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Edited by **Elizabeth Knowles**

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Samuel Johnson 1709–84*English poet, critic, and lexicographer*

on Johnson: see **Brown** 152:1, **Burney** 166:1, **Churchill** 213:19, **Colman** 229:18, **Cowper** 242:18, **Goldsmith** 345:31, **Hawthorne** 364:12, **Knowles** 442:9, **Macaulay** 481:13, **Pembroke** 572:11, **Smollett** 726:16, **Walpole** 801:11; see also **Epitaphs** 303:17, **Swift** 750:3

In all pointed sentences, some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness.

‘The Bravery of the English Common Soldier’ in *The British Magazine* January 1760

- 2 Liberty is, to the lowest rank of every nation, little more than the choice of working or starving.
‘The Bravery of the English Common Soldier’ in *The British Magazine* January 1760
- 3 Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755) preface; cf. **Hooker** 383:7
- 4 I am not yet so lost in lexicography as to forget that words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven. Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas: I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755) preface; cf. **Madden** 489:1
- 5 Every quotation contributes something to the stability or enlargement of the language.
on citations of usage in a dictionary
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755) preface
- 6 But these were the dreams of a poet doomed at last to wake a lexicographer.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755) preface
- 7 If the changes we fear be thus irresistible, what remains but to acquiesce with silence, as in the other insurmountable distresses of humanity? It remains that we retard what we cannot repel, that we palliate what we cannot cure.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755) preface
- 8 **Dull**. To make dictionaries is dull work.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755) ‘dull’ (8th definition)
- 9 **Excise**. A hateful tax levied upon commodities.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)
- 10 **Lexicographer**. A writer of dictionaries, a harmless drudge.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)
- 11 **Network**. Anything reticulated or decussated at equal distances, with interstices between the intersections.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)
- 12 **Oats**. A grain, which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)
- 13 **Patron**. Commonly a wretch who supports with insolence, and is paid with flattery.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)
- 14 **Pension**. Pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country.
A Dictionary of the English Language (1755)
- 15 The only end of writing is to enable the readers better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.
A Free Enquiry (1757, ed. D. Greene, 1984)
- 16 When two Englishmen meet, their first talk is of the weather.
in *The Idler* no. 11 (24 June 1758)
- 17 Among the calamities of war may be jointly numbered the diminution of the love of truth, by the falsehoods which interest dictates and credulity encourages.
in *The Idler* no. 30 (11 November 1758); see **Sayings** 648:10
- 18 Promise, large promise, is the soul of an advertisement.
The Idler no. 40 (20 January 1759)
- 19 I directed them to bring a bundle [of hay] into the room, and slept upon it in my riding coat. Mr Boswell, being more delicate, laid himself sheets with hay over and under him, and lay in linen like a gentleman.
A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775) ‘Glenelg’
- 20 A Scotchman must be a very sturdy moralist, who does not love Scotland better than truth.
A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775) ‘Ostig in Sky’
- 21 At seventy-seven it is time to be in earnest.
A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland (1775) ‘Col’
- 22 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.
review in the *Literary Magazine* vol. 2, no. 13 (1757)
- 23 About things on which the public thinks long it commonly attains to think right.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Addison’
- 24 Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Addison’
- 25 The great source of pleasure is variety. Uniformity must tire at last, though it be uniformity of excellence. We love to expect; and, when expectation is disappointed or gratified, we want to be again expecting.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Butler’
- 26 A man, doubtful of his dinner, or trembling at a creditor, is not much disposed to abstracted meditation, or remote enquiries.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Collins’
- 27 The true genius is a mind of large general powers, accidentally determined to some particular direction.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Cowley’

- 1 Language is the dress of thought.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Cowley’; cf. **Pope** 584:19, **Wesley** 812:1
- 2 The father of English criticism.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Dryden’
- 3 This play . . . was first offered to Cibber and his brethren at Drury-Lane, and rejected; it being then carried to Rich had the effect, as was ludicrously said, of making Gay *rich*, and Rich *gay*.
of **Gay’s** *The Beggar’s Opera*
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘John Gay’
- 4 In the character of his Elegy I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices . . . must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Gray’
- 5 An exotic and irrational entertainment, which has been always combated, and always has prevailed.
of *Italian opera*
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Hughes’
- 6 We are perpetually moralists, but we are geometricians only by chance. Our intercourse with intellectual nature is necessary; our speculations upon matter are voluntary and at leisure.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Milton’
- 7 An acrimonious and surly republican.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Milton’
- 8 I am disappointed by that stroke of death, which has eclipsed the gaiety of nations and impoverished the public stock of harmless pleasure.
on the death of **Garrick**
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Edmund Smith’
- 9 He washed himself with oriental scrupulosity.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘Swift’
- 10 Friendship is not always the sequel of obligation.
Lives of the English Poets (1779–81) ‘James Thomson’
- 11 Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature.
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 12 He that tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.
of **Shakespeare**
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 13 Love is only one of many passions.
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 14 Shakespeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition . . . That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature.
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 15 A quibble is to Shakespeare, what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures, it is sure to lead him out of his way and sure to engulf him in the mire.
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 16 We fix our eyes upon his graces, and turn them from his deformities, and endure in him what we should in another loathe or despise.
of **Shakespeare**
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 17 I have always suspected that the reading is right, which requires many words to prove it wrong; and the emendation wrong, that cannot without so much labour appear to be right.
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 18 Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils.
Plays of William Shakespeare . . . (1765) preface
- 19 It is better to suffer wrong than to do it, and happier to be sometimes cheated than not to trust.
in *Rambler* no. 79 (18 December 1750)
- 20 There are minds so impatient of inferiority, that their gratitude is a species of revenge, and they return benefits, not because recompense is a pleasure, but because obligation is a pain.
in *The Rambler* no. 87 (15 January 1751)
- 21 No place affords a more striking conviction of the vanity of human hopes, than a public library.
in *The Rambler* no. 106 (23 March 1751)
- 22 I have laboured to refine our language to grammatical purity, and to clear it from colloquial barbarisms, licentious idioms, and irregular combinations.
in *The Rambler* no. 208 (14 March 1752)
- 23 Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow; attend to the history of Rasselas prince of Abyssinia.
Rasselas (1759) ch. 1
- 24 The business of a poet, said Imlac, is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and appearances; he does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest.
Rasselas (1759) ch. 10
- 25 He [the poet] must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place.
Rasselas (1759) ch. 10; cf. **Shelley** 714:24
- 26 Human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed.
Rasselas (1759) ch. 11
- 27 Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures.
Rasselas (1759) ch. 26
- 28 Example is always more efficacious than precept.
Rasselas (1759) ch. 30

- 1 I consider this mighty structure as a monument of the insufficiency of human enjoyments.
of the Pyramids
Rasselas (1759) ch. 32
- 2 Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.
Rasselas (1759) ch. 41
- 3 There is perhaps no class of men, to whom the precept given by the Apostle to his converts against too great confidence in their understandings, may be more properly inculcated, than those who are dedicated to the profession of literature.
Sermons (1788) no. 8
- 4 In this state of temporary honour, a proud man is too willing to exert his prerogative; and too ready to forget that he is dictating to those, who may one day dictate to him.
on schoolmasters
Sermons (1788) no. 8
- 5 He [God] will not leave his promises unfulfilled, nor his threats unexecuted . . . Neither can he want power to execute his purposes; he who spoke, and the world was made, can speak again, and it will perish.
Sermons (1788) no. 10
- 6 How is it that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of negroes?
Taxation No Tyranny (1775)
- 7 A generous and elevated mind is distinguished by nothing more certainly than an eminent degree of curiosity.
dedication of his English translation of Fr. J. Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia* (1735), signed 'the editor' but attributed to Johnson in James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1734
- 8 There Poetry shall tune her sacred voice,
And wake from ignorance the Western World.
Demetrius forecasting the Renaissance
Irene (1749) act 4, sc. 1, l. 122
- 9 Here falling houses thunder on your head,
And here a female atheist talks you dead.
London (1738) l. 17
- 10 Of all the griefs that harrass the distressed,
Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest;
Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart,
Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart.
London (1738) l. 166
- 11 The stage but echoes back the public voice.
The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
For we that live to please, must please to live.
'Prologue spoken at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury Lane' (1747)
- 12 How small of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.
Still to ourselves in every place consigned,
Our own felicity we make or find.
lines added to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Traveller* (1764) l. 429; cf. Goldsmith 345:11
- 13 Let observation with extensive view,
Survey mankind, from China to Peru.
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 1
- 14 There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail.
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 159
- 15 A frame of adamant, a soul of fire,
No dangers fright him, and no labours tire.
of Charles XII of Sweden
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 193
- 16 His fall was destined to a barren strand,
A petty fortress, and a dubious hand;
He left the name, at which the world grew pale,
To point a moral, or adorn a tale.
of Charles XII of Sweden
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 219
- 17 Enlarge my life with multitude of days,
In health, in sickness, thus the suppliant prays;
Hides from himself his state, and shuns to know,
That life protracted is protracted woe.
Time hovers o'er, impatient to destroy,
And shuts up all the passages of joy.
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 255
- 18 In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,
Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise?
From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow,
And Swift expires a driv'ler and a show.
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 315
- 19 Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 345
- 20 Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to heaven the measure and the choice.
The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749) l. 351
- 21 A lawyer has no business with the justice or injustice of the cause which he undertakes, unless his client asks his opinion, and then he is bound to give it honestly. The justice or injustice of the cause is to be decided by the judge.
James Boswell *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 15 August 1773
- 22 Let him go abroad to a distant country; let him go to some place where he is *not* known. Don't let him go to the devil where he is known!
Boswell having asked if someone should commit suicide to avoid certain disgrace
James Boswell *Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 18 August 1773
- 23 I have, all my life long, been lying till noon; yet I tell all young men, and tell them with great sincerity, that nobody who does not rise early will ever do any good.
James Boswell *Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 14 September 1773
- 24 I inherited a vile melancholy from my father, which has made me mad all my life, at least not sober.
James Boswell *Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 16 September 1773; cf. Johnson 417:7

- 1 I am always sorry when any language is lost, because languages are the pedigree of nations.
James Boswell *Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 18 September 1773
- 2 I do not much like to see a Whig in any dress; but I hate to see a Whig in a parson's gown.
James Boswell *Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 24 September 1773
- 3 A cucumber should be well sliced, and dressed with pepper and vinegar, and then thrown out, as good for nothing.
James Boswell *Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 5 October 1773
- 4 I am sorry I have not learned to play at cards. It is very useful in life: it generates kindness and consolidates society.
James Boswell *Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) 21 November 1773
- 5 JOHNSON: I had no notion that I was wrong or irreverent to my tutor.
BOSWELL: That, Sir, was great fortitude of mind.
JOHNSON: No, Sir; stark insensibility.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 October 1728
- 6 Sir, we are a nest of singing birds.
of Pembroke College, Oxford
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1730
- 7 He was a vicious man, but very kind to me. If you call a dog *Hervey*, I shall love him.
of his former patron Henry Hervey
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1737
- 8 My old friend, Mrs Carter, could make a pudding, as well as translate Epictetus.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) Spring 1738
- 9 Tom Birch is as brisk as a bee in conversation; but no sooner does he take a pen in his hand, than it becomes a torpedo to him, and benumbs all his faculties.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1743
- 10 I'll come no more behind your scenes, David; for the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses excite my amorous propensities.
to Garrick; John Wilkes recalled the remark in the form: 'the silk stockings and white bosoms of your actresses do make my genitals to quiver'
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1750
- 11 A man may write at any time, if he will set himself doggedly to it.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) March 1750
- 12 A fly, Sir, may sting a stately horse and make him wince; but one is but an insect, and the other is a horse still.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1754
- 13 This man I thought had been a Lord among wits; but, I find, he is only a wit among Lords.
of Lord Chesterfield
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1754
- 14 They teach the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing master.
of the Letters of Lord Chesterfield
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1754
- 15 I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Lord Chesterfield, 7 February 1755
- 16 The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Lord Chesterfield, 7 February 1755
- 17 Is not a Patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Lord Chesterfield, 7 February 1755
- 18 There are two things which I am confident I can do very well: one is an introduction to any literary work, stating what it is to contain, and how it should be executed in the most perfect manner; the other is a conclusion, shewing from various causes why the execution has not been equal to what the author promised to himself and to the public.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1755
- 19 Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance.
on being asked why he had defined pastern as the 'knee' of a horse
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1755
- 20 I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave; and success and miscarriage are empty sounds.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1755
- 21 If a man does not make new acquaintance as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, Sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1755
- 22 No man will be a sailor who has contrivance enough to get himself into a jail; for being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned . . . A man in a jail has more room, better food, and commonly better company.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 16 March 1759; cf. **Burton** 170:15
- 23 No, Sir, I am not a botanist; and (alluding, no doubt, to his near sightedness) should I wish to become a botanist, I must first turn myself into a reptile.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 20 July 1762
- 24 BOSWELL: I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it . . .
JOHNSON: That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 16 May 1763
- 25 The notion of liberty amuses the people of England, and helps to keep off the *taedium vitae*. When a

- butcher tells you that *his heart bleeds for his country* he has, in fact, no uneasy feeling.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 16 May 1763
- 1 Yes, Sir, many men, many women, and many children.
on Dr Blair's asking whether any man of a modern age could have written Ossian
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 24 May 1763
 - 2 I did not think he ought to be shut up. His infirmities were not noxious to society. He insisted on people praying with him; and I'd as lief pray with Kit Smart as any one else. Another charge was, that he did not love clean linen; and I have no passion for it.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 24 May 1763
 - 3 You *may* abuse a tragedy, though you cannot write one. You may scold a carpenter who has made you a bad table, though you cannot make a table. It is not your trade to make tables.
on literary criticism
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 25 June 1763
 - 4 I am afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his hat. This shows that he has good principles.
of Dr John Campbell
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1 July 1763
 - 5 Great abilities are not requisite for an historian . . . imagination is not required in any high degree.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 July 1763
 - 6 The noblest prospect which a Scotchman ever sees, is the high road that leads him to England!
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 July 1763
 - 7 A man ought to read just as inclination leads him; for what he reads as a task will do him little good.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 14 July 1763
 - 8 But if he does really think that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, why, Sir, when he leaves our houses, let us count our spoons.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 14 July 1763;
cf. **Emerson** 299:15
 - 9 All the arguments which are brought to represent poverty as no evil, show it to be evidently a great evil. You never find people labouring to convince you that you may live very happily upon a plentiful fortune.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 20 July 1763
 - 10 Truth, Sir, is a cow, that will yield such people [sceptics] no more milk, and so they are gone to milk the bull.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 21 July 1763
 - 11 Young men have more virtue than old men; they have more generous sentiments in every respect.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 21 July 1763
 - 12 In my early years I read very hard. It is a sad reflection, but a true one, that I knew almost as much at eighteen as I do now.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 21 July 1763
 - 13 Your levellers wish to level down as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling up to themselves.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 21 July 1763
 - 14 It is no matter what you teach them [children] first, any more than what leg you shall put into your breeches first.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 26 July 1763
 - 15 Why, Sir, Sherry is dull, naturally dull; but it must have taken him a great deal of pains to become what we now see him. Such an excess of stupidity, Sir, is not in Nature.
of Thomas Sheridan
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 28 July 1763
 - 16 It is burning a farthing candle at Dover, to shew light at Calais.
on Thomas Sheridan's influence on the English language
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 28 July 1763;
cf. **Young** 839:1
 - 17 A woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 July 1763
 - 18 We could not have had a better dinner had there been a *Synod of Cooks*.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 5 August 1763
 - 19 Don't, Sir, accustom yourself to use big words for little matters. It would *not* be terrible, though I were to be detained some time here.
when Boswell said it would be 'terrible' if Johnson should not be able to return speedily from Harwich
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 August 1763
 - 20 I refute it thus.
on Boswell observing of Bishop Berkeley's theory of the non-existence of matter that though they were satisfied it was not true, they were unable to refute it, Johnson struck his foot against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, with these words
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 August 1763
 - 21 Sir John, Sir, is a very unclubbable man.
of Sir John Hawkins
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) Spring 1764
 - 22 That all who are happy, are equally happy, is not true. A peasant and a philosopher may be equally satisfied, but not equally happy. Happiness consists in the multiplicity of agreeable consciousness.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) February 1766
 - 23 Our tastes greatly alter. The lad does not care for the child's rattle, and the old man does not care for the young man's whore.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) Spring 1766
 - 24 It was not for me to bandy civilities with my Sovereign.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) February 1767
 - 25 There was as great a difference between them as between a man who knew how a watch was made, and a man who could tell the hour by looking on the dial-plate.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) Spring 1768

- 1 Let me smile with the wise, and feed with the rich.
responding to Garrick
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 October 1769; cf. **Garrick** 330:2
- 2 We know our will is free, and *there's* an end on't.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 16 October 1769
- 3 In the description of night in Macbeth, the beetle and the bat detract from the general idea of darkness,—inspissated gloom.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 16 October 1769
- 4 Most schemes of political improvement are very laughable things.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 26 October 1769
- 5 It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 26 October 1769
- 6 Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, he said, was the only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1770
- 7 Want of tenderness, he always alleged, was want of parts, and was no less a proof of stupidity than depravity.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1770
- 8 That fellow seems to me to possess but one idea, and that is a wrong one.
of a chance-met acquaintance
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1770; cf. **Disraeli** 270:24
- 9 Johnson observed, that 'he did not care to speak ill of any man behind his back, but he believed the gentleman was an *attorney*.'
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1770
- 10 The triumph of hope over experience.
of a man who remarried immediately after the death of a wife with whom he had been unhappy
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1770
- 11 Every man has a lurking wish to appear considerable in his native place.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Sir Joshua Reynolds, 17 July 1771
- 12 It is so far from being natural for a man and woman to live in a state of marriage, that we find all the motives which they have for remaining in that connection, and the restraints which civilized society imposes to prevent separation, are hardly sufficient to keep them together.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 March 1772
- 13 Nobody can write the life of a man, but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 March 1772
- 14 I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another. It is of no moment to the happiness of an individual.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 March 1772
- 15 If a sovereign oppresses his people to a great degree, they will rise and cut off his head. There is a remedy in human nature against tyranny, that will keep us safe under every form of government.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 March 1772
- 16 A man who is good enough to go to heaven, is good enough to be a clergyman.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 5 April 1772
- 17 Why, Sir, if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 April 1772
- 18 Grief is a species of idleness.
letter to Mrs Thrale, 17 March 1773, in R. W. Chapman (ed.) *Letters of Samuel Johnson* (1952) vol. 1
- 19 He has, indeed, done it very well; but it is a foolish thing well done.
on Goldsmith's apology in the London Chronicle for physically assaulting Thomas Evans, who had published a damaging open letter to Goldsmith in the London Packet 24 March 1773
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 3 April 1773
- 20 All intellectual improvement arises from leisure.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 13 April 1773
- 21 ELPHINSTON: What, have you not read it through? JOHNSON: No, Sir, do *you* read books *through*?
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 19 April 1773
- 22 Read over your compositions, and where ever you meet with a passage which you think is particularly fine, strike it out.
quoting a college tutor
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 30 April 1773
- 23 I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian ['Ossian'].
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to James Macpherson, 20 January 1775
- 24 There are few ways in which a man can be more innocently employed than in getting money.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 27 March 1775
- 25 He was dull in a new way, and that made many people think him *great*.
of Thomas Gray
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 28 March 1775
- 26 I never think I have hit hard, unless it rebounds.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 2 April 1775
- 27 Fleet-street has a very animated appearance; but I think the full tide of human existence is at Charing-Cross.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 2 April 1775
- 28 George the First knew nothing, and desired to know nothing; did nothing, and desired to do nothing; and the only good thing that is told of him is, that he wished to restore the crown to its hereditary successor.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 April 1775

- 1 It is wonderful, when a calculation is made, how little the mind is actually employed in the discharge of any profession.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 April 1775
- 2 The greatest part of a writer's time is spent in reading, in order to write: a man will turn over half a library to make one book.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 April 1775
- 3 Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 7 April 1775
- 4 Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 18 April 1775
- 5 Politics are now nothing more than means of rising in the world.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 18 April 1775
- 6 Players, Sir! I look upon them as no better than creatures set upon tables and joint-stools to make faces and produce laughter, like dancing dogs.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1775
- 7 In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1775
- 8 There is now less flogging in our great schools than formerly, but then less is learned there; so that what the boys get at one end they lose at the other.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1775
- 9 Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 20 March 1776
- 10 There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 21 March 1776; cf. **Shenstone** 715:6
- 11 Marriages would in general be as happy, and often more so, if they were all made by the Lord Chancellor, upon a due consideration of characters and circumstances, without the parties having any choice in the matter.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 22 March 1776
- 12 He is gone, and we are going.
on the death of her son, Harry
letter to Mrs Thrale, 25 March 1776, in R. W. Chapman (ed.) *Letters of Samuel Johnson* (1952) vol. 3
- 13 Questioning is not the mode of conversation among gentlemen. It is assuming a superiority.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 25 March 1776
- 14 Fine clothes are good only as they supply the want of other means of procuring respect.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 27 March 1776
- 15 If a madman were to come into this room with a stick in his hand, no doubt we should pity the state of his mind; but our primary consideration would be to take care of ourselves. We should knock him down first, and pity him afterwards.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 3 April 1776
- 16 We would all be idle if we could.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1776
- 17 No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 5 April 1776
- 18 A man who has not been in Italy, is always conscious of an inferiority, from his not having seen what it is expected a man should see.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 11 April 1776
- 19 BOSWELL: Sir, what is poetry?
JOHNSON: Why Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all *know* what light is; but it is not easy to *tell* what it is.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 12 April 1776
- 20 Every man of any education would rather be called a rascal, than accused of deficiency in *the graces*.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) May 1776
- 21 Sir, you have but two topics, yourself and me. I am sick of both.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) May 1776
- 22 If I had no duties, and no reference to futurity, I would spend my life in driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 19 September 1777
- 23 Depend upon it, Sir, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.
on the execution of Dr Dodd for forgery, 27 June 1777
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 19 September 1777
- 24 When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 20 September 1777
- 25 All argument is against it; but all belief is for it.
of the existence of ghosts
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 March 1778
- 26 John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have out his talk, as I do.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 31 March 1778
- 27 Though we cannot out-vote them we will out-argue them.
on the practical value of speeches in the House of Commons
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 3 April 1778
- 28 Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier, or not having been at sea.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 10 April 1778
- 29 Johnson had said that he could repeat a complete chapter of 'The Natural History of Iceland', from the Danish of Horrebaw, the whole of which was exactly thus:—'CHAP. LXXII. *Concerning snakes*. There are no snakes to be met with throughout the whole island.'
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 13 April 1778
- 30 The more contracted that power is, the more easily it is destroyed. A country governed by a despot is an inverted cone.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 14 April 1778

- 1 So it is in travelling; a man must carry knowledge with him, if he would bring home knowledge.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 17 April 1778
- 2 Sir, the insolence of wealth will creep out.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 18 April 1778
- 3 All censure of a man's self is oblique praise. It is in order to shew how much he can spare.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 25 April 1778
- 4 I have always said, the first Whig was the Devil.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 28 April 1778
- 5 Mutual cowardice keeps us in peace. Were one half of mankind brave and one half cowards, the brave would be always beating the cowards. Were all brave, they would lead a very uneasy life; all would be continually fighting: but being all cowards, we go on very well.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 28 April 1778
- 6 Were it not for imagination, Sir, a man would be as happy in the arms of a chambermaid as of a Duchess.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 9 May 1778
- 7 Madam, before you flatter a man so grossly to his face, you should consider whether or not your flattery is worth his having.
remark to Hannah More
Charlotte Barrett (ed.) *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay [Fanny Burney]* (1842) vol. 1, pt. 2, August 1778
- 8 Claret is the liquor for boys; port, for men; but he who aspires to be a hero (smiling) must drink brandy.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 7 April 1779
- 9 A man who exposes himself when he is intoxicated, has not the art of getting drunk.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 24 April 1779
- 10 Worth seeing, yes; but not worth going to see.
on the Giant's Causeway
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 12 October 1779
- 11 If you are idle, be not solitary; if you are solitary, be not idle.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Boswell, 27 October 1779; cf. **Closing lines** 222:5
- 12 Among the anfractuositities of the human mind, I know not if it may not be one, that there is a superstitious reluctance to sit for a picture.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1780
- 13 Every man has a right to utter what he thinks truth, and every other man has a right to knock him down for it. Martyrdom is the test.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1780
- 14 They are forced plants, raised in a hot-bed; and they are poor plants; they are but cucumbers after all.
of Thomas Gray's Odes
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1780
- 15 No man was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he had.
of Oliver Goldsmith
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1780; cf. **Garrick** 330:4
- 16 If a man talks of his misfortunes there is something in them that is not disagreeable to him; for where there is nothing but pure misery, there never is any recourse to the mention of it.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1780
- 17 I believe that is true. The dogs don't know how to write trifles with dignity.
to Fowke, who had observed that in writing biography Johnson infinitely exceeded his contemporaries
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1781
- 18 Mrs Montagu has dropt me. Now, Sir, there are people whom one should like very well to drop, but would not wish to be dropped by.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) March 1781
- 19 This merriment of parsons is mighty offensive.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) March 1781
- 20 We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich, beyond the dreams of avarice.
at the sale of Thrale's brewery
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 6 April 1781; cf. **Moore** 529:10
- 21 Classical quotation is the *parole* of literary men all over the world.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 8 May 1781
- 22 Why, that is, because, dearest, you're a dunce.
to Miss Monckton, later Lady Corke, who said that Sterne's writings affected her
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) May 1781
- 23 Sir, I have two very cogent reasons for not printing any list of subscribers;—one, that I have lost all the names,—the other, that I have spent all the money.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) May 1781
- 24 Always, Sir, set a high value on spontaneous kindness. He whose inclination prompts him to cultivate your friendship of his own accord, will love you more than one whom you have been at pains to attach to you.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) May 1781
- 25 A wise Tory and a wise Whig, I believe, will agree. Their principles are the same, though their modes of thinking are different.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) May 1781, written statement given to Boswell
- 26 I hate a fellow whom pride, or cowardice, or laziness drives into a corner, and who does nothing when he is there but sit and *growl*; let him come out as I do, and *bark*.
of Jeremiah Markland
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 10 October 1782
- 27 Resolve not to be poor: whatever you have, spend less. Poverty is a great enemy to human happiness; it certainly destroys liberty, and it makes some virtues impracticable, and others extremely difficult.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Boswell, 7 December 1782

- 1 How few of his friends' houses would a man choose to be at when he is sick.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1783
- 2 There is a wicked inclination in most people to suppose an old man decayed in his intellects. If a young or middle-aged man, when leaving a company, does not recollect where he laid his hat, it is nothing; but if the same inattention is discovered in an old man, people will shrug up their shoulders, and say, 'His memory is going.'
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1783
- 3 A man might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it.
of Ossian
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1783
- 4 Sir, there is no settling the point of precedence between a louse and a flea.
on the relative merits of two minor poets
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1783
- 5 When I observed he was a fine cat, saying, 'Why yes, Sir, but I have had cats whom I liked better than this'; and then as if perceiving Hodge to be out of countenance, adding, 'but he is a very fine cat, a very fine cat indeed.'
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 1783
- 6 Clear your mind of cant.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 15 May 1783
- 7 The black dog I hope always to resist, and in time to drive, though I am deprived of almost all those that used to help me . . . When I rise my breakfast is solitary, the black dog waits to share it, from breakfast to dinner he continues barking, except that Dr Brocklesby for a little keeps him at a distance . . . Night comes at last, and some hours of restlessness and confusion bring me again to a day of solitude. What shall exclude the black dog from a habitation like this?
on his attacks of melancholia; more recently associated with Winston Churchill, who used the phrase 'black dog' when alluding to his own periodic bouts of depression
letter to Mrs Thrale, 28 June 1783, in R. W. Chapman (ed.) *Letters of Samuel Johnson* (1952) vol. 3
- 8 As I know more of mankind I expect less of them, and am ready now to call a man a *good man*, upon easier terms than I was formerly.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) September 1783
- 9 If a man were to go by chance at the same time with Burke under a shed, to shun a shower, he would say—'this is an extraordinary man.'
on Edmund Burke
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 15 May 1784
- 10 It is as bad as bad can be: it is ill-fed, ill-killed, ill-kept, and ill-drest.
on the roast mutton he had been served at an inn
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 3 June 1784
- 11 JOHNSON: As I cannot be sure that I have fulfilled the conditions on which salvation is granted, I am afraid I may be one of those who shall be damned (looking dismally).
- DR ADAMS: What do you mean by damned?
JOHNSON: (passionately and loudly) Sent to Hell, Sir, and punished everlastingly.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 12 June 1784
- 12 Milton, Madam, was a genius that could cut a Colossus from a rock; but could not carve heads upon cherry-stones.
to Hannah More, who had expressed a wonder that the poet who had written Paradise Lost should write such poor sonnets
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) 13 June 1784
- 13 It might as well be said 'Who drives fat oxen should himself be fat.'
parodying Henry Brooke
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) June 1784; cf. **Brooke** 150:6
- 14 Sir, I have found you an argument; but I am not obliged to find you an understanding.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) June 1784
- 15 No man is a hypocrite in his pleasures.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) June 1784; cf. **Pope** 584:2
- 16 Talking of the Comedy of 'The Rehearsal,' he said, 'It has not wit enough to keep it sweet.' This was easy;—he therefore caught himself, and pronounced a more rounded sentence; 'It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction.'
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) June 1784
- 17 Who can run the race with Death?
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Dr Burney, 2 August 1784
- 18 Dictionaries are like watches, the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) letter to Francesco Sastres, 21 August 1784
- 19 Sir, I look upon every day to be lost, in which I do not make a new acquaintance.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) November 1784
- 20 I will be conquered; I will not capitulate.
on his illness
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) November 1784
- 21 Long-expected one-and-twenty,
Ling'ring year, at length is flown;
Pride and pleasure, pomp and plenty,
Great [Sir John], are now your own.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) December 1784
- 22 An odd thought strikes me:—we shall receive no letters in the grave.
James Boswell *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) December 1784
- 23 Abstinence is as easy to me, as temperance would be difficult.
William Roberts (ed.) *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Mrs Hannah More* (1834) vol. 1
- 24 As with my hat upon my head
I walked along the Strand,
I there did meet another man
With his hat in his hand.
in *European Magazine* January 1785 'Anecdotes by George Steevens'

- 1 Corneille is to Shakespeare . . . as a clipped hedge is to a forest.
Hester Lynch Piozzi *Anecdotes of . . . Johnson* (1786)
- 2 Difficult do you call it, Sir? I wish it were impossible.
on the performance of a celebrated violinist
William Seward *Supplement to the Anecdotes of Distinguished Persons* (1797)
- 3 Every man has, some time in his life, an ambition to be a wag.
Joyce Hemlow (ed.) *Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney* vol. 1 (1972)
- 4 [Goldsmith] seeming to repine at the success of Beattie's Essay on Truth—'Here's such a stir (said he) about a fellow that has written one book, and I have written many.' Ah, Doctor (says his friend [Johnson]), there go two-and-forty sixpences you know to one guinea.
Hester Lynch Piozzi *Anecdotes of . . . Johnson* (1786)
- 5 He hated a fool, and he hated a rogue, and he hated a whig; he was a very good hater.
of Bathurst
Hester Lynch Piozzi *Anecdotes of . . . Johnson* (1786)
- 6 I dogmatise and am contradicted, and in this conflict of opinions and sentiments I find delight.
on his conversation in taverns
John Hawkins *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1787) p. 87
- 7 *Iam moriturus.*
I who am about to die.
to Francesco Sastres, shortly before his death on 13 December 1784, in John Hawkins *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1787); cf. **Anonymous** 21:5
- 8 If the man who turnips cries,
Cry not when his father dies,
'Tis a proof that he had rather
Have a turnip than his father.
burlesque of Lope de Vega's lines 'si a quien los leones vence [He who can conquer a lion . . .]'
Hester Lynch Piozzi *Anecdotes of . . . Johnson* (1786)
- 9 It is very strange, and very melancholy, that the paucity of human pleasures should persuade us ever to call hunting one of them.
Hester Lynch Piozzi *Anecdotes of . . . Johnson* (1786)
- 10 Love is the wisdom of the fool and the folly of the wise.
William Cooke *Life of Samuel Foote* (1805) vol. 2
- 11 A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table, than when his wife talks Greek.
John Hawkins (ed.) *The Works of Samuel Johnson* (1787) 'Aphorisms, Sentiments, Opinions, etc.' vol. 11
- 12 Of music Dr Johnson used to say that it was the only sensual pleasure without vice.
in *European Magazine* (1795)
- 13 One day at Streatham . . . a young gentleman called to him suddenly, and I suppose he thought disrespectfully, in these words: 'Mr Johnson, would you advise me to marry?' 'I would advise no man to marry, Sir,' returns for answer in a very angry tone Dr Johnson, 'who is not likely to propagate understanding.'
Hester Lynch Piozzi *Anecdotes of . . . Johnson* (1786)
- 14 Was there ever yet anything written by mere man that was wished longer by its readers, excepting *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the *Pilgrim's Progress*?
Hester Lynch Piozzi *Anecdotes of . . . Johnson* (1786)
- 15 What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure.
William Seward *Biographia* (1799)