James Ralph:
An Eighteenth-Century Philadelphian
in Grub Street

James Ralph is a shadowy figure even to students of eighteenth-century literary England. More often than not their acquaintance begins and ends with Franklin’s references to him in the Autobiography or with the couplet which Alexander Pope inserted in the second edition of the Dunciad in 1728.

Silence ye wolves, while Ralph to Cynthia howls
And makes night hideous, answer him ye owls.

Ralph had valiantly and foolishly rushed to the defense of the dunces pilloried by Pope, and in a scurrilous poem, Sawney, had attacked the Wasp of Twickenham. This skirmish cost him dearly; he became the laughing stock of Grub Street and “complained that for a time he was in danger of starving as the booksellers no longer had any confidence in his capacity.” Although for a time in desperate straits, he survived the attack and during the next thirty years was in turn a partner of Henry Fielding in the Champion, a journalistic thorn in the side of Sir Robert Walpole and his successors, the trusted political secretary of Bubb Dodington and Frederick, Prince of Wales, and a historian of Stuart England whose labors have been praised by the historiographers of two centuries.

The place and date of Ralph’s birth are not definitely known. Most biographical dictionaries state that he was born between 1695 and 1710 and probably in or about Philadelphia, although the possibility of English birth is not entirely discounted. The Philadelphia Monthly Meetings and the records of Christ Church have notations about his children and grandchildren, but he is nowhere mentioned. The records of the Ogden family (Elizabethtown branch) show that a

1 Samuel Johnson, Lives of the Poets, New York, 1832, p. 254.
James Ralph married a Rebekah Ogden; if this is our James Ralph, and it is but a conjecture, 1695 would seem more nearly the correct birth date as Rebekah Ogden was born about this time. The region from Newark southward may well have been Ralph’s home before his arrival in Philadelphia.

Franklin’s *Autobiography* provides the first definite information we have about Ralph. There we learn that in 1724 he was clerk to a Philadelphia merchant, a member of the literary group which Franklin had organized, and an aspiring poet. Ralph seems to have impressed Franklin, for many years later, after extensive intercourse in the cultivated circles of two continents, he wrote: “Ralph was ingenuous and shrewd, genteel in his manners, and extremely eloquent; I think I never knew a prettier talker.” Colonial Philadelphia seems to have offered the genteel and eloquent Ralph little opportunity of attaining the literary distinction he craved, so he decided to accompany Franklin, who was sailing for London at the instigation of Governor Keith. Franklin noted, “thro some discontent with his wife’s relations, he purposed to leave her on their hands and never return again.” Ralph declared he was seeking to obtain goods in London to sell on commission here, but this was a subterfuge, and he never saw his wife or daughter after November 10, 1724, when in the ship *London Hope* he sailed with Franklin for England.

Franklin at once obtained work in Palmer’s printing house in Bartholomew Close while Ralph appealed vainly to Robert Wilkes for admission to His Majesty’s Players in Drury Lane, to Roberts, a publisher in Paternoster Row, with a proposal to edit a weekly modelled on the *Spectator*, and to the lawyers in the Temple for employment as a copyist, meanwhile living on Franklin’s earnings. The two friends had some philosophical discussion growing out of Franklin’s interest in Wollaston’s *Religion of Nature Delineated* on the second edition of which he was employed as compositor in Palmer’s printing house. Disagreeing with the reasoning of that book, Franklin wrote a refutation: *A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain* and dedicated it to Ralph, stating in the preface, “I have here, according to your request, given you my present thoughts on the general state of things in the universe.” Franklin soon came to regard his short

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3 Ibid., 272.
venture into polemics as another erratum and destroyed all but a few copies of the edition of one hundred. The remaining few are today among the most prized items of Americana.4

Failing in his efforts to secure employment of any nature in London, Ralph went off to Berkshire to teach school, "but thinking the business below him, and confident of future better fortune, when he should be unwilling to have it known that he once was so meanly employed, he changed his name, and [Franklin writes] did me the honor to assume mine." From the country Ralph wrote recommending his lady friend Mrs. T to Franklin's protection. Franklin seems to have misconstrued the instructions, for he attempted some advances which the lady refused and promptly reported to Ralph, who declared that the debt he owed to Franklin was thereby cancelled. This ended the intimacy between the two men; Franklin returned to Philadelphia in July, 1726, and thirty years were to pass before they met again.

Franklin had warned Ralph of the folly of pursuing poetry as a career, but the frenzy was upon him, and in 1727 he published The Tempest, or the Terrors of Death, an uninspired complaint of life imitative of Lucretius, and in the following year Night, which was satirized by Pope in his venomous couplet. Both of these works are in blank verse and both in subject and mood owe much to James Thomson's Winter (1726) and Summer (1727) which set a fashion in discursive-melancholy poetry. (Ralph in his prefaces pays homage to Milton for the excellence of his blank verse, but his own is generally end-stopped and far more Thomsonian than Miltonic.) Night is a conventional season poem with some good bits of nature description, but any real sharpness of impression is blurred by Ralph's use of the conventional poetic jargon of his day wherein nights are invariably "sable" and fruits of all kinds are referred to as "the apples of Pomona." American scenes are frequently described: among them Greenland, the West Indies, Niagara Falls, which Ralph had obvi-

4 Dr. Wroth of the John Carter Brown Library has suggested that an edition of Liberty and Necessity, published in 1733 and bearing a Dublin imprint, was probably published by James Ralph. Few other people in England had copies, and probably none of these had the slightest interest in Franklin's attempted refutation of Wollaston. It is an interesting surmise, but Dr. Wroth insists that it is no more than that. Only two copies of this Dublin edition are known to exist; they are in the Library of Congress and the Franklin collection of H. S. P. See Fac-Simile Text Society, Series I, New York, 1930.
ously never seen, and other portions of the American mainland not easily identified. The poem had some sale, going into a second edition the next year (1728). With *Sawney, an Heroic Poem occasion'd by the Dunciad* Ralph elected to cross lances with Pope in defence of the Grub Streeters, and was badly worsted in the battle. From this time on he was never taken seriously as a poet, although he published several other pieces in blank verse and in the more conventional heroic couplets of the day. Undoubtedly Ralph had only a modest poetic talent, but he described American scenery with considerable feeling and with little trace of self-consciousness, and anticipated later poetic generations by indulging in romantic melancholy, admiring Milton, and in certain poems exploiting the Gothic mood many years before this was popularized by the *Castle of Otranto* and other horror thrillers.

Unsuccessful as a poet, Ralph turned to the drama and in 1728 published *The Touchstone or Historical, Critical, Political, Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Reigning Diversions of the Town*. The subject matter belies the pompous title, for the *Touchstone* is a broad and racy account of the amusements of the London pleasure seeker, interspersed with serious comments on the decline of true comedy in the face of the competition of farce and harlequin shows. *The Beggar's Opera* had created a vogue for ballad opera and Ralph suggested as fit native subjects Dick Whittington and his Cat, Robin Hood, The Dragon of Wantley and Tom Thumb. Henry Carey, better known for "Sally in our Alley," used the Dragon of Wantley as a theme some years later; Henry Fielding was receptive to the Tom Thumb suggestion at once, and it brought about a friendship and collaboration of the two men which lasted for many years. When Fielding's *Temple Beau* was produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields in January, 1730, Ralph supplied an excellent prologue repeating the complaint of the *Touchstone* about the decline of high comedy.

Although both Ralph and Fielding deplored the burlesque tendency of the age, both agreed with Witmore, who in Fielding's *Author's Farce* observed: "When the theatres are puppet-shows, and the comedians ballad-singers; when fools lead the town, would a man think to thrive by his wit? If thou must write, write nonsense, write operas." Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies, or the Life and Death of
Tom Thumb the Great (1730), the most successful burlesque of its day, is based on many of the ideas which Ralph had advanced in the Touchstone: theme, use of nursery rhyme to ridicule the affectations of heroic tragedy, satire levelled against contemporary criticism and the pedantic scholarship of Bentley, Dennis and Theobald. Preferring to eat by his nonsense rather than starve by his wit, Ralph, like Fielding, catered to the taste of the town in his Fashionable Lady which was produced at Goodman’s Fields in April, 1730 and “met with tolerable success.” Its theme is the sad state of English drama, the stupidity of the theatre managers, and the uncritical praise of Italian opera; the dialogue is imitative of the Congreve-Vanbrugh school of comedy and is not inferior to much of it, Genest admitting “that it is not badly written.”

The play owes something to the Beggar's Opera, its action being interrupted by songs set to native airs. The Fashionable Lady had a moderately good run, and has added interest because it is the first theatrical success on the London stage written by an American.

By 1731 Ralph was in the uncomfortable role of a teacher who has been surpassed by a brilliant pupil. Fielding, a man of keen dramatic sense, learned much from Ralph and continued on to new dramatic triumphs, until by 1736 he was the leading playwright of the day. Ralph with indifferent success tried to refurbish Elizabethan plays; Franklin's warning about following the muse of poetry must have occurred to him frequently during the next few years. Finally in October, 1733, the London Journal announced that he had been appointed surveyor of houses for Cambridgeshire. The position enabled him, in Franklin's phrase, "to rub along," but in accepting it he must have realized how far he was from obtaining the literary eminence he craved. The exact nature of the work performed by Ralph as a surveyor is not known; however, he seems to have utilized the experience to write in 1734 a Critical Review of the Public Buildings, Statues and Ornaments in and about London and Westminster, a very popular guide to London which went into a second edition in 1736 and was reprinted four times in the next half century. Ralph showed a commendable zeal for city planning and compared London very unfavorably with Paris. In general his artistic tastes are those of his age: uni-

5 John Genest, Some Account of the English Stage 1660-1830, II, 223.
6 Ibid., III, 277.
formity, order, precision and balance pleased him in architecture and art.

Ralph had now been ten years in London; he had failed as a poet, was indifferently successful as dramatist and critic, and in writing a guide book and contributing for various newspapers had pretty clearly identified himself as a professional writer, a Grub Streeter. Far from prosperous in 1736 he was merely assisting Fielding in the management of the Haymarket Theatre. To add to his troubles he was constantly harried by Pope and his friends. They followed his writings with great care, and parodied and distorted his meaning at every turn. The Grub Street Journal, the leader in this, referred to him as “that modest, sweet (or as some say) smock-faced, selfworshiping prig.” Paul Whitehead in a poem The State Dunces (1733) saw him as:

A tiny witling of these Writing Days,
Full fam’d for tuneless Rhimes and short-lived plays.
Write on, my luckless Bard, still unashamed;
Tho’ burnt thy Journals, and thy Drama’s damn’d;
’Tis Bread inspires thy Politicks and Lays,
Not Thrift of Immortality or Praise.

It was surely an unenviable fame that Ralph fell heir to; yet it shows that he was sufficiently well known to draw and hold the fire of Pope and his wide circle.

The biting satire with which Fielding attacked the Walpole ministry on the stage in Pasquin and The Historical Register made the Haymarket Theatre a rallying point for the opposition—the self-styled Patriots, among whom were Chesterfield, the Duke of Bedford, and the elder Pitt. In a few years, as an avowed political writer, Ralph was to do much effective work for these worthies; meanwhile Fielding’s attacks on Sir Robert hastened the passage of the theatrical Licensing Act of 1737 which closed the Haymarket Theatre and ended the dramatic careers of both Fielding and Ralph. Fielding entered the Middle Temple as a law student while Ralph wrote parliamentary news for the Universal Spectator, an excellent periodical owned by Henry Baker, a son-in-law of Daniel Defoe. Ralph worked for the Spectator from 1737–39 when he once again joined forces with

8 Paul Whitehead, Satires Written by Mr. Whitehead, London, 1748.
9 Birch Manuscripts, Number 4317.677.
Fielding in the editorship of the Champion. The Champion was a cross between the Addisonian Tatler and Spectator and the more satirical Grub Street Journal, its editors attempting to regulate manners and morals as well as to harry Walpole and his ministers. Fielding disclaimed any talent for political writing, and left to Ralph the conduct of two columns called the "Index to the Times" and the "Journal of the War" where the prime minister's pusillanimous conduct of the War of Jenkins' Ear, the ineptness of the navy, and general parliamentary corruption were detailed in a crisp and provocative style. For political journalism Ralph had an excellent talent; those who speak disparagingly of his work in other fields admit this. One opinion stated:

This gentleman [Fielding] has an assistant on his paper, one Ralph, who has been sufficiently exposed in the Dunciad, and whose name was very industriously concealed, lest the character of a person so famous for dulness might do harm to the paper. This last person... who was discarded on account of his dulness and immorality, from being suffered to write in the Gaz [Gazette], is now assistant Champion of that party and thought a mighty smart fellow.11

When Fielding retired as editor of the paper in June of 1741, Ralph was named in his place and given a two-sixteenths share in the enterprise by the publishers. For two more years he fought the political battles of his employers with increasing bitterness and continued to do so for some months after the fall of the Walpole ministry, in 1742. In the scramble for office which followed, Dodington, Ralph's patron of the moment, went unplaced, and, altering the title of the paper to the British Champion, Ralph attacked the new government, ceasing only when Dodington accepted office in the Broadbottom ministry of the Pelhams in December, 1744. "The ablest pen in England," as Dodington referred to Ralph, was pensioned into silence, and we hear no more of him until December, 1747 when Dodington, planning to desert the ministry for the opposition led by the Prince of Wales,12 set Ralph up as editor of the Remembrancer. That The Remembrancer fully justified the characterization of "a weekly slap in the face for the Ministry" is vouched for by Horace Walpole in a letter to Sir Horace Mann in June, 1749: "The design of not giving one

11 An Historical View of the Principles, Characters, Persons, etc. of the Political Writers of Great Britain, London, Printed for W. Webb, 1740.
12 The Diary of Bubb Dodington, 1785, p. 238.
riband to the Prince’s children has made a great noise; there was a Remembrancer on that subject ready for the press. This is the Craftsman of the present age and is generally levelled at the Duke of Cumberland. It has absolutely written down Hawley, his favourite general and executioner, who was to have been on the staff." Dodington’s diary offers more telling proof of Ralph’s power as a political writer, for it contains a full account of the suppression of the Remembrancer by the ministry, and of Ralph’s rustication at Dodington’s villa until the demand for prosecution had died down. The diary also shows that Ralph was the intermediary who conducted the negotiations as a result of which Dodington quit the Pelhams for the Prince’s party. “One evening at parting his Royal Highness—clapping his hand on Mr. Ralph’s arm, dropped certain expressions, which, to the best of Mr. Ralph’s remembrance were these—Dear Ralph or good Ralph, get me Dodington, if possible.” Mr. Ralph got Dodington for the Prince, Mr. Dodington got the promise of being Secretary of State when the Prince came to the throne, and Mr. Ralph got the promise of being secretary to Dodington. These carefully laid plans of Dodington and his henchman were frustrated, and the political propaganda of the Remembrancer wasted by the sudden death of Prince Fred in March, 1751. England took the loss very calmly but it was a shock to Dodington and his man Friday. However, Dodington, a political chameleon, soon set about negotiating with the Pelhams again for his “merchantable ware”: six seats in the House of Commons controlled by him. After a respectable delay, about nine months, Dodington was once again admitted into the outer circles of the government and was occasionally consulted on matters of importance.

Restored once more to the councils of the powerful, Dodington set about taking care of Ralph, who was, it seems, hard hit by Frederick’s death, for he wrote:

My brain, such as it is, is my whole estate. I lost half a year’s pension, when I went into the Prince’s service. I lost another £100 about the same time by a bankrupt bookseller. His royal highness died in my debt £65, every farthing of which I had a thousand pressing occasions for; it is almost two years since that event. I did not alter my manner of living except in a few particulars thereon: 1. because I was put in hope that my friends would have been found to assist, if not provide for me, till I could again be useful; 2. because I thought it for their

14 Diary of Bubb Dodington, p. 20.
credit, that I should not appear a ruined man, while they continued to honour me with their countenance; and 3dly, because I knew I should be provided for (if ever I was provided for at all) in exact conformity to the figure I lived in, which I cannot yet be humble enough to suppose is better than I have pretensions to, unless the pretensions of players, fiddlers, rope-dances &c to a decent manner of living, should be thought better than mine.  

Ralph here shows a shrewd knowledge of the world; he was later, as we shall see, rewarded not as a mere hack, but as a writer of great political influence.

Political necessity forced Henry Pelham to come to terms with the time-serving Dodington; but there was no such necessity with Ralph, and a free lance once more, he was soon negotiating with the opposition group which now was headed by the Duke of Cumberland, known to his enemies as “The Butcher.” Other members were William Beckford, one time Lord Mayor of London, and the father of the author of *Vathek*, and John, the fourth Duke of Bedford, who had been at one time Secretary of State of the Southern Department under Pelham. Ralph kept Dodington informed of the bargaining for his services, and Dodington again urged the political wisdom of taking care of Ralph. Pelham was firm in his refusal not to deal with Ralph, and Dodington wrote in his diary:

I was sure Mr. Pelham would resent it very soon; yet I desired he should know this, and more particularly, that (as I had given him the offer of a most useful, honest and able man, and upon his rejecting it, had, some time since, given him fair warning by him, Lord Barnard, of what would happen) I must have no complaints, or insinuations, or even thoughts, that I was any way, act or part, in any thing that might come out. . . . Who could tell what a man that had been Secretary of State [the Duke of Bedford], might furnish? and how galling it might be rendered by the ablest pen in England?  

The opposition shortly thereafter provided funds for a new paper and on June 2, 1753 appeared *The Protester*, “On Behalf of the People,” written by one Issacher Barebone. Richard Rigby, private secretary to the Duke of Bedford, wrote to his employer: “I inclose you the *Protester*. I think it an extremely good preface to a political paper, and heartily wish success to the tribe of the Barebones.” The paper, a weekly, emphasized the need of an intelligent and disinterested opposition; then, having demonstrated the purity of its intentions,

moved on to attack the government. From week to week the attack
grew more bitter; then suddenly on November 10, 1753 Issacher
Barebone decided that the effort was a futile one and wrote: "Con-
vinced therefore upon the whole Matter, That I have, all this while,
been blowing on a Dead Coal, I think myself obliged in Point of Pru-
dence, Decorum and Duty to lay down the Bellows." To the Duke
of Bedford Ralph wrote:

My Lord,

My health being greatly impaired with repeated attacks of the gout, having
reason to apprehend that a prosecution of the heaviest kind was ready to be let
loose against me, and seeing no probability of a stand to be made in Parliament,
... I have returned to Mr. Beckford's agent £150 of the £200 I had received on
account and have laid down my pen.

Persuading myself that neither your Grace nor any other considerate person
will find just cause to complain of a measure which the current of the time
has rendered unavoidable, I have the honor to be, with the utmost respect, my
Lord

Your Grace's &
James Ralph

Whether a prosecution was intended or not is uncertain, but Doding-
ton's Diary states that, through David Garrick, Ralph had been intro-
duced to Lord Harrington who had arranged that Ralph, in return
for a pension of £300 per year and £200 paid down at once, refrain
from all other political writing. Henry Pelham was reluctant to come
to terms, but was overruled by his brother, the Duke of Newcastle.

It may be helpful in judging the effectiveness of the Protester to note
that before its appearance Pelham refused to pension Ralph, but that
after the paper had run for five months and just prior to the opening
of Parliament he did not forbid his brother from silencing the opposition's leading journalist. Ralph's days of partisan politics were
finished; in his next employment as a critic on the Monthly Review
he judged the political writings of others with what must have been
for him a truly Olympian detachment.

Thirty-two years as an "author by profession" found Ralph with
a comfortable pension and the reputation of an able political writer.
Dodington's view that in political matters Ralph's was "the ablest pen
in England" need not be accepted at its face value, but it cannot be

18 The Protester, No. 24.
19 Correspondence of the Duke of Bedford, II, 135.
20 Thomas Davies, Life of Garrick, I, 270.
denied that in the rough and tumble politics of eighteenth-century England his ability was generally respected. It is perfectly true that Ralph would write for either side, but so far as I have been able to determine he did not, like Daniel Defoe, write for both sides at one and the same time. His allegiance to a party or faction did not imply so quixotic a principle as actual belief in the views he was disseminating; it did mean that while employed by one party he kept to the terms of the bargain. It was Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania, I believe, who declared an honest politician to be one “who when bought, stays bought.” Perhaps under this latitudinarian view we can accept Dodington's estimate of him as “the honest Mr. Ralph.”

By the terms of his pension Ralph’s political career was at an end; with an assured income of three hundred pounds a year he had attained a competence unusual to an “author by profession.” His letters to the Duke of Newcastle, generally written when the semi-annual pension payments were due, show a continued keen interest in governmental matters. One, dated January 31, 1756, contains the interesting suggestion that were the stamp taxes at once applied to America “the growing Burden of the Colonies would be less sensibly felt by the Mother-Country.” The suggestion, it would seem, came from one who considered himself not a colonial, but a citizen of England.

All of Ralph’s political writings thus far noticed appeared in the various newspapers subsidized by his patrons. They found him useful, however, in more scholarly and impressive forms of political propaganda, and during the 1740s, working with extraordinary industry, he produced several works of considerable importance in the political history of eighteenth-century England. In 1742, while Ralph was still editing The Champion, Sarah Jennings Churchill published her memoirs as An Account of the Conduct of the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough from her first coming to Court to the Year 1710. This defense of her court life had been written with the aid of her secretary, Arthur Maynwaring, in 1711, but withheld from publication on the advice of Sir Robert Walpole, whom, at the time, the Duchess considered “extremely her friend.”

21 Newcastle Additional Manuscripts, No. 32,862, p. 310.
22 The Diary of Bubb Dodington, p. 238.
octogenarian Duchess, still at a white heat of indignation, dictated a revision of the memoirs to Nathaniel Hooke, of Lincoln’s Inn, who took care of the publication. Alexander Pope on reading a working copy of the text told the Duchess: “I wish everybody you love may love you, and am very sorry for everyone that does not.” According to Boswell, the Account was a principal topic of conversation in London for a year, and Johnson in the Gentleman’s Magazine stated that the Duchess “published her Conduct to shew that she was never once in the Wrong.” As the Duchess of Marlborough, in defending her husband and herself, had necessarily blamed others for many court and military intrigues, it was only natural that her Account was answered.

Ralph’s The Other Side of the Question (March, 1742) was much the most effective of several replies and speedily went into a second edition. Still blinded by bias, love and hate the Duchess did not always defend herself and her great husband scrupulously, and her over-statements and errors of fact made refutation of the Account an easy task. Ralph used two methods: quoting the Duchess against herself, and quoting other historians, chiefly Bishop Burnet, against her. She, for example, had claimed entire ignorance of the plan to place William and Mary on the throne in 1688.

But I do solemnly protest that, if there be Truth in any Mortal, I was so very simple a Creature, That I never dreamt of his (William) being King. Having never read, nor employed my time in anything but playing at Cards; and having no Ambition myself, I imagined that the Prince of Orange’s sole Design was to provide for the Safety of his own Country. Ralph’s reply, which echoed the opinion current in his day, also anticipated that of Macaulay and other historians.

What a noble Specimen have we here of the Marvel’ous? what striking images surround us on every side? a Court-Lady govern’d only by Scruples in Religion! a Favourite intent on nothing but Cards! and Lady Churchill persuaded that State measures had no other Spring than the public Good!

The Duchess was, naturally, most eloquent in defending her illustrious husband, and dwelt long on his military career which brought such signal victories to English arms. Ralph admitted the glories but closed his reply by asking:

24 The Other Side of the Question, p. 18.
But then, Madam, what Equivalent were these splendid Miracles for exhausting the Life-Blood of the Nation, all we could raise and all we could borrow?

In the Field, the Duke of Marlborough was, beyond all Contradiction, one of the greatest of Men: His Exploits have both enriched and adorned our Annals; ... But accomplished and meritorious as he was, three Kingdoms were rather too rich a Victim to be sacrificed, that his Triumphs might be rendered complete.

Thomas Davies, the first biographer of David Garrick, disliked Ralph very much, but admitted, "The book was written with so much art, and made so interesting, by the author's management that it sold very well."25

In January 1744/45 Ralph published the first volume of his History of England during the Reigns of King William, Queen Anne, and King George I, With an Introductory Review of the Reigns of the Royal Brothers Charles and James, a continuation of William Guthrie's History of England from the Invasion of Caesar until 1688. Both histories were subsidized: Guthrie's by Lord Chesterfield and Ralph's, apparently, by Budd Dodington. Ralph's work, which has been praised for its impartiality by historians for two centuries was, however, conceived in factionalism. Englishmen were greatly interested in the period covered by Ralph's work. Party spirit ran high, and Whigs and Tories were alike anxious to vindicate their eighteenth century positions in the light of the Puritan Revolution, the Restoration, and the Revolution of 1688, out of which had finally emerged parliamentary supremacy and cabinet government. Although this specialized interest in political principles caused considerable research, it did not have altogether happy results at this time, for writers strove to buttress theories and support factions, and on the whole tended to retard the writing of history on a social or philosophical basis. Not until Hume published his great work in 1754 was English life and thought set forth with either breadth or detachment.

Tories have had their full share in the making of English history, but the Whigs have done rather more of the writing of it. In 1744, as a matter of fact, there was no history which was favorable to the Tory position, while the Whigs could number Bishop Burnet, Oldmixon, Kennet, Echard, and the Frenchman Rapin de Thoyras. Bur-

Burnet’s *History of My Own Times* appeared in 1732 and caused a long and acrimonious discussion among the party men of the day. Swift called Burnet, “the most partial of all writers that ever pretended to impartiality.” Burnet’s *History* is now regarded as a memoir, but in the years following its publication it was accepted by Whigs as a fair exposition of events from the Restoration to the Peace of Utrecht. The ablest of the Whig apologists was Rapin de Thoyras whose history, published at The Hague in 1724, caused Voltaire to declare: “As for good [English] historians; I know of none as yet: a Frenchman has had to write their history.” This was the standard work until Hume published his *History of England* in 1754. The Whig histories, although of varying value, formed an historical tradition which the Tories might well have been unable to combat except by producing for themselves a work of dignity and accuracy. It is impossible now to know how well formulated this idea was when Chesterfield and Dodington put Guthrie and Ralph at their tasks. Ralph at least produced a work which in scholarly detachment and thoroughness far transcended mere party politics.

Ralph brought to his work a mind well trained in evaluating historical documents, an immense energy, and an historical method, which if not new, was still largely unpracticed: history based on documents. He felt that the continuity of his narrative demanded a review of the reigns of the last two Stuart monarchs and he devoted 1078 folio pages to examining the evidence of previous historians: Clarendon, Burnet, Echard, Kennet, Rapin, Ludlow, Lestrange, North and Oldmixon. Were this all, Ralph would be considered no more than an industrious compiler, but in addition to these generally available secondary sources he made abundant use of letters, diaries, memoirs, biographies, journals, parliamentary reports, budget statements, state tracts, reports of the judiciary and the daily *Gazettes* of the period. He was particularly fortunate to have had access, five years before publication, to the Lord John Somers *Tracts*. I have been unable to discover how Ralph became privy to this splendid source material, but every page of his history attests how extensively he drew upon it. Continuing in this laborious fashion, he completed his account of the reign of William III in 1746. It is unfortunate that his method

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was so time-consuming; for the original plan of bringing the narrative to the end of George I's reign was abandoned.

In no sense of the word was Ralph's a popular work. It was too scholarly for popular perusal; in a very real sense it was a historian's history and has been praised as such for two hundred years. Smollett in his popular History of England referred to the "circumstantial Ralph," and Charles James Fox while working on his History of the Early Part of the Reign of James II wrote to Malcom Laing: "Many thanks to you—I have found the place in Ralph and a great deal more important matter relative to those times, which is but slightly touched by other historians. I am every day more and more surprised that Ralph should have so much less reputation as an historian than he seems to deserve."27 Hallam in his History of England refers to Ralph as "the most acute and diligent historian we possess for these times."28

In 1758, after thirty years of hack writing, James Ralph published The Case of Authors by Profession, a short pamphlet which vigorously defended professional writers and severely arraigned their principal employers, the booksellers, theatre managers, and politicians. The essay received favorable comment in the Monthly Review and the Critical Review as a just appraisal of the difficulties of authorship. It has additional interest because Oliver Goldsmith may very well have received from it certain ideas which appeared in his Essay on the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe, and because from it Isaac D'Israeli quoted, without acknowledgment, extensive passages which appeared in his Calamities of Authors.

It is a commonplace of English literary history that during the mid-eighteenth century, when patronage by the wealthy was diminishing and patronage by the general reading public hardly established, the lot of the "author by profession" was an unenviable one. The low estate of authorship must certainly have been widely discussed by the scribblers of the day, but The Case of Authors by Profession appears to have been the earliest comprehensive defense of the class; for William Ruffhead, criticizing the pamphlet, declared:

It appears a little surprising, that none amongst that multitude of Writers, to which the discovery of printing has contributed, have ever, within our recollec-

tion, entered upon a professed discussion of their situation, with regard to the Public; and more especially when we peruse such instances of neglect and grievance, as are recorded by this sensible Author to have occurred to some of his contemporary brethren.29

The Case of Authors opens with an attack on the prejudice which placed the writer so low in the social scale.

A Man may Plead for Money, prescribe for Money, Pray and Preach for Money, marry for Money, fight for Money, do anything within the Law for Money, provided the Expedient answers, without the least Imputation.

But if he writes like one inspired from Heaven, and writes for Money, the Man of Touch, in the Right of Midas his great Ancestor, enters his Caveat against him as a Man of Taste: declares the two Provinces to be incompatible: that he who aims at Praise ought to be starved; and that there ought to be so much draw-back upon Character for Every Acquisition in Coin.30

The professional writer is caught on the horns of a dilemma. If he sells his work he is accused of venality; if he follows the example of the gentleman, or volunteer writer, and assigns the profits to his bookseller he is disparaged for his folly. Meanwhile for the luckless writer it seems “downright Folly to hope to rise by disinterested Merit.”

“The Writer has three Provinces. To write for Booksellers. To write for the Stage. To write for a Faction in the Name of the Community.”31 Writing for the bookseller was a grievance, for “let the Bargain be driven how it will for which, almost as much may be urged in justice to the Man of Craft, as against it, in Compassion to the Man of Ingenuity, Bookmaking is the Manufacture he must thrive by: The Rules of Trade oblige him to buy as cheap and sell as dear as possible.” This accounts for the many fluctuations of the press.

The sagacious Bookseller feels the Pulse of the Times,—not to cure but to flatter the Disease: As long as the Patient continues to swallow, he continues to administer: and on the first Symptom of a Nausea, he changes the Dose. Hence the Cessation of all Political Carminatives, and the Introduction of Cantharides, in the Shape of Tales, Novels, Romances &. And hence the sudden Change from a Course of Composers and Amusers to a Course of State-Stimulatives of the most daring and dangerous kind.32

The professional writer, a literary automaton, obeys the orders of his employers, the booksellers, in catering to the popular taste.

29 The Monthly Review, XVIII, 348. 30 Case of Authors, p. 2.
31 Ralph did not consider ministerial writing a province, as there was so little call for it; which, when needed, could be supplied at slight cost from either of the universities.
32 Case of Authors, p. 21.
Though there is no difference between the writer in his garret, and the slave in the mines. . . . Both have their tasks assigned them alike: Both must drudge and starve: and neither can hope for deliverance. The compiler must compile: the composer must compose on: sick or well: in spirit or out: whether furnished with matter or not: till, by the joint pressure of labour, penury, and sorrow, he has worn out his parts, his constitution, and all the little stock of reputation he had acquired among the trade; Who were all, perhaps, that ever heard of his name.\textsuperscript{33}

Ralph regarded bookseller and writer as alike victims of a vicious system, yet on the whole he treated the employing bookseller with commendable fairness. His attitude towards the stage was far more prejudiced, colored perhaps by his own several dramatic failures, for he declared:

But in truth, an author has more difficulties to struggle with in this walk than in any other. The dramatic muse is the coyest of the choir. To Addison she was a prude; she was a wanton to cibber; and in general, when least courted is easiest won. To cohabit with her, is the only way to obtain a sure ascendancy over her. It was by the dint of perpetual assiduity and familiarity shakespeare, johnson \{jonson\} fletcher, shirley, massinger, dryden, otway, southern, congreve, vanbrugh \{sic\} & obtain’d their several degrees of mastery. But in our days, all access to her is in a manner cut off.\textsuperscript{34}

This introduced the severe but not unjust charge that the managers of the two patent theatres, garrick and the younger rich, were arbitrary and capricious in their selection of new plays, and niggardly in their payments to the few fortunate authors whose works were accepted.

Those who have the custody of the stage claim also the custody of the muse; and sit in judgment on the virility of the suitor. . . . And having once pronounced him impotent, he is so to be esteem’d forever. . . . It follows, that even the bookseller is a perfect maecenas compar’d to the manager. . . . There is no drawback on the profit of the night in old plays: and any access of reputation carries no impertinent claims and invidious distinctions along with it.\textsuperscript{35}

When the public clamor for a new entertainment can no longer be denied, one of the dramatic inner circle is allowed to write, but the works of young and unknown dramatic writers get scant consideration, although the managers claim “that the one of a thousand who deserves encouragement never fails to get it.” Smollett has described garrick’s polite return of manuscripts he had never bothered to read, and rich’s boorish method of piling all new plays in a heap and allowing the

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 22.  
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 24.  
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 25.
disappointed authors to select any two they liked.\textsuperscript{36} “Whence it should follow, That Infallibility, denied to the Church . . . is the sole Property of the Stage.” Despite this infallibility, Cibber, “a bottle of as pert small Beer as ever whizz’d in any Man’s Face,” refused the Beggar’s Opera, and Garrick mistakenly rejected Dodsley’s Cleone and Home’s Douglas.

To be quite explicit, I am as much an Admirer of Mr. Garrick, and his Excellencies, as I ought to be; and I envy him no Part of his good Fortune. . . . But then, tho’ I am free to acknowledge that he was made for the Stage, I cannot be brought to think, the Stage was made only for him; or that the Fate of every dramatical Writer ought either to be at his Mercy, or that of any other Manager, whatsoever. And the single Consideration, That there is no alternative but to fly from him . . . to Mr. Rich is enough to deter any Man in his Senses, from embarking a second Time on such a hopeless Voyage.

In short, it needs no Proof, That he, who cannot stoop as low to a Manager of either House as to a Minister . . . had better, from the first, take Refuge in Grub-street, and indent himself as a Garrettier forever.\textsuperscript{37}

While conditions were not quite so hopeless as Ralph pictured them in 1758, the “author by profession” certainly did not regard the theatre as a lucrative field for his talents. Ralph blamed this largely on the close corporation methods of the managers of the two patent theatres. In part this was true, but the fact that the bookseller was in his own phrase “a perfect Maecenas compared with the Manager,” was rather due to the growth of the reading public than to managerial parsimony. The theatre attracted the leading literary minds of the day only so long as it paid higher prices than the booksellers, and “the reading public by destroying that preeminence destroyed the superior charm of the drama for an author.”\textsuperscript{38}

In discussing the third province of “the author by profession” Ralph declared that to write for a party carries with it the greatest prestige, but also involves the greatest risks. If the writer is tame and weak, contempt and neglect will be his only rewards, while if too bold, he will be quickly disowned.

It follows, that this Province can be but a very narrow one: And I call it the most flattering of all, because the Writer who fills it, is expected to do without Doors, which his Confederates in a superior Station, find impracticable to do within. . . .

While, therefore, these occasional Connections hold, while he is useful in collecting the Materials of Opposition, and in working up the whole Mass to a

\textsuperscript{36} Roderick Random, Chap. 53.  
\textsuperscript{37} Case of Authors, p. 27–28.  
\textsuperscript{38} A. S. Collins, Authorship in the Days of Johnson, p. 268.
Head, Hope sweetens all his Labours, all his Difficulties, all his Discourage-
ments, and at least he enjoys the Dream of growing serviceable to himself and 
his Country together.39

The opposition gather momentum, at length they dare risk a trial of 
strength, and succeed in displacing their opponents and gaining office 
themselves; “the pen is no longer of any Use.... And he that held it, 
is left, in the Language of Shakespeare, ‘Like an unregarded Bulrush 
on the Stream to rot itself with Motion.’ ” Ralph cited in proof of this 
one of the greatest examples of ministerial neglect in the eighteenth 
century.

Poor Amhurst! after having been a Drudge of his Party for the best Part of 
Twenty Years together, was as much forgot in the famous Compromise of 1742, 
as if he had never been born! ... And when he died of what is called a broken 
Heart, which happened within a few Months afterwards, became indebted to 
the very Charity of his Bookseller for a Grave.... A Grave not to be traced now, 
because then no otherwise to be distinguished, than by the Freshness of the Turf, 
borrowed from the next Common to cover it.40

The politico-literary writer had not always been held in such dis- 
esteem, but in 1758 there were too many factional hacks, and the re-
wards were correspondingly meagre. Nevertheless, Ralph claimed, 
the quality of their work was high; “at least on a par with the Times. 
They certainly write as well as our Heroes perform.”

Having pictured the life of an author as about the last a liberal 
mind would choose, Ralph anticipated his critics by declaring:

Were Authors to consider the Times as other Manufacturers do, they would 
act as reasonably.... But then they would not be Authors. Pride and Pleasure 
in their first Sallies not only serve them instead of Profit, but render them deaf 
to all other Considerations.

There is a Luxury of the Mind as well as of the Senses.... Of Those who 
administer to the latter, Authors stand the foremost.... And ought we to 
reproach them for the Exercise of those Talents which we are so much oblig’d to, 
for inlarging the Bounds of our Happiness?41

Ralph certainly said little about the relations between the profes-
sional writer and his employers which was not known before, but the 
very act of publishing such a vigorous defense indicated the begin-
ning of a more independent position for the professional writer.

The Case of Authors (1758) preceded by just one year a more 
famous discussion of the professional writer in The Present State of

39 Case of Authors, p. 31. 40 Ibid., p. 32.
41 Ibid., p. 72.
Polite Learning (1759). As Goldsmith and Ralph were members of the staff of the Monthly Review for a time in 1756–57, it is not an unreasonable conjecture that Goldsmith discussed with Ralph, who had grown old in writing, the disabilities of the “author by profession.” This conjecture is strengthened by a comparison of the two essays.

As might be expected, both complained of the low social standing of writers, but there is a remarkable uniformity of idea and mood. Goldsmith but echoed Ralph when he declared:

Those who are unacquainted with the world are apt to fancy the man of wit as leading a very agreeable life. They conclude, perhaps, that he is attended to with silent admiration, and dictates to the rest of mankind with all the eloquence of conscious superiority. Very different is his present situation. He is called an author, and all know that an author is a thing only to be laughed at. His person, not his jest, becomes the mirth of the company. At his approach, the most fat unthinking face brightens into malicious meaning. Even aldermen laugh, and revenge on him the ridicule which was lavished on their forefathers.42

Goldsmith, like Ralph, complained of contempt from those of supposedly educated and liberal tastes:

Yet it were well if none but the dunces of society were combined to render the profession of the author ridiculous or unhappy. Men of the first eminence are often found to indulge the illiberal vein of raillery.43

Ralph had declared that the writer was between the horns of a dilemma: if he accepted money he had no social standing; if he allowed the profits of his writing to revert to the bookseller he was declared a fool. Goldsmith, while not so explicit, seems to have had the same idea in mind.

The poet’s poverty is a standing topic of contempt. His writing for bread is an unpardonable offence. Perhaps of all mankind an author in these times is used most hardly. We keep him poor, and yet revile his poverty. Like angry parents who correct their children till they cry, and then correct them for crying, we reproach him for living by his wit, and yet allow him no other means to live.44

Ralph thought writing for money was preferable to starvation, and declared, “Mr. Hogarth will tell you like an honest Man that till Fame appears to be worth more than Money, he will always prefer Money to Fame.” The same idea is presented by Goldsmith in this fashion.

42 Present State of Polite Learning, ed. Cunningham, III, 22.
43 Ibid., III, 54.
44 Ibid., III, 55.
If the profession of an author is to be laughed at by the stupid, it is certainly better to be contemptibly rich than contemptibly poor. For all the wit that ever adorned the human mind will at present no more shield the author's poverty from ridicule, than his high-topped gloves conceal the unavoidable omissions of his laundress.\(^\text{45}\)

Goldsmith discussed the ill treatment of political writers, and in the first edition cited the cases of Sale, Savage, Amhurst, and Moore. In *The Case of Authors* Ralph had discussed Amhurst's unhappy lot at length, and anticipated Goldsmith in his conclusion that, for the writer, the least of evils was to seek employment with the booksellers. Ralph had likened the writer in his garret to the slave in the mines: Goldsmith, a more gentle soul, with less accumulated bitterness, nevertheless expressed much the same opinion of booksellers as Ralph.

The author when unpatronized by the great, has naturally recourse to the bookseller. There cannot perhaps be imagined a combination more prejudicial to taste than this. It is to the interest of the one to allow as little for writing, and of the other to write as much as possible. Accordingly, tedious compilations and periodical magazines are the result of their joint endeavors. In these circumstances, the author bids adieu to fame; writes for bread, and for that only imagination is seldom called in. . . . His reputation never spreads in a wider circle than that of 'the trade,' who generally value him, not for the fineness of his compositions, but the quantity he works off in a given time.\(^\text{46}\)

Ralph had protested against the caprice and favoritism displayed by managers and the obsequiousness necessary in a dramatic writer if he wished to have his play reach the stage. Goldsmith has the following on this point:

Yet getting a play on, even in three or four years, is a privilege reserved only for the happy few who have the arts of courting the manager as well as the muse; who have the adulation to please his vanity, powerful patrons to support their merit, or money to indemnify their disappointment.\(^\text{47}\)

Both Ralph and Goldsmith incurred the enmity of David Garrick for their remarks about theatre managers. Ralph, to be sure, was much franker than Goldsmith, and he was, at the time, under some obligation to the great actor, who had introduced him to Lord Hartington and thus facilitated the grant of his pension. Garrick was no longer in a position to injure Ralph and had to be content with terming him

\(^{45}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{46}\) *Ibid.*, p. 57. It should be remembered that Goldsmith left the employ of Griffiths in September, 1757, after a disagreement. His tedious labor there helped to fill a periodical.

“the most ungrateful man in the kingdom.” Goldsmith, however, was made to pay for his frankness; for some years later, when the secretaryship of the Society of the Arts became vacant, he applied to Garrick for a recommendation and was refused. During the interview Garrick mentioned the criticism in the *Present State of Polite Learning*, and Goldsmith declared frankly that, “In truth he had spoken his mind, and believed what he said was right.”

Ralph’s pamphlet found another admirer in the next century, for *The Case of Authors by Profession* fell into the hands of that indefatigable literary historian and anecdotist, Isaac D’Israeli, some time before 1812, the year in which he published the *Calamities of Authors* in his series of *Miscellanies of Literature*. The running title of Ralph’s work is: *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade, Stated. With Regard to Booksellers, the Stage and the Public.* It hardly seems simple coincidence that the first chapter in the *Calamities of Authors* should be entitled “Authors by Profession” and the second “The Case of Authors Stated,” but if simple coincidence it is, there are nearly a dozen more in the nine pages of D’Israeli’s first chapter. He wrote:

It is indeed by our authors that foreigners have been taught most to esteem us; and this remarkably appears in the expression of Gemelli, the Italian traveller around the world, who wrote about the year 1700; for he told all Europe that he could find nothing amongst us but our writings to distinguish us from the worst of barbarians.

Ralph had noted the opinion more than fifty years earlier when he stated:

It has already been urg’d, That such among them [authors] as have the Knowledge, Prudence, Probity, and Spirit requisite to such a high Calling, are an Ornament to the State they belong to: and in Churchill’s Collection of Voyages, an Italian Traveller, one Gemelli, gives all Europe to understand, That he could find nothing amongst us but our Writings, to distinguish us from the worst of Barbarians.

In speaking of volunteer writers Ralph wrote: “There is indeed a Species of Venality which can no otherwise be palliated, than by the famous Maxim of a late famous State-Casuist, ‘That he is a Fool who is a Grain honester than the Times he lives in.’” This in D’Is-

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50 *Case of Authors*, p. 3-11, 18-19, 31-38, 60.
raeli's account becomes simply, "Another has said, 'He is a fool who is a grain honester than the times he lives in,'" Ralph referred to the curious combination of rapacity and obsequiousness which characterized some political writers as "partaking as much of the Hussar as that of the Swiss." This phrase seems to have commended itself to D'Iraeli for he incorporated it into the following rhetorical bouquet: "Unblushing venality! In one part he [the political writer] shouts like a plundering Hussar who has carried off his prey; and in the other he bows with the tame suppleness of the quarterly Swiss chaffering his halbert for his price." Again, Ralph called opposition hirelings "writers of a faction in the name of the community." D'Iraeli uses identical words and, after paraphrasing Ralph's account of the rise of the opposition to political power, told of the unhappy lot of the now useless journalist. Let us first read the original of 1758:

At last, the Time of Projection comes. . . . The country is brought to groan for a Change. . . . The strongest Faction in the C———t takes Advantage of the Cry, to displace the Weaker. All sufficient Patriots become insignificant Ministers. . . . Opposition is at an End. . . . The Pen is no longer of any Use. . . . And he that held it, is left, in the Language of Shakespeare, Like an unregarded Bulrush on the Stream to rot itself with Motion.

Following this, Ralph cited the unhappy fate of Nicholas Amhurst, who became indebted to the Charity of his very Bookseller for a Grave. . . . A Grave not to be traced now, because then no otherwise to be distinguished, than by the Freshness of the Turf, borrowed from the next Common to cover it.

In the Calamities of Authors we read:

When the ardent patron was changed into a cold minister, their pen [political writers] seemed wonderfully to have lost its point, and the feather could not anymore tickle. They were flung off, as Shakespeare's striking imagery expressed it, like

'An unregarded bulrush on the stream,
To rot itself with motion.'

Look on the fate and fortune of Amhurst. The life of this 'Author by Profession' points a moral. . . . Amhurst succeeded in writing out the minister and writing in Bolingbroke and Pulteney. . . . His patrons mounted into power—but—they silently dropped the instrument of their ascension. He died broken-hearted, and owed the charity of a grave to his bookseller.

Ralph quoted Hogarth to the effect that "till Fame appears to be worth more than Money he would always prefer Money to Fame," and he repeated Fielding's question in the Covent Garden Journal, "Why is he whose livelihood is in his pen, a greater monster in using it
to serve himself, than he who uses his tongue for the same purpose?" Isaac D’Israeli also quotes both of these.

The case is clear, I think, that D’Israeli did not bother to acknowledge his indebtedness to an eighteenth-century writer who happened to be one of these same despised “authors by profession.” It may be argued that as the first edition of The Case of Authors carried on the title page “No Matter by Whom” and the second only “J. R.,” D’Israeli did not know to whom he was indebted, and found it too much of a mystery to penetrate. But he spent many years of his life penetrating just such literary mysteries, and this would not have been very difficult to solve, especially as Davies in his Life of Garrick specifically mentioned Ralph’s authorship of the work. It would appear that The Case of Authors was good enough to paraphrase and quote, but not sufficiently important to acknowledge as a source.

From time to time Franklin had been informed of Ralph’s rise in the world. In 1753 Governor Denny arriving in Philadelphia had brought word that Ralph was still alive, “that he was esteem’d one of the best political writers in England; had been employed in a dispute between Prince Frederick and the King, and had obtained a pension of three hundred a year; that his reputation was indeed small as a poet, but that his prose was thought as good as any man’s.” 51 No one admired success more than Franklin and when he arrived in London in July, 1757 he sought out his old friend, whose knowledge of the political situation might be of great value to him in his struggle with the Penns. Whether Franklin actually wrote An Historical Review of the Constitution and Government of Pennsylvania in 1759 or not is still, I believe, a disputed point. Certainly Franklin never acknowledged his part in the business, but we have the word of his son William that “Ralph is engaged to see it through the press.” 52 It is pleasant to think that more than thirty years later Ralph was able to free himself from Franklin’s debt by this favor. By a curious quirk of fate Franklin was in London, visited Ralph during his last illness in 1761–62, and had a correspondence with Ralph’s daughter, who showed great interest in her American relations. At this time Franklin was far from the height of his fame, but Ralph had gone as high as he was destined to go. Like many other Philadelphians, Logan, Allen, Syng, Bartram,

52 Paul Leicester Ford, Franklin Bibliography, p. 111.
Galloway, Rittenhouse and Bond, Ralph has been overshadowed by the figure of Franklin. Removed from that shadow and judged in the light of his career as a poet, dramatist, critic, publicist and historian, he appears as a man of consequence in the literary and political life of eighteenth-century England. His career has added interest for us because he was certainly the first American ever to wrest a decent living out of eighteenth-century Grub Street.

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