October 2015

Frederick A. Pottle Correspondence

Frederick Albert Pottle 1897-1987

Henry Ernest Dunnack 1867-1938
Maine State Library

Marion Cobb Fuller
Maine State Library

Hilda McLeod
Maine State Library

Hilda McLeod Jacob
Maine State Library

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalmaine.com/maine_writers_correspondence

Recommended Citation
Pottle, Frederick Albert 1897-1987; Dunnack, Henry Ernest 1867-1938; Fuller, Marion Cobb; McLeod, Hilda; and Jacob, Hilda McLeod, "Frederick A. Pottle Correspondence" (2015). Maine Writers Correspondence. 417.
http://digitalmaine.com/maine_writers_correspondence/417

This Text is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine State Library Special Collections at Maine State Documents. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine Writers Correspondence by an authorized administrator of Maine State Documents. For more information, please contact statedocs@maine.gov.
POTTLE, FREDERICK A.

Born at Lowell, Aug. 3, 1897.
I was born, Aug. 3, 1697, at Lovell, Maine, the second of six children, of whom five are now living. When I was an infant, my father moved to the nearby town of Otisfield, where I grew up on a rocky hundred-acre farm. For my first schooling I went to the district school (then ungraded) at East Otisfield, which, as late as 1910, was precisely the kind of building described by Whittier in his well known poem. At the age of twelve, since Otisfield had no high school, I entered the high school in the adjacent town of Oxford, walking the three miles' distance twice a day. From Oxford High School in 1913 I entered Colby College, where I worked my way with some help from my older brother. (My father died during my sophomore year.) I never had any athletic ability, but spent a good deal of time in intercollegiate debating and dramatics, playing generally female parts because when I entered college I was only half grown and had a shrill voice. I remember with shame that I once toured Maine as Kate Hardcastle, and with horror that I repeated the performance in the role of Paula Tanqueray. My undergraduate work was mainly in the sciences, though I took an A. B. degree, it then being my ambition to be a chemist. I had no formal courses in English literature at all. But early in my senior year I fell in by accident with Shelley (of whose works I had previously known only "The Cloud") and was swept off my feet. I changed my plans and decided instead of a chemist to be one of the major English poets. I let my hair grow, opened my shirt collar, and insulted the President of the College. In spite of this I managed to graduate summa cum laude in June 1917.

In September 1917 I began my professional career as a teacher of history and business English (two subjects which I had never studied) at Hebron Academy, a few miles from my home. I wrote poetry, indulged in violent tirades against the War, and meanwhile tried to enlist. My younger brother had been in the Navy from before our entry into the War, and when he came home on furlough I decided that I must have a uniform like his. But I was rejected for the Navy because of my nearsightedness, and went back to Hebron. During the Christmas vacation of 1917, while visiting at Colby, I learned that the Army recruiting office at Waterville would enlist anybody for anything he wanted. I went down with a friend and we enlisted for the Signal Corps - why I can't remember. It appeared, however, that there was a real examination at Portland. I was told that because of my defective vision I could get into no branch of the service except the Medical Department. I was ashamed to go home again, and let myself be entered in the Medical Corps. Nothing luckier ever happened to me.

My war history is told with sufficient fulness in "Stretcher." I got out of the Army in July 1919. During 1919-20 I taught history and debating in the Dearing High School, Portland, Maine. The next September I was married, and entered the Yale Graduate School, where I had been given a scholarship. (My original intention was to go to Harvard, but Harvard offered me no scholarship, and my fiancee already had a good position as cataloguer in the Yale Law Library.) I did not at that time intend to be a teacher of English. My old plan of being a man of letters was still in force, but I thought a year of hard study of English literature would help me. The late Professor Cook, without any apparent intention of doing so, won me over to the side of research scholarship, a change which I have never regretted. I took my M. A. in June 1921, writing my essay under Professor Phelps on the subject of Shelley's influence on the young Browning. The essay was published in a small edition in 1923 with the title, "Shelley and Browning: A Myth and some Facts."

In July 1921 our daughter, Annette, was born, and we moved to Durham, New Hampshire, where for two years I directed the Oral English in the University of New Hampshire. Those two years were exceptionally busy and happy ones, though saddened by the loss of our little girl at the age of thirteen months. We have no
other children. In the autumn of 1923 I returned to New Haven to complete my work for the Ph.D. degree, which I took in June 1925. My dissertation was done under Professor Tinker, and dealt with the literary career of James Boswell. A part of it was awarded the John Addison Porter Prize, the largest University prize at Yale. I took the money and spent a summer in England, traveling and working in the libraries. Mrs. Pottle made a tour of the Continent and joined me later in England.

In the autumn of 1925 I began teaching freshman English at Yale. At the end of the year, I was transferred to Yale College and given three sections of sophomore English and a course in the Graduate School (Professor Cook's course in Theories of Poetry). My schedule remained the same during 1927-28. During 1928-29 I served as a stop-gap for Professor Wenner, who is temporarily incapacitated from teaching, and taught the elementary Old English in the graduate school. During this time I brought out several short essays and scholarly articles, mainly on Boswell, and in 1927 collaborated with Professor Tinker in a monograph entitled "A New Portrait of James Boswell," published by the Harvard University Press with typography by Bruce Rogers.

Last June was published by the Oxford University Press the work to which I have devoted most of my spare time since 1924, an exhaustive bibliographical study entitled, "The Literary Career of James Boswell, being the bibliographical materials for a Life of Boswell." It has been generously reviewed in periodicals at home and abroad.

The history of the writing of "Stretchers" is long and possibly amusing. Evacuation Sight has maintained a company organization ever since the War, and a group of us meet every year for a reunion. At one of these reunions - it was in New York, and, I think, in 1924, I casually mentioned the fact that it would be possible to write a better company history than any that had yet appeared. The company at once elected me to the post of historian. At that time I was engaged on my thesis and had no time for anything else. I endeavoured to escape by announcing that I could not write a history without a large body of materials. Knowing the dilatory habits of men, I thought that would end the matter. But it didn't. A good many members sent me valuable stuff - diaries, letters, and pictures. I saw that I was trapped.

But during the summer of 1925 I was abroad, and during my first year of teaching I could get no time for a company history. I reserved the end of the summer of 1926 for the job. However, I played around, and suddenly found that only two weeks were left of the vacation. At the time that seemed ample. I got to work and managed to finish a draft of two chapters. By that time I could see how large a job I had on my hands. As I was again teaching new courses, I had no time during the year for work on the history, but I grimly resolved to put it behind me the next summer.

I worked at it like a slave all through the summer of 1927. Every morning at 9, I sat down to write, and I wrote steadily until 1, whether I felt like it or not. When the clock struck one, I jumped up even if I was in the middle of a sentence.

By the end of the summer I had it finished except for a final chapter. It seemed to me that I ought to be able to get that one chapter done during the school year, but I couldn't. It lay on my desk and nearly drove me mad. My wife threatened to burn the MS. Just then it occurred to me to take it to Professor Wenner, who was lessening the tedium of a long illness in bed by reading all the
literature of the War. He read it, said he liked it, and encouraged me to think that it might be good enough for general publication.

During the summer of 1928 I finally completed the manuscript, and the company had it typed. Harper's had been asking me to write a biography of Boswell, which I declined doing, but sent them the history instead. I received several encouraging notes concerning it, and then the MS itself, by express collect, with a form letter of rejection. At that moment Mr. Day sent out a circular letter to the members of the Yale faculty urging them to submit their MSS to the Yale Press. I hurried down with my book the next day. Mr. Malcolm Davis, the editor, was pleased with it, gave it its present name, and enthusiastically urged its acceptance. Since that time everybody at the Press has been keenly interested in the fortunes of the book, and has worked in a most enthusiastic manner to ensure its success. Six extracts were published as a serial in "The Outlook and Independent" during September and October, and the book was published on October 18. The Press has also generously prepared at cost a special company edition for members of Evacuation Night (with a few copies for general sale), containing additional narratives concerning the officers and nurses, and a complete roster of the organization.

Soon after the untimely death of Geoffrey Scott on August 15, 1929, I was asked by Colonel Isham to complete the edition of his great collection of Boswell Papers from Malahide Castle. I have been allowed by the University to teach on part time this year, and have already begun work on the manuscripts.

I am thirty-two years old, a trifle less than six feet tall, slender, have brown eyes and hair, and wear spectacles. In youth I took no interest in athletic sports, but last year I developed a fanatic fondness for squash, which the University promptly terminated by tearing down all the squash courts. My chief delights are the theatre and the reading of prefaces of learned books. In politics, I am by conviction a Socialist but by temperament a thoroughgoing reactionary, in religion an Anglo-Catholic.
MR. FREDERICK POTTLLE

CORRESPONDENCE

MARCH 1930
March 28, 1930.

Dear Mr. Dunrack,

I had the Yale Press send you a copy of "Stretchers" with an inscription such as I think you want. This book has a record volume which might properly appear in a collection like yours, but I did not dare to send it without asking you. "Stretchers" was written as a history of Evacuation Hospital Eight, with little thought of general publication. After the MS was done, I found that people
who read it thought it of general interest, and the Yale Press was

glad to take it on as a commercial venture. I then threw into a

separate volume all the matter that concerned only the company:
two special histories of the officers and nurses, and an elaborate roster

prepared by the Adjutant General's

Office giving condensed military histories of all the men and women

ever connected with E. H. S. We

printed 400 copies only of this

second volume, intending merely to

supply the company and such

libraries as would find it useful.
The price is $2.00 — something less

than the actual cost of production.
I was glad to underwrite its publication out of the royalties on "Stretchers". I will have a copy of this sent to you if you wish, or you can order direct from the Yale Press.

I am sorry, but I can't get you a copy of "Shelley and Browning." This was printed in 1923 in a limited edition of 125 copies, sold by subscription before publication. I have only one copy myself, and have been hoping for a long time to pick up some more copies. It really isn't much of a book, though.

In 1927 I collaborated with
Professor C. B. Tinker (who, by the way, was born in Auburn) in a monograph called "A New Portrait of James Boswell", published by the Harvard University Press, with several plates and typography by Bruce Rogers. It cost $15, but I am afraid it is out of print. Do you want a copy if I can locate one?

My most important book is "The Literary Career of James Boswell", published last June by the Oxford University Press. It is not a work for general reading, but a reference book - an elaborate bio-bibliographical study of all Boswell's publications. This is still in print, and sells
for $15. I shall be glad to have an inscribed copy sent to you if you wish. I may add that "Stretcher" is the only one of these books on which I make a cent, and that my royalty on that will be practically cancelled if you buy a copy of the second volume.

Last September, following the death of Mr. Geoffrey Scott, I took over the editing of the Boswell Papers, now being published from the collection of Col. Ralph H. Isham of Glen Head. When finished, they will fill eighteen very large volumes.
printed with very sumptuous style by Wm E. Rudge, typography by Bruce Rogers. They cost $900 the set, to be paid at the rate of $50 for each volume issued. I suppose you will hardly be interested in this, but I mention it because I understand that less than 60 sets remain unsubscribed.

The Yale Press is sending you a copy of an autobiography I wrote for them last autumn. The picture I enclose is all I have at present. It appeared in *Outlook* when "Statch" was running there as a serial.

I wonder if you have identified me as the son-in-law of Mrs. Starbuck at Oxford?  

Faithfully yours,  
Frederick A. Potter.
April 2, 1930

Mr. Frederick A. Pottle
Strathaven Apartments
Glen Cove, New York

Dear Mr. Pottle:

We have received your biographical sketch. It is altogether lovely. We send you a thousand heart-beats for this production. I am positively sure it will help to make our "Book of Maine Authors" famous; I am inclined to think distinguished as well.

I read "Stretchers" last night. When I came to that little bit about "Harriet" I was mighty glad it was raining outside and that I was alone. When I had finished the book I passed it over to Smith (who is practicing law in Augusta and just now revising the Maine Statutes, and who knew you in Jolby). After he had been reading for a while he exclaimed, "Great Scott, Dad! This is the best war book I have ever read!" Then he turned back to the first page to discover who was writing it. He scratched his head a bit and then said, "Well! I used to know this bird."

I am ordering copies of "Stretchers" at once for our traveling libraries. This is the sort of a book that will do people good to read. Many of the others have been of a type that I have hesitated to use. I congratulate you most sincerely on writing this inspiring and instructive book.

In pursuing the policy we have adopted in regard to Maine Authors we want everything you have written, and the word "everything" is underlined. If you will autograph the various items, and add any explanatory word, it will be a very great favor.
Of course, we want the additional book printed in connection with "Stretchers". May I urge you to spare no effort to add to our list "Shelley and Browning". It will be a great misfortune if we have any of the items missing from your list of publications. Most certainly we want "A New Portrait of James Boswell", and won't you please have Professor Tinker add his autograph? Then be sure to send us "The Literary Career of James Boswell". When I think of the Boswell Papers I am inclined to lose my reason in view of the fact that it does not look as though we would ever have them in our library. When you say, "I suppose you will hardly be interested in this", I know you are thinking of the $900.00. I am starting some sort of a campaign in the hope that some good friend will add this set to the State Library.

No, sir, we had not identified you with our good friend Mrs. Starbird. Of course I knew that one of the girls had gone to the Yale Library. You certainly have a good eye. Now I am hoping that next summer you will find your way over to the State Library so that we may have the pleasure of meeting you.

Just at this time I am under the necessity of asking a slight favor, namely, that you date your bills July 1st. It happens that our appropriation for this fiscal year has all been used.

We shall be most happy if at any time we can be of service to you.

Very truly yours,

HD/S.
April 24, 1930.

Dear Mr. Dunrach, you have probably received a bill from the Harvard University Press for a copy of The New Portrait of James Boswell, and are wondering where the book is. I have it, and am holding it for Professor Tinker's autograph. He is at Harvard this semester, and never comes to New Haven in the middle of the week, when I am there. But I shall certainly see him within the next month, and...
will send on the book just as soon as he has put his name in it.

I suppose you have already received the autographed copy of my *Literary Career of James Boswell* which I sent you last week.

Faithfully yours,

Frederick A. Potter
May 7, 1930

Dr. Frederick Pottle
Strathaven Apartments
Glencove, New York

Dear Dr. Pottle:

We received "The Literary Career of James Boswell, Esq.," a number of days ago. Thank you for the interesting inscription. Such inscriptions add very greatly to the interest of books as collection items, but some of our authors neglect to add them and it is always a pleasure to us to have one like yours.

We shall be delighted to have the New Portrait of James Boswell when it is ready for us. We appreciate the trouble that you are taking to obtain Dr. Tinker’s autograph also. It would be difficult to imagine anything more interesting than such a scholarly item autographed by two Maine authors. I wonder whether you became interested in Boswell together, or if your separate interests united.

Thank you for the trouble which you have taken in behalf of our collection.

Very truly yours

H. D. /p
May 24, 1930

Dr. Frederick Pottle
Department of English
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

My dear Dr. Pottle:

From all points of view, "A New Portrait of James Boswell" is an item of rare interest and your extremely interesting inscription adds the final touch to what is, and will continue to be, one of the real gems of our Maine Author Collection.

I am immeasurably grateful to you for the trouble which you have taken to enable us to add to our collection this doubly autographed copy of your very beautiful book.

Very truly yours
August 31, 1930.

Dear Mr. Dunneck,

I am sorry not to be able to help you locate your quotation, but I am really not such an expert on Johnson as you infer. My work has been mainly on Boswell. I know Johnson so far as he appears in the Hifi, the Tour to the Hebrides, and the other Johnsoniana. There is a good deal in Johnson's own works which I have never read. I am
sending on your query to Professor Tinker, who knows Johnson better than I do—a good deal better. I suggest that you also write to Professor Joseph Epes Brown of Princeton, author of The Critical Opinions of Samuel Johnson. His book may have your quotation in it, but it has no proper index, and I can’t find “Quotation” or “Elocution” or any other likely subject among his headings. But he read everything by or about Johnson in compiling it, and may remember the quotation. You may say that I recommended your writing, if you wish. Faithfully yours,

Frederick A. Pottle
Strathaven Apartments
Glen Cove, N. Y.
October 19, 1930.

Dear Mr. Dunnaack,

Mrs. Starbird has written to me asking for a short autobiography for her Oxford book. I thought I had a copy of the one I sent you, but I can't find it. Could you have a copy made for her? I hate to take the trouble to write the thing.
out again. If you would mail it directly to her, it would be a great kindness to me. Mrs. C. F. Starbuck, Oxford, Maine.

Faithfully yours,

Frederick A. Pottle
October 22, 1930.

Dr. Frederick Pottle,
Strathaven Apartments,
Glen Cove, New York.

Dear Dr. Pottle:

We shall be very glad to copy for Mrs. Starbird the interesting account of yourself which you so kindly prepared for our Maine Author files. I will have it done at once, and when I send it I shall inquire about her Oxford Book about which I am not at present informed, altho I know that for some time she has been interested in Maine history, particularly Oxford history.

Thank you for your letter about the Johnson quotation and for the trouble which you took to dig it out for me.

Very truly yours,
March 22, 1931

Dear Mr. Dunthack,

About Christmas time the Oxford University Press published in a small edition a complete Catalogue of the Debam Boswell MSS compiled by Mrs. Pottle and myself. The book was really prepared for the exhibition of the MSS at the Grolier Club during December and January, but I thought it too bad not to have a few copies published. Rudge printed the book, which is
bound in scarlet buckram uniform with that used on the volumes of the Boswell Papers. The price is $7.50. I fancy that the Oxford Press has sold all the copies they had, but I think Rudge still has a few. Do you wish one sent for your Maine authors collection? Besides giving bibliographical descriptions of all the MSS, we added notes describing the contents of all the important documents.

Faithfully yours,
Frederick A. Potter
Dr. Frederick A. Pottle,
400 East Fiftieth Street,
New York City.

Dear Dr. Pottle:-

I greatly appreciate your thoughtful letter regarding the catalog of the Isham collection of Boswell manuscripts, compiled by you and Mrs. Pottle. It would be a great favor if you could obtain this for us and have it autographed for our Maine Author Collection. Please do not neglect to have Mrs. Pottle autograph it, also.

Very truly yours,

STATE LIBRARIAN

HED/mlh
April 7, 1931

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
400 East Fiftieth Street
New York City

Dear Dr. Pottle:

Thank you for sending the doubly autographed copy of the Catalog of the Private Papers of James Boswell. It is a beautiful example of book-making as well as a most interesting bibliographical item, and I am delighted to have the privilege of adding it to the Maine Author Collection. I am very grateful to you for making it possible for us to have it.

Very truly yours

HED/MCF

STATE LIBRARIAN
HE two latest volumes of the Boswell papers covering the period 1777-1781, contain plenty of new material to delight the heart of the Boswellian, but for those readers who still think of Boswell as Johnson's impresario they will be something of a disappointment. Vol. 13 contains the journal at Ashbourne, the home of Dr. Taylor, an old schoolfellow of Johnson's with whom Boswell also became intimate, and the jaunts to London in 1778 and 1779, but these journals were used in the writing of the Life, and all the Johnsonian juice has already been extracted from them. We knew, for instance, that Johnson considered Prior a "Lady's Book." What we did not know is that Boswell disagreed with the great Doctor, that he thought Prior's tales "rather too wanton for modest women, according to the established opinion. But I have my own private notions as to modesty," continues Boswell, "of which I would only value the appearance: for unless a woman has amorous heat she is a dull companion, and to have amorous heat in elegant perfection, the fancy should be warmed with lively ideas." This is the sort of comment that abounds in these journals and that enables us to know Boswell as we can never hope to know Johnson or indeed anybody except Boswell. No one, not even Pepys or Rousseau, possesses Boswell's uncanny capacity for self-revelation.

Professor Pottle spreads before us the daily records of Boswell's life with the same scrupulous care that he devoted to the bibliography. It can have been no easy task to decipher Boswell's handwriting with its cryptic abbreviations, and to reconstruct the passages that Boswell blotted out. "I have often been guided," says Professor Pottle, "by slight indications of the MS (dots of missing 'i's, fragments of ascending and descending letters, etc.) which can hardly be indicated in a printed text." Verily such is the scholar's kingdom of heaven. No detail of Boswell's life is too sordid or too trivial for this most conscientious of editors to ignore. Boswell's zest for life finds its match in his editor's zest for scholarship.

It need hardly be said that Boswell could ask for no better apologist. Knowing as much about him as he does, Professor Pottle refuses to strike a balance between what was noble and what was contemptible in Boswell's character. Complete understanding, as so often happens, involves complete sympathy. Among the noble elements in his character Professor Pottle rates highest "the disinterested love that he showed for his friends and relations." Perhaps Mrs. Boswell is not included in either category for it would be difficult for the most ardent Boswellian to expatiate on the disinterested love that he shows for his wife. The editor maintains that Boswell's isolation within the family was pathetic, that Mrs. Boswell, "admirable woman though she was, was given to depleting his swelling vanities with pointed sarcasms." That may be so, but did any woman ever have better cause for exercising whatever talent for sarcasm she possessed? The casual reader, unless he starts out prepared to make every allowance for Boswell's temperament, is more likely to be impressed with Mrs. Boswell's almost unbelievable forbearance than with her husband's pathetic isolation. Boswell himself records the "angelic attentions" of his "invaluable spouse" more often than her sarcasms. On one occasion, after he had told his wife that he had been "dallying with strumpets," he remarks, "she was goodhumored and gave me excellent beefsoup, which lubricated me and made me well." And yet Professor Pottle maintains that there was no member of the family to whom Boswell could turn for affectionate and uncritical support.

Professor Pottle also maintains that Boswell was a kind and thoughtful father. That he was fond of his children no one would deny, but in the two volumes before us there is no indication that they stuck at his heart strings. He liked to hear them recite the divine service, and he was pleased when they did well at dancing school, but they never for a moment deterred him from taking any of his beloved jaunts to London. Boswell was undoubtedly a good friend to John, his mentally deranged brother, but with his younger brother David, who had been in the wine business in Spain for thirteen years and whose homecoming Boswell looked forward to so eagerly, he was very soon quarrelled. He complained of David's precision and self-conceit and in a burst of anger said that he would not travel with him for five guineas a day. That may possibly have been David's fault, but Dr. Johnson, not always an easy person to get on with, took a great liking to him. The fact is that Boswell was delightful as a friend but not so delightful in the family circle. Johnson once remarked that Boswell was never in anybody's company who did not wish to see him again. His constant desire to entertain everybody sometimes antagonized but usually endeared him to his friends and acquaintances. We do not hear that it endeared him to his father, to his stepmother, or to his brother.

Apart from the speculations about Boswell's character which the journals inevitably give rise to they contain a good deal of interesting information about distinguished people of the day, some of whom we have met in the journals before and some of whom appear in these volumes for the first time.

General Burgoyne flits through these pages, but unfortunately Boswell's interview with him at the very time when he was being subjected to official enquiry because of his conduct at the battle of Saratoga is not recorded. Boswell merely refers to it as one of the great events of his London jaunt. His sympathy with the American cause, which always annoyed Dr. Johnson, crops out continually. He can take no pleasure in the news of a victory in Georgia over Count D'E斯塔ing and the Americans, "for I considered that it would only encourage a longer continuance of the ruinous war." Another personage of the day whom Boswell much enjoyed meeting was Lord Bute, the prime minister who was responsible for Johnson's pension. It had taken Boswell ten years to get into his lordship's house, like the siege of Troy as he cheerfully explained, but having had to wait so long he marvelled all the more at its splendor. "The Hall was a constellation of laced footmen; all glitter." Even more exciting was his interview with the King, which he was at particular pains to record before dinner on his return home. Conversations recorded after dinner had a sad way of getting twisted. For a moment Boswell was in some uneasiness lest the King should not speak to him, but eventually the King did turn to him and they discussed General Paoli.

It is astonishing how absorbed the reader gets in Boswell's daily struggle against the sins of the flesh. Actually it is a tragic story but his infinite resiliency blinds the reader, as no doubt it did Boswell himself, to the pathos of his situation. As we lay down each successive volume we wonder again why he chose to strip himself naked before the world. The
fact that he did not destroy the journal seems to indicate that he contemplated ultimate publication. No doubt he did not want his contemporaries to read the full record of his backslidings but posterity he may have felt would be more lenient. And yet if Boswell had been intent on self-immortalization he would surely, as Professor Pottle suggests, have made specific provision for the publication of his papers at some period after his death, instead of which he left the question for his executors and his children to decide. Now that it has been decided his ghost is probably preening itself with satisfaction, but the welcome that Colonel Isham and Professor Pottle will receive in the next world from Mrs. Boswell is another matter.

Arnold Whitridge is assistant professor of English at Columbia University and a frequent writer on literary subjects.
The Isham Boswell


Reviewed by ARNOLD WHITRIDGE
Columbia University

O NCE again, Colonel Isham, Professor Pottle, and William Edwin Rudd have pooled their talents for the benefit of the small reading public that can afford this glorious edition of Boswell's Papers. Colonel Isham’s rescue of the Boswell manuscripts from the vaults of Malahide Castle is now an old story. He was fortunate to get the late Geoffrey Scott to decipher the manuscript, and he has been no less fortunate in his choice of Professor Pottle to carry on the work that Geoffrey Scott left unfinished. No rare Greek papyrus has ever received more scrupulous devotion than Professor Pottle has given to Boswell’s journals. Whether Boswell warrants such extreme cultivation may be questioned. Poor Mrs. Boswell would turn in her grave if she knew that the shameless journal had become public property, but there is no question that the author himself would be enchanted with the beautiful publicity he has finally achieved.

The Isham Papers have already shown us in startling relief Boswell the indefatigable lover, the lion hunter, the buffoon, and the literary artist. In every guise there had been a disarming sincerity about the man that no one had been able to resist. Zélide, the Dutch blue-stocking, Paoli the Corsican patriot, John Wilkes the demagogue, and Burke the philosopher, all bore witness to the charm of his society. Johnson described him in "The Journey to the Western Islands" as a "companion whose gaiety of conversation and civility of manners are sufficient to counteract the inconveniences of travel," and on another occasion he speaks of him more succinctly but no less accurately as "a man everybody likes."

The three recent volumes covering the period 1774–1777 reveal a far less endearing personality. For the first time we hear of his "coarse, ill-bred and abusive style of conversation." His "valuable" wife is continually being humiliated by his bouts of sodid debauchery. He begins to lose that wonderful appetite for life that has crippled posterity as it did his own contemporaries. From time to time he becomes affixed with "a kind of faintness of mind, a total indifference as to all objects of whatever kind, united with a melancholy dejection." Boswell had always been subject to fits of hypochondria, but by the year 1775 the fits of drunkenness and hypochondria succeed each other with a wearisome regularity.

In one of his vivid portraits in miniature Lyttton Strachey states that it "would be difficult to find a more shattering refutation of the lessons of cheap morality than the life of James Boswell," but if Mr. Strachey will take the trouble to read Boswell's own journal he will find on the contrary that no one ever paid more dearly for his backslidings. At the age of thirty-five Boswell began to realize that he was a failure. He made his vows of sobriety as often as ever but he knew now that he could never keep them. His friend Sir John Pringle, probably the wisest friend he ever had with the exception of Johnson, once told him that he knew nothing. Boswell admitted that Sir John was right.

There is an imperfection, a superficiality, in all my notions. I understand nothing clearly, nothing to the bottom. I pick up fragments, but never have in my memory a mass of any size. I wonder really if it be possible for me to acquire any one part of knowledge fully. I am a Lawyer. I have no system of Law. I write verses. I know nothing of the art of Poetry. In short I could go through every thing in the same way.

The uncanny detachment with which Boswell records in his journal every humiliation he experienced need not blind us to the change in spirit that had come over him since he thrust his way into Rousseau's sanctum and thumped him on the shoulder.

Of course there were still moments of gaiety in Boswell's life, as when he drove through the village of Welwyn on the road to London singing "The Roast Beef of Old England," and making "a prodigious jovial noise." The society of Johnson always had an invigorating effect upon him, because Johnson refused to listen to his continual plaints of self-pity. In another way the bustle of London acted as a tonic, but Boswell was a busy Edinburgh lawyer and he only managed to get to London occasionally. The myth that he spent his life at Johnson's elbow taking down every chance remark from the lips of the great man has already been exploded. During the three years covered by these volumes he spent only three months in Johnson's company. Those three months have already been accounted for in the "Life." The Journal adds little, for instance, to what we know already about the trip to Lichfield and Ashbourne in 1776. We learn that he kissed the maid in Johnson's house in Lichfield, and that he got more than usually drunk while staying with Paoli in London, but except for a few such details the "Life" is a more vivid record than the journal. Boswell was too good an artist not to select the best passages for his biography.

The original material is contained in the daily record of his life in Edinburgh. Boswell tells us how he very nearly had to fight a duel with one William Miller whose father was the justice who had ruled against him in the John Reid case. Apparently, in an effort to save his client, he had written on the papers casting doubts upon Miller's impartiality, upon which Miller's son had challenged him to a duel. The agony that Boswell and Mrs. Boswell went through before the young man was finally pacified throws a new light on Boswell's character. He was a timid man by nature, and yet he was continually being challenged to fight duels. Sometimes he did the challenging himself. He never actually met an opponent on the field of honor—or he his opponents always apologized—but on seven separate occasions he had to weigh the conflicting claims of honor and discretion. His son, Alexander Boswell, inherited his propensity for libelling the men he disagreed with, but unlike his father Alexander Boswell lacked the courage to admit his mistakes. He persisted in a duel at the hands of a man whom he had erroneously called "a fat coward."

In addition to the Journals these volumes contain the account of two interviews, one with David Hume on his deathbed, and the other with Margaret Rudd, the celebrated forger, which are among the best things Boswell ever wrote. His longing to see how an atheist would meet death is very characteristic of the man. In spite of his weakness religion played a very real part in his life. No matter how often he was unfaithful to his wife he was perfectly sincere in asking Johnson for "a short clear system of religion" with which to face the future. He craved assurance about the life hereafter because to a man of his temperament annihilation was too awful to contemplate, and yet he would not have missed the sight of David Hume dying quite placidly "in the persuasion of being annihilated." This titillation of the emotions, spiritual as well as carnal, was exactly what he enjoyed more than anything in the world.
The visit to the notorious Margaret Rudd was no less exciting in its way than the visit to David Hume. When Boswell first met Mrs. Rudd she had just succeeded in cheating the gallows. Her lover had been hanged for forgery and she herself had only escaped by playing on the sympathies of the jury. Boswell’s cautious tête-à-tête with the wickedest woman in London shows what a helpless innocent he was in spite of his debauchery. He congratulated himself upon his escape from Mrs. Rudd without even letting her know his name, but his escape was only temporary. In a later volume of the journal we shall see how at her own time the talented Mrs. Rudd added the laird of Auchinleck to her list of distinguished victims.
March 1, 1938

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
c/o The Viking Press
30 Irving Place
New York, New York

Dear Dr. Pottle:

Since it has been several years since we have written to you, we want to secure your present address, and also your permission to send BOSWELL'S JOURNAL OF A TOUR TO THE HEBRIDES... and BOSWELL AND THE GIRL FROM BOTANY BAY to you for inscriptions.

We have these splendid books, and we want to add them to the Maine Author Collection, but before so doing, we hope we may send them to you for your inscription. An enclosed envelope is for your convenience in replying.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

Encl—1

SECRETARY
March 4, 1938

Miss Hilda McLeod, Secretary
Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine

Dear Miss McLeod:

My present (and permanent) address is Hall of Graduate Studies,
Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

By all means send the books to be autographed. If there is any
particular kind of inscription that you wish please let me know.

Faithfully yours,

Frederick A. Potter

FAP:BFM
March 5, 1938

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
Hall of Graduate Studies
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

There is no particular inscription which we wish in the two books which are going forward to you under separate cover. If there is any interesting incident in connection with the writing of them, perhaps that would be a suitable inscription. Anything that suggests itself will be gratefully received.

We enclose a return label and sufficient postage to cover mailing charges.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hm
Encl--2

SECRETARY
March 14, 1938

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
27 Livingston Street
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

The two books have arrived, and of course we are delighted with such interesting inscriptions. They add significant value to the volumes, and it is with appreciation of your willingness to help us in this matter, and pleasure in the fact that you are a Maine man, that we add these to the Maine Author Collection. Thank you very much.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY

BY

SECRETARY
June 17, 1943

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
Hall of Graduate Studies
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Pottle:

THE IDIOM OF POETRY was ordered for the lending section of our library some time ago; but the Maine Author Collection does not yet boast an inscribed copy.

You have been kindly interested in this project in past years; and we hope you will want to place a copy of THE IDIOM OF POETRY in the exhibit. It is a fine book, and it gives us pleasure to claim the author as a Maine man.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hmj

SECRETARY
July 23, 1943

Dear Mrs. Jacobs,

I am asking the Cornell Press to send you a copy of "The Idiom of Poetry" for the Maine Author Collection. To save unwrapping the book and remailing, I am having it sent direct, and enclose an inscription which you can paste in. If by oversight the Press sends a bill, please send it to me.

Faithfully yours,

Frederick A. Potter
August 2, 1943

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
27 Livingston Street
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

The copy of THE IDIOM OF POETRY for the Maine Author Collection came today, and we are certainly very grateful for your generous interest. Please accept our thanks for the book and for the inscription page.

We hope when you are again in Maine that you may find time to call at the library. We think you might find this collection a pleasure and a surprise. It has grown rapidly in the past several years, and boasts a remarkable variety of subjects. Your volumes are not its least distinction, and we are very happy to add THE IDIOM OF POETRY to the others.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hmc secreTARY
July 27, 1950

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
35 Edgehill Road
New Haven 11, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

The news that we may expect BOSWELL'S LONDON JOURNAL is good news, indeed. The fact that such an eminent Boswell scholar as you are can be claimed as a Maine man is a source of pride, and the contributions you have made to literature as a result of your study of this famous man are outstanding.

We shall order the book, of course, for the lending section of the library; and we hope that you may want to inscribe and present a copy to the Maine Author Collection, which is distinguished by former works of yours.

You have our good wishes for the success of this new volume.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
October 31, 1950

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
35 Edgehill Road
New Haven 11, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

The presentation copy of BOSWELL’S LONDON JOURNAL 1762-1763 has arrived, and we place it in the Maine Author Collection with pride and appreciation, of both your generosity and your diligence in editing this material.

Our warm thanks go to you for making it possible to add the new book to your earlier volumes on the exhibit shelves.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
November 4, 1954

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
35 Edgehill Road
New Haven 11, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

BOSWELL ON THE GRAND TOUR was noted in the Bulletin of the Maine Library Association, and of course we have your Boswell books in the general library; but we notice that the Maine Author Collection lacks this volume.

We do hope that we are going to be able to add an inscribed copy to your other books in the exhibit. They are a distinctive and valued part of the collection.

Sincerely yours

Sincerely yours

In Charge of

In Charge of

hmj

Maine Author Collection
February 15, 1955

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle  
Box 1504A, Yale Station  
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

Thank you very much for the Maine Author Collection copy of your absorbing and lively BOSWELL ON THE GRAND TOUR. We are delighted to be able to add it to your other books in the exhibit, and appreciate your interest and generosity.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection

hmj
January 11, 1955

Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine
Mrs. F. W. Jacobs

Dear Mrs. Jacobs,

I have been very busy and have neglected to answer your letter of November 4 asking me to give a copy of BOSWELL ON THE GRAND TOUR to the Maine Author Collection. Do you still lack the book? If you do, I will try to get one ordered. I may send the inscription to be inserted, because otherwise I would have to have the book sent here, open the package, and then remail it.

Faithfully yours,

Frederick A. Potter
January 13, 1955

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
Box 1504A, Yale Station
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

It is certainly good news that we may anticipate the arrival of a copy of your book BOSWELL ON THE GRAND TOUR for inclusion in the Maine Author Collection. Yes, we do need it there. The collection has grown, through the years, and we are proud of it; but we are always a little unhappy if there is one volume missing from any Maine writer's works. We should be delighted to insert the inscription, as you suggest. We will let you know promptly when the book and inscription arrive.

Sincerely yours

In Charge of
hmj
Maine Author Collection
May 19, 1955

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
Box 1504A, Yale Station
New Haven, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

With great pleasure we acknowledge the arrival of your distinguished book, "BOSWELL ON THE GRAND TOUR," for the Maine Author Collection. "Illuminating" and "impressive" are the adjectives we like best from the reviews; but beyond the knowledge of history and people and customs which may be gained, is the undeniable entertainment afforded by means of your generous scholarship.

Thank you so much for making it possible for the Maine collection to include this latest volume.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
October 30, 1956

Dr. Frederick A. Pottle
35 Edgehill Road
New Haven 11, Connecticut

Dear Dr. Pottle:

Our appreciation is warm, not only for the copy of BOSWELL IN SEARCH OF A WIFE, but also for your continuing interest in the Maine Author Collection.

This is certainly a monumental work -- all the Boswell books -- and this is sure to captivate the faithful Boswell followers, as well as make new friends. We noted it in the Maine in Print list which is to appear in the November Bulletin of the Maine Library Association; and of course the library put this new title on the order list as soon as we learned of it.

Thank you very much for the collection copy.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
December 24, 1959

Hightstown
New Jersey

Gentlemen:

The copy of BOSWELL FOR THE DEFENCE which you so kindly sent for the Maine Author Collection is acknowledged with appreciation of your interest, congratulations on the fine volume, and our own particular pride in the author.

Sincerely yours

hmj

In Charge of
Maine Author Collection
Dr. Frederick A. Pottle  
35 Edgehill Road  
New Haven 11, Connecticut  

Dear Dr. Pottle:  

Just before Christmas a copy of your new book, BOSWELL FOR THE DEFENCE, was received, addressed to the Maine Author Collection. We acknowledged the gift to the publisher, but later found inside the back cover a note that it is sent with your compliments.  

This seems much more like old times, but we must seem extremely laggard in expressing our appreciation of your continuing kindness. The latest volume in this monumental series fills us again with admiration and an eagerness to renew acquaintance with Boswell and his world.  

Congratulations, and again our warm thanks for the Maine Author Collection copy.  

Sincerely yours  

In Charge of  
Maine Author Collection