

**PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS ON VARIOUS
SUBJECTS; MRS. PIOZZI AND ISSAC
WATTS: BEING ANNOTATIONS IN
THE AUTOGRAPH OF MRS. PIOZZI ON A
COPY OF THE FIRST EDITION OF THE
PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAYS OF WATTS**

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Philosophical essays on various subjects; Mrs. Piozzi and Issac Watts: being annotations in the autograph of Mrs. Piozzi on a copy of the first edition of the Philosophical essays of Watts by James P. R. Lyell

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JAMES P. R. LYELL

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**PHILOSOPHICAL
E S S A Y S**

O N

Various SUBJECTS,

V I Z.

Space, Substance, Body, Spirit, the Operations of the Soul in Union with the Body, Innate Ideas, perpetual Consciousness, Place and Motion of Spirits, the departing Soul, the Resurrection of the Body, the Production and Operations of Plants and Animals;

With some REMARKS on Mr. *Locke's* Essay on the Human Understanding.

To which is subjoind

A brief Scheme of ONTOLOGY,

O R

**The Science of BEING in general
with its Affections.**

By I. W.

L O N D O N :

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MRS. PIOZZI AND ISAAC WATTS

BEING
" ANNOTATIONS IN THE
AUTOGRAPH OF MRS. PIOZZI ON
A COPY OF THE FIRST EDITION
OF THE *Philosophical Essays* OF WATTS

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

by
JAMES P. R. LYELL,
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PREFACE

THE chance acquisition in an old bookshop of a copy of the first edition of *The Philosophical Essays* of Isaac Watts, formerly in the possession of and annotated copiously by Mrs. Piozzi, is the excuse for the following pages, if any is needed in these days, when the cult of Dr. Johnson and his circle has attained such an assured position in connection with English literature of the eighteenth century.

The fact that apparently these annotations have been hitherto unrecorded, and contain references to Dr. Johnson and other distinguished people, besides affording some new light on the versatile genius of Mrs. Piozzi, is the additional apology offered for removing the notes, upon which this essay is based, from the obscurity of a bibliographer's notebook.

My thanks are due to Mr. L. F. Powell, M.A., of the Taylor Library, for his kindness in reading over these pages and making some suggestions based upon his special knowledge of the subject.

J. P. R. L.

New College,
Oxford.
June 1934.

INTRODUCTION

ONE is accustomed to recall Isaac Watts as a hymnologist, rather than as a philosopher or a metaphysician. His hymns, such as "How bright these glorious spirits shine," "Jesus shall reign where'er the Sun," "O God, our help in ages past," and many others to be found in any recognised collection, are more familiar to most of us than his *Scheme of Ontology*, his *Dissertations on Space*, or his remarks on Locke's *Human Understanding*, all of which are included in his *Philosophical Essays*, the volume of which attracted Mrs. Piozzi.

Watts was born in Southampton in 1674, and was the son of a schoolmaster in that town, a Nonconformist, and a man who had suffered imprisonment for his opinions in the reign of Charles II. Isaac, the eldest of his nine children, began his education at home. It is recorded that he commenced to learn Latin at the age of four! Be this as it may, he laid the foundations of a sound knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew under the direction of the Rev. John Pinhorne, Master of the Free School at Southampton, and Rector of one of the churches in that city.

At the age of sixteen he was sent to an academy kept by the Rev. Thomas Rowe in Stoke Newington, where it is said that he increased his general knowledge with marked assiduity. One of his biographers, Dr. Thomas Gibbons,* refers to a large volume in the handwriting

*Gibbons—*Memoirs of Rev. Isaac Watts, D.D.*, London, 1780.

of Watts containing dissertations in Latin upon various and important subjects, which Dr. Johnson has described as showing "a degree of knowledge, both philosophical and theological, such as very few attain by a much larger course of study."* In estimating the value of Johnson's comments on the life of Watts, especially the early part of it, it must not be forgotten that when he contemplated the inclusion of Watts among his *Lives of the Poets* he wrote on July 7th, 1777, to Dilly, the bookseller, that while the name of Dr. Watts "has long been held by me in veneration, I would not willingly be reduced to tell of him only that he was born and died. Yet of his life I know very little, and, therefore, must pass him (over) in a manner very unworthy of his character, unless some of his friends will favour me with the necessary information."†

In the following year Johnson returns to the matter, and at an interview with Dilly he said to him: "I shall do what I can for Dr. Watts, but my materials are very scanty." Johnson paid Watts a notable compliment when he did deal with him in the *Lives of the Poets*, where he says (vol. viii. p. 383), "Dr. Watts was one of the first authors that taught the Dissenters to court attention by the graces of language. Whatever they had among them before, whether of learning or acuteness, was commonly obscured and blunted by coarseness and inelegance of style. He showed them that zeal and purity might be expressed and enforced by polished-diction."

*Johnson—*Lives of the Poets*, vol. viii.

†G. Birkbeck Hill—*Boswell's Life of Johnson*, Oxford, 1887, vol. iii. p. 126.