambler* (which ran from 1749 to 1752) with the exception of four letters in

No. 10 by Mrs Chapone; No. 30 by Catherine Talbot (Elizabeth Carter's friend); No 97 by Samuel Richardson; and No. 44 and 100 by Elizabeth Carter.

But it is by her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, addressed to her niece, that Mrs Chapone is principally remembered.

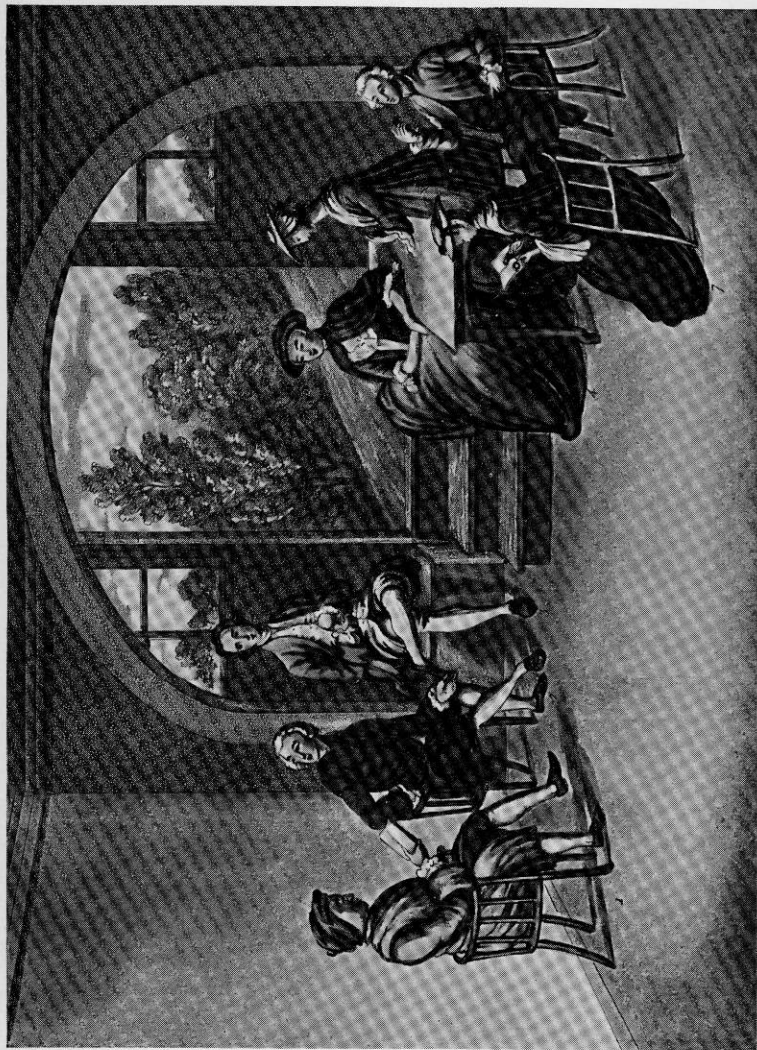
It is surprising to find that this exponent of Eighteenth Century propriety was very far from accepting in her youth the standards of contemporary convention. She had a mind of some originality and the courage of her opinions. Writing to Mrs Carter, of all people—whose favourite author Johnson was—she stigmatises *Rasselas* as “an ill-contrived, unfinished, unnatural and uninstructional tale.” Then she enjoyed argument for the sake of argument, and married a poor man for love against all the accepted canons. And yet she lacked the final daring of carrying many of her views to a logical conclusion; the spirit of the age was too strong for her; and we have seldom met with a more curious dabbler in ingenious compromise.

She was of an ardent, emotional temperament, a little afraid indeed, of the strength of her emotions. For instance, when she meets Mrs Montagu by Mrs Carter's introduction, she writes: “I begin to love her so much that I am quite frightened at it, being conscious my own insignificance will probably always keep me at a distance that is not

at all convenient for loving." This is very different from the diffidence of Fanny Burney, which, after all, sprang largely from an excess of self-consciousness. On the subject of the emotion of love Hester Mulso (afterwards Mrs Chapone) considered herself an authority, and she appears to have had good reason for this statement. Writing to Mrs Carter, she says: "Mrs Montagu, *entre nous*, is an ignoramus on this subject, as I have observed on many occasions, nor are you quite an adept. It is the only subject in the world of which I think myself a better judge than either of you." Her emotional capacities gave her artistic susceptibility; though wholly untrained, she had much natural taste in music, and a sweet powerful voice, and she was able to draw sufficiently well to make an "exceedingly like" portrait of Elizabeth Carter for Samuel Richardson, the novelist. The drawing was done without Mrs Carter's knowledge, but this lady was informed, that, as he could not possibly wear it in his snuff-box, she need not be scandalised.

Hester Mulso had a great enthusiasm for genius, and it was through her worship of *Clarissa* that she became the novelist's friend: he delighted in her sprightly conversation, and called her "a little spit-fire." "Excellent Miss Mulso," he begins a letter to her. "Richardson," says Mrs Barbauld, "lived in a kind of flower garden of ladies. They were his inspirers, his critics, his applauders."

But this enthusiast, this strong advocate in her earlier years of the importance of love in marriage, could lay claim to neither beauty nor any charm save that arising out of entire unaffectedness, extraordinary vitality, a sanguine disposition, and a keen sense of humour. Contemporary evidence, speaking generally, describes her as of an uncommon ugliness. She writes of herself as . . . "a poor gentlewoman that never was guilty of more than four poor odes, and yet is as careless, as awkward and as untidy as if she had made as many heroic poems as the great and majestic Blackmore." In Fanny Burney's Early Diary [1782], when Mrs Chapone was fifty-five, we read: "We . . . . went one evening last week to the Dean of Winchester's where we met Mrs Chapone, who looked less forbidding than usual; but she is deadly ugly to be sure—such (an) African nose and lips, and such a clunch figure! 'Poor Chappy! She's so ugly you know!' Mr Seward says." This, however, was not Richardson's opinion, nor does her portrait confirm it. There is a curious coloured drawing by Miss Highmore, which represents Richardson reading the manuscript of *Sir Charles Grandison* to his friends in the grotto of his house at North End, Hammersmith, in 1751. The "grotto" is simply a room leading up by three steps to a gravel path bordered by evergreens. Hester Mulso occupies the centre of the drawing, and her expression shows "that intelligent sweet-



SAMUEL RICHARDSON READING THE MANUSCRIPT OF *SIR CHARLES GRANDISON* TO HIS FRIENDS

(HESTER MULSO, AFTERWARDS MRS. CHAPONE, IN THE CENTRE OF THE PICTURE)

AFTER A COLOURED DRAWING BY MISS HIGHMORE





ness" which Richardson describes "as shining out" in the countenance of Miss Mulso. Perhaps her ugliness increased with age. She seems to have been beloved by her friends for qualities that were rooted directly in her century, "an uncommon solidity and exactness of understanding," "a lively, agreeable, turn of conversation," "good sense, talents," and conduct governed by the best and noblest principles.

Hester Mulso was born at Twywell, Northampton, in 1727, and kept house for her father after he became a widower. She appears to have been largely self-taught. Whilst staying with an Aunt at Canterbury she made the acquaintance of Elizabeth Carter (1745) with whom she kept up an extensive correspondence, and for whose character she had the highest admiration. Her early letters to Mrs Carter contain a clear picture of Hester Mulso's character, and throw many interesting sidelights upon Richardson and his circle. She writes, for instance, to Mrs Carter from Richardson's house, North End:—

"Mr Richardson was all goodness to us, and his health being better than usual enabled him to read and talk to us a great deal with cheerfulness, which never appears more amiable than in him. We had a visit while there from your friend Mr Johnson and poor Mrs Williams. I was charmed with his behaviour to her, which was like that of a fond

father to his daughter. . . . Mr Johnson . . . did me the honour to address most of his discourse to me. I had the assurance to dispute with him on the subject of human malignity."

Such a disputation would have been quite after Hester Mulso's heart : she loves to argue with Mrs Carter on such subjects as whether evil is only negative ; she enjoys defending Richardson against Mrs Carter's prejudice in favour of Fielding. But her most interesting "amicable controversy" was with her honoured friend, Mr Richardson himself, on the subject of Clarissa's filial obedience. Her letters to him have been published, and make entertaining reading. They belong to the years 1750-1751, and foreshadow her Matrimonial Creed, which is a triumph of casuistry.

Clarissa Harlowe's case might certainly be considered a test case, for on the one hand we have the most unscrupulous tyranny, and on the other hand, dutifulness struggling against inclination, modesty, and a sense of right. That the attitude of her parents could have been capable of any defence even by the novelist himself seems to us appalling ; but he may have remembered that he was writing to a somewhat headstrong and emotional girl, and have aimed his logic rather at Hester Mulso than at Clarissa Harlowe.

Richardson, Hester Mulso held, advocated an obedience to parents too rigorous and too servile.

She was willing to admit freely many of Richardson's premisses ; it never entered her head to suppose a child at liberty to dispose of herself in marriage ; she only argued for the negative. But she insisted that Clarissa was both reasonable and just in disclaiming authority which was made use of not to promote her happiness, but to make her miserable. " Under these circumstances," she says, " why is she continually represented as afflicting her soul with remorse and fear ? " A marriage with Solmes " would have involved Clarissa in guilt as well as *unhappiness* ; a guilt very little, if at all, *short of solemn perjury before the altar of God.*" So we have the curious paradox that though a child is not at liberty to dispose of herself in marriage, yet obedience to parents may be a crime ; and furthermore, that parents are as a rule quite unworthy of the obedience which she holds is due to them.

" . . . I must have *dreamt* (for I did not invent it) that those marriages which are made up by the parents are *generally* (amongst people of quality or great fortune) mere Smithfield bargains, so much ready money for so much land, and my daughter flung into the bargain ! I must have been asleep when I fancied I heard experienced people talk of an honourable engagement with a person of small fortune, however worthy, however suitable by birth, merit and temper, as *madness and folly.*"

It is not quite clear when Hester Mulso met "an attorney named Chapone" at Richardson's, but in this passage we fancy we read some inspiration of personal feeling. Mr Chapone was introduced to Richardson by Mrs Dewes, Mrs Delany's sister; she describes him as "a remarkably sober, good young man; his father a very worthy clergyman."

We see in these letters on Filial Obedience a mind held in the trammels of a convention, loosening a knot here and there, unable to free itself, struggling, yet accepting its bonds.

The struggle becomes more conspicuous and more painful in the Matrimonial Creed. Clarissa's is an extreme case—an "awful example" of the danger of filial obedience; but in normal instances no doubt there is a good deal to be said for the guidance of parents when marriage is contemplated. It is much more difficult for a speculative and venturesome soul to reconcile itself with the creed of man as Lord and Master in married life. Yet in her "Letter to a new married Lady" published 1777, this is the Creed Mrs Chapone definitely professes. Like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu she holds in theory that man is the superior creation, and that the wife's whole duty is submission to his will. The woman's personality is to be sunk not only in the interests, but even in the inclinations of the man. In earlier life Hester Mulso reconciles this doctrine with her love of independence by an extraordinary method of compromise. In her Matrimonial Creed, she

first asserts her premiss, and then proceeds to demolish it, piece by piece. We give a few clauses of this curious composition :—

- “(1) I believe that a husband has a divine right to the absolute obedience of his wife in all cases where the first duties do not interfere; and that as her appointed ruler and head, he is undoubtedly her superior. . . .
- “(2) I believe it expedient that every woman should chuse for her husband one whom she can heartily and willingly acknowledge her superior, and whose judgment and understanding she can prefer to her own. . .
- “(3) Notwithstanding this acknowledged superiority of right of command, I believe it highly conducive and to delicate minds, absolutely necessary to conjugal happiness, that the husband have such an opinion of his wife's understanding, principles and integrity of heart as would induce him to exalt her to the rank of his *first* and *dearest* friend. . . .
- “(4) In order to preserve this friendship perfect and entire, I believe it necessary that all such inequality and subjection as must check and restrain that unbounded confidence and frankness which are the essence of friendship, be laid aside or suffered to sleep.”



In a word : Man is the superior ; but a woman must be very careful to choose a man who is superior to herself. There is inequality ; but it is absolutely necessary to the happiness of delicate minds that there should be equality. Hester Mulso does not know how to abstain from setting up her nine-pin of convention ; and she sets it up again and again, only to knock it down. Yet to her own age there appeared no inconsistency, since on every hand we find her lauded for her "uncommon exactness of understanding."

We have already made allusion to the drawing by Miss Highmore, which represents Richardson reading *Sir Charles Grandison* to his friends, and to the fact that Hester Mulso occupies the central position in the picture. Hester Mulso, we may remark, had a very high opinion of this novel. "I apprehend it will occasion the kingdom being overrun with old maids. It will give the women an idea of perfection in a man which they never had before, and which none of the pretty fellows they are so fond of could ever have furnished them with."

Now the position of importance occupied by Hester Mulso in this picture has a peculiar appropriateness. For not only is she associated with Richardson's work as a contemporary sympathiser with *Clarissa* in her revolt ; her connection with the novels is of a more close and intimate kind, if, as Mrs Delany reports, he took her as a

model for his greatest characters. The suggestion is made by Mrs Donnellan, a friend of Mrs Delany's :—

“Donnellan commends Miss Mulso's letters, but does not so well like the young woman, that is, she admires her sense and ingenuity, but thinks her only second-rate as to *politeness of manner*; and that Richardson's *high admiration* for her has made him take her as a model for his greatest characters, and that is the reason they are not really so polished as he takes them to be.”

There speaks the Eighteenth Century and its preoccupation with *les grâces*! Hester Mulso was of good family, but she tells us herself that she was careless, awkward and untidy; her love of disputation may have been considered a little forward by the *grandes dames* of the time, and her independence of manner had been fostered perhaps by her becoming at a very early age mistress of her father's house. But Richardson himself was of tradesman stock, and continued a tradesman to the end, retaining throughout his life the prejudices, the conventions, and the limitations of his class. The lack of polish in Richardson's characters may have sprung from his inability to appreciate Miss Mulso's refinement, quite as much as from Miss Mulso's failure to reach Mrs Donnellan's standard. Richardson, we may add, once asked Mrs Donnellan to point out to him any errors he had

made in *Sir Charles Grandison* concerning the manners of the aristocracy. This severe censor picked so many holes in the work, that the discouraged Richardson muttered he had better forthwith throw it into the fire.

When Hester Mulso became engaged to Mr Chapone, it was with little hope of concluding a speedy marriage. There were grave financial difficulties in the way. The union finally took place in 1760 when Hester was thirty-five years old. We cannot be certain that she was happy; her family insist upon the point, but Mrs Barbauld is said to have reported otherwise, and the fact that her later writings appear to favour so exclusively the *mariage de convenance* might suggest that her own experience of a love match did not fulfil all ideals. In any case, the marriage was of short duration. Chapone died at the end of ten months, and the sorrow of this nearly killed his wife. Mrs Montagu writes to Mrs Carter in 1761 :—

“I am indeed grieved at the heart for Mrs Chapone; all calamities are light in comparison of the loss of what one loves, uniquement; after that dear object is lost . . . the soft and quiet pleasures are over, business may employ and diversions amuse the mind, but the *soul's calm sunshine and the heartfelt joy* can never be regained. Mrs Chapone has great virtues, and if she has the martyr's sufferings, will have the martyr's reward.”

Mrs Chapone was left with a small income, and spent much of her time at the houses of friends. Like so many of the ladies of the Blue-Stocking coteries, she had many connections in the church; she visited for long periods her uncle, the Bishop of Winchester. Mrs Delany writes somewhat indignantly to her niece, "The late Bishop of Winchester allowed her £20 a year out of his annual income of above £6000, and has only added £30 a year more for her life."

While Mrs Chapone was staying with her second brother, who was a clergyman in Yorkshire, that affectionate interest in her niece was awakened, which resulted in the *Letters*. These were published in 1772, and dedicated to Mrs Montagu, by whom they had been corrected, with "some strokes of your elegant pen." They were received with universal praise. Mrs Delany writes: "It is plain truth in an elegant, easy style, and the sentiments natural and delicate. . . . It sells prodigiously; one should hope from that, that though there are many corrupted minds, there are also many *ready to listen to the voice of the charmer*." For these Letters Mrs Chapone received "but £50," and Walter, the publisher, "made above £500 of it."

England produced, in the Eighteenth Century, two volumes of Letters on the subject of Education, one of which, decried by contemporaries, has become a standard work—though not a standard work on Education; and the other, accounted by contempor-

aries as a book in value next to the Bible, has fallen into utter oblivion. The educational works of Maria Edgeworth and of Hannah More belong more properly to the Nineteenth Century.

Although Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son*, and Mrs Chapone's *Letters to her Niece*, are poles apart, yet they have this in common; they were neither of them written in the first instance with any definite view to publication, and they both aim at training the objects of their interest to a certain approved and conventionalised Eighteenth-century type.

Lord Chesterfield desired to build up a perfect specimen of the Eighteenth-century Man of the World. "The general opinion of these letters among the better sort of men," writes Mrs Delany to her brother in 1774, "is that they are ingenious, useful as to polish of manners, but *very hurtful* in a moral sense. . . . *Les grâces* are the sum total of his religion." Dr Johnson remarked more bluntly that the Letters taught the "morals of a courtesan and the manners of a dancing master." Our present day commentators pronounce a much more favourable verdict. Leslie Stephen defends Chesterfield from being a mere fribble or rake, and considers him a singularly shrewd impartial observer of life, possessing the intellectual vigour which implies a real desire for good administration. Austin Dobson says that if you blame Lord Chesterfield for worldly wisdom you blame him in company with



Horace and Cicero, Bolingbroke and La Bruyère, De Retz and La Rochefoucauld. Be that as it may, Chesterfield's letters set before our eyes his model of Eighteenth century perfections: Mrs Chapone's Letters present the somewhat narrow pattern of womanhood that happened to be the ideal of the time—a type prevalent, one might say universal, in contemporary fiction, and not without a large measure of charm. "Gentleness, meekness and patience, are her (woman's) peculiar distinctions," says Mrs Chapone. Her aims in her table, her dress, and in all other things are to be "*propriety* and *neatness*," and "*elegance* if her state demands it."

It is perhaps not very kind, even on this ground of similarity, to class Mrs Chapone and Lord Chesterfield together. As Mrs Chapone herself points out, Lord Chesterfield unweariedly recommends and enforces the *appearances* of all that he considers engaging—even sweetness of countenance he thinks may be put on and adjusted at the glass, like the rouge and the bouquet: "He forgets that those appearances must be the result of real excellences which he takes no pains to inculcate." The real excellences are what Mrs Chapone desires to see cultivated.

It is, however, a striking fact and illustrative of the innate conservatism of English people that at a time when new educational theories and experiments were so much in the air—when Rousseau was



writing his *Emile*, whose every page crashes with the breaking of barriers—when Madame de Genlis was making her pupils, the sons of the Duke of Orleans (Phillippe Egalité) act their history lessons: English writers remain contentedly within the narrow circle drawn round them in the past, and are not even aware of the vast open spaces that lie beyond.

And yet Mrs Chapone's little volume appeals to us for this very reason; it is so typically Eighteenth Century, and it has charm, it has simplicity, it has sincerity. There is not a trace in it of affectation, pretension or patronage. Written at the dictates of affection, it reads pleasantly and flowingly; and undoubtedly it possesses a considerable measure of sound common-sense. The larger proportion of the Letters are concerned with the best method of studying the Scriptures, and with the cultivation of the moral qualities, and on both these points Mrs Chapone has much that is excellent to say. It is interesting to note that she advocates later in life the examination of the evidence of the Christian religion, so that her niece may be convinced on rational grounds of its divine authority. She warns her niece that St Paul's teachings have been "fatally perverted" by commentators to yield the doctrine of salvation by faith alone; and warmly recommends St James's Epistle, which is "entirely practical and exceedingly fine." Her religious teaching is, indeed,

largely ethical ; and although she has read some of the mystics, she holds in this book that emotion in religion is as much to be avoided as emotion in marriage.

"On the Regulation of the Heart and the Affections"; this chapter, like its title, is full of Eighteenth Century atmosphere. The chambers of our emotions are to be as neatly ordered and as faintly perfumed in lavender as our linen closets : reason and principle are to control every nook and cranny, and to keep even our virtues from their own defects. "Compassion . . . was not impressed upon the human heart only to adorn the fair face with tears, and to give an agreeable languor to the eyes. It was designed to excite our utmost endeavour to relieve the sufferer." It is only by reading old volumes of this sort that we can understand the outcry raised against Mrs Thrale's second marriage. "Romantic notions" are here condemned ; "the passions" submitted to a strict censorship ; suitability of character, degree and fortune made the first condition of happiness. Mrs Chapone holds, however, no brief for marriage, and bids her niece "not be afraid of a single life."

It is when we come to Mrs Chapone's curriculum that we feel most strongly the shrinkage of horizons. How delightfully accessible has knowledge become ! And yet how cribb'd, cabin'd and confin'd ! There are indeed large domains that it is unsuitable for the young lady to explore ;

the abstruse sciences, for instance, and the learned languages; knowledge of these would allow too great excuses for pendency and presumption: but — curious inconsistency — the classics offer no such temptations for undue boasting if read in translation. Poetry, “this enchanting art,” is highly recommended, “particularly those immortal ornaments of our nation, Shakespeare and Milton.” Shakespeare is not here hedged about with all the limitations Hannah More prescribes. (Hannah More does not think it possible, nor does it appear necessary — to debar “accomplished and elegantly-educated young persons” “from the discriminated, the guarded, the qualified perusal of such an author as Shakespeare.”) But “fictitious stories” are only to be read with great caution, since they “tend to inflame the passions of youth whilst the chief purposes of education should be to moderate and restrain them.”

History, however, universal history, is the one study suitable for the female mind. A little geography and chronology reduced to the simplest equation are useful aids in this study; for geography, a bare adjective helps to keep the characteristics of countries in mind. As to chronology, a few leading dates—Creation, 4000 B.C., Flood, 2350 B.C., and the dates of the four Great Monarchies, will be found useful. Universal History itself is not nearly so formidable as it sounds. Ancient History is contained in *L'Histoire Ancienne* of Rollin, and of

this only the account of Grecian and Roman History need be read with any anxious desire of retaining it perfectly! This book, with Vertot's *Révolutions Romaines*, gives all that it is absolutely necessary to know of ancient history. Modern History is almost as easily mastered, though more books have to be traversed. As a course of History reading, Mrs Chapone's scheme appears to be excellent; but as giving a knowledge of universal history, it is, of course, ludicrously inadequate. Yet while the dogmatism of the dates and of the characterising adjectives strike us as simply comic, we must allow that the effort to break away from merely local—from English history—is commendable, the effort to give the pupil some kind of general view, some understanding of the currents and tendencies that make the continuity of world-life. But compare Mrs Chapone's method with the contemporary method adopted by Madame de Genlis for teaching history to her royal pupils! Madame de Genlis anticipated the modern rage for illustration in education—the modern reliance on the dramatic instinct in children. She had medallions of the Roman Emperors with their dates, painted on the walls of the garden pavilion, and scenes from Roman history over its doors; she used a magic lantern, with historical slides, which included scenes from the history of China and Japan; she took her pupils to museums and the sites of famous events, and made

them act in their own persons the historical voyages of discovery, and take part in historical tableaux. Although she endeavoured to cover too much ground, her method is original and alive. For methods of Education we must not go to Mrs Chapone. The merit of her little book lies in the fact that necessary stress is laid upon the formation of the moral character, that the cultivation of the imagination is given a place in the scheme, and that not too much is attempted.

Mrs Chapone's beloved niece did not live long to profit by her aunt's affectionate counsel. She married a clergyman and died in child-birth.

"How is our Blue Club cut up!" writes Madame d'Arblay in 1801, with reference to the death of Mrs Chapone. Mrs Chapone is well acclaimed one of the Blue-Stockings; not only by reason of her famous *Letters*, but by reason of her friendships with members of the coterie. We have already mentioned the relations of affection that bound her to Mrs Carter and to Mrs Delany. She accompanied Mrs Montagu on her visit to Scotland, stopping at Hagley on the way (Lord Lyttleton's place) where, as it was wet, he read them part of his History. Mrs Chapone had her assemblies too; rational, instructive, social, but apparently somewhat dull. "The meetings, in truth, at her dwelling, from her palpable and organic deficiency in health and strength for their sustenance, though they never lacked of sense or

taste, always wanted spirit," writes Madame d'Arblay.

Mrs Chapone's last years were clouded by money difficulties and increasing physical debilities.

Possessing a character that had in it many elements of revolt, a character capable of enthusiasm and of passion, she remains the author of the book best suited to Miss Pinkerton's Academy: and this at a time when the fundamental axiom of Rousseau's *Emile* was undermining the foundations of society: "Prenez le contrepieds de l'usage et vous ferez presque toujours bien."



## THE BLUE-STOCKINGS IN PICTURES

SIR Joshua Reynolds ; Hogarth ; Rowlandson : we have in their work an epitome of the Eighteenth Century : of its grace and beauty ; of its somewhat primitive morality ; of its Rabelaisian coarseness.

The Eighteenth Century has left behind it no surpassing body of literature ; it was too circumscribed, too self-satisfied, too occupied with a narrow criticism of the immediate. But these limitations are no disadvantage to an art that concerns itself mainly with the representation of material things ; the portrait painter finds all the scope he needs for delicate observation in the cultivated personalities of the men and women around him, while the painter of social life gains force and directness by concentration in a small compass.

The great painters that flourished in the Eighteenth Century, unlike most of the great painters of our day, occupied themselves principally with the life of the time ; they have left us transcripts of such exquisite grace and such marvellous fidelity that the rough pageantry of those streets has become a familiar experience, and the ladies

in their floating scarves, gleams of actual beauty.

The Eighteenth Century has, within its somewhat narrow limits, evolved a type of beauty peculiar to itself, a beauty that is another word for grace. The stately dances of the day—what are they but hymns to grace? And the beauty of Sir Joshua's ladies—is it not grace incarnate, a subtle harmony and quiet, the poise of perfect ease, with a fresh wind stirring the draperies lest the sweetness should seem too sweet? In his pictures we find the far-away floating ideal of all those wearisome little Manuals of Deportment, all those tedious Maxims of Manners, all those dull Treatises on Propriety which are so characteristic a feature of the age. But surely this cannot be taught—this movement of his ladies free as the swaying grass, their confidence as alert and delicate as a harebell's? Indeed we feel that only the touch of a genius most tender and sympathetic could transform, as Reynolds does, artificiality into spontaneity; could win such abiding fragrance out of flowers grown in hot-house air. "He is lily-sceptred," says Ruskin, "his power blossoms but burdens not." Charm is too heavy a word for his airy forms, all faint light and frail draperies—enchantment we would rather say—but an enchantment without mystery and without magic—a spell that arrests simply because it is perfect achievement. For this Eighteenth Century ideal of womanhood

has strict limitations, and one type, varying very little, becomes in the end a trifle monotonous. We feel at times that the grace is too external—that the surroundings, the pose even, suggest the conventional. If we would attain to invariable sweetness and light there must be sacrifices, eliminations—sacrifices of character—eliminations of soul. Such sacrifices and eliminations were, however, willingly made in a century which had for ideal a colourless passivity. Miss Reynolds, Sir Joshua's sister, writes in her *Essay on Taste*, "Perhaps the most perfect feminine mind habitually aims at nothing higher than an exemption from blame."

Among the Blue-Stockings the one who has given us the most charming word-picture of this Eighteenth-century ideal, and who approaches it most closely in her own person, is Fanny Burney. It is greatly to be regretted that the supreme interpreter of that ideal should not have painted so appropriate a subject. Once when Fanny Burney was dining with Sir Joshua Reynolds at his villa on Richmond Hill, she became aware that he was looking at her with a glance of peculiar intentness. "I know what you are thinking about," she said. "Ay," he replied, "you may come and sit to me now whenever you please." He had caught her characteristic attitude—the secret of her personality. Fanny Burney once visioned herself in caricature, touched with the humour of the contrast between Dr Johnson's rugged figure and her diminutive one.

“Dr Johnson *forced* me to sit on a very small sofa with him, which was hardly large enough for himself; and which would have made a subject for a print by Harry Bunbury, which would have diverted all London.” Harry Bunbury was an acquaintance of Fanny Burney’s, and an artist of considerable wit, who with somewhat too facile pen devoted himself chiefly to quizzing the fashionable foibles of the day.

Mrs Thrale, with those “strong points” in her face and her expressive eyes, was a less happy subject for Sir Joshua’s brush; but in his portrait of her, the painter has been very successful in depriving her of character. She is painted with her daughter, and this picture was one of the series of eight by the same master, in the possession of Mr Thrale, known as the Streatham Gallery, and before referred to.

It is some distance from these graceful, slightly conventional visions of Sir Joshua to the sturdy realism of Hogarth, with his unrivalled power of character-drawing, his fertility of invention, his enthralling minutiae, and his uncompromising morality. His pictures are, as he claimed them to be, scenes of a drama, the drama of life; he has painted for us a moving panorama of the Eighteenth Century, and peopled it with living, shouting, suffering, laughing beings. The salon, the boudoir, the theatre, the workshop, the cockpit, the prison cell, the mad-house — these are

some of his backgrounds — interiors brimming over with observation, with detail; and he has given us scenes in the open air, boisterous, exuberant, such as the *Fair at Southwark*, which has been compared to painted noise. If we would see Eighteenth-century London in all its brutality through the eyes of a grim realist, we must walk its streets with Hogarth; indeed he compels us along with him, for he has a harsh lesson to teach us: he will show us the Rake's Progress, and the Harlot's Progress, the Idle Apprentice led to the gallows, and the unfaithful Countess drinking her death-draught. Morality, we may remark, is much simplified in a world where the good and the bad are strikingly differentiated, and where rewards and punishments follow appositely in accordance with desert. But thus the world appears to Hogarth, and in this wise he sets it before us.

A little girl of fourteen was taken by her father, who was a friend of the painter's, to a studio in Leicester Fields where Hogarth was painting the *Lady's Last Stake*, and was asked to sit to him. "You are not fourteen years old yet, I think, but you will be twenty-four, and this portrait will then be like you," said Hogarth; "'Tis the Lady's last Stake; see how she hesitates between her money and her honour. . . ." This little girl afterwards became Mrs Thrale. Hogarth was not the one to practise eliminations,



THE LADY'S LAST STAKE

(MRS. THRALE WHEN A YOUNG GIRL SAT AS MODEL FOR THE LADY)  
AFTER THE PAINTING BY HOGARTH



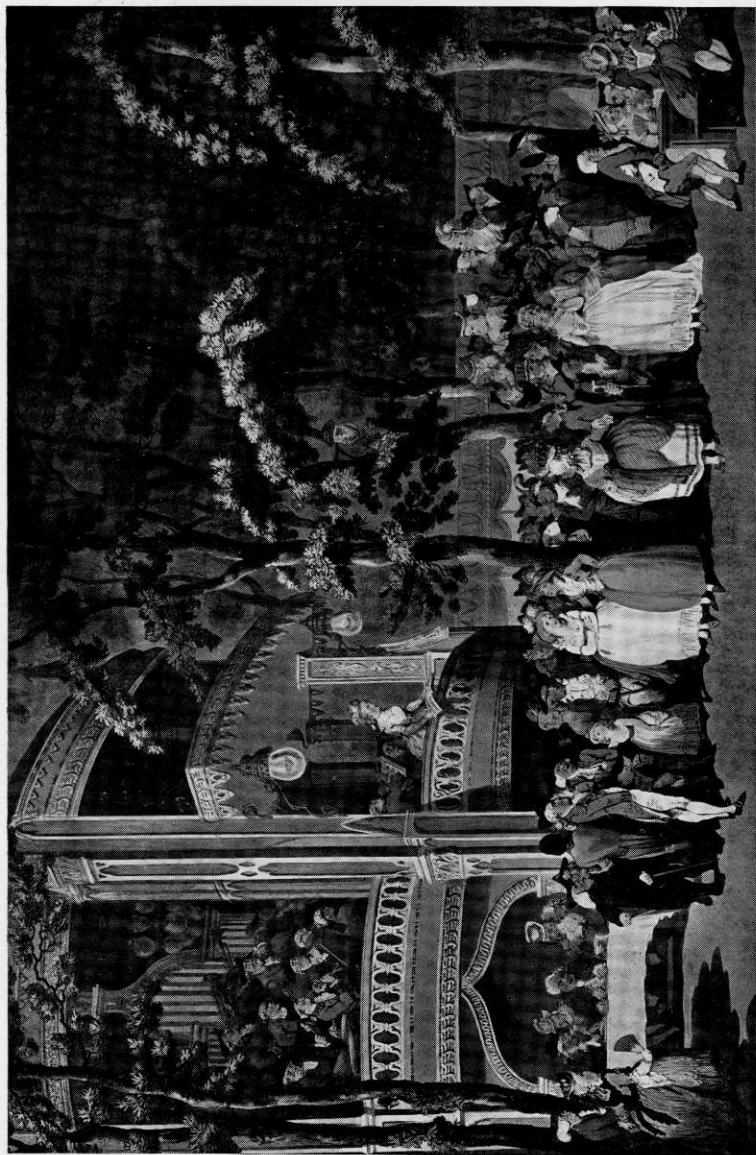


and the lady in his picture has a most expressive countenance. But we doubt if Mrs Thrale at the age of twenty-four possessed such good looks. Mrs Thrale, in her reminiscences, describes certain distinctive traits of the painter. She gives his vivid appreciation of Johnson's conversation in symbols of his own art: "Mr Hogarth, among the variety of kindnesses shown me when I was too young to have a proper sense of them, was used to be very earnest that I should obtain the acquaintance, and, if possible, the friendship of Dr Johnson, whose conversation was, to the talk of other men, like Titian's paintings compared to Hudson's." The strong didactic tendency of the man is shown in her statement that "his discourse generally ended in an ethical dissertation, and a serious charge to me, never to forget his picture of the *Lady's Last Stake*."

Mrs Delany came into contact with Hogarth too. He promised to give her some instructions for drawing "which will be of great use—some rules of his own that he says will improve me more in a day than a year's learning in the common way." It does not appear that the matter went further, but the incident would seem to suggest that Hogarth, as well as Sir Joshua Reynolds, saw considerable talent in Mrs Delany's work. In painting she did nothing original, but confined herself to copying the old masters. Elizabeth Robinson writes in 1740: "Madam

Pen is copying Sacharissa's picture by Vandyck, and does it with all that felicity of genius that attends her in all her performances." Sir Joshua Reynolds was so much astonished at the force of a copy she had made of the Sigismunda attributed to Correggio, that he could not believe it was done in crayon until Mrs Delany had the glass removed that he might examine it closely. With such artistic gifts, such delicate appreciation, such perfect taste, it is natural to wish it had been in her power to collect pictures. She had a few. She leaves in her will to Lady Bute a picture of the Three Maries after Salvator Rosa, and another of the Raising of Lazarus. There is one delightful little passage in a letter of hers, showing how her thoughts ran in terms of painting and poetry. "Could I have attended to the beauties *en passant* between dear, sweet Ilam and this place (Sudbury), I should present my dearest Mary with such a mixture of pastoral delights as would have served a Claude or a Shenstone for their whole lives." How would Claude like to be bracketed with Shenstone — that most artificial of pastoralists? But Mrs Delany was in one sense a patron of art, since she introduced the Cornish painter Opie to the notice of George III. and Queen Charlotte. By command of their Majesties, Opie painted Mrs Delany's portrait — a charming and very sincere piece of work. The picture was hung in the bedchamber of the King





### VAUXHALL GARDENS

FROM A CARICATURE BY THOMAS ROWLANDSON

(IN SUPPER-HOX TO THE LEFT ARE SEATED JOHNSON, BOSWELL, GOLDSMITH AND MRS. THRALE)

and Queen at Windsor Castle, and is now at Hampton Court. He also painted another portrait of Mrs Delany for Lady Bute.

Mrs Thrale, painted by Reynolds and by Hogarth, also appears in a caricature of Rowlandson's. It represents a crowd of people standing before the Orchestra at Vauxhall. In a supper box at the side are Johnson, Boswell, Goldsmith, and Mrs Thrale.

The position of the caricaturist was one of immense influence during the latter half of the Eighteenth century, and his deformities of human beings, amazingly vital, extraordinarily clever in execution, and often very coarse, must take their stand in any picture of the age beside the half-ideal portraits of Sir Joshua, and the breathing realities of Hogarth.

A visionary beauty, limited in sphere; an exuberant variety of exaggerated ugliness; and between these, a portraiture of reality in myriad phases made to subserve a strong moral purpose; so, perhaps, we may represent the Eighteenth Century under the symbols of Sir Joshua Reynolds, Hogarth, and Rowlandson.

What is the pictorial record of the Queen of the Blues? Mrs Montagu was too assiduous a follower of the fashion to be a discerning patroness of art. She bought Chinese vases because they were the rage, and her Room of Cupidons reads strongly suggestive of Boucher. Angelica



Kauffman did a ceiling for her because it was the correct thing to have a ceiling done by Angelica Kauffman: and for the same reason Mrs Montagu employed "Mr Adams" to design her a ceiling and a chimney-piece and doors, "which are pretty enough to make me a thousand enemies."

So also Mrs Montagu was painted by Sir Joshua because everyone of any pretension was painted by this master. But her position of eminence is best exemplified in a large portrait group,—the fifth picture in the series of six painted by the Irish painter Barry for the Great Room of the Society of Arts in John Street, Adelphi.

Barry's is a tragic story. He had unbounded confidence in his own powers, fierce pride, and an unhappy temper that made his course through life full of difficulties. He undertook to paint these pictures to vindicate the position of English art with an almost heroic disregard of ways and means. They were begun in 1777, and continued till 1781, the painter meanwhile supporting himself with etching. The Society of Arts appears to have behaved with generosity, but Barry proudly insisted on dying of hunger in a garret.

The pictures still hang in the Great Room—historical and allegorical subjects—vast in size, ambitious in design. We are only concerned with the fifth of the series, which represents "The Society." The picture includes a great number of

figures and groups; the then President, Lord Romney—the Prince of Wales—noblemen—men of science, like William Locke and Dr Hunter—wits like Soame Jenyns—orators like Burke. Almost in the centre of the picture, with the light full on her, is Mrs Montagu. She is in profile, stooping a little as was her wont, and looking up while she fingers some rich brocade. Her hair, which is a chestnut brown, is rolled back off her forehead and dressed over a small cushion. A black scarf is thrown over the back of the head, and knotted at the throat; she wears a cape of white muslin, frilled, and her skirt is of a dull red colour. The profile of her face is very sharp, she has a long straight nose, and heavy eyelids. It is a clever face, full of animation, strength and intelligence. The groups in the picture are disconnected, and consequently the whole lacks unity, but there is one slight incident which concerns itself with Mrs Montagu—"that distinguished example of female excellence who long honoured the Society with her name and subscription." Two Duchesses are standing near her, the Duchess of Rutland and the Duchess of Devonshire, and between them is Doctor Johnson—a most flattering portrait of the Doctor—"pointing out this example of Mrs Montagu to their Graces' attention and imitation." This was of course before Mrs Montagu's serious quarrel with Johnson; it is one of life's little ironies that

he should be represented through all time distinguishing before all the world this lady of whose intellect he so constantly spoke with disrespect, though he did justice to her benevolence.

Horace Walpole disliked both Dr Johnson and Mrs Montagu, and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that the picture should have excited his ire—his aristocratic ire—the more so, as when he wrote, the Lyttleton controversy had taken place. To William Mason he says : “Yes, I have told you that Barry has apotheosised you. . . . There are two gentlewomen, too, who I believe will stare as much as you at the company in which they find themselves. Had they been hurried into Charon’s hoy at once, they could not be more surprised at the higgledi-piggledyhood that they would meet there. In short, these two poor gentlewomen are the Duchesses of Devonshire and Rutland, who this new Master of the ceremonies to Queen Fame has ordered that well-bred usher to the Graces, Dr Johnson, to present to Mrs Vice Queen Montagu under whose tuition they are to be placed, and who is recommended to them as a model to copy.” He goes on to say that they are “knotted into such a mob of heads that you would think them crowding out of Ranelagh, and so unlike they are, that I did not know which was which.”

It must be confessed that a good many of the

heads are wooden ; but Mrs Montagu's does not come in this category : and it is pleasant to have this striking, if fanciful record, of the position that the greatest of Blue-Stocking hostesses occupied among her contemporaries.

## FANNY BURNEY (MADAME D'ARBLAY)

1752-1840

“**R**APTUROUS and most innocent happiness during anonymous success.” So in old age Madame D'Arblay endorsed one of her own letters written when her novel *Evelina* was in the full tide of its triumph.

Of this rapturous and most innocent happiness of the author in a success, Fanny Burney has left an account more complete and more detailed than any in our literary history. Her journal records every slightest word of praise lavished upon the novel, records every flattering speculation as to its authorship, records every tremor of emotion she experienced when her responsibility came gradually to be known. In the description she gives of her thrills of alarmed modesty, of her blushes and her silence, of her running out of the room when the praise became too excessive to be borne, we recognise the Eighteenth-century young lady, the creator of *Evelina*, lively, high-spirited and obviously fulfilling in her own person and to her own satisfaction all the demands of a highly-conventionalised ideal of womanhood. Austin Dobson says that the greatest debt of gratitude we owe to Fanny Burney is that she prepared the way



MISS BURNEY

(MADAME D'ARBLAY)

FROM A PORTRAIT BY EDWARD BURNEY





for Jane Austen. Certainly the character of *Evelina* combines in an eminent degree the qualities of "sense" and "sensibility," to be so admirably dissected by the later novelist. *Evelina* is in essence a delicate study of topical sensitiveness. The charm, the appeal, the success of the book—for us of this age at least—consist in the heroine's subtle apperceptions of, and dainty emergence from the equivocal positions in which she is placed. The character-drawing, so greatly admired by Fanny Burney's contemporaries—Dr Johnson calls her a "character-monger"—appears to us a little crude: the machinery of the plot is very clumsy: but the book has perennial life, not only as a brilliant chronicle of manners but because it embodies the charm of a certain type of womanhood. *Evelina* is the product of an artificial age, living under and obeying artificial conditions; but the atmosphere is so natural to her that she breathes and moves in it with perfect ease and freedom, and brings with her such freshness that its overcharged perfumes acquire something of the fragrance of wild violets.

*Evelina* was published when Fanny Burney was twenty-six—she was born in 1752. But already she had had unusual opportunities for observation; already she had had no small practice in the literary craft.

Her father, Dr Burney, the most fashionable music-master in London, by reason of his eminence

as musician and author, and even more by reason of his charm of personality, attracted to his house a large circle of notable people. "I love Burney," said Dr Johnson, "my heart goes out to meet him. . . . Dr Burney is a man for all the world to love." Garrick also was an intimate familiar at the Burney house, 1 (now 35) St Martin's Street. Most of the great singers of the day came to sing at Dr Burney's Sunday entertainments, which brought to the house many guests eminent in other directions.

Mr Crisp of Chessington, an old family friend to whom Fanny used to send long chronicle letters, writes with reference to one of these parties: "You have produced such an illustrious assembly of princes and generals, and lords and ladies, and wits and pictures, and diamonds and shoulder knots, that I feel myself shrink into nothing at the idea of them." To this "Second Daddy" of hers Fanny forwarded anecdotes, "conversation pieces," costume descriptions, character sketches; she also kept an elaborate journal, and wrote down stories almost from the cradle. These early manuscripts she destroyed when only fourteen in a great bonfire, moved thereto by the representations of her step-mother on the foolishness of idle scribbling. But the instinct was too strong to be thus suppressed. Her life was a full one, for her father employed her constantly as amanuensis in the composition of his *History of Music*; and *Evelina* was written in snatched moments on odd

scraps of paper. She managed to arrange and transcribe her novel while her father was away on a continental tour collecting further material for his book. Her brother Charles, more as a frolic than anything else, negotiated the publication of her novel, the authorship of which was to remain a profound secret. Mr Lowndes of Fleet Street offered £20 for the manuscript—"an offer," she writes, "which was accepted with alacrity; and boundless surprise at its magnificence!" The book was published in 1778, and made its way slowly at first; it was six months before Dr Burney read it. But then he wrote, after he had become aware of the authorship, "What will all this come to? Where will it end? and when and how shall I wake from the vision of such splendid success? for I hardly know how to believe it real." After this, it is not so much *Evelina's* triumph, as Fanny's triumph and Fanny's sensations that are recorded in her journals and letters. When Dr Burney announces in a letter his intention of revealing the authorship of *Evelina* to Mrs Thrale, Fanny writes, "I shook so when I read it, that had anybody been present I must have betrayed myself." Diffidence and modesty may have been to a large extent natural to her, but she so emphasises their attractions that she must undoubtedly have cultivated the expression of these qualities on every possible occasion. She reports Dr Johnson as having said to Mrs Thrale: "Modesty with her

is neither pretence nor decorum ; 'tis an ingredient of her nature . . .” and Horace Walpole, writing in 1785, gives like testimony . . . “ She, half and half sense and modesty, which possess her so entirely that not a cranny is left for affectation or pretension. Oh! Mrs Montagu,” he goes on, “you are not above half as accomplished.” Then her extreme “*facilité à rougir*” lent colour to her reputation for sensitiveness. The occasions which made call upon her modesty were, according to her own account, incessant. Yet her enjoyment is so young and so fresh that in spite of some monotony her Diary makes exhilarating reading, and when she touches upon the prominent figures of the age, its interest becomes considerable. She writes: “But Mrs Thrale! She—she is the goddess of my idolatry! what an *éloge* is hers!” And again . . . “But Dr Johnson’s approbation! . . . it almost crazed me with agreeable surprise—it gave me such a flight of spirits that I danced a jig to Mr Crisp, without any preparation, music, or explanation—to his no small amazement and diversion.” Forty-eight years later she told Sir Walter Scott that this jig was danced round a mulberry-tree in the garden at Chessington. The mulberry-tree is there to this day.

A word as to her personal appearance. It was singularly in keeping with the extreme sensitiveness she portrays in her record. She had a “speaking” face, that derived its attraction from the rapid play

of expression rather than from beauty of feature. She was short in stature, brown in complexion, and very slenderly made. "What a slight piece of machinery is the terrestrial part of thee, our Fannikin!" . . . writes Mr Crisp. Her eyes—doves' eyes Mrs Streatfield called them, presumably because they were greenish-grey, Fanny suggests—were short-sighted, and the consequence was she stooped somewhat. She retained her girlish appearance into middle life.

We now come to "the most consequential day I have spent since my birth"—namely the day of her visit to the Thrales at Streatham, and the practical beginning of her friendship with Dr Johnson.

Of Dr Johnson the worst and best has been so minutely written by contemporaries that at first we are overwhelmed in their particularity of detail, and as trait after trait is flashed before us our judgment remains suspended between the repulsive and the admirable. It is only after a time, when we have removed ourselves from the conflicting throng of little facts, and look back, that we see in perspective the real contour of that imposing personality in all its greatness. "Suppose Mount Athos carved," says Elizabeth Barrett Browning :—

"To some colossal statue of a man,  
The peasants, gathering brushwood in his ear,  
Had guessed as little as the browsing goats



Of form or feature of humanity  
Up there—in fact had travelled five miles off  
Or ere the giant image broke on them,  
Full human profile, nose and chin distinct  
Mouth, muttering rhythms of silence up the sky  
And fed at evening with the blood of suns. . . .”

And yet it is the brushwood, and the jagged stones, and the grasses, and the lichen that give in distance colour, and even form; and Fanny Burney's details have contributed in no slight degree to softening the harshness of outline in this colossal statue of a man.

The Dr Johnson of Boswell is to all intents and purposes the Dr Johnson of Fleet Street: the Fleet Street atmosphere, the coffee-house atmosphere, seems to cling to him wherever he goes. So close has the association become, so living is the picture presented by Boswell, that Dr Johnson's name immediately evolves Eighteenth-century London, and his friends and associates detach themselves with vivid distinctness from the crowds that throng the streets. But Boswell had small opportunity for studying Johnson at Streatham Place, where the Doctor passed so large a portion of his later years, and Mrs Thrale has failed in her *Anecdotes* to give any clear impression of the Doctor's personality. Fanny Burney, therefore, remains our chief source of information on this most interesting period of Johnson's life.

Fanny was now nearing the full tide of success,

and everything was seen through a glamour of happiness. Streatham Place she describes briefly as white, and very pleasantly situated in a fine paddock. Mrs Thrale captured her affections at once—"she is all unaffected drollery and sweet good-humour," she writes. Natural liveliness, sweetness of disposition, general benevolence, a rare union of gaiety and feeling—such are the qualities that Fanny attributes to her friend. As to Dr Johnson, he appears in an entirely new light. His great figure seems to have been more at ease in these spacious surroundings than in the cramped coffee-house parlours, and his whole attitude and conversation breathe an air of well-being unusual to his melancholy and gloomy nature. In consequence we find him "facetious," "extremely comical"—insisting that Miss Burney must have a rasher for her supper, and in sheer exuberant farce challenging Thrale to get drunk with him. From the very first he took a liking for Fanny, and not only championed *Evelina*, and her second novel, *Cecilia*, with all the weight of his authority, but flattered her by his constant attentions and desire for her company. On the point of ladies' dress he was most fastidious, and she was even happy enough to please him in this matter. This was the more surprising, since the question of dress was throughout her life something of a trouble to her. "She was always working at her clothes," a contemporary tells us; and she herself

writes of "the perpetual replenishment they require, which practically occupies every moment I spend out of company."

Boswell dwelt upon the Doctor's physical disabilities and habits for the sake of photographic accuracy; Mrs Thrale dwelt upon them in self-justification, and to glorify her own forbearance; but Fanny Burney, though she mentions, does not dwell upon his peculiarities. She saw in him "as great a *souled* man as a *bodied* one, and were he less furious in his passions, he would be demi-divine."

Fanny Burney was always received with affection by Dr Johnson at Bolt Court, and she writes that she finds him "more instructive, entertaining, good-humoured, and exquisitely fertile than ever." On another occasion when she made breakfast for him he welcomed her with open arms and called her "dearest of all ladies." When he was on his death-bed she spent long hours at the house in the vain hope that she might be allowed to see him before the end. There seems to have been real affection between these two oddly assorted mortals, and her memory is kept green partly by its connection with this perennially vital old man.

But not only Dr Johnson acclaimed her genius. She was welcomed at all great assemblies of the day, not by reason of her father's popularity, but on account of her own shining merits. "Now that I am invited to Mrs Montagu's I think the measure

of my glory full!" she writes. Sir Joshua Reynolds, too considerate to let her hear her own praises but through others, as she tells us, was always picking up some anecdote to prove in what esteem her novels were held. Burke made her many most eloquent compliments on *Cecilia* "too delicate either to shock or sicken the nicest ear," she says. When finally she was introduced by Mrs Chapone to the Duchess of Portland and Mrs Delany, she reports these ladies as uttering page after page of the most extravagant eulogium. These conversations make curious, and not quite convincing reading. Take a few random excerpts as examples: *The Duchess of Portland*: "Cry, to be sure we did. Oh, Mrs Delany, shall you ever forget how we cried? But then we had so much laughter to make us amends, we were never left to sink under our concern. . . ."

"For my part," said Mrs Chapone, "when I first read it, I did not cry at all. I was in an agitation that half killed me, that shook all my nerves, and made me unable to sleep at nights, for the suspense I was in; but I could not cry from excess of eagerness. . . ."

And so on for pages.

"No book," said Mrs Delany (as reported by Fanny Burney), "ever was so useful as this, because none other that is so good was ever so much read."

We cannot but feel that Lady Llanover may have some justification for her statement that Fanny

Burney coloured her narrative. Much as they may have admired *Cecilia* the words as reported seem a little too highly charged for such well-bred and serious ladies. For *Cecilia*, Fanny Burney received £250.

Fanny Burney's introduction to Mrs Delany had an important bearing on her future. When staying at Mrs Delany's house at Windsor she was presented to the King and Queen, and afterwards she was offered the post of Queen's Bed Chamber Woman.

Up to this moment we have felt ourselves in company with the author of *Evelina*—the woman of quick observation—the writer of lively dialogue. We might have fancied that as her future life was to yield an unusual measure of variety and romance, her sympathies would have widened, her experience broadened. But this is not the case. She has the power of superficially sketching a person or a scene in a few vivid words, but no instinctive sense of the depth or the tragedy of human existence. *Evelina* remains the highwater mark of her achievement, and even the high spirits that made the charm of her earlier writings desert her under the irksomeness of her position at Court.

But consider for a moment the elements of contrast in her life! Her brilliant entry into intellectual society and loyal acclaim by the giants of the day; her sudden eclipse for five years in the tedious fatigues of a Court, having to submit to the

unceasing tyranny of a coadjutor, narrow, jealous, and violent, fretted by unimportant minutiae of etiquette, and yet having opportunity of observing at first hand the madness of the King and important affairs of state; her resignation and intimate converse with the French emigrant aristocrats living at Juniper Hall in Surrey; her romantic marriage at Mickleham Church with Monsieur d'Arblay, a penniless nobleman who had lost his fortune in the Revolution; the simple life that she led with him for eight years in Surrey, her pension from the Queen of £100 a year being until the publication of *Camilla* practically their entire support; her residence of ten years in France, where her husband regained some £65 a year out of his fortune, but felt himself obliged to take a small post in the Civil Department of the Ministère de l'Intérieur; the accession of Louis XVIII. to the throne, and her husband's command as General under him during the Hundred Days; her own residence in Brussels at the time of the Battle of Waterloo; here indeed is overflowing material for romance! An account of matters of such moment could not fail to be interesting, but her later diaries lack the liveliness of her earlier writings, and have gained no compensating depth of thought or sense of character. Her egoism, natural, excusable, even charming in a girl, continues in after life the nucleus round which everything moves. And it is not the egoism of a strong



personality. Continuous reading of the Diary makes us feel as if we were wading in shallows. Sparkling shallows often, with much play of surface light; limpid shallows, revealing a character most affectionate and kindly; but shallows still, far removed from the deeper currents and the great waters. Horace Walpole, writing on *Camilla* in 1796, says: "Alas! she has reversed experience, which I have long thought reverses its own utility by coming at the wrong end of our life when we do not want it. This author knew the world and penetrated characters before she had stepped over the threshold; and now she has seen so much of it, she has little or no insight at all: perhaps she apprehended having seen too much, and kept the bags of foul air that she brought from the Caves of Tempests too closely tied."

The five years that Fanny Burney spent at Court were years of misery. Her salary was £200 a year with rooms and a man-servant. She who had been flattered, courted, lauded to the skies, found herself shut away in narrow confinement from all that life held dear, from her family, from her friends, "royally gagged, and promoted to fold muslins," as Horace Walpole put it, her constant companion a coarse, harsh woman, Mrs Schwellenberg, whose temper, naturally irascible, became at times furious even to savageness. This woman stands out distinct among the somewhat

shadowy figures of the Court, with her broken English, her pet frogs, and her unfeeling cruelty, by which Miss Burney's predecessor in office nearly became blind from inflammation of the eyes through having to drive in the coach in all weathers with the windows down. Mrs Schwollenberg created such terror that no one dared resist her, and the equerries at first hardly ventured to speak to Miss Burney because of this woman's jealousy. But apart from the tyranny, Miss Burney does not appear to have been suited for a position at Court. She was over-anxious about the minutiae of etiquette, and she suffered cruelly when she believed that slights were put upon her. Mrs Thrale had written long before : " I live with her in a degree of pain that precludes friendship—dare not ask her to buy me a ribbon—dare not desire her to touch the bell lest she should think herself injured." To be summoned to the Queen by means of a bell was hurtful to Miss Burney's dignity ; her short-sightedness made her additionally nervous ; she was so pernickety about her dress that she seems constantly to have had to run into the presence with her toilette incomplete. When the Court visited Nunehead near Oxford the neglect she met with caused her agonies of shame. . . .

" To arrive at a house where no mistress or master of it cared about receiving me ; to wander about, a guest uninvited, a visitor unthought of. . . ."

Her duties were not heavy, but they were fairly

continuous. Her first summons to the Queen was about seven-thirty A.M., and after prayers she returned to breakfast in her own room. She spent till nearly a quarter to twelve making preparations for the day, and then was summoned to help the Queen in her afternoon toilette. From three to five was her only "quite sure and undisturbed time." At five she dined with Mrs Schwollenberg; at eight gave tea to the Equerry in Waiting, and any friend invited by the King and Queen. She spent the rest of the evening with Mrs Schwollenberg till supper at eleven—and between eleven and twelve her last summons to the Queen took place. Queen Charlotte remains a vague figure in the Diary, though reported by Fanny as all sweetness, encouragement and gracious goodness. The King stands out much more clearly—amiable, quaint, considerate, unconventional in opinion: and Fanny Burney manages to rise to the great opportunity of his illness. Her description indeed is a contribution to history—full, too, of curious little personal touches: when the Court removes to Kew, for instance, she tells us how the Prince of Wales chalks up the names on the doors, assigning apartments. She had a dramatic encounter with the King in Kew Gardens before he had recovered from his madness. Coming upon him unexpectedly walking with two doctors she ran away in terror, and was pursued by him. The Doctors bade her stop, and she forced herself to turn, and

met the King, who retained all his wonted benignity of countenance, though there was something still of wildness in his eyes. To her surprise he stooped and kissed her, and then proceeded to talk with that volubility which was a mark of the disease. Once he is said to have talked without ceasing sixteen hours at a stretch. On this occasion he touched upon a myriad topics,—Handel—Mrs Delany—Mrs Schwellenberg—Dr Burney—showing a warm personal interest in Fanny, and a surprising understanding of the difficulties of her position.

After five years, giving as excuse her failing health, she resigned her appointment at Court.

And now our path leads to a little tract of country at the foot of Box Hill and among the hills in its vicinity. To our generation this tract has a peculiar and poignant association. Can there be in all the world a landscape so full of mystery and of magic as this which has inspired George Meredith's *Woods of Westermain*? The woods hold such a virgin freshness, such a dazzling intensity, that in them we seem to touch the very springs of life. The leap and flash of detail is so sharp and pure, that it serves not to distract, but to minister to the ecstasy of the mystic, who in a trance of sympathy reads to the very heart and soul of nature :—

“Look with spirit past the sense  
Spirit shines in permanence.”

But nightmare horrors lurk in these woods for the scoffer, the doubter, the egoist, and he who hates the shadow of a grain. So this our greatest poem of initiation into the mysteries of nature begins and ends with a warning:—

“Enter these enchanted woods  
You who dare.”

Yet these woods of revelation, that quiver with spiritual rapture and terror, and whose beauty to-day seems of faery, formed in the Eighteenth Century no more than a picturesque stage for a series of little comedies and dramas, with tragedy lurking in the wings. Indeed as we follow the French emigrant nobles, gay, light-hearted amid their dire reverses, passing from Juniper Hall to Norbury, the trees seem to shape to an old convention that they may form a correct background for a life still dignified, still graceful, though it has been rudely interrupted by scenes of violence and of blood. The Surrey woods turn to a Watteau landscape with the hush and suspense of his invariable suggestion of brooding storm.

The Emigrés, like the vanquished Cavaliers, are figures of such pathetic picturesqueness that Romance claims them for her own, sweeping lightly aside the protests of Reason and of Justice. The hair-breadth escapes of these delicately-nurtured aristocrats, the shifts and hardships of their lot, the unflinching courage with which they met the shocks

of ill-fortune and the resourceful gaiety with which they turned their hands and brains to the task of getting a living—these are qualities that appeal quickly to the imagination, and when described by the glowing pen of a Chateaubriand make reading of the most fascinating adventure.

On the valley road that winds between Mickleham and Burford Bridge stands Juniper Hall, the home for some time of a little colony of Emigrés. On one side of the valley rises the range of Box Hill, and on the other, the slopes on the summit of which is Norbury Park. This is the scene of the third act of Fanny Burney's life.

She was now forty, broken in health, and we fancy a little disillusioned. Her affections had remained unengaged in early youth, when she had had certain proposals of marriage which she put lightly aside; but after the triumph of *Evelina* there were at least two affairs of the heart which moved her profoundly, and which ended in disappointment. She came to her friends, the Locks of Norbury Park, a little faded, a little tired, feeling perhaps that the flower of life was over, that its interest and fragrance lay all in the past, and that the future had nothing to offer except withered leaves. But to the little French colony she was still "la première femme en Angleterre," as Madame de Staël calls her—Madame de Staël, who was now in England and presided over the Emigrés at Juniper Hall.



Fanny was fascinated by Madame de Staël, as in former years she had been fascinated by Madame de Genlis. These famous Frenchwomen possessed, besides great brilliance of intellect, great personal charm, and in both cases the friendship ripened quickly. The extreme propriety of the *Bas Bleu* ladies is exemplified by the fact that at the first breath of rumour touching the reputation of the French women, Fanny Burney felt herself compelled to cease all intercourse. But before the break with Madame de Staël a stronger attachment came into Fanny Burney's life.

Mrs Phillips, Fanny Burney's married sister, had a cottage at Mickleham, and as the emigrants were very shortly on intimate terms with the society of the neighbourhood, Mrs Phillips was able to give Fanny detailed and vivid accounts of the French Colony before she came among them. From Mrs Phillips' pen we have received our clearest picture of Monsieur d'Arblay. "He seems to me a true *militaire*," she writes, "*franc et loyal*—open as the day—warmly affectionate to his friends—intelligent—ready and amusing in conversation, with a great share of *gaieté de cœur*, and, at the same time, of naïveté and *bonne foi*." His portrait shows him handsome, aristocratic, debonnair. He was the officer on guard at the Tuilleries the night on which the Royal Family escaped to Varennes. He was about forty at this time, and had lost his whole estates in the Revolution.

Fanny's acquaintance with Monsieur d'Arblay soon grew into warm friendship. He undertook to teach her French, and she wrote: "He is passionately fond of literature, a most delicate critic in his own language, well versed in both Italian and German, and a very elegant poet." The romantic attachment ended in an offer of marriage, which was evidently looked on with misgiving by her father, since Monsieur d'Arblay, despite his birth and character, could only be regarded as a soldier of fortune under great disadvantages. Finally Dr Burney reluctantly gave way, and the marriage took place in Mickleham Church in 1793.

The d'Arblays' only certain means of support was Fanny's pension from the Queen of £100 a year. The marriage was undoubtedly one of extraordinary courage on both sides, and the cheerfulness and good sense with which these two so diverse characters adapted themselves to their cramped circumstances shows them in a very attractive light. They rented a little cottage at Bookham in Surrey, and lived a life "tranquil, undisturbed and undisturbing." Madame d'Arblay writes: "Can life, Monsieur d'Arblay often says, be more innocent than ours, or happiness more inoffensive? He works in his garden or studies English and mathematics while I write. When I work at my needle, he reads to me; and we enjoy the beautiful country around us in long and

romantic strolls." It is a delightful picture, and indeed Madame d'Arblay herself seems to have caught something of that exquisite grace which marks the letters written by the emigrants to Monsieur d'Arblay on his marriage. Certainly the most charming letter that she ever penned, as it is the most generous, was written to her husband's great friend, the Comte de Narbonne, who was then in serious difficulties. It was written after the birth of her son in 1794.

"Will you take a little cell under our rustic roof and fare as we fare? What to us hermits is cheerful and happy will to you, indeed, be miserable; but it will be some solace to the goodness of your heart to witness our contentment; to dig with M. d'A. in the garden will be of service to your health; to nurse sometimes with me in the parlour will be a relaxation to your mind. You will not blush to own your little godson."

*Camilla*, Madame d'Arblay's third novel, was published by subscription in 1796. Among the list of subscribers we find the names of Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, Fanny Burney's lineal literary descendants. Dr Burney told Horace Walpole that *Camilla* had realised £2000; but Austin Dobson asserts that the authoress only received £250 for it. Be that as it may, with the proceeds of the book the d'Arblays built *Camilla Cottage* near Box Hill on

a plot of land rented from Mr Lock of Norbury Park. They moved into their new dwelling in 1796. The cottage has been considerably added to and altered, but enough remains of the interior of the original unpretentious structure to enable us to reconstruct without difficulty the simple home life led by the d'Arblays with their beloved child, especially as the neighbourhood itself continues practically unchanged.

On her departure for France, where she resided for ten years, Madame d'Arblay passes out of English literary life. It is true that she published another novel, *The Wanderer*, which brought her the amazing sum of £7000, but as literature the book does not count.

Reference has already been made to the brave fight made by her husband in Paris against adverse circumstances, and to his elevation to the rank of General on the accession of Louis XVIII. During the Hundred Days the d'Arblays experienced many adventures. Madame d'Arblay fled to Brussels, encountering Chateaubriand on the way; General d'Arblay was wounded at Trèves by the kick of a horse, and Madame d'Arblay had a journey of exciting danger in order to join him. In 1815 they returned to England, taking up their residence at Bath. Here they had to live with the strictest economy, in order to support their son genteelly at the University. In 1818 General d'Arblay died. Madame d'Arblay

then went to live at 11 Bolton Street, Piccadilly. It was here that Rogers, in 1826, and again in 1828, brought Sir Walter Scott to see her. Scott speaks of her in his journal as having "no remains of personal beauty," but "a gentle manner and a pleasing expression of countenance."

At the age of eighty Madame d'Arblay published her *Memoirs of Dr Burney*, claiming to be based on her father's manuscript as well as on her own diaries. Though no excuse can be offered for the brutality of its reviewers, yet the book affords justifiable ground for resentment. To begin with, Madame d'Arblay made an unforgivable holocaust of untold quantities of letters and manuscripts belonging to her father, that she might produce a work which is in effect little more than a feeble imitation of her own diaries. Then with all her tortuous euphuism, with all her aggressive parade to avoid naming herself, she, "the Memorialist," "the Bookhamite Recluse," is the all-important character of the memoirs. They are written in an extraordinarily convoluted style—involved is too mild an expression—and written so long after the events that the same reliance cannot be placed upon them as upon the diaries. The first Blue-Stocking to shiver at the charge of Pedantry has left behind her one of the most pedantic books in the language.

Madame d'Arblay's son, described as clever,

indolent and eccentric, a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, took orders in 1819, and in 1836 became minister of Ely Chapel, Holborn. In 1837 he died of influenza, and in 1840 Madame d'Arblay herself died.

Madame d'Arblay's life links in a surprising manner the Eighteenth and the Nineteenth Centuries. To have been the pet of Dr Johnson and the admirer of Disraeli's *Contarini Fleming*; to have known intimately Mrs Delany, the friend of Swift, and to have met Sir Walter Scott; to have been the author of *Evelina*, and to have lived into the reign of Queen Victoria; such thoughts make us realise how arbitrary is time, and how near we are in actual fact, as well as in sentiment, to the Eighteenth Century.



## BLUE-STOCKING COTERIES

THE Blue-Stockings gave other forms of entertainment as well as receptions: breakfast parties, dinner parties. The somewhat ethereal fare on which conversation is sustained in the *Bas Bleu*—biscuits, tea, lemonade and orgeat—must not be supposed to indicate the delicate appetite of the age, nor to register the full weight of Blue-Stocking hospitality. By the evening, indeed, the heavy meals of the day were over; and the fact that no lavish preparations were expected from hostesses promoted the frequency and the pleasantness of these evening assemblies. Mrs Delany, for instance, entertains Handel and some dozen of her friends. “Mr Handel was in the best humour in the world . . . and accompanied Strada and all the ladies that sung, from seven o’clock until eleven. I gave them tea and coffee, and about half an hour after nine had a salver brought in of chocolate, mulled white wine and biscuits.”

But in addition to these simple forms of hospitality, certain of the Blue-Stocking hostesses were able to indulge, as we have already seen,

in profuse and splendid entertainment, appropriate to a period which had so strong a relish for material things.

The Eighteenth Century is famous for its solid eating and hard drinking. We read with astonishment of the physical endurance that could face dinners eight hours long with constantly replenished glasses. These were the days of the six-bottle men. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's physician was amazed, she tells us, that she could manage to subsist on the following fare :—

“I wake generally about seven, and drink half a pint of warm asses' milk, after which I sleep two hours ; as soon as I am risen, I constantly take three cups of milk coffee, and two hours after that a large cup of milk chocolate : two hours more brings my dinner, where I never fail swallowing a good dish (I mean plate) of gravy soup, with all the bread, roots, etc., belonging to it. I then eat a wing and the whole body of a large fat capon, and a veal sweetbread, concluding with a competent quantity of custard and some roasted chestnuts. At five in the afternoon I take another dose of asses' milk ; and for supper twelve chestnuts (which would weigh twenty-four of those in London), one new-laid egg, and a handsome porringer of white bread and milk. With this diet, notwithstanding the menaces of my wise doctor, I am now

convinced that I am no longer in danger of starving. . . .”

One recalls, too, the fare provided by Lady Smart in Dean Swift's *Polite Conversations*. Lord Sparkish, Tom Neverout, and Colonel Alwit come to breakfast with my Lady Smart at eleven; Lord Smart returns to dinner at three; and eight persons sit down to table. Here is the Bill of Fare:—

*First Course.*—Sirloin of beef, fish, shoulder of veal and tongue, claret.

*Second Course.*—Almond - pudding fritters, chickens, black puddings and soup. Wine and small beer.

*Third Course.*—Hot venison pasty; a hare, a rabbit, some pigeons, partridges, a goose and a ham. Beer and wine.

A tankard of October was passed from mouth to mouth. The men drank Burgundy when the ladies withdrew to tea. After an hour the gentlemen joined the ladies, and played quadrille till three in the morning.

The whole day would seem in some circles to have been consumed in eating and drinking. There were however approximate hours for meals, varying more than they do to-day. The midday dinner was still in general use. Mrs Montagu, when staying with the Duchess of Portland at Bulstrode, writes: “We breakfast at

nine, dine at two, drink tea at eight, sup at ten." Mrs Delany gives as the hours for eating in Ireland, ten, three, and ten again. In great houses, according to Hannah More (1788), the hour for dinner was six. Fanny Burney, when at Windsor in the Queen's service, dined at five, took tea at eight, supper at eleven. Horace Walpole dined at four.

This custom of dining late gave scope to fancy and freedom in the matter of lunch. When the King and Queen visited the Duke and Duchess of Portland at twelve noon, Mrs Delany tells us of the refreshment that was provided for them. "The Duchess of Portland brought Her Majesty a dish of tea, rolls and cakes, which she accepted, but would carry it back herself when she had drank the tea, into the Gallery where everything proper for the time of day was prepared, tea, chocolate, etc., bread-and-butter rolls, cakes, and—on another table—all sorts of fruit and ice. When the tea was done with, a cold collation took its place." But luncheon parties in our modern sense were not given at the time.

The breakfast party, however, was a very popular form of entertainment, which Mrs Montagu in particular seems to have favoured. The most enthusiastic account of one of these breakfasts is from the graceful pen of Madame du Bocage, who herself held a famous Salon in Paris. The account appears in her *Letters on England, Holland,*

*and Italy.* Mrs Montagu (Lady Montagu, as Madame du Bocage calls her) was then living at Hill Street, and the breakfast was given in the Chinese Room. "We breakfasted . . . to-day April 8th, 1750, at Lady Montagu's in a closet lined with painted paper of *Pekin* and furnished with the choicest movables of *China*. A long table, covered with the finest linen, presented to the view a thousand glittering cups and dishes, which contained coffee, chocolate, biscuits, cream, butter, toasts, and exquisite tea. You must understand that there is no good tea to be had anywhere but in London. The mistress of the house, who deserves to be served at the table of the gods, poured it out herself. This is the custom, and in order to conform to it the English ladies wear a white apron and a pretty straw hat, which suits their height admirably, and becomes them well, not only in their own apartments, but at noon, in St James's Park, where they walk with the stately and majestic gait of nymphs."

Forty-one years later Mrs Montagu is still giving breakfast parties—this time at the great house at Portman Square. She breakfasted seven hundred persons in 1791, says Horace Walpole. Of another breakfast party Fanny Burney writes: "The crowd of company was such that we could only slowly make way in any part. . . . There could not be fewer than four or five hundred

people. It was like a full Ranelagh by daylight. . . . Dr Russel, who was in high spirits . . . laughed heartily at seeing the prodigious meal most of the company made of cold chicken, ham, fish, etc."

It is obvious that in assemblies so frequented, and so inevitably miscellaneous, conversation in its best sense was impossible. We fancy that conversation did not flourish so well even at the receptions specially established for its cultivation, as at those intimate dinner-tables composed of chosen guests. Mrs Thrale's dinner parties, of which some account has been given, were perhaps rather large and formal. We would sooner have been present at some of the smaller dinners, generally composed of eight picked guests, such as Mrs Garrick's party described by Boswell, the first she gave after the death of Garrick. "The company was, Miss Hannah More, who lived with her, and whom she called her chaplain; Mrs Boscawen, Mrs Elizabeth Carter, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Dr Burney, Dr Johnson, and myself. We found ourselves very elegantly entertained. . . . We were all in fine spirits; and I whispered to Mrs Boscawen, 'I believe this is as much as can be made of life.' In addition to a splendid entertainment, we were regaled with Lichfield Ale, which had a peculiar appropriate value." (Garrick, of course, was a native of Lichfield, as well as Dr Johnson.)



"I believe this is as much as can be made of life." Here we have the highest diploma that has ever been granted to social entertainment.

Most interesting to us of this age is the account by Hannah More of a "very pleasant comical dinner" given by Mrs Cholmondeley. "We were only nine females; everything was very elegant; but we were as merry as if there had been no magnificence; and we all agreed that men were by no means so necessary as we had all been foolish enough to fancy." This was indeed a daring innovation—an assertion of resource and individuality quite startling—the faint foreshadowing of a future age when independence should become the step to interdependence.

Among her intimates Mrs Montagu also introduced an original practice. She did not anticipate, like Mrs Cholmondeley, but reverted to a far past, and introduced into an atmosphere of Eighteenth Century propriety a ceremony primitive, picturesque, belonging to an ancient heroism, the "Feast of Shells," which she celebrated by drinking with her friends out of a nautilus to the immortal memory of Ossian.

Somewhere surely in the ante-chambers of Mrs Montagu's being was an unexplored sympathy for the strange and the wild. Shakespeare's romance leaves her unmoved, but his Witches on the heath thrill her. The century suppressed this side of her nature as it caused Mrs Chapone insensibly

to trim her conclusions on the inequality of the sexes. We recognise the "Feast of Shells" to be a transient impulse; the breakfast parties, the receptions, the *Thé* which so excited Hannah More's scorn, show Mrs Montagu in a more characteristic light. "You are to invite fifty or a hundred people to come at eight o'clock," writes Hannah More, "there is to be a long table, or little parties at small ones . . . tea and coffee are made by the company, as at a public breakfast; the table is covered with rolls, wafers, bread-and-butter; and what constitutes the very essence of a *Thé*, an immense load of hot buttered rolls, and muffins, all admirably contrived to create a nausea in persons fresh from the dinner-table . . . the Duke of Dorset in Paris, where people dine at two, thought this would be a pretty fashion to introduce; we who dine at six must adopt this French translation of an English fashion." She adds: "Of all nations under the sun, I take it, the English are the greatest fools."

Buttered toast appears to have been "an insular institution" at this time.

The exceeding popularity of tea, and the vast quantity that was drunk, come somewhat as a surprise. It seems from the accounts given above to have been welcome at all hours of the day; the pages of Boswell are tinted with tea; and we all remember that story told by Northcote, how the Dowager Lady Macleod, having poured Dr

Johnson out sixteen cups of tea, asked him if a small basin would not save him trouble and be more agreeable? Dr Johnson, in fact, takes upon himself to defend tea in most sober print in the *Literary Magazine*. He writes of himself as a "hardened and shameless tea-drinker, who has for twenty years diluted his meals with only the infusion of this fascinating plant, whose kettle has scarcely time to cool, who with Tea amuses the evening, with Tea solaces the midnight, and with Tea welcomes the morning."

Splendid breakfast parties, formal or intimate dinner parties, receptions, simple or magnificent; all these are included in the radius of Blue-Stocking entertainment. We should, however, be doing grave injustice to the Blue-Stocking movement if we were to imply that Mrs Montagu, Mrs Vesey, Mrs Thrale (and Mrs Boscawen) were its only hostesses. These have merely been selected as typical, and because selection is inevitable. But allusion has already been made in passing to other well-known leaders of the Blue-Stocking coteries—to Mrs Ord, at whose party Fanny Burney was introduced to Soame Jenyns, and to whom Wraxall assigns a third of that "triple crown" of leadership in place of Mrs Boscawen, Hannah More's choice for investiture. It was at Mrs Ord's house that Hannah More found "every delectable in the blue way." We have also mentioned Miss Monckton (afterwards Countess

of Cork), who had the finest "bit of blue" at the house of her mother, Lady Galway. Miss Monckton was the lady to whom, when she asserted that she had found some of Sterne's writings pathetic, Dr Johnson made his memorable reply: "That is, because, dearest, you are a dunce." She lived to 1840, entertaining to the end, and has been called the "last of the Blue-Stockings." Then there was Mrs Cholmondeley, an active disintegrator of the Circle, as well as a giver of "female" dinner parties. Mrs (afterwards Lady) Crewe has been quoted as one authority for the origin of the term Blue-Stocking. This lady was the daughter of Dr Burney's early patron Fulke Greville, and to her Sheridan dedicated the *School for Scandal*. He pays her in the dedication this somewhat doubtful compliment:—

"What e'er she says, though sense appears throughout,  
 Displays the tender hue of female doubt;  
 Deck'd with that charm, how lovely wit appears,  
 How graceful *science*, when that robe she wears!"

Lady Lucan, as well as Lady Crewe, we have met with in the verses to the *Herald*. Lady Lucan's were the parties so blue, they were quite "mazarin blue." Mrs Walsingham and Lady Herries are also named as prominent hostesses by Lady Louisa Stuart. Hannah More writes of Walsingham's "various power to cheer the lonely, grace the letter'd hour."

There are many other names in the memoirs, and names no doubt forgotten by the memoirs. As we reflect over all these leaders of Society, we see the Blue-Stocking movement spread in ever-widening circles. London no longer contains it—it has reached Streatham Place and Strawberry Hill and Hampstead—it touches in its expansion many of the great country houses. House parties in the country are indeed the form of entertainment best suited to the genius of the English people, with the opportunities they afford for sport and for games; and they have been popular from the time of Sir William Temple down to the present day. But conversation has usually been only a subsidiary attraction; the Blue-Stockings gave it the first place at their country seats. The movement extended as far north as Crewe Hall, Lady Crewe's house, and as far west as Batheaston, near Bath, where the doings of Mrs (afterwards Lady) Miller excited the interest and the ridicule of her contemporaries.

For this lady introduced into her entertainments an element new to England. Wit and quickness of parts were to be employed, not merely in conversation, but in the making of verses. This had long been a feature in certain Salons in France, both in the Seventeenth and in the Eighteenth Centuries. The daughter of Madame Geoffrin, Madame de la Ferté-Imbault, established a famous "Order" of Lampooning Knights and

fooling Ladies, the members of which contributed to the entertainment a song, an epigram, an anecdote, or some quip in verse or prose. The hostess was the Queen of the order which had its appointed officers. The English imitation of this Institution at Batheaston required quite an elaborate apparatus. There was a large antique vase said to have been found in Cicero's villa. In this vase, which stood in a low window overlooking the Avon, the guests deposited their verses. This vase is now in Victoria Park. There were myrtle wreaths to crown the brows of the victors, namely, the three writers of the best verses as adjudged by a Committee. Lady Miller, robed as a pagan priestess, performed this ceremony. Her appearance was unfortunately not well suited to the part, for Fanny Burney describes her as "a round, plump, coarse-looking dame of about forty. . . ." Four volumes of the contributions were published under the title of *Poetical Amusements at a Villa near Bath*.

These doings were regarded as frivolous by the more sober, and as absurd by the more cynical members of the community. Dr Johnson wondered how people could be persuaded to write for the lady. "I named a gentleman of his acquaintance," Boswell relates, "who wrote for the vase." *Johnson*: "He was a blockhead for his pains." *Boswell*: "The Duchess of Northumberland wrote." *Johnson*: "Sir, the Duchess of Northumberland



may do what she pleases ; nobody will say anything to a lady of her rank." "*Bout rimés*," he said on another occasion, "is a mere conceit, and an *old* conceit *now*." Horace Walpole's account of the "puppet show Parnassus at Batheaston" is racy. "Alas," he says, "Mrs Miller is returned (from abroad) a beauty, a genius, a Sappho, a tenth muse. . . . They hold a Parnassus fair every Thursday, give out rhymes and themes, and all the flux and quality of Bath contend for the prizes. . . . There never was anything so entertaining or so dull. . . ."

But despite the ridicule of Walpole and the scorn of Johnson, many poets of note in their day condescended to contribute to the Vase: and Miss Anna Seward, to use her own words, owed to Lady Miller's kind bidding the first public recognition of the pipings of her own artless reed. Which, being interpreted, is to say that she submitted to the Batheaston arbiters two of her best poems—the "Monody on André," and the "Elegy on Captain Cook."

Miss Seward was only a casual visitor at Bath: her kingdom was Lichfield, where she reigned as intellectual Queen and where she was affectionately and admiringly designated under the symbol of the Swan. The Swan was daughter to a canon of the Cathedral, and lived for nearly half a century at the Palace, entertaining widely.

For the blue fire was not merely carried by hostesses from London to make a blaze at their country seats, as in the case of Lady Crewe of Crewe Hall: neither was it solely fanned by Londoners in quest of health and pleasure such as frequented Lady's Miller's receptions at Bath-easton. One of the most remarkable features of the Blue-Stocking movement was its spontaneous outburst in provincial centres. The end of the Eighteenth Century offers a practically unique record of intellectual coteries in provincial towns—coteries not attracted by any dominant genius, not drawn together by any question of universal appeal, but consisting simply of little groups of cultivated people with definite literary ideals, interested largely in each other's poetical efforts, and enjoying to the full the social satisfaction induced by mutual admiration and an abundance of sentiment. Lichfield is one of these centres, and Norwich another.

It might have been surmised that Lichfield, having produced two of the most prominent figures of the age—Samuel Johnson and David Garrick—would have exhausted its powers; but after these two giants had left to exert their magnetism in London, the city still retained ample mental nourishment to support a coterie of talent, both native and transplanted. Looking back at Lichfield through the years, the figures that attract us most are those delightful experimenters,

Erasmus Darwin and Thomas Day. Dr Darwin's experiments were in Science and in Verse, blended in his extraordinary "Botanic Garden"—that "poem cast in metal," whose parts are as sharp and glittering as the instruments of the surgeon's profession, and whose machinery of elementals is as polished and mechanical as the most precise engineer could demand. Thomas Day, remembered now as the author of "Sandford and Merton," made much more dangerous experiments than Darwin, for Life and Love were his subjects, and the record of those experiments has proved a perennial source of inspiration to the dramatist down to the present time. But to contemporary eyes Day and Darwin were but satellites about the Central Figure of Lichfield Society—the Swan.

The distinguishing quality of the Lichfield coterie was sentiment, as the distinguishing quality of the Norwich coterie was seriousness. In Norwich the Quaker element remained dominant, and learning went hand in hand with philanthropy: even the gay and charming Mrs Opie fell under the spell of this atmosphere, and joined the Society of Friends. But sentiment, so universal in the Eighteenth Century, had its intimate home in Lichfield, and its essence in Miss Seward. Mr E. V. Lucas in his study of the Swan has brought out with subtle humour all the rich and delicate flavour of this Lichfield sentiment—all its stilted enthusiasms and prim floweriness. Miss Seward

when she takes up her pen to write, poses invariably in the attitude of the Muse—a pose that becomes in the end almost unselfconscious. She is mirrored thus in her personal letters as well as in her once popular poems. It was her way—and indeed to some extent the way of her century—to set life's experiences about with fine words, and frame them in a decorative freize—to express extravagant admiration for the work of friends, and to “drop into poetry” on every available occasion. And life's experiences bulk larger on the little stage of Lichfield than in the vast circus of London. The history of the Lichfield coterie is one full of character and romance—we become quickly acquainted with the few personages, who are all intimate with one another. The Lichfield love-affairs alone are of absorbing interest, and Miss Seward, though she never married, was no stranger to the tender passion and had always torrential sympathy to offer to those who confided in her. She made Sir Walter Scott her literary executor, and in the generous performance of this office, time which might have been devoted to what the world would always have remembered, was given to what the world has already forgotten. In her day Miss Seward was accepted at her own valuation, and no one had the remotest perception that her pose might be regarded as humorous. The humour of the Batheaston celebration, however, was obvious to many contemporaries.

But the Blue-Stocking movement, many-sided as it is, would not be complete without this little irresponsible outburst of bunting, and the gay little villa at Batheaston has a tiny appointed place amid the solider and more imposing edifices of Blue-Stocking hospitality.

## ELIZABETH CARTER (1717-1806)

ELIZABETH CARTER—the translator of Epictetus. Those few words contain matter for infinite surprise. At first sight Epictetus would seem to have no appeal for the Eighteenth Century—an age of self-indulgence, an age of corruption in most departments of life—an age antagonistic to the implied asceticisms of the Greek Philosopher. How could the doctrines of Stoicism even interest a people so supremely satisfied with material things? Then the translator was a lady in a century which considered Greek the most unladylike of all subjects for study—a modest, diffident girl, near-sighted, awkward in company, slow in learning though of patient determination. Yet in spite of these apparent obstacles to success, the book proved so good a selling-book that it helped its translator to independence for life; and in spite of her unfeminine learning, Mrs Carter is one of the most loved and most lovable of the Blue-Stocking ladies.

Elizabeth Carter probably possessed more learning than any other lady of the *Bas Bleu* Coteries. Her father taught her Latin, Greek and Hebrew. She acquired a perfect knowledge of French from a Huguenot refugee minister; Italian, Spanish and



German she taught herself, and she also studied Portuguese and Arabic. The country people round Deal where she lived regarded her as a kind of witch who could forecast the coming of storms and the periods of high tide. Her nephew and biographer tells how she once went to a puppet show at Deal, and Punch was uncommonly dull and serious, who was usually more jocose than delicate. "Why, Punch," says the showman, "what makes you so stupid?" "I can't talk my own talk," says Punch, "the famous Miss Carter is here."

The process of learning was, however, exceedingly painful to the famous Miss Carter, and she employed devices which probably undermined her health and made her in later life a victim to constant headache. To keep herself awake at night she used to take snuff, bind a wet towel round her head, and chew green tea and coffee. In order to rise between four and five in the morning, she got the sexton to pull a thread in the garden which was attached to a bell at the head of her bed. Verses of hers signed "Eliza" began to appear in the *Gentleman's Magazine* when she was in her seventeenth year—1734; she was born in 1717. Before she was twenty-two she had published a small collection of poems and two translations—one from the French, an attack on Pope's Essay on Man and one from the Italian, Algarotti's "Newtonianismo per le Dame"—"Sir Isaac



ELIZABETH CARTER

FROM THE PAINTING BY SIR THOMAS LAWRENCE, P.R.A., IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY



Newton's Philosophy explained, for the use of the Ladies, in six Dialogues, on Light and Colour." These works established her reputation. Dr Johnson, whose acquaintance she made through Cave, the Bookseller and Publisher, wrote in 1738 to Cave as follows: "I have composed a Greek epigram on Eliza, and think she ought to be celebrated in as many different languages as Lewis le Grand." Richardson, who saw her *Ode to Wisdom* in manuscript, inserted it in his *Clarissa Harlowe*, unaware at the time of the identity of the author. Her fame spread on the Continent: the scholar Baratier desired the honour of correspondence with her; and later, in 1759, an account of her accomplishments with a word "portrait" of her appeared in Russia. Yet even during the period of excessive study, Elizabeth Carter delighted in the ordinary enjoyments of youth; to quote the somewhat stilted language of her nephew and biographer: . . . "those who have long been accustomed to contemplate with respect, and even reverence, the deep scholar and pious moralist, will be surprised when they are told that Mrs Carter loved dancing, was somewhat, when very young, of a romp. . . ." Indeed, at no period of her life did she exhibit the least symptom of pedantry. And if she was the most learned of the Blue-Stockings, she was also the most modest. "Carter taught the female train the truly wise are never vain," says Hannah More. Mrs Montagu wrote of her

when first they met before their friendship had ripened: "She is a modest, amiable, gentle creature, not *hérissée de grec* nor blown up with self-opinion." Undue pride in learning was partly counteracted by the large claims which were made upon the domestic side of her nature, which kept her in touch with warm human interests. Her father, the Rev. Nicolas Carter, D.D., was perpetual curate at the Chapel erected at Deal, and for many years Elizabeth shared the charge of his children by a second marriage. She educated her half-brother, Henry, for the University. She was of necessity much occupied with household cares; plain needlework engaged her attention;—she wrote, for instance, to Archbishop Secker in reply to his suggestion that she should write the *Life of Epictetus*, "Whoever that somebody or other is who is to write the *Life of Epictetus*, seeing I have a dozen shirts to make, I do opine that it cannot be I." Her cooking stands eulogised for all time in Dr Johnson's famous saying: "My old friend, Mrs Carter, can make a pudding as well as translate *Epictetus*, and work a handkerchief as well as compose a poem." Her success in forming a special good sweet cake was such, that she was "employed to make every Christening cake that happened in the family ever after."

Though she always spent some part of the year in London, she fulfilled all social obligations towards her neighbours at Deal. "I am engaged

this afternoon with I know not how many vociferous fat gentlewomen at penny quadrille," she writes.

Another safeguard against pedantry is to be found in her extreme diffidence—"elle est modeste à l'excès," says the Russian account of her. She writes to her bosom friend, Miss Talbot, when there was some question of finding a place for her at Court, "Need I remind you of the very awkward and even idiot figure I make in company when I am under the least restraint; and that I have no one popular art of conversation to remove in any degree the prejudice which must infallibly be raised from so foolish and unpromising an appearance."

She acquired perfect ease of manner in later life, but at no expense of modesty; her contemporaries all unite in praising her unaffected simplicity, which was as noticeable at the literary coteries in London as at the penny quadrille parties in Deal.

Lady Louisa Stuart says of Mrs Carter that she was wholly untainted with pedantry, or affectation. "Upon her," she says, "the sound scholarship of a learned man sate, as it does upon a man, easily and quietly. . . . But the very humility and plainness of her character," Lady Louisa Stuart goes on, "made it avail nothing towards simplifying the general tone of her society, for she loved listening far better than talking; and as she had no quick



perception of other people's feelings and absurdities, much less any disposition to oppose them, she sate still, honestly admiring what a livelier (though perhaps a shallower) person would have criticised or ridiculed." In fact, Lady Louisa assesses Mrs Montagu's worth by her friendship with Mrs Carter.

Elizabeth Carter also possessed that strongest solvent of pride of intellect—a keen sense of humour. Wit is a quality of the head, and humour of the heart: wit is the more dazzling and humour the more kindly quality, and Mrs Carter had all the sanity that humour gives, the sense of proportion and the wide sympathy. She attracts us to-day, not by reason of her learning, but by reason of her depth of emotion, strenuous, helpful, imaginative even. Her poems, which won so much contemporary admiration, appear to us trivial and stilted; but in her letters, her affections spur the mind to tender images and gentle fancies. Her sound common-sense is evidenced in the following piece of advice published among her *Miscellanies*:—

“ Madam,

“. . . Are you young? Why then be wise, and be a wonder. Are you old? Be cheerfully prudent and decently agreeable; as for your opinions, be consistent in all, and obstinate in none, and rejoice that you are got so far in safety through

a dangerous world. Are you naturally gay? Why then never go out of your way to seek for pleasure, and you will constantly enjoy it. Are you serious? Remember that not to be happy is not to be grateful. Are you melancholy? Beware of romance. Are you handsome? Be unaffected and charm like Lady C——. Are you plain? Be easy and outshine all beauties. . . . Are you in a moderate station? Be content, though not affectedly so; be philosophical, but not affectedly so; see the world in its just light, but, for the most part, keep your thoughts to yourself. Are you sleepy? Go to bed."

All Mrs Carter's relationships in life, with father, with step-mother, with half-brother, with friends, were marked by the charm of mutual understanding. Her father was a man of large views, giving sons and daughters alike the same education, and fostering in them that independence of spirit which was so marked a characteristic of Elizabeth. We find this verse of hers in a poem addressed to her father:—

"Ne'er did thy voice assume a master's pow'r  
Nor force assent to what thy precepts taught;  
But bid my independent spirit soar,  
In all the freedom of unfetter'd thought."

He trusted to her judgment at an early age matters which were usually dictated by parents

without appeal. He wished her to marry, as he was unable to provide for her after his death, but he refused in any way to cross her inclination, and was willing in particular cases to leave the decision entirely in her hands. Elizabeth Carter never married; but we need not thence conclude, as Mrs Montagu did, that she did not know what love was. Mrs Montagu wrote to Mrs Carter with reference to Cowley, "I agree with you that his love-verses are insufferable. I think, you and I who have never been in love, could describe it better were we ask'd, what is it like?"

This passage reveals the curiously prosaic turn of Mrs Montagu's character. It is a fact of extraordinary significance that Mrs Montagu—a woman—a wit—in her *Essay on Shakespeare*, makes no particular mention of Shakespeare's women characters, considered by modern commentators his greatest triumphs in creation. The vision of Shakespeare's glory belongs to a seer of this age, who, gazing upon a sea of storm, found Shakespeare's genius embodied in the whole world from the arching sky to the ageless hills and seas:—

"And there the soul alive in ear and eye  
That watched the wonders of an hour pass by  
Saw brighter than all stars that heaven inspheres  
The silent splendour of Cordelia's tears,  
Felt in the whispers of the quickening wind  
The radiance of the laugh of Rosalind,

And heard, in sounds that melt the souls of men  
With love of love, the tune of Imogen."

How remote all this is from the Eighteenth Century! Mrs Montagu was as insensitive to the brilliant sallies and spiritual renunciations of Shakespeare's women as to their romantic passions. Mrs Carter, on the other hand, if she did not know what romantic love was, had perhaps a better conception of its magic than her friend. "'Tis surely a fatal error," she writes, "to give oneself up to certain enchantments that lead the mind into faery regions of dreams and shadows, where it is amused and fixed on imaginary forms of happiness and perfection which vanish with the fickle cause that gave them being, and one is left in the midst of a wild and perplexed solitude, astonished and utterly at a loss what road to take or where to meet with any object to divert it."

Elizabeth Carter's independence, encouraged by her father, was further stimulated by her love of the open air—a trait very unusual in that century. It was her habit, partly from inclination and partly for the sake of health, to take long walks before breakfast, and she had full delight in the sense of new adventure and the glory of freshness that is held by the early morning. Her letters contain many clear-cut impressions of the country round Deal. Speaking of the companion of these rambles she writes: "Many are the exercises of patience she meets with in our peregrination,

sometimes half-roasted with the full glare of sunshine upon an open common, then dragged through a thread-paper path in the middle of a cornfield, and bathed up to the ears in dew, and at the end of it perhaps forced to scratch her way through the bushes of a close, shady lane, never before frequented by any animal but birds. In short, towards the conclusion of our walk, we make such deplorable ragged figures, that I wonder some prudent country justice does not take us up as vagrants. . . . an apprehension that does not half so much fright me, as when some civil swains pull off their hats, and I hear them signifying to one another, with a note of admiration, that *I am Parson Carter's daughter.*" Parson Carter's daughter was a good walker up to nearly the end of her life; "without vanity I may pretend to be one of the best walkers of the age," she says. On two occasions, at least, she walked from Canterbury to Deal—16 or 17 miles—when the coach put her down at the former town—a performance of no account in this athletic age, but which constituted a feat in the Eighteenth Century. A keen and discriminating zest for nature continued with her to the last. This is excellently shown in a brief extract from a letter to Mrs Montagu, dated 1761: ". . . This object I was so undone at your not seeing, was no other than a single honeysuckle. It grew in a shady lane, and was surrounded by the deepest

verdure, while its own figure and colouring, which were quite perfect, were illuminated by a ray of sunshine. There are some common objects, sometimes placed in such a situation, viewed in such a light, and attended by such accompaniments as to be seen but once in a whole life, and to give one a pleasure entirely new; and this was one of them, and I firmly believe there was no such honeysuckle ever existing in the world before. . . .” She speaks somewhere of her “intemperate love of air,” and she writes that she does not think of Mrs Montagu’s house in Portman Square as a magnificent house, and a fine house, and an elegant house, though all this is very true, but as a house containing a great quantity of air. Mrs Carter’s own house in Deal, to which she moved in 1762—though it was small—she describes it as a vinegar-bottle—was in so exposed a position that she says it was “too much like the Eddystone.” Of her sitting-room she writes: “It is in everything but motion an absolute cabin.” From her window she would observe the sea every hour of the day, “and every hour it wears some new appearance if it be only from the various colourings it receives from the shifting clouds.” This love of the open is the trait in Mrs Carter that brings her closest to the present age.

And now to glance at the work that has carried her name down to us. Elizabeth Carter began her translation of Epictetus in 1749 as a mere exercise



in composition to do pleasure to her friends, Miss Talbot and Dr Secker, Bishop of Oxford, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. The Bishop indeed translated at first one or two specimen sheets for her guidance, and advocated her use of a less polished style of English, that she might approximate more to the blunt and incisive periods of the Greek author. Without the encouragement of these friends it is doubtful whether she would have carried her task to its conclusion, for often she flagged and thought of giving it over. The question of publication only arose after the translation was completed in 1756; the book itself was not published till 1758. There were one thousand and eighteen copies struck off at first, but as these were found insufficient for the subscribers — the subscription was a guinea a copy — two hundred and fifty more were printed; and there were two other editions in Mrs Carter's life.

And now we come to a curious point in Eighteenth Century ethics. Miss Talbot began to be troubled as to the wisdom of giving this translation to the world — as to the effect it might have on the minds of believers. "It is terrifying," she wrote, "to think what effects a book so mixed up of excellence and error might have in this infidel age, if it be not sufficiently guarded with proper notes and animadversions." Mrs Carter's common sense would not allow her at first to accept this suggestion. "No infidel," she replied, "I believe, will find any great

comfort in the study of Epictetus, unless he is perverse enough to take comfort in finding himself obliged to practise the morality of the gospel without its encouragements and supports." But Miss Talbot was so persistent, and the Bishop so fully shared her views, that at last Mrs Carter took fright, and we find her writing, "It is surely a dangerous experiment to administer poison to try the force of an antidote." In the end, however, Miss Talbot's counsel prevailed, and an antidote was provided in the shape of notes.

It was as an extraordinary feat of learning rather than as a gospel of a new code of ethics that the translation appealed to the Eighteenth Century. If Miss Talbot thought Stoicism a dangerous doctrine, Mrs Montagu thought it silly. "There is so much absurdity in the stoical doctrines, one cannot read their works with intense pleasure, but Epictetus is reckoned one of the best of them. . . ." There was, perhaps, never an age when Epictetus as a teacher would have been so little understood. And, indeed, the success of the translator was largely due to the interest of her contemporaries in a curiosity. But Elizabeth Carter herself had decidedly some measure of kinship with the philosopher. Her rigidity of principle, her absolute simplicity, her love of independence, her constant suffering, and even her sound common sense, found sympathetic echo in the doctrines of Epictetus. Of all the great philosophers, Epictetus is perhaps the most

didactic, and this quality made strong appeal to her. In spite of her constant residence in London, and the fact that she mixed freely with the society of her day, she remained to the end a little provincial, which is to say a little prejudiced, a little narrow. Fanny Burney, writing in 1781, says that of life and manners she is as ignorant as a nun. She could not read Chatterton's poems, because "his dissolute life and his melancholy end equally shocked her feelings and her principles," to quote the words of her nephew and biographer, who published her memoirs in 1816. Her "aversion to the smallest relaxation in the moral principle" prevented her also from enjoying the poetry of Burns. This nephew, a worthy clergyman no doubt, but pompous and self-opinionated, in trying to draw his aunt mainly as a mirror of Christian perfection for the "edification" of "the world," has unwittingly laid undue stress upon her piety—such portion of it, at least, as comes within his narrow purview—and in order to emphasise this, he has glossed over other qualities which in her correspondence make her lovable. But, at the same time, piety was a leading characteristic of her nature. Mrs Montagu quotes to her sister a remark of her husband's about Mrs Carter: ". . . She would be a good sort of woman if she was not so pious." But Edward Montagu, as Dr Beattie reminds us, "set too much value on mathematical evidence, and piqued himself too much on his knowledge in that science." Her

friends were constantly appealing to Mrs Carter to remove their religious difficulties, and she wrote large numbers of letters to confute their fears and to resolve their doubts. Mrs Vesey seems to have been the friend made most unhappy by scepticism, and we have already shown what profound sympathy Mrs Carter evinced with the "Sylph's" irresponsible idealistic nature. In one curious letter we read: "Why did you start and turn your eyes to the opening door? Ah, my dear Mrs Vesey, the heart is wiser and honester than the head. If, at that hour of silence and solemn thought, Lady Anne (Dawson) had been permitted to stand before you, could even that have been more convincing than the voice of common sense, which, with intuitive perception, assents to the truth of eternal revelation, and pronounces it impossible that such virtue could ever die." In the prosaic Eighteenth Century it is remarkable to find a strong belief in apparitions and the influence of the dead. Yet among Dr Johnson's papers, discovered after his death, was this prayer: ". . . If Thou hast ordained the souls of the dead to minister to the living, and appointed my departed wife to have care of me, grant that I may enjoy the good effects of her attention and ministration, whether exercised by appearance, impulses, dreams, or in any other manner agreeable to Thy government. . . ." Boswell adds that he, whom it has pleased God to afflict in a similar manner, had

“certain experience of benignant communication by dreams.”

Mrs Carter's biographer endeavours to prove that she would hold acquaintance with none but those of strictest principle. To some extent this is true. She had been brought up in an ecclesiastical atmosphere, though her father himself was a broad-minded cleric, as is shown by his objection to the Athanasian Creed. The compromise he agreed to, by which his brother paid a curate to read it for him, is a curious and even comic solution of a conscientious scruple. Mrs Carter numbered among churchmen many friends of integrity and standing. Hannah More gives an interesting criticism of Mrs Carter's religious views. Writing in 1809 she says: “Her calm, orderly mind dreaded nothing so much as irregularity; she was therefore most strictly High Church, and most scrupulously forebore reading any book, which proceeded from any other quarter. . . . The exactness of her morality was exquisite, but her dread of enthusiasm cooled and cramped her genius and spirit.” Dr Johnson, whose friendship she enjoyed for some fifty years, was of a deeply religious temperament, as is evidenced by the *Prayers and Meditations* published after his death. Characteristically enough, he was her favourite author, and in a letter to her he expressed a respect “which I neither owe nor pay to any other.” Mrs Carter contributed two papers to *The Rambler*, Nos. 44

and 100: one of them being on Religion and Superstition. Superstition is there personified thus: "She was dressed in black; her skin was contracted into a thousand wrinkles, her eyes deep sunk in her head, and her complexion pale and livid as the countenance of Death." Religion approaches "as the most lovely object I had ever beheld. The most engaging charms of youth and beauty appeared in all her form; effulgent glories sparkled in her eyes, and their awful splendour were softened by the gentlest looks of compassion and peace." This is all a little obvious, but it indicates the turn of writer and editor. Lord Lyttleton, too, another friend, author of *Observations on the Conversion of St Paul*, was a man of Christian character and profession and is credited with having established Mrs Montagu's religious convictions. He wrote the Prefatory verses to Mrs Carter's volume of Poems published in 1762, extolling her above Sappho:—

"For the sacred head  
Of Britain's poetess the Virtues twine  
A nobler wreath by them from Eden's grove  
Unfading gather'd, and direct the hand  
Of Montagu to fix it on her brows."

These poems were dedicated to yet another friend, the Earl of Bath. He accompanied Mrs Montagu and Mrs Carter on their tour to Spa, and he appears not only to have possessed unfailing



charm, but to have led an exemplary life. In 1761, Mrs Carter wrote to Miss Talbot an amusing letter from Tunbridge Wells with reference to the assiduous attention of these two lords upon herself and Mrs Montagu. Referring to some rumour that Lady A. was preferred to themselves she says : "When one fine gentleman said to another fine gentleman upon the Pantiles, '*she talks Greek faster than any woman in England*' ; pray was this meant of my Lady A—? Or, when the market-folks in the side walk left their pigs and their fowls to squall their hearts out, while they told each other, '*Sartainly she is the greatest Scollard in the world*' ; was the person they stared at, and directed their sticks to, my Lady A.?"

Mrs Carter could not have been so generally loved and esteemed, nor could she have held Mrs Montagu and Mrs Vesey for intimate friends, if she had not possessed a large share of tolerance for the frivolities, weaknesses, and failings of humanity. In early life she knew and corresponded with the unfortunate Savage, and in later life she seems to have had some liking for Horace Walpole, then Lord Orford, who, among other attentions, sent her a poem of Hannah More's, "Bishop Bonner's Ghost," which he had insisted on printing at his press at Strawberry Hill. Fanny Burney describes Mrs Carter thus in her advanced years : "She is a noble-looking woman ; I never saw age so graceful in the female sex yet ; her whole face

seems to beam with goodness, piety, and philanthropy."

In spite of her narrowness in certain directions, we may think that Mrs Carter would not have been out of sympathy with many developments of this century. The athletic girl would probably have appealed to her: as witness this extract from an early letter of hers, written in the winter time: "In proportion as my sister has mended, I have now recovered my spirits; I am now nearly as gay and wild as ever, and want to be flying all over the face of the earth, though this weather something cramps my genius, for I cannot meet with anybody here romantic enough to take moonlight walks in the snow, and travel as people do in Lapland." Indeed throughout these letters there are indications of an adventurous spirit which in another century might have made of Mrs Carter an explorer in unknown lands. To this ill-health is no barrier, as Mrs Bishop's case proves. It is probable too that Mrs Carter would have sympathised with woman's fight for independence. Though she cannot be said to have lived by her pen, at least it laid the foundation of her small competence, which was supplemented by annuities from Mrs Montagu after the death of her husband, and from the heirs of the Earl of Bath. Also she relished certain enjoyments, so pathetically satirised by Kipling in *The Light that Failed*. "Besides," she writes, "whenever I dine by myself, I revel in

cake and tea, a kind of independent luxury in which one needs very little apparatus, and no attendants, and is mighty consistent with loitering over a book." She believed in the equality of the sexes, and considered that women did not occupy the position which was their due. Her biographer relates how one day at Lambeth Palace she complained to the Archbishop of the unfair manner in which our translators have rendered the 12th and 13th verses of the seventh chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians; that for the evident purpose of supporting the superiority of the husband they had translated the same verb, as applied to the husband, *put away*, and as applied to the wife, *leave*; *Let him not put her away*, and *let her not leave him*. The Archbishop denied the fact, and asserted that the words in the original were not the same; but finding his antagonist obstinate, "Come with me, Madam Carter," said he at length, "to my study and be confuted." They went, and his Grace, on consulting the passage, instead of being angry that he was found to be in the wrong, said with the utmost good humour, "No, Madam Carter, 'tis I that must be confuted, and you are in the right."

Mrs Carter always took special delight in any proofs of women's talents. She admired Madame d'Arblay's novels, Mrs Radcliffe's works, and the Plays of Joanna Baillie; and she would, no doubt

have endorsed the sentiment in the following verse signed M.A. (probably Mary Astell), and prefixed to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's letters from Constantinople, though the letters themselves were too free-spoken for her admiration :—

“ Let the *male authors* with an envious eye  
 Praise coldly, that they may the more decry :  
 Women (at least I speak the sense of some)  
 This little spirit of rivalry o’ercome.  
 I read with transport, and with joy I greet  
 A genius so sublime, and so complete,  
 And gladly lay my laurels at her feet.”

But it was not in the nature of Mrs Carter in any way to try and enforce this, to her, merely private opinion on the position of women; and Mrs Mary Astell's rabid tracts, forcible and bitter, condemning the foolishness of women in their race after husbands, and exposing in flamboyant colours the tyranny of men, would have met as little with Mrs Carter's approval as the principles displayed in Mary Wollstonecraft's "wild theory concerning the Rights of Women," which her biographer tells us she detested.

Mrs Carter belonged, and she herself says, "to the quiet-looking, silent people," and she seems to have won the esteem of the "good and great," by never endeavouring to obtain it. We have already spoken of her acquaintance with the "good": as to the "great," the Queen desired to

be introduced to her, and this ceremony took place at Lord Cremorne's house at Chelsea in 1791. The Princess of Wales came to tea with her at her house at Deal, at Mrs Carter's usual hour of six, and stayed above two hours. In Mrs Carter's case we feel that it must have been her attainments, rather than her personality, that drew royal attention. Yet Mrs Montagu embroidered the homespun of this character with many graceful twists of phrases: "I had been long deprived of the pleasure of wandering amongst the aromatics of Parnassus; when I have my full range I only idly sport there like the butterfly; you are the honey-bee, and extract the precious essence," she writes. We may conclude with another extract from a letter of Mrs Montagu's, which embodies in its brevity a very happy excursion into fancy and into philosophy:—

"Will your head never be cured of those painful diseases, thinking and aching? . . . Alas no! Our perfections and imperfections are more intimately united, and more closely woven into our frame than we are apt to imagine; the destinies dye the wool before they spin our thread; they use none but grain colours, and sun, wind, and rain, and the force of external accidents operate but little. Hypatia would have been a philosopher, and Sappho a wit, though they had been educated at a French boarding-school at Chelsea or Kensington. You are destined to

have wisdom and the headache, and all the folly of the multitude and knowledge of physicians cannot prevent it. Perhaps on the delicacy of the same fine nerve depends your acute reasoning and acute pain."



## THE BLUE-STOCKINGS IN THE GARDEN

THE usual picture presented to us of Eighteenth-century life is a picture within walls—not necessarily within the walls of houses but within the enclosure of the town. Not only in the Eighteenth Century did bricks and mortar make channels for life at its fiercest, but we are apt to imagine the whole interest of existence concentrated within their narrow sphere. Sometimes indeed a window is opened on the country-side, and we have a glimpse of the rolling “Seasons” over a prospect of hamlets brown and dim discovered spires; we hear afar off the clash of Chevy Chase, and in remoter distance discern the ghosts of Ossianic heroes. These sights and sounds are acclaimed by subsequent critics as portents of the approaching “return to nature,” and of the coming advent of Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, Coleridge, and their successors.

An open casement here and there: we are inclined to fancy this the only passage through which the country was wafted in upon Eighteenth-century life. But Nature was approaching much more swiftly, much more concretely, much more

effectively by way of the Eighteenth Century Garden.

For the latter half of the Eighteenth Century marks a violent reaction against the formal garden in England—against the terrace, the straight canals, the walls of yew, the arcades of holly and box—all those methods by which it was attempted “to form with verdure what the builder formed with stone.” The geometry of the garden had become even more precise under the influence of Dutch William, and protest, both practical and theoretic, began to come from the most unexpected quarters. Addison of the smooth line and Pope of the exquisite polish, condemn—in the Garden—the clipping of trees and borders and the effort after level uniformity. “Our trees rise in Cones, Globes, ‘Pyramids,” Addison complains, “we see the mark of the scissors upon every plant and bush.” Pope wittily imagines the perfections in artifice produced by an eminent town gardener of his invention who thus advertises his bargains. “Adam and Eve in yew, Adam a little shattered by the fall of the tree of knowledge in the great storm; Eve and the Serpent very flourishing. . . . Divers eminent modern poets in bays, somewhat blighted, to be disposed of a pennyworth.” Pope did more than theorise and jeer. Horace Walpole thus describes his garden at Twickenham. “Pope had twisted and twirled and rhymed and harmonised his little five acres till it appeared

two or three sweet little lawns opening and opening beyond one another, and the whole surrounded with thick impenetrable woods." It sounds delightful—but not quite natural. Indeed it has been unkindly called "a complicated piece of mimicry of rural scenery of all sorts."

The ideal garden of the Eighteenth Century was no longer a walled space, under unnatural and despotic laws, but aimed at being part of the landscape, one with nature, blending imperceptibly into the surrounding scenery. In order to avoid arresting the eye by an arbitrary division between the garden and the country outside, the Eighteenth Century invented the curious device of a sunk fence, also called by the name of "Ha-Ha!" owing to the involuntary exclamation of surprise prompted by coming upon it unexpectedly. This invention is the "capital stroke" of landscape gardening. Horace Walpole says of the famous landscape gardener Kent: "He leaped the fence and saw that all nature was a garden." Even the gardens of Vauxhall, which Fanny Burney complains of as being too formal, were separated by a "Ha-Ha!" from the adjoining hayfields; and Monsieur d'Arblay worked with his own hands at a sunk fence round the garden of Camilla Cottage near Box Hill.

England is rich in the literature of the garden. Not only have we the embroidered imagination of Chaucer's gardens, of Spenser's gardens, of

Milton's garden; we have the descriptive enthusiasm of Bacon and of Cowley, while the movement against formalism in the Eighteenth Century has its blank-verse chronicle in William Mason's *English Garden*, and finds lyrical treatment in other poems. The Eighteenth Century also gave us that amazing and characteristic production—"the most delicious poem upon earth," Horace Walpole calls it—Erasmus Darwin's *Botanic Garden*. This poem, all polish and sparkle, with its impossible faëry hierarchy and unconvincing personifications, is as much a curiosity of literature as of garden-lore.

William Mason is the Blue-Stocking who in the *Bas Bleu* masquerades as Maro. The formal garden is to him an object of abhorrence. He writes of Sir William Temple's famous garden at Moor Park :—

. . . . . "behold what Temple called  
A perfect garden. There thou shalt not find  
One blade of verdure, but with aching feet  
From Terras down to Terras shalt descend  
Step following step by tedious flights of stairs.  
On leaden platforms now the noonday sun  
Shall scorch thee; now the dark arcades of stone  
Shall chill thy fervour. . . ."

Nature is to be the model for the gardener, nature, bold in effect, prodigal in shade—nature, ever various, whose forms are undulating and whose lines are curves. The gardener

should approach his garden as the artist his canvas :—

. . . "Take thy plastic spade  
It is thy pencil ; take thy seeds, thy plants,  
These are thy colours. . . ."

Mason describes the hues appropriate to the foreground, the middle distance and the background of the garden picture—the foreground is to bear conspicuously vivid green, warm brown and opaque black ; sober olive marks the second distance, while the third declines thence into soft blue and faintest purple. Mason gives directions for planting proper foliage at appointed intervals ; for varying and mixing the chosen greens ; for applying universally the principle of the soft and melting curve ; for guiding the pathway so that each step shall awake fresh beauties. He also considers in much detail the fence, the flower-bed, and the ornamentation of the garden by means of such structures as the Temple, the Obelisk, the Column, and the Triumphal Arch ; features which, together with the grotto, are so characteristic of Eighteenth Century garden life.

No garden, however small, was complete without one of these curious constructions. There was, of course, Pope's famous grotto composed of "marbles, spars, gems, ores and minerals" : when Mrs Delany visited the Garricks at their villa on the Thames, the company took tea and coffee

at the end of the lawn sloping to the River in Shakespeare's Temple "where there is a very fine statue of Shakespeare in white marble, and a great chair with a large carved frame that was *Shakespeare's own chair*." Mrs Delany herself designed a grotto for the Duchess of Portland: and she describes a famous grotto at Clifton thus:—

"Opposite the entrance there is an arch and a sort of a rocky cave; four pillars support a dome with a skylight on the left hand in perspective, one arch within another; there is a statue of a river-god; a cascade falls from thence over rocks, coral, shells, and is received by a basin; the walls on each hand are richly, irregularly, and very boldly adorned with everything the earth and sea can produce proper for the purpose."

Indeed, the memoirs of the time are full of descriptions of these artificialities, which harmonised but ill with the new ideals that were pushing their way through tree and lawn.

As is the universal way with reformers, the landscape gardeners were somewhat reckless in their devastation. Many a formal garden of great beauty that had matured to a delicate richness and discovered subtle harmonies with its surroundings was ruthlessly destroyed. And, moreover, artificiality inevitably crept into the methods of the landscape gardeners. Sir Walter Scott, indeed,



condemns the *English Garden* as affectation labouring to seem simple. And there is presumption in this landscape gardening, too. We are inclined to smile when we read that the "good" Lord Lyttelton, Mrs Montagu's friend, and one of the Blue-stockings, was praised for "the new modelling of the shades and the unfettering of the rills" at his place Hagley, in Worcestershire. At the same time it is significant that Thomson in his *Seasons*—Thomson, one of the heralds of the return to Nature—made Hagley his choice for panegyric in his *Spring*. Hagley Park appears in this poem simply as a landscape: we read of dales "with woods o'erhung, and shagg'd with mossy rocks"; of "solemn oaks that tuft the swelling mounds"; while from the fair brow of the height "the bursting prospect spreads immense around." For, with all its recklessness, its affectations, its mistakes, landscape gardening is indicative of a new era; it implies an awakening to larger beauties, a desire for further horizons. The formal garden has all the sharp vivid definition of mediæval times, which concentrated such marvellous colour and vitality in a tiny space; the landscape garden is characteristically modern, wider, vaguer in stretch, attempting the difficult, the impossible.

The garden played a distinctive part in the lives of most of the Blue-Stockings. They spent their childhood as a rule in formal gardens, for these

had not yet come under the touch of the landscape gardener. Thus Mount Morris, Elizabeth Robinson's home, was surrounded by walled gardens of the geometric type. This type was not, however, universal. The garden of Thomas Mulso at Twywell, Northamptonshire, seems to have been a piece of natural scenery left almost untouched. We read of orchards basking in the sunshine "enriched by a cheerful piece of water," which was surrounded by timber trees and fringed with lowly shrubs, "affording altogether a wild scene of tranquil beauty, indescribably interesting," to quote from the ambiguous description of Mr Cole of Scarborough.

Mrs Delany at Delville, near Dublin, and Mrs Thrale at Streatham Place, had both of them formal gardens. Dr Delany, into that garden of his, so small that a crow flying over it made it night, and a snail crept round it in a minute, had crammed a most ordered minutiae of conventionalities. The walks were straight, terminating in little porticoes, and there were valleys crossed by level artificial mounds, while on the highest point was a temple decorated by Mrs Delany. This dainty and ingenious decorum had no doubt its attraction for her. She herself describes a very charming breakfast scene in this garden (June, 1750):—

"My garden is, at present, in the high glow of

beauty, my cherries ripening, roses, jessamine and pinks in full bloom, and the hay partly spread and partly in cocks, complete the rural scene. We have discovered a new breakfasting place under the shade of nut-trees, impenetrable to the sun's rays, in the midst of a grove of elms where we shall breakfast this morning; I have ordered cherries, strawberries and nosegays to be laid on our breakfast table, and have appointed a harper to be here to play to us during our repast, who is to be hid among the trees."

The grace, the artistic feeling of Mrs Delany are apparent in these arrangements; just as the emotional appeal of Mrs Vesey is evidenced in the surroundings that are imagined for her. For Mrs Vesey is not to be associated with anything so ordered as a garden. But Lucan (near Dublin) was situated in wild and picturesque scenery, and "I figure you to myself," says Mrs Carter, "contemplating the faded woods, catching the first whisper of the languid gale and walking beneath the falling leaves, and in these pensive amusements so congenial to the tenderest feelings of the heart thinking over all your absent friends."

The vast grounds at Streatham Place, with their luxurious ice-houses and pineries and high-walled enclosures, are symbolic of the solidity of the Thrales. The gardens were laid out in the old-fashioned method; the Thrales were insensitive,

we fancy, to the more subtle influences of the age. Yet one of Mrs Thrale's happiest images is a garden image. She says charmingly of Dr Johnson: "His mind resembled a royal pleasure garden within whose ample dimensions, everything subservient to dignity, beauty or utility was to be found; from the stately cedar down to the lowliest plant or herb." The gardens of Streatham Place, which must have suggested this simile, have thus stretched out a root into literature and flourish in a remote corner of its evergreen domains.

Mrs Montagu, who also had great wealth, who "in trifles" always conformed to the fashion and who had a sincere feeling for the beauties of nature, submitted one of her gardens to the direction of the most famous landscape gardener of the day, "Capability" Brown—mentioned in the *Bas Bleu*. Brown's nickname is due to his frequent use of the phrase: "This spot has great capabilities." He was Gardener Royal at Hampton Court, and planted the famous vine there in 1796. He refused, however, to reorganise the artificial grounds of the Palace as George III. desired, and merely suggested that the trees should be allowed to grow in their natural way. The alterations of Mrs Montagu's garden at Sandford, in Berkshire, are charmingly described in a letter from Hannah More to Pepys:—

"Sandford is amazingly improved; you would

recant your former errors, which brought you into disgrace could you see with what happiness Brown has beckoned the distant hills to come into prospect. His hand, with an art nobler than that of Midas, turns gold itself into beauty."

Mrs Carter and Hannah More had only small gardens, little radiant spots outside any elaborate scheme where flowers seemed to bubble up out of the earth. Elizabeth Carter was always slipping out into the garden for rest and refreshment. Hannah More was an ardent gardener, and she loved her garden so much that at times she wondered if such passion of joy were consistent with her religion. These two gardens are little places of rapture and peace, with the divinity of nature warmer in them, perhaps, than when she is more obtrusively captured.

And, finally, we must not forget those little gardens in Surrey where Monsieur d'Arblay worked with such energy and such ignorance. It is a pathetic picture; we see Fanny at the window of her cottage at Bookham stitching the little clothes or writing her *Camilla*, and looking up every now and again at her husband digging—this brave seigneur: and wondering what struggles, what hardships, the uncertain future held. The garden here is a resource from bitter thoughts, an outlet for action.

Yet Madame d'Arblay writes gaily, even humor-

ously, of her husband's gardening exploits. He had no preconceived theories, no knowledge even of gardening, and his experience was gained solely by the deductive method. He demolished an asparagus bed, protesting nothing could look more like "des mauvaises herbes"; he spent immense toil planting and transplanting strawberries round the hedge, unaware that they would bear no fruit the first year. His greatest passion was for transplanting. "Everything we possess he moves from one end of the garden to the other to produce better effects. Roses take the place of jessamines, jessamines of honeysuckles, and honeysuckles of lilacs, till they have all danced round as far as the space allows; but whether the effect may not be a general mortality, summer only can determine." Madame d'Arblay gives a charming and vivid sketch of her husband mowing down the hedge with his sabre—"and with an air and attitude so military that, if he had been hewing down other legions than those he encountered—*i.e.* of spiders—he could scarcely have had a mien more tremendous or have demanded an arm more mighty. Heaven knows I am 'the most *contente personne* in the world' to see his sabre so employed."

So in the garden, the old and the new existed side by side; so in some gardens, the new order superseded the old, and the attempt was made to include the wider landscape in the picture and to harmonise narrow spots of cultivation with Nature's



grander scheme. This breaking down of walls, this concealment of barriers, seems preparatory to an age of expansion in many directions—to an age of more extended reach, of more searching aspirations, to an age poignantly aware “of portals opening, of an hour prepared, prophesied . . .”

The women too, whom present-day idealists picture as so securely sheltered behind high walls, were, as a matter of fact, looking out free and far over the surrounding country ; and we may, perhaps, consider that sunk fence or “ha-ha!” symbolic of the fact that woman’s domain was no longer necessarily to be included within narrow limits, but that she was at liberty to travel as far into the beyond as her capacities would take her.





HANNAH MORE

FROM AN ENGRAVING BY A. HALBERT AFTER THE PICTURE BY OPIE IN 1786

## HANNAH MORE (1745-1833).

HANNAH MORE had the good fortune to be born just in the nick of time. Her talents, particularly adapted to the needs of her age, brought her remarkable social success, wide popularity and a large fortune. Her works have interest for this generation also, for she had the gift of seizing and fixing in verse and in prose certain characteristic movements of her age. She crystallised the dispersed elements of the Blue Stocking assemblies in her poem, the *Bas Bleu*. Her tragedy, *Earl Percy*, brought out with great success by Garrick, remains typical of the conventional heroic drama of that age; her Cheap Repository Tracts, written to counteract the broad-spread principles of the French Revolution, have the great interest of being among the first successful literary appeals to the populace; while the schools she established were early heralds of the important educational movement which took place towards the close of the Nineteenth Century.

At first sight her character appears full of contradictions. She makes appeal to the democracy: and at the same time embodies in her

ballads and schools the principle of authority, the doctrine of Church and State and a rigid system of caste. She realises the importance of education; but halts on the very threshold. She writes a successful tragedy; and abjures the theatre. She suffers the most unwarrantable persecution from a clergyman; and introduces an "exemplary parish minister" into every one of her narrative tracts. But these contradictions are only apparent, and her biographers generally are far too anxious to draw a strict line between the Hannah More who mixed freely with the great world, and the Hannah More who tried in vain to live the life of a recluse at Cowslip Green and Barley Wood. From the very first she was a woman of intense religious conviction and high moral ideal; and to the very end she retained her fondness for social intercourse, though she did not allow herself the same freedom of indulgence in the pleasures of the world as in earlier days. Writing to Sir W. W. Pepys, in 1817, she says, "I really can say that age, as far as I can judge, has in no degree subdued the natural gaiety of my temper, and I hope it is no infringement on better things, that my taste for humour, and a sort of sensible nonsense, is no whit diminished."

Hannah More is interesting by reason of her intuitions and of her limitations—her sense of the coming of a new epoch, and her incapacity to

anticipate its needs. She stood on the threshold of a new age, the age of democracy; she felt dimly the stirrings of its latent powers; she tried to influence and to mould that mass of inchoate thought. Yet with all her power of sympathy, with all her understanding of suffering, she built her schools on the basis of a narrow sectarianism, which involved her in the most cruel persecution.

The bare facts of her life must be summed up briefly. She was born in 1745 at Stapleton, near Bristol, the daughter of a schoolmaster, and one of five girls. Her three eldest sisters established a Boarding School at Bristol, which soon became fashionable and even celebrated, and when Hannah was old enough she took part in the teaching. At the age of twenty-two she became engaged to a man of property in the neighbourhood much older than herself, but as he kept deferring the date of marriage, her friends dissuaded her from continuing the engagement. Her talents had made her locally celebrated, and she had published a pastoral drama for the use of girls' schools, *The Search after Happiness*, so she visited London in 1772 with something of a reputation. In 1785, at the age of forty, she retired to a cottage, Cowslip Green, in the Mendip Valley, and afterwards built for herself a more commodious house in the same neighbourhood (1801), Barley Wood,



where she was joined by her four sisters, who had now gained a competency. This she only quitted after the death of all her sisters, to take up her residence at Clifton, 1828, where she lived till her death in 1833.

The social triumphs brought to Hannah More by her literary successes were as signal as those enjoyed by Fanny Burney. Hannah More moved in circles as intellectual and more select : she went, not only to the general assemblies, but to the more intimate parties. While by temperament she had the same power of enthusiasm and the same exuberance of spirits as Fanny Burney, she was far less occupied with her own personality and was of a much more serious cast of mind, which enabled her to keep herself to some extent disentangled, aloof, able to play the part of spectator, to observe, to analyse, and finally to concentrate in her poem of *Bas Bleu* the particular social movement with which she was associated. This poem, of which it will be remembered that Johnson said "there was no name in poetry that might not be glad to own it," stands to some extent as the text of this book and has had separate consideration. It well illustrates Hannah More's remarkable power of catching the flying moment on the wing. That her opportunities were great her memoirs and letters abundantly prove. They throw a good deal of light on the social life of the time,

and contribute largely to our knowledge of its distinguished persons.

Her most intimate friends were the Garricks.

In 1773, on a visit to London, her admiration for the acting of Garrick in *Lear* expressed in a letter to a mutual friend, led to an introduction, and the Garricks in their turn introduced her to the brilliant circle of their acquaintance. She paid long visits to them at their house at Adelphi Terrace, and at their house at Hampton, where they generally spent a day or two every week, particularly Sunday. Her friendship with husband and wife seems to have been a perfect relation and is a revelation of their constant tact and kindness. Mrs Delany, who visited Garrick's villa at Hampton in 1770, pays a warm tribute to Mrs Garrick's good sense and gentleness of manner, and the excellence of her taste. In 1776 Hannah More, writing from Adelphi Terrace, says, "I am so much at my ease; have a great many hours at my own disposal; read my own books and see my own friends." The Garricks generally had company at meals to save time, and Hannah More met at their table "the most polished and delightful society in the world." On one occasion when she was ill in lodgings she writes: "At six this evening, when Garrick came to the Turk's Head to dine, there accompanied him in the coach a minced chicken in a stew-pan, hot, a canister of fine tea, and a pot of cream. Were there ever such people! Tell it not in epic or in lyric, that

the Great Roscius rode with a stew-pan of minced meat with him for my dinner." For Garrick's genius Hannah More possessed the most profound admiration, an admiration which he was not slow to reciprocate ; he called her " Nine," because he held that in her own person she embodied all the muses. Garrick produced her *Percy* in 1777, and his death in 1779 may be regarded as a turning-point in her life, determining her more definitely on retirement and devotion. She and Mrs Garrick continued close friends till the death of the latter in 1822, and Hannah More spent above twenty winters under her roof.

Hannah More's friendship with Horace Walpole has been somewhat a stumbling-block in the paths of her chief biographers. They consider it " inconsistent " with her principles that she should have been on terms so intimate with this " loose and light-minded person." And yet, perhaps, nothing reveals more strikingly that charm of personality possessed by both, which enabled them to appreciate qualities so different from their own. The cynic writes to Hannah More letters instinct with delicate understanding ; a deep admiration for all that is fine in her underlies his characteristic note of raillery. " It is very provoking that people must always be hanging or drowning themselves, or going mad, that you forsooth, mistress, may have the diversion of exercising your pity and good-nature, and charity and intercession, and all

that bead-roll of virtues that make you so troublesome and amiable, when you might be ten times more agreeable by writing things that would not cost above half-a-crown at a time. You are an absolutely walking hospital, and travel about into lone and bye places with your doors open to house stray casualties." And "Saint Hannah," as he called her, "thou excellent champion as well as practiser of all goodness," met him on equal ground with perfect simplicity and thorough enjoyment of his wit and conversation.

For Hannah More Dr Johnson seems to have had a warm affection, judging from his terms of endearment to her as reported in one of her sister's letters, "child," "little fool," "love," "dearest." One of the famous cases in which Boswell impugns Mrs Thrale's veracity concerns a remark of Dr Johnson's to Hannah More. Mrs Thrale reports Dr Johnson as saying to Hannah More that her flattery choked him: Boswell's version reads as follows: "Dearest lady, consider with yourself what your flattery is worth, before you bestow it so freely:" while Miss Sarah More in a private letter gives the following account of the same incident: "They indeed tried who could 'pepper the highest' and it is not clear to me that the lexicographer was really the highest seasoner." The affair certainly takes a very different complexion in each of its representations. The following characteristic speech of Johnson's is reported by

one of the sisters: "I love you both," cried the innamorato, "I love you all five—I never was at Bristol—I will come on purpose to see you—what!—five women live happily together!—I will come and see you—I have spent a happy evening—I am glad I came—God for ever bless you; you live lives to shame duchesses." Hannah More must have had a strong sense of fun when she could write: "I have got the headache to-day, by raking out so late with that gay libertine Johnson."

Though one of the most striking and representative of Church-women, there was hardly a tincture in Hannah More of that gloomy spirit of self-analysis and fanaticism which drove such souls as Cowper's to despair, and which is faintly reflected in the letters to Hannah More of Newton, Cowper's friend. The Christianity advocated by Mrs Carter, Mrs Chapone and Mrs More was a Christianity of active benevolence, as is implied in the titles of Hannah More's treatises, *Practical Piety* (1811), *Christian Morals* (1812), and *Moral Sketches* (1819). Passive Christianity, meditation, prayer in its higher phases, was difficult to them, and possessed of dangerous aspects. Mrs Chapone indeed tells us that the mystics had at one time a great attraction for her, but that she soon became convinced of the errors of that state of mind. Holding, as these ladies did, very strong convictions on doctrinal religion, it is remarkable

how large a measure of tolerance distinguishes their judgment. Hannah More was reproached by Dr Johnson for reading the Port-Royalists, "alleging that as a good Protestant I ought to abstain from books written by Catholics. I was beginning to stand upon my defence when he took me with both hands, and with a tear running down his cheeks, 'Child,' said he, with the most affecting earnestness, 'I am heartily glad you read pious books, by whomsoever they may be written.'" In after life Hannah More considered that both Johnson and Addison had been too general in their religious teaching, and she believed the Emancipation of the Catholics to be a disintegrating and retrogressive measure; but Catholics and Dissenters were welcome to her house in Barley Wood, and she continued to read, not only the Jansenists, but the works of Puritans and Nonconformists, remarking that she found "nothing more good than the lean of their fat." "Christianity is a broad basis," she writes. "*Bible* Christianity is what I love; that does not insist on opinions indifferent in themselves; a Christianity practical and pure, which teaches holiness, humility, repentance, and faith in Christ, and which, after summing up all the evangelical graces, declares that the greatest of these is Charity." Against Methodism, however, her feeling was strong; anything approaching to what she calls "enthusiasm" was suspect to her,



and extempore prayer, as we shall see later on, appeared to her dangerous in the extreme.

Hannah More's activities cover an immense field. Her versatility was extraordinary. She lent the weight of her pen to the cause of the Slaves, to the cause of the French Emigrant clergy. She was eager in her desire for the emancipation of the Greeks. She wrote volume and tract as a counterblast to the literature of Infidelity, to the literature of Revolution. She stood for law and order, for Church and State, for authority and tradition; her *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795) hawked about by pedlars, found their way into the poorest cottages and were distributed over the whole world. Her life-long friend, Bishop Porteous of London, writes: "The sublime and immortal publication of the 'Cheap Repository' I hear of from every quarter of the globe. To the West Indies I have sent ship-loads of them. They are read with avidity at Sierra Leone, and I hope our pious Scotch missionaries will introduce them into Asia." We may add that the organization for circulating her tracts is believed to have developed into the Religious Tract Society. Hannah More's *Village Politics* by Will Chips, a little pamphlet scribbled in one sick day, circulated in London by hundred thousands, and was sent by Government to Scotland and Ireland, while many patriotic persons printed large editions of it at their own expense. She attacked the Manners of the Great;

and published in 1808 *Cælebs in search of a Wife*, a novel, or rather treatise, entirely ethical in its aim, the heroine of which is a modernized version of Milton's Eve. This book was so popular that it brought her £2000 in a single year. "From the hut of clay to the hall of cedar," to quote the grandiloquent Editor of her *Memoirs*, her influence made itself felt. But it is to the sphere of Education that her most important work belongs.

The first production of her pen was the *Search after Happiness*, a pastoral drama, written at the age of seventeen for the use of schools. This became so popular that we read in Miss Mitford's *Our Village* of its being performed before admiring audiences at Reading. Her Biblical dramas followed. Hannah More wrote *Strictures on Female Education*, inveighing against the abuse of accomplishments, and she was also the author of other educational works. But her most remarkable achievement was the establishment in Cheddar and its neighbourhood of a large number of Charity schools, at the suggestion of her friend Wilberforce, and in the teeth of violent opposition. At this moment when education is so prominently in the minds of all, Mrs More's methods, systems, and ideals are of peculiar interest.

She and her sisters went about the work with remarkable thoroughness. At Cheddar, for instance, she took a lodging in a little public-house, visited and persuaded all the principal

farmers, and turned an ox-house into a school-room. "We spent our whole time getting at the characters of all the people, the employment, wages, and number of every family; and this we have done in our other nine parishes. . . ."

Thus it came about that the poor were no mere abstractions to her, but flesh and blood individuals: and Will Chip, the Journeyman Carpenter; the Hackney Coachman, thrifty and sober; Patient Joe of the Newcastle Colliery—are all characters well within the comprehension of the uneducated, while her doggrel ballads, homely and racy, were calculated to appeal quickly to their senses.

"And the *true Rights of Man* and the life of his cause  
Is not equal *possessions*, but equal just *laws*."

We of to-day cannot feel the same confidence in the laws, or in their administration; but the justice and generosity of the rich was a necessary implication in Hannah More's social system:—

"If sickness o'ertake me the laws of the land  
Hold out to my wants a compassionate hand:  
Should some churlish church-warden presume to oppress,  
At the next justice-meeting I straight get redress."

Not only do the Justices redress the wrongs of the poor, but in the *Loyal Weavers* the Squire gives Tim Jenkins two dinners a week; the Parson distributes potatoes half-price, the health of Jack Wilkes is "restored by the gentlefolks' soup": and the gentlefolks provide work for

the unemployed, "so some work in their gardens and some on the road." Hannah More's knowledge of the practical needs of the poor is evidenced in her Cheap Repository Tracts, in which she gives recipes for inexpensive dishes and hints on domestic economy.

Her schools were definitely—one had almost said aggressively—Church Schools. Her masters and mistresses were chosen chiefly for their piety, and they had to perform a large amount of parish work, which the clergyman, by reason of distance, or of indifference, did not perform. As to the curriculum Hannah More writes: "My notions of instructing the poor are very limited. I allow *no writing*; nor any reading but the Bible, catechism and such little tracts as may enable them to understand the Church service." This instruction took place on Sundays; we may note here that Robert Raikes started the first Sunday Schools in 1781; while Mrs Trimmer opened hers at Brentford in 1786. On week days Hannah More tells us the children learn "such coarse work as may fit them for servants." The farmers' sons, however, were allowed to learn writing and cyphering, subjects unsuited to the children of labourers. This experiment of combining teaching with coarse work reminds us of Pestalozzi's Institute of the Poor, opened in 1775, at which the Swiss Educationalist had about fifty children from Zurich,

Berne and Basle. He employed the children in summer with field work and in winter with spinning, etc., and in the schools afterwards under his direction he continued to make book learning and handiwork run parallel. Hannah More and Pestalozzi had one and the same aim—to train the child to be a sincere Christian. Both of them regarded Education principally as a ladder to heaven. "It is recorded that God opened the heavens to the patriarch of old and showed him a ladder leading thither. This ladder is let down to every descendant of Adam; it is offered to thy child. But he must be taught to climb it." So writes Pestalozzi; and the quenchless faith and enthusiasm that inspired him breathe in the words. But Pestalozzi sought to achieve his purpose by a selfless outpouring of human love and sympathy, while Hannah More, with all her noble if austere energy, relied rather upon careful instruction in the catechism.

The contrast is great when we compare Hannah More's somewhat simple fare with the modern curriculum of the Board School, and her restricted caste system with the modern educational ladder by which the poorest child may climb—not to heaven—but direct to the University. Indeed, when the "higher" education of the poor began to be advocated, Hannah More took fright. She had done pioneer work in education: but like so many pioneers, the recklessness of her successors

alarmed her. Speaking of a book on popular education she writes: "Truth compels me to bear my public testimony against his extravagant plan, which is, that there is *nothing* which the poor ought not to be taught; they must not stop short of science." Such a doctrine she considers not only absurd, but dangerous; and she desires Parliament "to steer the middle way between the Scylla of brutal ignorance and the Charybdis of a literary education." Yet however we may disapprove of Hannah More's educational limitations, we must allow that her aim was of a high nobility,—that she had a truer conception of the *worth* of ethical and moral training than many of the utilitarian educationalists of our day. She accepted the conditions of class; they were part of her hierarchy; as to the training of the faculties of mind—education in its proper sense—she does not seem to have had any clear conception. She wished her system to produce God-fearing and virtuous men and women: and firmly believed this result could be obtained by scripture-lessons and sermons.

We must not omit reference to the Blagdon controversy, since this "furious feud" illustrates the danger of irresponsible clerical control. Mr Bere combined the duties of magistrate and clergyman at Blagdon, and persuaded Mrs More, who was in delicate health and overburdened with work, to establish a school in the village (1795).



This was put under the charge of a schoolmaster named Young. Presently rumours got abroad that Young was indulging in Methodistical practices, putting questions on spiritual experience, and encouraging the young people in extemporary prayer. Hannah More had him severely reprimanded for this breach of the regulations and forbade the weekly instruction of adults by the schoolmaster, and the offence was never repeated. The clergyman next accused Young of traducing his (Bere's) character; and Hannah More was put in the painful predicament of having to choose whether to dismiss Young, and ruin his career, or to act against her invariable practice not to maintain a school "without the full consent and countenance of the resident officiating minister." On other occasions she had at the request of the clergy dismissed teachers, not merely for a "tendency to enthusiasm," but for a suspicion of such tendency: but in this case she felt that Young might be suffering under an unjust accusation, and to her lasting credit she required further evidence before laying an imputation on his moral character. Bowing to the recommendation of a local tribunal, she dissolved the school in 1800, reopened it at the request of the Bishop, and dissolved it again by her own desire. For three years she was the object of dastardly attacks, which caused her serious suffering. She herself states that the motive of the clergyman was to attract notice and get preferment

by representing her schools as seminaries of vice, sedition and disaffection. The question became a national one, canvassed in the leading reviews; libellous tracts, hateful caricatures, accusations of the most grotesque character were aimed at Hannah More. She writes in 1802, "Battered, hacked, scalped, tom-a-hawked as I have been for three years, and continue to be, brought out every month as an object of scorn and abhorrence, I seem to have nothing to do in the world" (of society).

Through all this crisis it is only fair to say that she had the support of the leaders of the Church. Bishop Porteous of London, with whom for twenty years she spent a month every year at Fulham Palace, only once wavered in his faith in her. She refused to answer her traducers, and the ugly affair dragged on until she closed the school.

Her active benevolence was occupied in many other schemes besides founding schools. She was a woman of large heart, in whom pity worked powerfully—"blackmanity" Horace Walpole called her sympathy with the slaves. Not only causes but individuals awakened her interest and endeavours. There was the milkwoman of poetical genius at Bristol, "Lactilla" the literary world named her, for whom Hannah More raised a large subscription; there was the mad girl, Louisa, whose personality was involved in romantic mystery; the young heiress, too, who had been seduced, in search of whom Hannah More pene-

trated into the lowest haunts. Any story of misery appealed at once to her sympathy and activity, and when she read of a young girl who had thrown herself into the lake in St James's Park, in masquerade costume, she immediately took cab and sought her out in a street of bad fame to befriend her.

In her own part of the country she established benefit societies for the women. The wages earned were only 1s. a day, and the subscription to the Club was 1½d. a week. Out of this Club a sick woman received 3s. a week, and 7s. 6d. for a lying-in. These Clubs prospered so much that in 1825 £2000 had accumulated in the three parishes, which sum was invested in the funds. In the period of distress after the Peninsular War, when the miners were threatened with starvation, she herself bought up the ore; and jointly with six other persons gave security to Government for £700. In connection with her schools she established annual festivals; she provided divinity students with books, and distributed bibles with lavish hand.

Hannah More's personality is inevitably a little hidden under the variety of her multifarious labours. Our eyes are drawn away from her to the fruits of her active benevolence—to all her practical schemes for the improvement of the condition of the poor. She is overshadowed by the mass of her writings—all, with the exception of the tragedies, avowedly

ethical in aim. The extraordinary popularity of these is evidenced by the fact that they were translated into many of the languages of Europe and the East, and that they brought their author some £30,000; but amid all her literary triumph she retained a perfect balance, realising that mediocrity is often the secret of popularity. "To what is called learning I never had any pretension. Life and manners have been the objects of my unwearied observation. . . . Considering this world as a scene of much action and of little comparative knowledge; not as a stage for exhibition, or a retreat for speculation, but as a field on which the business which is to determine the concerns of eternity is to be transacted; as a place of low regard as an end, but of unspeakable importance as a means; a scene of short experiment, but lasting responsibility; I have been contented to pursue myself, and to present to others, those truths, which, if obvious and familiar, are yet practical and of general application. . . ." The amazing energy, the driving power that enabled her to accomplish so much, both in the worlds of literature and of philanthropy, are necessarily the qualities that first strike the imagination; and had we visited her in the Mendip Valley no doubt the real Hannah More would have come upon us as a surprise, the gentle old lady, delicate in health, full of gaiety and humour, quaker-like in her dress, and so devoted to her garden that she feared the love of

it might prove a stumbling-block in her religious path. Her eyes were of a remarkable vivacity, and were described by her sisters as "diamond." Mr S. C. Hall in his "Memoirs" speaks of them as being, when she was eighty, "the clearest, brightest, and most searching that I have ever seen; they were singularly dark—positively black they seemed as they looked forth among carefully trained tresses of her own white hair—and absolutely sparkled while she spoke of those of whom she was the venerated link between the present and the long past." Those who visited her, and the number was legion—she had four hundred visitors the first two weeks she spent at Clifton—seem to have carried away an impression of something unique. Newton, Cowper's friend, who misdoubted worldly joys, allows himself to feel in all his letters to Hannah More that here is legitimate ground for enthusiasm; he even breaks into rhyme on the subject of her cottage of Cowslip Green—a thatched cottage, one storey high, giving charming views over the surrounding country:—

"In Helicon could I my den dip  
I might attempt the praise of Mendip;  
Were bards a hundred I'd outstrip 'em  
If equal to the theme of Shipham:  
But harder still the task, I ween  
To give its due to Cowslip Green."

Macaulay, who was Hannah More's godson, spent many of his holidays at Barley Wood, and Sir

George Trevelyan, Macaulay's biographer, gives a delightful account of Hannah More's relation to the boy; Sir George Trevelyan calls her "the most affectionate and wisest of friends," and tells how she made the boy read prose to her by the ell, and poetry by the hour; how she would coax him from his books into the garden, and how she gave him advice and sympathy in all his literary enterprises.

Hannah More could indeed adapt herself to young and to old, as to rich and to poor; could win the approbation and affection of such diverse characters as Johnson, Garrick, Horace Walpole, Newton, as well as reach the proletariat by her common-sense doggerel. Since everything no doubt contributed to her development, she seems to have drawn from the Blue-stocking movement, whose chronicler she was, nourishment of a vitalising kind; and among the Blue-stocking ladies she stands pre-eminent as a force in her age; as a champion of the oppressed, and as a pioneer in educational experiment.



## THE BLUE-STOCKINGS AND FEMININE OCCUPATIONS

THERE is an old superstition among men which survives to the present day, that knowledge in women is fatal, not only to feminine charm, but to domestic efficiency. Molière has delightfully stated this view in all its gay inconsequence, in all its innocent egoism :

. . . "l'on sait tout chez moi, hors ce qu'il faut savoir.  
On y sait comme vont lune, étoile polaire  
Vénus, Saturne et Mars, dont je n'ai point affaire ;  
Et dans ce vain savoir, qu'on va chercher si loin,  
On ne sait comme va mon pot, dont j'ai besoin. . . .  
L'un me brûle mon rôl en lisant quelque histoire  
L'autre rêve à des vers quand je demande à boire."

In no century was this view so prevalent as in the Eighteenth Century. Almost all the little manuals on Education that found acceptance rule out certain subjects as unsuited for feminine study—the classical languages, for instance, and science. The object of these eliminations is the cultivation of feminine charm rather than, as in Molière's time, the achievement of domestic efficiency. And the average ideal of feminine charm in the Eighteenth Century is, as we have already seen, a tame, cling-

ing, clipped sweetness, closely hedged by barriers of convention that shelter it from the clear blowing airs of heaven. We are struck by the minute attention paid in these treatises to propriety of manner, to points of etiquette, to subtleties of deportment. We are even more struck by the curious neglect of domestic training, though in this sphere, perhaps instinct was supposed to supersede study. Mrs Chapone, it is true, imparts in her writings a few hints on domestic economy and advice on the right management of servants; but this is a somewhat limited description of the whole duty of domestic woman. No doubt it would have been considered a little indelicate to give instruction on such subjects as sick-nursing or the care of babies. As a matter of fact, the babies of the upper classes were usually farmed out in this century, and, indeed, there does not seem much evidence to prove that domestic administration was peculiarly efficient, even when stimulated by a wholesome ignorance of books.

How does domestic efficiency stand when combined with a knowledge of books and languages? What manner of housewives were the Blue-Stockings? How far were they familiar with domestic management—with cookery? What proficiency had they in needlework? Did they give themselves at all to that one interest sometimes allowed the domestic woman outside her home, the care of the poor? These are questions that require honest

examination, because a still undecided problem is concerned in the answer.

The Blue-Stockings were not all exact economists; they were not all judicious mistresses; they were not all exquisite needlewomen. Temperament and circumstance: these affect the lives of the learned and the unlearned alike. Practical Mrs Handcocks are always needed to supplement the idealistic nature of a Mrs Vesey; kind Betty Mores may always save their sisters experience in domestic affairs until it is too late to learn; and there are sometimes Thrales, so anxious for their wives to cultivate the intellect that they will not allow them any control over the kitchen or the larder. When there are short-comings for such causes as these, it is not fair to lay the blame upon books. What we have to inquire is: Did study interfere with the performance of domestic duty? Was any claim sacrificed for the sake of self-expression or self-cultivation? Was the household administration of a Blue-Stocking inferior to that of an unlettered woman?

We glance back upon the lives we have been considering, and the answer is not uncertain. Fanny Burney wrote *Evelina* at odd moments snatched from her very arduous labours as amanuensis to her father. Elizabeth Carter translated *Epictetus* in the intervals of preparing her step-brother for the University. Mrs Montagu was a notable housewife with an intimate knowledge of

every department, and administered her domestic affairs as capably as her estates. Fanny Burney, in prospect of her marriage, drew up a forecast of expenses, and managed to live with her husband and baby while she was writing *Camilla* on something like £120 a year. Mrs Carter was an excellent cook ; Dr Johnson's saying should be taken as a motto by the Blue-Stockings of the future : " My old friend, Mrs Carter, can make a pudding as well as translate *Epictetus*, and work a handkerchief as well as compose a poem." Neither among other domestic and literary interests was needlework neglected—such plain needlework as occupied Mrs Carter with the making of twelve shirts, instead of writing the life of Epictetus, as Archbishop Secker suggested ; such endless dressmaking and alteration as consumed so much of Fanny Burney's valuable time ; such elaborate fancy-work as resulted in Mrs Montagu's feather-hangings and in Mrs Delany's various and delicate triumphs. Dr Johnson considered plain needlework to be " one of the greatest felicities of female life," contributing to woman's amusement, to her sanity, to her length of days. He was much struck by a remark once made to him by a lady : " A man cannot hem a pocket handkerchief, and so he runs mad."

The case of fancy-work is a little different. In the past century fancy-work and amateur work generally fell upon evil days. This was, no doubt, partly owing to the idea that knowledge was

unfeminine, and consequently that any production revealing study or exactitude savoured of the pedant. A spurious feminine apparatus was therefore invented, chiefly, heaven be praised, of perishable material, such as bread, paper, paste-board, twigs of trees. But to this day, in remote country lodgings we find preserved under glass covers wax fruits that set the teeth on edge and foolish samplers that must have worn out the patience and the eyes of our great-grandmothers. In Mrs Delany's time, however, the tradition that had come down out of the past was not quite dead. Ladies no longer worked elaborate pieces of tapestry full of movement and emotion, but needle-work was still a part of daily life, still made the refinement of decoration, both of the person and of the home. To this ideal we are returning, with our hand-embroidered dresses and cloaks and curtains; and much of the artistic craftsmanship of our day would seem to derive back directly to Mrs Delany. We read, for instance, of a set of covers made for chairs, of linen of a brilliant dark blue, for which Mrs Delany designed a beautiful pattern of oak leaves cut out in white linen and attached down with different sorts of white knotting which also formed the veining and stalks. Bed-spreads too, she worked on the same model. This recalls the appliqué work done in many of the pleasant hand-factories of the present time. Mrs Delany also worked backs and seats for chairs in worsted

chenille representing groups of flowers or birds copied from nature. "I have worked *Caton* (a jonquil parrot) in the back of one of the chenille chairs I am doing for the Duchess in the midst of *purple astres* which sets off his golden *plumage to admiration*."

And now to turn to "woman's sphere" outside the home. To-day the question of charity has become an exceedingly difficult one. Specialists who have studied the conditions condemn indiscriminate giving as a mere sop to one's own conscience, calculated in the long run to create the class it would relieve. Classification has divided the poor into the unemployed, the can't-works, and the won't-works, each class requiring separate and different treatment. The question is now one of agonising complication, and the palliatives merely experimental; public opinion is not yet roused to vigorous action—to that sacrifice of leisure by every competent individual in some united scheme, which is the only thorough way of coping with the evil.

In the Eighteenth Century there is but little consciousness of the social problem. Dr Johnson, indeed, is never tired of inveighing against those who indulge in imaginary sorrows when there is so much real sorrow in the world; and in a very practical way he did what he could to relieve this. Also he made the test for a civilisation, not the position of its women—the usual test—but the provision for its poor. "Gentlemen of education," he observed,



"were pretty much the same in all countries ; the condition of the lower orders, the poor especially, was the true mark of national discrimination." But poverty and social injustice and social wrong were generally accepted as necessary evils, and not regarded in any sense as problems demanding scientific investigation and capable, perhaps, of radical amelioration.

Among the Blue-Stocking ladies who concerned themselves most actively with charity were Mrs Montagu, Mrs Carter, and Mrs More.

Mrs Montagu was the Lady Bountiful on a grand scale, the kind Patroness, the dispenser of gifts from above. Indeed, her charities were considered by some of her contemporaries, a little too evident, though Dr Johnson defends her against this accusation : " I have seen no beings who do as much good from benevolence as she does from whatever motive . . . No, Sir, to act from pure benevolence is not possible for finite beings, human benevolence is mingled with vanity, interest, or some other motive."

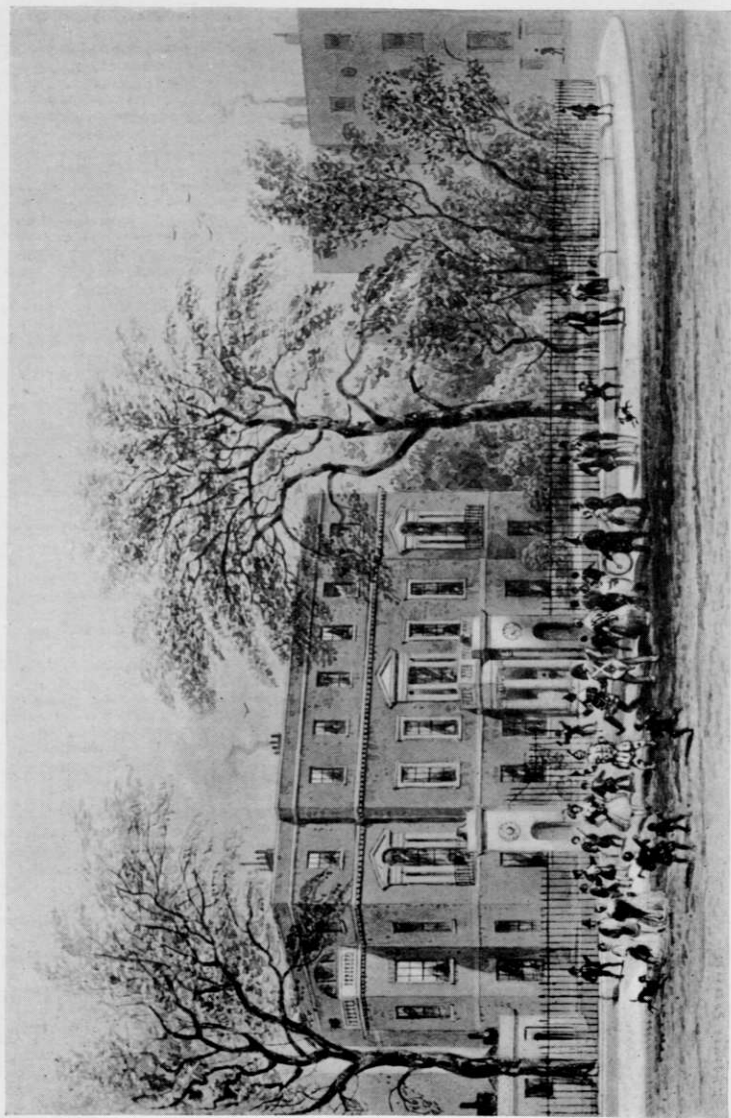
It was on her estates in Northumberland that she bestowed her bounties most freely. She had been accustomed on her arrival to give her colliery people a feast, but, as the good souls, men and women, used to get very drunk, she contented herself instead with killing a fat beast once a week and sending to each family a piece of meat. She would have the boys and girls to supper in

batches—fifty-nine at a time—giving them rice pudding and boiled beef, the expense, as she writes to her sister-in-law, not being great, as rice is cheap and skimmed milk and coarse beef served the occasion. Clothes she gives, too, when the families are large, and she proposes, if things continue to thrive, to establish spinning, knitting and sewing schools for the girls. Benefits of this sort, she amusingly admits, “and a general kind behaviour give a good deal of advantage to the coal owners as well as to the colliers.”

But the charitable action that most struck the imagination of her time and that is noticed in the obituary notice of the *Gentleman's Magazine* as her only claim to remembrance is the feast that she gave to the chimney sweepers every May-day on the lawn in front of her house in Portman Square. You remember how tenderly Charles Lamb speaks of these “dim specks—poor blots—innocent blacknesses” bidding you give them a penny, or better, twopence, and recounting how an annual supper was held for them at Smithfield on St Bartholomew's day, consisting of sausages and small ale; a ceremony which Mrs Montagu royally anticipated. No question, you see, of stopping the tyranny and torture; but in the year, one delightful hour's alleviation. Tradition has it that Mrs Montagu's attention was drawn to the hard life of the little chimney-sweeps owing to the kidnapping by

master sweeps of a boy-relative of her husband's, afterwards recovered ; possibly Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's son, whose subsequent erratic career was more suited to the times of Haroun al Raschid than to the unadventurous Eighteenth Century. Hannah More is bidden to Mrs Montagu's feast ; preoccupied with the horrors of the slave trade, she says she will come unless she attends a feast of "free negroes" instead. Madame d'Arblay, in her *Memoirs of Dr Burney* gives an account of this May-day festival. It is the subject on which we can least forgive the insincerity of her Johnsonese ; though, indeed, the style is too comic to offend seriously. "Not all the lyrics of all the rhymsters, nor all the warblings of all the spring-feathered choristers, could hail the opening smiles of May like the fragrance of that roasted beef and the pulpy softness of those puddings of plums with which Mrs Montagu yearly renovated those sooty little agents to the safety of our most blessing luxury."

This lavish giving is part of the love of display in Mrs Montagu's character—not gaudy or vulgar, but rather aesthetic—she loved a striking *coup d'œil*—a scenic effect—backgrounds of magnificence and foregrounds of contrast. To quote Madame d'Arblay again : "Not to vain glory, then, but to kindness of heart, should be adjudged the publicity of that superb charity which made its jetty objects for one bright morning cease



MRS. MONTAGU'S HOUSE IN PORTMAN SQUARE, SHOWING CHIMNEY SWEEPS DANCING BEFORE IT  
FROM THE WATER-COLOUR BY T. HOSMER SHEPHERD IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM



to consider themselves as degraded outcasts of society."

Undoubtedly, Mrs Montagu had a kind heart. But she was always the grand lady, a being from another sphere, descending to earth laden with good things, to disappear again into the empyrean.

This was not the method of Hannah More, of Elizabeth Carter. Mrs Carter, though practising the charity of gifts in her native Deal, was one of the first in that century to recognise the value of investigation in a large town like London. *The Ladies' Charitable Society*, to which she belonged, anticipated in many respects the principles of the Charity Organisation Society. "At the first institution of our Society, we wished to have afforded an unlimited relief; but very short experience convinced us that this was impracticable and we were obliged to restrain it to five parishes. Yet, that none of the poor people might be disappointed, who had been encouraged to hope, all whose cases had been examined by the inquirers prior to this regulation were (unless unworthy) relieved; and those to whom, from sickness, a continued relief was necessary, had their continued relief, though out of the limits, long after the order was passed." The Books of the Society were open to subscribers. This first attempt at organisation was fraught with difficulty and disappointment, but it marks a great advance in the way of looking at the subject. Mrs



Carter's common-sense stood her in good stead, lacking a knowledge of political economy. There is an interesting passage in a letter of hers to Mrs Vesey on the question whether Mrs Vesey was justified in spending money upon herself by purchasing a carriage. "In general, no doubt, the best relief to the poor is from supplying their wants by the means of their own honest labour: and, therefore, your plans in the cabriolet are not to be ranked among the vices of useless luxury. They only become so, I apprehend, when by too great an expense in employing those who *can* work, there is not enough reserved for the relief of those who from various innocent inabilities, *cannot*. It must be confessed, there must always be a danger of mistake, when the benefit arising to others is interwoven with the indulgence of our own fancies; and, perhaps, the only secure way of avoiding it is by a regular appropriation of all the several articles of expense."

Hannah More's charities are too intimately bound up with her life to be easily separated from it, and they were so many and so various that we have only been able to indicate them briefly. The investigations of Mrs Carter's society were in the nature of tentative experiment. Hannah More's investigations were carried out with scientific thoroughness. She was the only lady of the Blue-Stocking coteries who approached these questions from the more modern point of

view. Her energy in collecting facts and statistics, her fervent labours in the cause of humanity, link her with the Nineteenth Century ; but she retains her faith in the efficacy of Eighteenth Century methods, the finality of Eighteenth Century beliefs. And we may repeat that Hannah More brought more to the task she set herself than the organising brain ; she brought a heart overflowing with compassion, a hand ever open and ready.

Thus, where domestic claims existed, it would appear that the Blue-Stockings met them with heart-whole devotion ; where domestic occupations required performing it seems that generally speaking the Blue-Stockings were admirably efficient ; while in trying to improve the condition of the unhappy, they manifested generosity, common-sense and self-sacrifice. Their writings and their entertainments are not their only—not their chief—claim upon our interest and our sympathies ; it is the throbbing woman underneath that gives value to their wit and their learning.

## CONCLUSION

AS we look back into that blue haze of the past, which for a brief while superseded the speckled black and red of the card-table, we pause to wonder if it were a mere transient exhalation, or if it fostered conditions that were to help forward the intellectual development of women, their independence, their position in the eyes of the world and their claims for greater opportunities.

Women had been famous scholars before the Eighteenth Century, but in England they had done very little in literature. An odd memoir or two, a tiny treatise on hawking or on the religious life, a ballad, a song—these had been their contributions—stray leaves that drifted almost accidentally into the great domain of literature. In the Eighteenth Century, quietly, unobtrusively, women began to remove the barriers from that field. The Blue-Stockings entered upon it almost in a body, taking possession of different allotments; we have Fanny Burney's Novels, Mrs Chapone's Letters, Mrs Montagu's Essay, Mrs Carter's Translation, Mrs Thrale's Anecdotes and the multifarious prose and verse of Hannah More.

Outside the inmost circle we find Mrs Lenox ; Mrs Macaulay, the author of the *History of England from the Accession of the Stuarts*—an able piece of work that won the praise of Lecky ; Mrs Barbauld and Miss Seward, both poetesses ; Mrs Trimmer, author of the *History of the Robins* ; Joanna Baillie ; Mrs Radcliffe ;—to name no others. This is a remarkable record for women, who, though most of them would have disowned the title, were nevertheless pioneers. Thus, by their number, the Blue-Stockings accustomed the general public to the idea of women writing ; by their achievements they asserted their right to a place within the gates of literature ; by their success they prepared a way for those who were to follow. They won territory for woman's intellectual advance ; they made breathing-space for the genius that was to develop into the supreme expression of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and the lyrics of Christina Rossetti.

With regard to their personal independence, we have already seen that the Blue-Stockings, while neglecting no social or domestic duty, were able to shape their own lives to original aims, to cultivate their individual gifts, and to put their theories in action. Elizabeth Carter and Hannah More are, indeed, typical of the independent woman ; Elizabeth Carter with her fearless delight in nature, her passion for lonely walks, her solitary

meals of cake and tea; Hannah More with her intense convictions, her insatiable energy, driving about the country, putting up at odd taverns and finally forced to deny the one authority to which she had always bowed, the clergyman. Furthermore, both these ladies won economic independence, earning a competence by means of the pen. Then four of our Blue-Stockings made more or less unconventional marriages; Hester Mulso and Fanny Burney; Mrs Pendarves and Mrs Thrale when they married a second time. Mrs Montagu and Mrs Vesey possessed individuality of a marked character.

But while the Blue-Stockings, by their achievements, demonstrated their intellectual, social and philanthropic capacities and in their lives asserted their independence, their initiative, their belief in self-development; they made no open claim for equality, mental, moral, or political. They stood apart from those who advocated directly and specifically, the doctrine of woman's advancement.

So early as 1673 we find a protest in an *Essay on Education* against the tendency to "breed women low." So early as 1694 we have Mrs Mary Astell's proposal for the foundation of a College for the higher education of women. Mrs Mary Astell is the pioneer of the Woman's movement in the modern sense of the word—the first to point out that if girls are worse educated than boys it is unreasonable to com-

plain that women are more uneducated than men. Mrs Astell was a woman of exemplary life, a profound scholar, a devout Christian and deeply read in theology. She wrote an *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1706) and many fiery little tracts which we fancy smouldered very quickly to ashes in that uncongenial air. She worshipped Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as a living proof of woman's genius. Lady Mary herself believed in the higher education of women, but chiefly as a resource for their leisure, as a contribution to their delight in life. "I think it the highest injustice to be debarred the entertainment of my closet and that the same studies which raise the character of a man should hurt that of a woman." "Ignorance," she says in another place, "is as much the fortress of vice as idleness, and, indeed, generally produces it." But, unlike Mrs Astell, she was emphatic, as we have already stated, about the necessity for concealing all traces of learning—a possession which, if suspected, would be fatal to social success.—At the end of the Eighteenth Century, we have another and a different Mary, Mary Wollstonecraft, whose *Rights of Women*, temperate as it appears to-day, aroused a very whirlwind of abuse. Horace Walpole was only voicing the general opinion when he called the author by the cruel name of a "hyena in petticoats."

No such tempest ever disturbed the cerulean



community of Blue-Stockings. To Mrs Delany, to Mrs Montagu, the Eighteenth Century conventions were second nature. Fanny Burney strove eagerly to shape herself to them in minutest exactitude, and Mrs Chapone, after a weak resistance, bowed to them in their entirety. Within the inner Blue-Stocking bounds the established order reigned supreme, the accepted decorum, the approved propriety; its members moved and spoke as the standards of the time dictated.

And, contradictory as it may sound, the Blue-Stocking movement owes its influence largely to its regard for convention. Because they did not by the least shadow transgress custom in their social relations, because they conformed externally to the somewhat narrow idea of woman in that age, the Blue-Stockings were allowed liberty to write and study and think much as they pleased. The world, fashionable and intellectual, flocked to their assemblies; no dangerous opinions frightened it away, no wild and deplorable theories. Inevitably, the wit and learning of the Blue-Stockings began to impress, without alarming, their guests. Insensibly, men began to realise that charm was not incompatible with developed quickness of parts, with wide reading, with happy allusion; that knowledge need not be accompanied by pedantry, and that success in novel writing might add no more than a delicate

zest to the writer's vivacity. Dr Johnson, Walpole, Burke, gave their ardent praise without *arrière pensée* to women in whom learning has added a lustre to the intellect and a tenderness to the heart. And it is no small thing in such a century as the Eighteenth Century for women of wit and knowledge and initiative to have attained so large a measure of respect and recognition. The Blue-Stocking movement undoubtedly helped to establish the position of the learned woman in the eyes of the world.

But though the Blue-Stockings were, generally speaking, so far creatures of their age as to deprecate the public pressing, or even the public expression of unconventional views; yet, being women of profound common sense it was inevitable that they should be aware of certain disabilities bearing hardly upon their sex. The learning of Mrs Carter enabled her to point out to Archbishop Secker, that the translators of the First Epistle to the Corinthians had been guilty of a false translation for the purpose of supporting the superiority of the husband. The wisdom of Mrs Delany condemned the practice of judging men and women by different standards of morality. Hester Mulso is indignant at the contemptuous way in which *The Rambler* speaks of her sex; in a word, most of the Blue-Stockings recognised the existence of inequalities and injustices as between

women and men. They recognised the existence of these inequalities and injustices; that is their sole contribution to the movement for "women's rights." But this is a contribution, and a contribution of importance. The thought that was to animate the future existed in germ; and to-day we can hardly venture to ignore the power of thought as a shaper of events.

We have endeavoured to show briefly, how far the Blue-Stocking movement helped to forward the intellectual development of women, their independence, their position in the eyes of the world, and their claims for greater opportunities.

But it is not as preparers of the way, nor as givers of impetus, nor as remote influences on the present that we would take leave of the Blue-Stockings. This removes them too far into the sphere of abstract generalisation, and farewells are human things with warm hand-clasps and grateful words. The Blue-Stockings were generous in giving the best of themselves to their contemporaries, and to us also, who have striven however imperfectly to live back into their time, they have been ready to offer their brilliant hospitality, their sensible advice, their wise counsel. They seem very close to us in some respects; the interval of over a century has made no serious gap in thought between us; we understand them, and they would probably understand us. So we clasp hands across the years, and part with regret from the kindly

companionship of these women, who lent to the name of Blue-Stocking a lustre dimmed afterwards by false implication,—a lustre which the present day may yet see restored to something of its ancient glory.



# INDEX

- ADDISON, Joseph, as a moralist, 5, 307  
condemns formal gardens, 287
- Adam, Robert, 54, 218
- Andover, Vicountess, 153
- Anecdotes of Painting*, Horace Walpole's, 80
- Anecdotes of Dr Johnson*, Mrs Thrale's, 117, 133, 228, 332
- Astell, Mary, her lines to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, 283  
her tracts, 283  
her pioneer work, 334  
her writings, 335
- Austen, Jane, 223, 242
- BAILLIE, Joanna, 282, 333
- Baltimore, Lord, 90
- Banks, Sir Joseph, 80
- Barbauld, Mrs., on the absurdities of fashion, 4  
on Richardson's "flower-garden" of ladies, 191  
on Mrs Chapone's marriage, 200  
a poetess, 333
- Barclay, Mr., 131, 132
- Barley Wood, 300, 301, 307, 318
- Barry, James, 58, 218, 220
- Bas Bleu*, Hannah More's, 22, 27, 63, 64, 75, 77, 105, 107, 146, 148, 150, 158, 174, 178, 185, 246, 289, 295, 299, 302
- Bath, Earl of, 28, 56, 57, 64, 65, 71, 279, 281
- Batheaston, 256, 258, 259, 261, 262
- Beattie, James, on Johnson's jealousy, 59  
on Edward Montagu, 276
- Bishop Bonner's Ghost*, Hannah More's, 280
- Blue-Stocking*, life-history, 16  
its precursors, "wit" and "witting," 19, 20  
implies unconventional dress, 21  
the Stillingfleet derivation, 21  
its first mention, 21  
its inventors, 21
- Blue-Stocking*, views of Mrs Carter and Mrs More, 22  
origin suggested by Lady Crewe, 23  
term used for men as well as women, 23  
various plays upon the word, 24  
first connection with pedantry, 25
- Boscawen, Hon. Mrs., in *Herald* verses, 11  
importance as Blue-Stocking hostess, 126, 254  
Mrs Montagu's letter to her, 35  
her description of Mrs Montagu, 50  
in *Bas Bleu*, 64  
Boswell's tribute to her, 65  
*Sensibility* addressed to her, 65, 66  
at Mrs Garrick's dinner-party, 251
- Boswell, James, on origin of term "Blue-Stocking," 21  
his description of Mrs Boscawen, 65  
his description of Mrs Thrale, 118  
his description of Thrale, 121  
his views on birth, trade, and wealth, 121, 130  
calls himself as Johnsonian as Mrs Thrale, 129  
description of Johnson's conversation, 129, 145  
accuses Mrs Thrale of inaccuracy, 134, 305  
thinks enmity against Mrs Thrale carried too far, 137  
his portrait in Rowlandson's caricature, 217  
depicts a Fleet Street Dr Johnson, 228  
on Mrs Garrick's dinner-party, 251  
his belief in influence of the dead, 277
- Botanic Garden, The*, Erasmus Darwin's, 81, 260, 289
- British Synonymy*, Mrs Piozzi's, 140
- Brown, "Capability," 76, 295, 296
- Bulstrode (Bucks) its bathing-tubs out of order, 69



- Bulstrode (Bucks), Horace Walpole's description of, 100
- Mrs Delany meets King and Queen there, 101
- Blue-Stocking party at, 153
- hours of meals at, 248
- Bunbury, Harry, 213
- Bunbury, Lady Sarah, 69
- Burke, Edmund, praises women of the age, 10
- his tribute to Mrs Montagu, 28
- enacts Hortensius in *Bas Bleu*, 76
- his high appreciation of Mrs Delany, 83
- his remark on Johnson's death, 134
- his friendship with Mr Vesey, 170
- a phrase of his quoted by Hannah More, 173
- his portrait in Barry's picture, 219
- his compliments on *Cecilia*, 231
- Burney, Captain, 74
- Burney, Charlotte Ann, 135
- Burney, Dr, his authorship of *Herald* verses, 10
- his condemnation of *Witlings*, 20
- his description of "ingredients" for parties, 181
- his parties, 224
- his delight in *Evelina*, 225
- his objections to Fanny's marriage, 241
- Burney, Fanny (Madame D'Arblay), her sensitiveness, 9
- her *Cecilia*, Burke's opinion, 10
- in *Herald* verses, 11
- her place in Johnson's Female Administration, 12
- called "Pretty Fanny," 13
- her *Witlings*, 19, 20
- disowns the name "Blue-Stocking," 25
- her descriptions of Mrs Montagu, 48, 54
- describes meeting of Johnson and Mrs Montagu after quarrel, 61
- her complexion, 67 68
- her appearance and dress, 74, 226, 227
- introduced to Mrs Delany, 103, 232
- attracted by Madame de Genlis and Madame de Staël, 115, 240
- her descriptions of Mrs Thrale, 118, 139
- reports Mrs Thrale's admiration for Johnson, 129
- her opinion of Miss Thrale, 135
- Burney, Fanny (D'Arblay), on Mrs Thrale's second marriage, 137
- on Mrs Chapone's parties, 153, 208
- her account of Mrs Vesey, 166
- on Mrs Vesey's loss, 176
- on Mrs Montagu's "Circle" method, 182
- on Mrs Vesey's "disintegration" method, 185
- on the "square," 187
- her description of Mrs Chapone, 192
- her characteristics caught by Sir Joshua, 212
- visions herself in caricature, 213
- her happiness in success of *Evelina*, 222
- its appeal, 223
- her instinct for writing, 224
- anonymous appearance of *Evelina*, 225
- her description of its triumph, 226
- her "modesty," 226
- her first visit to the Thrales, 227
- importance of her account of Johnson, 228
- her friendship with Johnson, 229, 230
- her literary and social success, 231, 302
- appointed Bed-Chamber woman, 232
- her life summarized, 233
- her egoism, 234
- her life at Court, 234
- her over-sensitiveness, 235
- her duties, 236
- her description of the King's madness, 236, 237
- her visit to Norbury Park, 239
- her marriage and early married life, 241
- builds Camilla Cottage, 242
- her residence abroad, 243
- her old age, 244
- her *Memoirs of Dr Burney*, 244
- on Mrs Montagu's breakfast-parties, 250, 251
- her description of Lady Miller, 257
- on Mrs Carter, 276, 280, 281
- her garden, 296, 297
- her domestic economy, 323
- her account of the chimney-sweeper feasts, 328
- Bute, Lady, 181, 216, 217

- CAMBRIDGE, Mr, 60  
*Camilla*, Fanny Burney's, 233, 234, 242, 296, 323  
 Campbell, Rev. Dr Thomas, 127  
 Carolan (Irish Bard), 99  
 Carter, Elizabeth, her strictures on public pleasure-gardens, 3  
   her censure of the "macaroni gentlemen," 4  
   her sympathy, 9  
   in *Herald* verses, 11  
   her place in Female Administration, 12  
   called "Sappho," 13  
   views on origin of term *Blue-Stocking*, 22  
   friendship with the Earl of Bath, 57  
   on character of Lord Lyttleton, 59  
   in *Bas Bleu*, 64, 65  
   in *Sensibility*, 66  
   her appearance and dress, 71  
   her favourite author, 88, 190  
   on Mrs Thrale's second marriage, 137  
   desires Lord Orford to put down Faro, 147  
   her opinion on cards, 148  
   on Mrs Vesey's imagination, 160  
   singularity of her friendships, 161  
   her sympathy with Mrs Vesey, 162  
   and with Mrs Vesey's country, 163  
   her account of the Irish beggar, 163  
   and of Mrs Vesey's impracticality, 165  
   and of her childishness, 167  
   on Mr Vesey's character, 171  
   and on his architectural vagaries, 171  
   her description of Mrs Handcock, 173  
   on Mrs Vesey's loss, 176  
   contributor to *Rambler*, 190, 278  
   her character, 263  
   her learning, 263, 264  
   her early writings, 264  
   her early fame, 265  
   her absence of pedantry, 265  
   her domestic occupations, 266, 323  
   her diffidence, 267  
   her simplicity of character, 267  
   her humour, 268  
   her family relationships, 269  
   her views concerning love, 271  
   her independence, 271  
   her love of walking, 272
- Carter, Elizabeth, her appreciation of nature, 273  
   her house at Deal, 273  
   her translation of Epictetus, 274, 275  
   her sympathy with his philosophy, 275  
   her piety, 276, 306  
   her letters on religious difficulties, 277  
   her friends, 278-280  
   her poems, 279  
   her tolerance, 280  
   her adventurous spirit, 281  
   her attitude on the woman-question, 282, 283  
   her introductions to Royalty, 284  
   on Mrs Vesey at Lucan, 294  
   her garden, 296  
   her charity, 329  
   her belief in investigating cases, 329  
   her political economy, 330  
   the independent woman, 333  
 Carter, Rev. Nicolas, 266, 269, 278  
 Cave, Edward, 265  
 Cecilia, Fanny Burney's, 10, 126, 229, 231, 232  
 Chapone, Mr, 76, 196, 200  
 Chapone, Mrs (Hester Mulso), her "uncommon good sense," 9  
   in *Herald* verses, 11  
   her method of memorizing, 11  
   her place in Female Administration, 12  
   her *Simplicity* recommended, 50  
   her place in *Sensibility*, 66  
   her appearance and dress, 73, 192  
   Mrs Delany's opinion on the *Letters*, 88  
   her letter to Mrs Delany, 101  
   introduces Fanny Burney to Mrs Delany, 103  
   her criticism of Mrs Thrale's *Anecdotes*, 133  
   attacks card-parties in *Rambler*, 146  
   her later opinion on card-playing, 148  
   her *Essay on Conversation*, 151, 152  
   her connection with *Rambler*, 189  
   her independence of mind, 190  
   her emotional temperament, 191  
   her artistic susceptibility, 191  
   her enthusiasm for genius, 191  
   her ugliness, 192

- Chapone, Mrs (Hester Mulso), her character, 193  
 her birth and early life, 193  
 her friendship with Richardson, 193  
 her disputations, 194  
 her defence of *Clarissa*, 195  
 her *Matrimonial Creed*, 196, 197  
 her opinion of *Sir Charles Grandison*, 198  
 as Richardson's model, 199  
 her marriage, 200  
 her widowhood, 201  
 her *Letters*: their success, 201  
 her *Letters* compared with Chesterfield's, 203  
 their religious teaching, 204, 306  
 their teaching on the emotions, 205  
 the curriculum they embrace, 206, 207  
 her claim to title of "Blue-Stocking," 208  
 her reported praise of *Cecilia*, 231  
 on domestic economy, 321
- Charlotte, Queen, presented with a spinning-wheel, 85  
 her affection for Mrs Delany, 102, 103  
 as described in Fanny Burney's *Diary*, 236  
 her lunch at Bulstrode, 249  
 her interest in Mrs Carter, 283
- Chateaubriand, 239, 243
- Chatham, Lord, 157
- Chesterfield, Lord, 202, 203
- Cholmondeley, Mrs (Blue-Stocking hostess), her disintegration of Circle, 186, 255  
 her female dinner-party, 252
- Clarissa Harlowe*, Richardson's, 40, 191, 194, 265
- Clayton, Mrs, 91
- Cælobs in search of a Wife*, Hannah More's, 309
- Confessions, Rousseau's, 88
- Cork, Countess of, *see* Monckton, Miss
- Cowley, Abraham, 270, 289
- Cowper, William, his religious melancholy, 7, 306  
 his opinion on Mrs Montagu's *Essay*, 46  
 his lines on Mrs Montagu's Feather-Room, 53
- Cowslip Green, 300, 301, 318
- Crewe, Lady (Blue-Stocking hostess) in *Herald* verses, 11
- Crewe, Lady (Blue-Stocking hostess), on origin of term *Blue-Stocking*, 23  
 Sheridan's dedication to her, 255  
 her entertainments at Crewe Hall, 256, 259
- Crisp, Mr (of Chessington), 20, 224, 226, 227
- D'ARBLAY, Madame, *see* Burney, Fanny
- D'Arblay, Monsieur, 75, 233, 240, 241, 242, 243, 288, 296, 297
- Darwin, Erasmus, and Mrs Delany, 81  
 member of Lichfield coterie, 260  
 his "delicious" poem, 289
- Day, Thomas, 260
- De la Ferté-Imbault, Madame, 256
- De l'Epinay, Madame, 113
- De l'Espinasse, Mademoiselle, 113, 115
- De Genlis, Madame, her connection with Fanny Burney, 115, 240  
 her educational methods, 204, 207, 208
- Delany, Dr, 75  
 his account of Mrs Delany's first marriage, 89  
 his second marriage, 94  
 Mrs Montagu's account of him, 95  
 his "portrait" of Maria, 96  
 his defence of Swift, 97  
 his death, 99  
 his laying-out of Deville, 293
- Delany, Mrs (Mary Granville)  
 inveighs against follies of fashion, 4  
 her charm, 9, 82-84  
 called "old wit," 19  
 her comment on Room of Cupidons, 50  
 in *Sensibility*, 66  
 her complexion, 67, 68  
 her appearance and dress, 72, 73  
 her advocacy of strange drugs, 72  
 her paper-mosaics, 78-81  
 pen-pictures of her, 82, 83  
 her practice of feminine arts, 84, 85  
 her worship of Propriety, 86  
 her criticism of men and manners, 87  
 her opinion of Rousseau, 88  
 her marriage with Mr Pendarves, 89  
 her other admirers, 90  
 her visit to Ireland, 91  
 her description of Dean Swift, 92, 93  
 her correspondence with Dean Swift, 93

- Delany, Mrs (Mary Granville), her  
   marriage with Dr Delany, 94  
   his "portrait" of her, 96  
   her description of Ireland, 98  
   her interest in Irish Industries, 98  
   her interest in Irish music, 99  
   her widowhood, 99  
   her entertainments, 100  
   her wit and learning, 101  
   her friendship with the King and  
   Queen, 102, 103  
   presented by them with a house,  
   103  
   her meeting with Fanny Burney, 103  
   her attitude towards Royalty, 104  
   on sex-inequalities, 114, 337  
   her strictures on Blue-Stocking  
   conversation, 153  
   her ideal of conversation, 154  
   her description of an assembly, 181  
   on Mrs Chapone's allowance, 201  
   and on her *Letters*, 88, 201  
   her opinion on Chesterfield's  
   *Letters*, 202  
   her relations with Hogarth, 215  
   her artistic gifts, 216  
   her portrait by Opie, 216  
   her reported praise of *Cecilia*, 231  
   her entertainment of Handel, 246  
   her hours for meals in Ireland, 249  
   her account of King and Queen at  
   Bulstrode, 249  
   her visit to the Garricks, 290  
   her description of a grotto, 291  
   her breakfast in the garden, 294  
   her tribute to Mrs Garrick, 303  
   her needlework, 324  
 Delville (near Dublin), 94, 95, 293  
 De Narbonne, Comte, 242  
 De Polignac, Madame (wears blue  
   stockings) 23  
 De Staël, Madame, 115, 239, 240  
 Dewes, Mrs., 196  
*Dialogues of the Dead* (Lord Lyttleton's  
   and Mrs Montagu's), 38, 39, 46,  
   47, 60  
*Diary*, Fanny Burney's, 192, 226, 236, 244  
 Donnellan, Mrs, 82  
   description of Mrs Delany, 83  
   goes to Ireland with Mrs Delany,  
   91  
   her opinion of Miss Mulso, 199  
   her fault-finding with *Sir Charles*  
   *Grandison*, 200  
 Dorset, Duke of, 253  
 Du Bocage, Madame, 249, 250  
 Du Deffand, Madame, 113, 115  
 EDGEWORTH, Richard Lovell, 12  
 Edgeworth, Maria, 202, 242  
*Emile*, Rousseau's, 204, 209  
*English Garden*, *The* (Mason's), 76,  
   289, 290, 292  
 Epictetus, Mrs Carter's translation of,  
   263, 273, 274, 275, 322, 323  
*Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*,  
   Mrs Anstell's, 335  
*Essay on Shakespeare*, Mrs Montagu's  
   38, 41-46, 58, 270, 332  
*Essay on Taste*, Miss Reynolds', 212  
*Evelina*, Fanny Burney's, 74, 222, 223,  
   225, 229, 232, 239, 245, 322  
 "FEAST OF SHELLS," 252  
*Female Quixote*, 10  
 Feminad, 12  
*Flora*, Mrs Delany's, 78, 80, 81  
 Foundling Hospital, 6  
 Friend, William, 34, 51  
 GALWAY, Lady, 24, 255  
 Garrick, David, enacts Roscius in *Bas*  
   *Bleu*, 76  
   his intimacy with the Burney's, 224  
   his "Temple," 291  
   his friendship with Hannah More,  
   303, 304  
 Garrick, Mrs, her dinner-parties, de-  
   scribed by Boswell, 10, 251  
   Mrs Delany's appreciation of, 303  
   her friendship with Hannah More,  
   303, 304  
*Gentlemen's Magazine*, 264, 327  
 Geoffrin, Madame, 111, 113, 256  
 George III., his attentions to Mrs  
   Delany, 101  
   his request for Handel's MS.  
   music, 102  
   his patronage of Opie, 216  
   as described in Fanny Burney's  
   *Diary*, 236, 237  
   and "Capability" Brown, 295  
 Godschall, Mr and Mrs, 19  
 Goldsmith, Oliver, 217  
*Grandison*, *Sir Charles*, Richardson's,  
   73, 192, 198, 200  
 Granville, Mary, *see* Delany, Mrs  
 Gray, Thomas, 61, 76  
 Greville, Fulke, 255  
 HAGLEY Park (Worcestershire), 208,  
   292  
 Handcock, Mrs, 169, 172, 173, 322  
 Handcock, William, 169  
 Handel, 102, 246

Harcourt, Lord, 185, 186  
 Hawkins, Letitia, 114  
 Henry, Mrs, 165  
*Herald Verses*, 10, 11, 65, 255  
 Herries, Lady (Blue-Stocking hostess), 255  
 Highmore, Miss, 73, 192, 198  
*History of England from the Accession of the Stuarts*, Mrs Macaulay's, 333  
*History of Henry II.*, Lord Lyttleton's, 60, 170, 208  
*History of Music*, Dr Burney's, 224  
*History of the Robins*, Mrs Trimmer's, 333  
 Hogarth, 210, 213-215, 217  
*Humanist, The*, 96  
 Huntingdon, Lady, 87

Jenyns, Soame, called "old wit," 19  
 meets Fanny Burney, 187, 254  
 in Barry's picture, 219

Johnson, Dr, as a moralist, 6  
 his "menagerie," 6  
 his periods of darkness, 7  
 his opinion on women of the age, 10  
 his praise of Mrs Montagu's conversation, 10, 41, 55  
 his Female Administration, 12  
 his tribute to Mrs Montagu, 28  
 his defence of Shakespeare, 42  
 his criticism of Mrs Montagu's *Essay*, 45  
 his relations with Mrs Montagu, 58, 59, 60, 61  
 his appreciation of *Bas Bleu*, 63  
 his remarks on the Irish and Scotch, 97  
 his desire for the study of Gaelic, 97  
 as a symbol of the age, 110  
 his connection with the Thrales, 119, 120, 127, 128  
 accuses Mrs Thrale of the insolence of wealth, 122  
 his outbursts controlled by Thrale, 123  
 accuses Mrs Thrale of giving exaggerated praise, 126  
 his admiration for Mrs Thrale, 127  
 his Latin ode to her, 128  
 as executor to Thrale's will, 130, 131  
 Mrs Thrale's break with him, 132, 133

Johnson, Dr, halloos Burney on to attack Mrs Montagu, 145  
 attacks card-parties in *Rambler*, 146  
 advises sweetmeats for parties, 147  
 his later opinion on card-playing, 148  
 his remark on Mr Vesey, 170  
 his contributors to *Rambler*, 190  
 his behaviour to Mrs Williams, 193  
 his opinion on Chesterfield's *Letters*, 202  
 his portrait in Rowlandson's caricature, 217  
 his portrait in Barry's picture, 219, 220  
 his admiration for Dr Burney, 224  
 his description of Fanny Burney's modesty, 225  
 his friendship for Fanny Burney, 229, 230  
 his exuberance of spirits, 229  
 on Tea, 254  
 his disapproval of Lady Miller's parties, 257  
 his Ode to Mrs Carter, 265  
 his tribute to Mrs Carter's cooking, 266, 323  
 his belief in influence of the dead, 277  
 his religious temperament, 278  
 his mind compared to a garden, 295  
 his friendship with Hannah More, 305, 306  
 objects to her reading *Port-Royalists*, 307  
 his opinion on needlework, 323  
 his test of civilization, 325  
 on Mrs Montagu's benevolence, 326

Juniper Hall, 233, 238, 239

KAUFFMAN, Angelica, 53, 218

"LACTILLA," 315  
 Ladies' Charitable Society, 329  
 "Lady's Last Stake, The," Hogarth's, 214, 215  
 Lansdowne, Lord and Lady, 89  
 Lenox, Mrs, 10, 333  
*Letters on England, Holland, and Italy*, Madame du Bocage's, 249  
*Letters on Filial Obedience*, Mrs Chapone's, 194, 195, 196

- Letters on the Improvement of the Mind*, Mrs Chapone's, 88, 190, 201, 203-208, 332
- Letters to his Son*, Lord Chesterfield's, 202, 203
- Lichfield Coterie, 259, 260, 261
- Life of Beattie*, Sir William Forbes', 21
- Life of Lord Lyttleton*, Dr Johnson's, 59, 60
- Literary Magazine*, 254
- Lock, Mr and Mrs, 239
- Lucan, Lady (Blue-Stocking hostess), 11, 255
- Lucan (near Dublin), 163, 171, 294
- Lyttleton, Lord, his tribute to Mrs Montagu, 28, 48
- Mrs Montagu's letters to him, 36, 38
- his *Dialogues of the Dead*, 46, 60
- his description of Mrs Montagu, 48
- his friendship for Mrs Montagu, 56, 57
- Johnson's *Life* of him, 60
- in *Bas Bleu*, 64, 65
- his acquaintanceship with Vesey, 169
- visited by Mrs Chapone and Mrs Montagu, 208
- his religious convictions, 279
- his place in Worcestershire, 292
- MACARTNEY, Lord, 49
- Macaulay, Mrs, 333
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington, 6, 318, 319
- Macleod, Dowager Lady, 253
- Mason, William, on Dr Johnson's and Mrs Montagu's quarrel, 61
- enacts Maro in *Bas Bleu*, 76
- his portrait in Barry's picture, 220
- his *English Garden*, 289, 290, 292
- Matrimonial Creed*, Mrs Chapone's, 194, 196, 197
- Maxwell, Dr, 59
- Memoirs of Dr Burney*, Madame d'Arblay's, 137, 167, 182, 244, 328
- Middleton, Dr, 30
- Miller, Lady (Blue-Stocking hostess), her vase at Batheaston, 256, 257
- her appearance, 257
- opinions on her entertainments, 258
- encourages Miss Seward, 258
- Miscellanies*, Mrs Carter's, 268
- Monbodo, Lord, 68
- Monckton, Miss (Blue-Stocking hostess), 24, 255
- Monsey, Dr, uses term "blue-stockings" (1756), 22
- his admiration for Mrs Montagu, 56, 57
- character described by Mrs Montagu, 57
- Montagu, Edward, marries Elizabeth Robinson, 33, 92
- his character and pursuits, 34
- admiration for his wife, 56
- his preoccupations, 75
- his view of Mrs Carter, 276
- Montagu, Edward Wortley, 33, 91
- Montagu House, Portman Square, Room of Cupidons, 50
- Feather Room, 52
- Great Room, 53
- Horace Walpole's opinion of, 53
- breakfast parties at, 56, 250
- its "quantity of air," 273
- the chimney-sweeper feasts at, 327, 328
- Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley, her marriage, 91
- on the necessity for concealing learning, 108, 335
- her view of man, 196
- her daily diet, 247
- verses prefixed to her *Letters*, 283
- her son kidnapped, 328
- her belief in higher education of women, 335
- Montagu, Mrs (Elizabeth Robinson), her wit, 9
- her conversation, 10, 40, 41, 55
- in *Herald* verses, 11
- her place in Female Administration, 12
- her cognomens, 13, 28
- on the Witlings, 19
- connection with origin of term *Blue-Stocking*, 22
- causes for her renown as hostess, 29
- as a child, 31
- as a girl, 31
- friendship with Duchess of Portland, 32
- her early letters, 32
- her appearance, 33
- her marriage, 33
- her temperament, 35
- her appreciation of nature, 36
- her censures on country-life, 36
- her correspondence, 37
- its prolixity, 38
- its "picture-drawing" faculty, 38, 39



Montagu, Mrs (Elizabeth Robinson),  
 her reading, 39  
 her *Essay on Shakespeare*, 41  
 her sensitiveness to coming influences, 42, 43  
 uses comparative method, 43  
 her account of the Præternatural Beings, 44  
 her attack on Voltaire, 45  
 Johnson's opinion on the *Essay*, 45  
 Cowper's opinion on the *Essay*, 46  
 her three *Dialogues of the Dead*, 46, 47  
 contemporary descriptions of her, 48, 49, 50  
 her Room of Cupidons, 50  
 her Chinese Room, 51, 250  
 her Feather Room, 52, 53  
 her qualities as a hostess, 54, 149  
 frequenters of her assemblies, 55  
 her lavish entertainment, 56  
 her friendships, 56, 57  
 her relations with Dr Johnson, 58-61  
 in *Bas Bleu*, 64  
 in *Sensibility*, 66  
 her complexion, 67  
 her use of the Plunge-Bath, 68  
 her appearance and dress, 71  
 her descriptions of Mrs Delany, 82, 86  
 her opinion of Dr Delany, 95  
 her ban on card-playing, 148  
 on the "visiting-tone," 151  
 on subjective landscape, 157  
 her opinion of Mr Vesey, 175  
 her "Circle" method, 181  
 described by Madame D'Arblay, 182  
 and by Lady Louisa Stuart, 183, 184  
 on Mrs Chapone's loss, 200  
 her "correction" of Mrs Chapone's *Letters*, 201  
 her account of Mrs Delany's artistic gifts, 215, 216  
 as a follower of fashion, 217  
 painted by Sir Joshua, 218  
 her portrait in Barry's picture, 218, 219, 220  
 her breakfast-parties, 250  
 her Feast of Shells, 252  
 her *Thé*, 253  
 her tribute to Mrs Carter, 266  
 her absence of romance, 270  
 her view of Stoicism, 275  
 her annuity to Mrs Carter, 281

Montagu, Mrs (Elizabeth Robinson), her descriptions of Mrs Carter, 284, 285  
 her gardens, 295  
 as a housewife, 322  
 her needlework, 323  
 as Lady Bountiful, 326, 327  
 her feasts to chimney-sweepers, 29, 327  
 her love of scenic effect, 328  
 Moore, Thomas, 141  
*Morals, Christian*, Hannah More's, 306  
 More, Elizabeth, 322  
 More, Hannah, on sums lost in gambling, 3  
 inveighs against follies of fashion, 4  
 as a moralist, 6  
 her noble energy, 9  
 in *Herald* verses, 10  
 her place in Female Administration, 12  
 called "Saint Hannah," 13  
 her tribute to Mrs Montagu, 28  
 her description of Mrs Montagu, 48  
 her crystallization of the Blue-Stocking movement, 63  
 dramatis personæ of her *Bas Bleu*, 64, 65, 76, 77  
 dramatis personæ of her *Sensibility*, 65, 66  
 her appearance and dress, 71  
 supers in her *Bas Bleu*, 77  
 on Mrs Delany's knowledge, 101  
 the lineage of the *Bas Bleu*, 105  
 on the making of synonyms, 140  
 on the *Bas Bleu* assemblies, 149  
 on Conversation generally, 150, 151  
 on Politics in Conversation, 154, 155  
 on the Society at Mrs Vesey's, 170  
 her veneration for Mrs Handcock, 173  
 her account of Mrs Vesey's last days, 177  
 her description of Bishop of St Asaph's assembly, 180  
 her criticism of the "Circle" method, 184  
 on the reading of Shakespeare, 206  
 her description of Mrs Montagu's *Thé*, 253  
 on Mrs Carter's religious views, 278  
 on Sandleford, 295  
 her garden, 296  
 her adaptation to her age, 299  
 her apparent contradictions of character, 300  
 her intuitions and limitations, 301  
 events of her life, 301

- More, Hannah, her social success, 302  
 her friendship with the Garricks, 503  
 her friendship with Horace Walpole, 304  
 her friendship with Dr Johnson, 305, 306  
 as a church-woman, 306  
 her views on Christianity, 307  
 her activities and writings, 308, 309  
 her social system, 310  
 her educational work, 311  
 her curriculum, 312  
 her educational ideals, 313  
 her persecution at Blagdon, 314, 315  
 her active benevolence, 315, 316  
 her popularity and balance, 317  
 her appearance, 318  
 her relations with Macaulay, 319  
 her importance as a force, 319  
 her collection of facts and statistics, 331  
 the independent woman, 334
- More, Sarah, 305
- Mount Morris (Kent), 30, 293
- Mulso, Hester, *see* Chapone, Mrs
- NEWTON, John, 306, 318, 319
- Norbury Park, 239
- Norwich Coterie, 259, 260
- Observations made in the course of a Journey through France, Italy, and Germany*, Mrs Piozzi's, 139
- Observations on the Conversion of St Paul*, Lord Lyttleton's, 279
- O'Connor, Charles, 97
- Ode to Wisdom*, Mrs Carter's, 265
- Opie, John, 216, 217
- Opie, Mrs, 260
- Ord, Mrs (Blue-Stocking hostess), 26  
 her method of arranging guests, 187  
 her importance as hostess, 254
- Orrery, Lord, 97
- Ossian*, Macpherson's, Mrs Montagu's admiration of, 43
- PENDARVES, Mrs, *see* Delany, Mrs
- Pendarves, Mr, 89, 90
- Pennington, Rev. Montagu, 158, 276
- Pepys, Sir William Weller, enacts Lœlius in *Bas Bleu*, 76, 77  
 on the death of conversation, 155
- Percy, Earl, Hannah More's, 299, 304
- Perkins, Mr, 131, 132
- Pestalozzi, 311, 312
- Phillips, Mrs, 240
- Piety, Practical*, Hannah More's, 306
- Piozzi, Mrs, *see* Thrale, Mrs
- Piozzi, Signor, 117, 121, 134, 135, 136, 138, 139
- Plunge-Bath in Marylebone, 68
- Poetical Amusements at a Villa near Bath*, 257
- Polite Conversations*, Swift's, 248
- Pope, Alexander, 287, 290
- Porteous, Bishop, 308, 315
- Portland, Duchess of, Prior's verses about her, 32  
 friendship with Mrs Montagu, 32, 39  
 as a craftswoman, 85  
 friendship with Mrs Delany, 89  
 visited by king and queen, 101, 249  
 her reported praise of *Cecilia*, 231
- Prayers and Meditations*, Dr Johnson's, 6
- Prior, Matthew, 32
- RADCLIFFE, Mrs, 282, 333
- Raikes, Robert, 311
- Rambler, The*, 146, 189, 278, 337
- Rambouillet, Hôtel, 106
- Ranelagh, 220, 251
- Rape of the Lock*, 67
- Rasselas*, 190
- Récamier, Madame, 112
- Retrospection*, Mrs Piozzi's, 140
- Reynolds, Miss, on Johnson's admiration for Mrs Thrale, 128  
 on feminine passivity, 212
- Reynolds, Sir Joshua, opinion on Mrs Montagu's *Essay*, 45  
 admiration for Mrs Delany's *Flora*, 80  
 his portraits in the Streatham Gallery, 123  
 his interpretation of the Eighteenth Century ideal, 211, 217  
 and Fanny Burney, 212  
 his portrait of Mrs Thrale, 213  
 his praise of *Cecilia*, 231
- Richardson, Samuel, Miss Highmore's drawing, 73  
 contributor to *Rambler*, 190  
 given portrait of Mrs Carter, 191  
 friendship for Miss Mulso, 191, 193  
 his controversy with Miss Mulso, 194  
 his limitations of class, 199  
 his use of *Ode to Wisdom*, 265
- Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft's, 335

- Robinson, Elizabeth, *see* Montagu, Mrs
- Robinson, Matthew, 33
- Rogers, Samuel, 244
- Roland, Madame, 112
- Rousseau, 88, 203, 209
- Rowlandson, 3, 210, 217
- Russel, Dr, 251
- ST ASAPHS, Bishop of, 139, 180
- Salon, The, in Seventeenth-Century France, 106, 107  
in Eighteenth-Century France, 108, 109  
in England and France contrasted, 110-113, 115, 116
- Sandleford (Berkshire), Stillingfleet's visit there, 22
- Brown's improvements at, 295
- Savage, Richard, 280
- School for Scandal*, 152, 255
- Schwellenberg, Mrs, 234-237
- Scott, Sir Walter, when on Island of Skye, 128  
and Madame d'Arblay, 226, 244  
as Miss Seward's literary executor, 261  
on *English Garden*, 291
- Search after Happiness*, The, Hannah More's, 301, 309
- Secker, Archbishop, 266, 274, 275, 282, 323, 337
- Sensibility*, Hannah More's, 65, 66
- Seward, Miss Anna, describes Mrs Thrale, 124  
contributes to Batheaston Vase, 258  
her coterie at Lichfield, 259  
her sentiment, 260  
her attitude towards life, 261  
a poetess, 333
- Seward, Mr, 192
- Sheridan, his lines on Delville, 95  
his *School for Scandal*, 152  
his dedication to Lady Crew, 255
- Sketches, Moral*, Hannah More's, 306
- Society of Arts, 218
- Solander, Dr, 80
- Stillingfleet, Benjamin, wears blue stockings, 21  
leaves off blue stockings, 22
- Streatfield, Mrs, 227
- Streatfield, Sophy, in *Herald* verses, 11  
Thrale enamoured of, 126
- Streatham Gallery, 123, 213
- Streatham Place, 119-121, 124, 126, 127, 138, 229, 293-295
- Strictures on Female Education*, Hannah More's, 309
- Strictures on the Manners of the Great*, Hannah More's, 6, 308
- Stuart, James (Athenian), 52
- Stuart, Lady Louisa, on Mrs Montagu's parties, 26  
her description of Mrs Montagu, 49-51  
and of frequenters of Mrs Montagu's assemblies, 55  
and of Mrs Montagu's "Circle" method, 182, 183  
her mention of Blue-Stocking hostesses, 255  
her opinion of Mrs Carter, 267, 268
- Swift, Dean, as a Satirist, 5  
his appreciation of Mrs Delany, 83, 84  
Mrs Delany's description of him, 92, 93  
his correspondence with her, 93, 94  
Dr Delany's defence of him, 97  
his account of a day's meal, 248
- TALBOT, Miss, 161, 190, 267, 274, 275, 280
- Temple, Sir William, 256, 289
- Thomson, James, on character of Lord Lyttleton, 59  
his description of Hagley Park, 292
- Thrale, Miss, 135
- Thrale, Mr, 75  
his importance and wealth, 120, 121  
described by Boswell, 121  
and by Mrs Thrale, 122, 125  
and by Dr Johnson, 123  
controls Johnson's outbursts, 123  
his Streatham Gallery, 123, 124  
his exclusion of Mrs Thrale from domestic affairs, 125, 322  
his entertainments, 127  
his death, 130  
his business failings, 130
- Thrale, Mrs (Mrs Piozzi), her vivacity, 9  
in *Herald* verses, 11  
her place in Female Administration, 12  
called "Hebe," 13  
on Mrs Montagu's knowledge, 41  
her description of Mrs Montagu, 55  
her use of rouge, 67  
on Lady Sarah Bunbury, 69  
her appearance and dress, 73, 118  
her force of personality, 117

- Thrale, Mrs, her vivacity contrasted with Mrs Montagu's, 118  
 her sweetness of temper, 119  
 her connection with Johnson, 119, 120  
 her description of Thrale, 122  
 refused share in domestic affairs, 125  
 her colloquial wit, 125  
 her sentimental exaggeration, 126  
 her book-knowledge, 126  
 her entertainments, 127, 251  
 her feeling for Johnson as viewed by herself in retrospect, 128  
 and as reported by contemporaries, 129  
 her business capacity, 130, 131  
 her break with Johnson, 132  
 her *Anecdotes*, 133  
 the controversy they aroused, 134  
 her marriage with Piozzi, 134, 136  
 the opposition to it, 135-137  
 her love the unforgivable feature, 136  
 her life after second marriage, 138  
 after second widowhood, 139  
 her writings, 139, 140  
 her gaiety, 141  
 her lines to Piozzi, 141  
 her ban on card-playing, 148  
 her function as hostess, 149  
 painted by Sir Joshua, 213  
 her relations with Hogarth, 214, 215  
 in Rowlandson's caricature, 217  
 on Fanny Burney's oversensitiveness, 235  
 her gardens and garden-image, 294, 295  
*Thraliana*, 25, 122  
*Tracts, Cheap Repository*, Hannah More's, 299, 308, 311  
 Trimmer, Mrs, 311, 333
- Vauxhall, 217, 288
- Vesey, Mr, 75, 163, 169, 170, 171, 172, 175
- Vesey, Mrs, her "sympathy," 9, 13  
 invention of term "Blue-Stocking" ascribed to her, 22  
*Bas Bleu* dedicated to her, 64  
 her appearance and dress, 70  
 her ban on card-playing, 148  
 her function as hostess, 149  
 influence of landscape upon, 157  
 her correspondence, 158  
 her character, 159
- Vesey, Mrs, her friends, 159, 160  
 her idealistic temperament, 164  
 her restlessness, 164  
 her impracticality, 165  
 her "oddities," 166  
 her childishness, 167  
 her letters to Mrs Carter, 168  
 her pursuit of pleasure, 169  
 her birth and marriages, 169  
 Mr Vesey's neglect of her, 170, 171  
 characteristics of her parties, 174  
 her magic of personality, 175  
 her grief at Vesey's death, 176  
 her failing faculties, 176  
 her disintegration of the "Circle," 181  
 her gifts described in *Bas Bleu*, 185  
 and elsewhere, 185  
 her religious doubts, 277  
*Village Politics*, Hannah More's, 308  
 Voltaire, 40, 42, 43, 45, 110
- WALPOLE, Horace, his strictures on gaming, 3  
 his opinion of Hannah More, 10  
 his play upon the word *Blue-Stocking*, 24, 25  
 his appreciation of Montagu House, 53  
 description of Mrs Montagu's breakfast-parties, 56  
 resentment against Johnson, 61  
 on use of cold water, 68  
 enacts Horace in *Bas Bleu*, 76, 77  
 his *Anecdotes of Painting* and Mrs Delany, 80  
 his description of Bulstrode, 100  
 Madame du Deffand's affection for him, 113, 114  
 his appearance, 114  
 his criticism of Mrs Piozzi's *Anecdotes*, 133  
 calls her Mrs *Frail* Piozzi, 137  
 his tribute to Mrs Vesey, 160  
 on Mrs Vesey's parties, 175, 186  
 his power of soothing Mrs Vesey, 177  
 his criticism of Barry's "The Society," 220  
 his appreciation of Fanny Burney, 226  
 his perception of her falling-off, 234  
 his hour of dinner, 249  
 his scorn of the Batheaston "Parnassus," 258  
 on landscape gardening, 288

- Walpole, Horace, his opinion of *The Botanic Garden*, 289  
 his friendship with Hannah More, 304, 305  
 his name for Mary Wollstonecraft, 335
- Walsingham, Mrs (Blue - Stocking hostess), 101, 255
- Wanderer, The*, Fanny Burney's, 243
- Wesley, John, his religious views, 6  
 his correspondence with Mrs Delany, 90
- West, Gilbert, his letters to Mrs Montagu, 40
- West, Gilbert, influence of landscape upon, 157
- Whitfield, 6
- Wilberforce, William, 309
- Williams, Mrs, 58, 193
- Winchester, Dean of, 192
- Witlings The*, Fanny Burney's, 19
- Wollstonecraft, Mary, 283, 335
- Wraxall, Nathaniel, 115, 254
- YOUNG, Dr, *Letter on Original Composition*, 39  
 influence of landscape upon, 157

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## CONTENTS

	PAGE		PAGE
General Literature, . . .	2-24	Little Library, . . .	32
Ancient Cities, . . .	24	Little Quarto Shakespeare, . . .	33
Antiquary's Books, . . .	25	Miniature Library, . . .	33
Arden Shakespeare, . . .	25	New Historical Series, . . .	34
Beginner's Books, . . .	26	New Library of Medicine, . . .	34
Business Books, . . .	26	New Library of Music, . . .	34
Byzantine Texts, . . .	26	Oxford Biographies, . . .	34
Churchman's Bible, . . .	26	Romantic History, . . .	34
Churchman's Library, . . .	27	School Examination Series, . . .	35
Classical Translations, . . .	27	School Histories, . . .	35
Classics of Art, . . .	27	Simplified French Texts, . . .	35
Commercial Series, . . .	27	Simplified German Texts, . . .	35
Connoisseur's Library, . . .	28	Six Ages of European History, . . .	36
Handbooks of English Church History, . . .	28	Standard Library, . . .	36
Illustrated Pocket Library of Plain and Coloured Books, . . .	28	Textbooks of Science, . . .	36
Junior Examination Series, . . .	29	Textbooks of Technology, . . .	37
Junior School-Books, . . .	29	Handbooks of Theology, . . .	37
Leaders of Religion, . . .	30	Westminster Commentaries, . . .	37
Library of Devotion, . . .	30		
Little Books on Art, . . .	31	Fiction, . . .	37-45
Little Galleries, . . .	31	Books for Boys and Girls, . . .	45
Little Guides, . . .	32	Novels of Alexandre Dumas, . . .	46
		Methuen's Sixpenny Books, . . .	46

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THE YELLOW DIAMOND.  
THE LOVE THAT OVERCAME.

**Sidgwick (Mrs. Alfred).** THE KINS-MAN.

**Surtees (R. S.).** HANDLEY CROSS.  
MR. SPONGE'S SPORTING TOUR.  
ASK MAMMA.

**Walford (Mrs. L. B.).** MR. SMITH.  
COUSINS.  
THE BABY'S GRANDMOTHER.  
TROUBLESOME DAUGHTERS.

**Wallace (General Lew).** BEN-HUR.  
THE FAIR GOD.

**Watson (H. B. Marriott).** THE ADVENTURERS.

**Weekes (A. B.).** PRISONERS OF WAR.  
**Wells (H. G.).** THE SEA LADY.

**White (Percy).** A PASSIONATE PILGRIM.