

**THE SEASONS: A POEM,
COMPARED WITH
THE LONDON AND
EDINBURGH EDITIONS**

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JAMES THOMSON

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S E A S O N S :

A POEM.

BY

JAMES THOMSON.

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IMPROVED EDITION,
WITH NOTES AND AN INDEX.

NEW YORK:
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1854.

THE
L I F E
OR
JAMES THOMSON.

It is related of a lover of poetry and of nature, that, on being asked which of the Seasons he liked best, he replied, "If you mean the natural seasons, I prefer the *Spring*—but if Thomson's, *all*." This production, now republished, of one of the best standard British poets, is so complete as a whole, although written at different times and under different circumstances, that one is greatly at a loss which portion to prefer, and is very certain that no part could be omitted, without marring the symmetry of a most perfect work. Some passages are, indeed, more highly wrought than others—some descriptions more true than others to nature and to life; but, as a whole, the united poem, "The Seasons," is so chaste and beautiful, that it may be said of the author and the work, with as much truth as in almost any case whatever, that there is in it "no line which, dying, he might wish to blot." What is not a little remarkable, such was the character of Thomson, that the bathing scene, and the exhortation to this duty and

privilege, in his *Summer*, was written by one who is said never himself to have ventured into the water, and the exhortation in the same, to the "falsely luxurious," to awake and spring from the bed of sloth, by one who was himself so indolent as often not to rise until mid-day. So true it is, that we can all preach much better than we practise.

The Author of the *Seasons* was born in 1700, at Ednam, near Kelso, in Scotland, being one of nine children of the minister of that place. He was sent to the school of Jedburgh, where he early discovered a propensity to poetry, which drew the attention of the neighboring gentry. He was removed to the university of Edinburgh, and induced, by the wishes of his friends, to study divinity; but he soon gave up theological studies, and paid an exclusive attention to literature. After acting for some time as a private tutor to Lord Binning, he quitted the university, and went to London, where his *Winter* was purchased by Millar for a very trifling consideration, and published in 1726, with a dedication to Sir Spencer Compton. Its merits, however, were not discovered until it accidentally caught the eye of Mr. Whately, who brought it into general notice. It led to the author's introduction to Pope. In 1727, he published his *Summer*, which he addressed to Bubb Doddington, his poem to the memory of Sir Isaac Newton, his *Britannia*, and, in 1728, his *Spring*, and in 1730, his *Autumn*. He had previously brought on the stage his tragedy of *Sophonista*; and, not long after, he was selected as the travelling associate of Mr. Talbot, with whom

he visited the continent. On his return, he was rewarded with the post of secretary of briefs by the Lord Chancellor Talbot, which was merely a sinecure. About this time, he published his poem of Liberty, with the cool reception of which he was much disappointed.

Soon after, the death of Lord Chancellor Talbot vacated Thomson's office, and Lord Hardwick, who succeeded to the seals, gave it to another. An introduction to Frederic, prince of Wales, produced him a pension from that prince of £100 per annum. In 1738, he produced a second tragedy, entitled Agamemnon, which was coldly received, and a third, entitled Edward and Eleonora. In 1740, he composed the masque of Alfred, in conjunction with Mallet; but which of them wrote the song, since become national, of "Rule Britannia," has not been ascertained. In 1745, his most successful tragedy, entitled Tancred and Sigismunda, was brought out, and warmly applauded. The following year produced his *Castle of Indolence*.

He now obtained the place of surveyor-general of the Leeward Islands, but soon after (1748) died of a cold caught on the Thames, in the forty-eighth year of his age. He was buried at Richmond, and a monument was erected to him in Westminster Abbey, in 1762, with the profits of an edition of his works. He left a tragedy entitled *Coriolanus*, which was acted for the benefit of his family.

Thomson was large and ungainly in person, and somewhat heavy in deportment, except among inti

mate friends, by whom he was much beloved for the kindness of his heart. His *Seasons* abounds in sensibility and beauty of natural description. His diction, although occasionally cumbrous and labored, is always energetic and expressive. His *Castle of Indolence* is the most spirited and beautiful of all the imitations of Spenser, both for moral, poetical, and descriptive power. His tragedies possess little dramatic interest.

This edition of *The Seasons*, with an accurate index, and prefatory argument to each of the books, will, it is believed, commend itself to the general reader and to those particularly engaged in literary instruction.

Concord, N. H. Jan. 1840.

SPRING.



The subject proposed. Inscribed to the Countess of Hertford.

The Season is described as it affects the various parts of Nature, ascending from the lower to the higher ; with digressions arising from the subject. Its influence on inanimate Matter, on Vegetables, on brute animals, and, last, on Man ; concluding with a dissensive from the wild and irregular passion of Love, opposed to that of a pure and happy kind.

Come, gentle Spring, ethereal Mildness, come,
And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,
While music wakes around, veiled in a shower
Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.
O Hertford, fitted or to shine in courts 5
With unaffected grace, or walk the plain
With innocence and meditation joined
In soft assemblage, listen to my song,
Which thy own Season paints ; when Nature all
Is blooming and benevolent, like thee. 10
And see where surly WINTER passes off,
Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts :
His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
The shattered forest, and the ravaged vale ;
While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch, 15
Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.
As yet the trembling year is unconfirmed,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets 20
Deform the day delightless : so that scarce
The bittern knows his time, with bill engulfed,
To shake the sounding marsh ; or from the shore
The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
And sing their wild notes to the listening waste. 25

At last from Arics rolls the bounteous sun,
 And the bright Bull receives him. Then no more
 Th' expansive atmosphere is cramped with cold,
 But, full of life and vivifying soul,
 Lifts the light clouds sublime, and spreads them thin,
 Fleecy, and white o'er all surrounding heaven. 31

Forth fly the tepid airs; and unconfined,
 Unbinding earth, the moving softness strays.
 Joyous, th' impatient husbandman perceives
 Relenting Nature, and his lusty steers 35
 Drives from their stalls, to where the well-used plough
 Lies in the furrow, loosened from the frost.

There unrefusing, to the harnessed yoke,
 They lend their shoulder, and begin their toil,
 Cheered by the simple song and soaring lark. 40
 Meanwhile incumbent o'er the shining share
 The master leans, removes th' obstructing clay,
 Winds the whole work, and sidelong lays the glebe.

While thro' the neighboring fields the sower stalks,
 With measured step; and liberal throws the grain 45
 Into the faithful bosom of the ground:
 The harrow follows harsh, and shuts the scene.

Be gracious, Heaven! for now laborious man
 Has done his part. Ye fostering breezes, blow;
 Ye softening dews, ye tender showers, descend! 50

And temper all, thou world-reviving sun,
 Into the perfect year! Nor ye who live
 In luxury and ease, in pomp and pride,
 Think these lost themes unworthy of your ear:
 Such themes as these the rural *Mars* sung (e) 55
 To wide-imperial Rome, in the full height
 Of elegance and taste, by Greece refined.

In ancient times, the sacred plough employed
 The kings and awful fathers of mankind:
 And some, with whom compared your insect tribes 60
 Are but the beings of a summer's day,
 Have held the scale of empire, ruled the storm
 Of mighty war; then, with unwearied hand,