HILL'S BOSWELL.

AN EXCELLENT EDITION.

BOSWELL'S LIFE OF JOHNSON. Including Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales. Edited by GEORGE BIRKBECK HILL, D. C. L. In 6 volumes. Portraits and Fac-similes. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press; New-York: Macmillan & Co.

Samuel Johnson's pride in his university and his college would have been gratified by the knowledge that the one would publish and a member of the other edit this sumptuously printed and carefully prepared edition of his life by Boswell. Nothing could be handsomer in typography and paper. Of the illustrations it is not possible to speak with the same admiration. They are mostly process reproductions, and it seems that the more photogravure is experimented with and "improved" by fresh patents, the more strange and ghastly its results are liable to be. The old fashioned copper-plate, line and stipple engraving, and etching are all really superior to anything the modern processes have here achieved, and to our thinking they are much more in accord with the subject and the work. No man hated shams and make-believes more heartily and thoroughly than Johnson, and it seems a pity that he should not have been given solid art work in this otherwise magnificent and meritorious edition. The illustrations, however, constitute but an insignificant feature in the publication. Of the editor's labors it is difficult to speak too highly, though Boswell has had several good editors. Macaulay's tremendous attack upon Croker no doubt produced in many minds the belief that Croker's edition was worthless. But Dr. Hill, while agreeing in many if not most of Macaulay's strictures, and while expressing his own opinion that Croker was a shallow man of no deep reading, is constrained to admit that he has been much indebted to his predecessor. Nevertheless it is true, as Macaulay charged, that Croker took wholly inexcusable liberties with his text. Much might be pardoned him for the errors of his notes, but no possible justification can be found for his presumptuous mutilation of Boswell, and his attempts at correction and emendation. The helps he gave to his successor consisted in the bringing of some special knowledge derived from connections concerning Johnson's time and contemporaries. This matter is certainly of value, for it is precisely the kind of information which as time passes becomes more precious because of the increasing differences between the separated epochs. Undoubtedly it was easier to understand Boswell without notes sixty years ago than it ever will be again. Undoubtedly, also, notes become more indispensable, and require to be fuller, as time passes. And probably few men have been better fitted for the work of annotation and editing than Dr. Birkbeck Hill.

According to his own account he was led indirectly to the study of Johnson, but having entered upon it the subject speedily possessed him. So full was he of it that being requested to write a two column review of a new edition of Boswell (Napier's) he read the whole of the six volumes through, and says he does not think he omitted so much as a line. Evidently special enthusiasm is needed for such deeds, and the devotion which has gone to the accomplishment of Dr. Hill's work is manifested in many conclusive ways. His preparatory studies must have been deep and far reaching. Samuel Johnson was a man of wide reading, not only for his own but for any period. His conversational flights were all-embracing. There are few subjects of any general interest upon which he did not discourse during the year when Boswell's tablets were busy. Both he and his biographer moreover were fond of quotation, and both were wont to take for granted their hearers' or readers' familiarity with the sources of their citations. Boswell indeed takes credit to himself for scrupulous verification of all the quotations used by the doctor, but he refers especially to the poetical quotations. In the easy talk of the tavern or the fireside many allusions were made continually which, while perfectly intelligible at the time, have become more or less obscure to all but the students of the eighteenth century. To the elucidation of all such obscurities Dr. Hill has addressed himself, and the multitude of recondite topics and references thus illuminated demonstrates the zeal and thoroughness with which he has discharged his editorial function.

It is indeed good advice that he gives in his preface, to follow Johnson's own recommendation regarding the reading of Shakespeare. There is so massive a common-sense in the passage that we shall not apologize for introducing it. Says Johnson: "Let him that is yet unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last with utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing let it not stoop at correction or explanation. When his attention is strongly engaged let it disdain alike to turn aside to the name of Theobald or of Pope. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased let him attempt exactness and read the commentators." That is a good way to read Boswell, and he can certainly be thoroughly enjoyed as he comes from the hands of Malone. But whoso desires to grasp Johnson's time, to live his life over, to understand his associates as well as himself, to get the due sense of proportion in the picture, will have, lacking time for independent research, to put himself in the hands of the commentators. Of this Croker, with all his special equipments, is least to be depended upon. In the honesty and integrity of Dr. Birkbeck Hill full trust may, on the contrary, be placed, and besides, and this is of importance, his judgment is clear and sound.

Nowhere is it more strongly exhibited than in his estimate of Boswell. Nothing in the history of literature is more curious than the position accorded this biographer. The writer of the best biography extant in any language has been admitted to a questionable fame upon sufferance. Though every man who has reached years of discretion can count upon the fingers of both hands notorious instances of bad biography, though in very recent days it has been proved that the possession of exceptional literary talent is not necessarily a guarantee against the most deplorable fiascos in this kind of history, though it has been seen that even a friend of the deceased, with every desire to exalt his honor, may, as by sheer perverseness, only write down and shame his subject; these suggestive experiences have not received their most obvious application, have not served to rehabilitate the biographer of Johnson. Even Macaulay, who so keenly appreciated the delights of Boswell's narrative, who could catalogue its merits in so splendid and graphic a diction, saw nothing in the assiduous little Scotchman but a sort of literary flunkey or jackal, and laughed at him with good-humored contempt while extolling his work. Dr. Birkbeck Hill takes a deeper, broader view. He does not hesitate to ascribe actual genius to Boswell, and this, we incline to believe, will be the ultimate judgment of the world.

For where is there such another book as Boswell's Johnson? Who can produce the equal of it for sustained interest, for dramatic force, for lifelight, for naturalness, for the exhibition of human traits, for the ingenuous exhibition of petty foibles, for the skilful setting forth of great arguments? It is not in the power of a mere stenographer to produce these effects. The capacity which has succeeded in making Dr. Johnson the best and most fully known character in English literature, which has so reproduced the man in body and clothes, in mind and soul, which has drawn for us his character, his temperament, his weaknesses, his excellences, his least little habits, with a detail absolutely microscopic and a graphic force unparalleled; which has made of this life a gallery of striking scenes, each pregnant with suggestion, each illustrative of some trait in the great man's many-sided character—the capacity which has been equal to these effects must deserve a more liberal estimate than it has hitherto received. And Boswell did more than all this. While concentrating his attention and cares upon Johnson, he drew, in lower relief, but still clearly and firmly, whole groups of his contemporaries. We have been made acquainted with them all, the Thrales, Dr. Burney and his charming daughter, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Burke, Garrick, Topham Beauclerk, Bennet, Langton, Malone, Thomas Warton, Adam Smith, Goldsmith, Dick Savage, and how many more; but for Boswell's genius is it not probable that with regard to many of these our knowledge to-day would be far less intimate, our feelings for less cordial than they are! For it is a peculiarity of Boswell that though he has more than a spice of malice in his composition, though his self-conceit is so colossal as to keep him always bristling against possible slights, he yet contrives to present most of his dramatis personæ in the best light, and to illustrate their largest aptitudes in some interesting and amusing anecdote or example.

Dr. Hill observes in the preface: "I had indeed at one time intended to enlarge this relation by essays on Boswell, Johnson, Mrs. Thrale and perhaps on other subjects." It is greatly to be regretted that he did not adhere to this purpose, and it is sincerely to be hoped that in a future edition he may make the suggested additions which are sure to be valuable and which may be trusted to throw even some new light upon the subjects. In the work before us the editor has done his duty most judiciously. He has in his own words "attempted not to criticise but to illustrate Johnson's statements." In order to show what Johnson really thought it is necessary often to go to his printed works, for, as he himself said, "sometimes he talked for victory," but he was too conscientious to perpetuate error by writing it. Dr. Hill has performed a service which will be appreciated in citing from Johnson's collected works whenever his spoken and written views seem to differ and it is desirable to ascertain which he really held. The scrupulous verifier of quotations apparently may experience a novel emotion occasionally in tracing up those used in the life of Johnson, for Dr. Hill remarks, "In one case my long search was rewarded by the discovery that Boswell was quoting himself."

While the foot-notes are abundant, for the most part original, and generally sufficient, longer explanations and discussions than could be thrown in that form have been used as appendices. Of these there are several in nearly every volume, and many of them deal with fresh information. The little essay on Johnson's feelings toward the founders of the United States, for example, goes to show that the antipathy manifested by him to the Colonists was really attributable to the strength of his abhorrence of slavery. He could not reconcile it to his conscience that the men who talked so boldly about the rights of men could be sincere so long as they continued to traffic in their fellow creatures. This view of the situation Dr. Hill considers dominated Johnson's expressions on American affairs. How he disposed of the awkward fact that the maintenance of the slave trade was due to the obstinate inhumanity of the British Government itself, and how he got over the other circumstance that the Colonists had protested and petitioned against the continuation of the infamous commerce is not explained, perhaps for the reason that there is really no explanation of it possible save the warping effect of Johnson's Toryism.

Among the new matter here published for the first time Dr. Hill cites the following: "Fifteen hitherto unpublished letters of Johnson; his college composition in Latin prose; a long extract from his manuscript diary; a suppressed passage in his 'Journey to the Western Islands'; Boswell's letters of acceptance of the office of Secretary for Foreign Correspondence to the Royal Academy; the proposal for the publication of a Geographical Dictionary issued by Johnson's beloved friend, Dr. Bathurst; and Mr. Recorder Longley's record of his conversation with Johnson on Greek metres." Dr. Hill appears to hold a higher opinion of Johnson's Latin verses than is warranted by the actual merit of those exercises. Croker, as is well known, once asked the Marquis Wellesley, who was an authority on the subject, what he thought of Johnson's verses, and Lord Wellesley, under a pledge of secrecy first exacted from his interrogator, replied that they were all bad, but that some of them were worse than others. If this opinion be sound the composition from the Pembroke College MSS. is not of much importance.

Dr. Hill justly prides himself upon his index, which fills more than half the sixth volume, and which in every page exhibits the most labored and conscientious research. He has also deserved well of men of letters by a concordance of Johnsonian sayings. "Next to Shakespeare," he observes, "he is, I believe, quoted and misquoted the most frequently of all our writers"; and here at least is a help against the further misquotation of him. Taking it altogether Dr. Birkbeck Hill's edition of Boswell may perhaps be regarded as the most scholarly, painstaking, liberal-minded, fair and complete that has yet been published. No doubt it has faults and omissions, but it is honest work throughout, and careful and loving work, and it is informed by a sanity and ripeness of judgment and illustrated by an extent of information which must place and keep it in the front rank.

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THE PETROLEUM MARKET.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD AND RANGE OF PRICES.

The crude oil market yesterday was less active than on Wednesday. There was no important news from the oil fields and the scalpers did most of the trading. Considerable steadiness in prices was shown but near the close the tendency was downward.

The range of prices and the total dealings at the Consolidated Exchange were as follows:

Opening	57⅞	Lowest	57⅛
Highest	58	Final	57⅛
Sales, barrels			962,000

Refined oil was unchanged at 6½ cents per gallon.

PITTSBURG, Penn., Aug. 4.—Crude Oil—National Transit Certificates opened at 57½ and closed at 57¼; highest price, 58⅛; lowest price, 57⅛.

TITUSVILLE, Penn., Aug. 4—Crude Oil—National Transit Certificates opened at 57½ and closed at 57¼; highest price, 58; lowest price, 57⅛.

BRADFORD, Penn., Aug. 4.—Crude Oil—National Transit Certificates opened at 57½ and closed at 57⅛; highest price, 58⅛; lowest price, 57⅛. Clearances, 360,000 barrels.

OIL CITY, Penn., Aug. 4.—Crude Oil—National Transit Certificates opened at 57⅝ and closed at 57⅛; highest price, 58; lowest price, 57⅛. Sales, 497,000 barrels; charters, 93,650 barrels; clearances, 1,462,000 barrels; shipments, 74,879 barrels; runs, 56,988 barrels.

COTTON MARKETS—BY TELEGRAPH.

LIVERPOOL, Aug. 4.—12:30 p. m.—Cotton—Business is good at hardening rates. Middling Uplands, 5⅛d.; do. Orleans, 5⅛d. Sales—12,000 bales, including 2,000 bales for speculation and export. Receipts 5,000 bales, including 4,200 bales American.

Futures firm. Uplands Low Middling clause, August delivery, 5 25-64d.; do. August and September delivery, 5 25