Winter he owed the suggestion of his own poem. In 1712 he attended a school at Jedburgh, held in the aisle of the parish church. He learnt there some Latin, but with difficulty, and the earliest recorded utterance of the future poet was “ Confound the building of Babel.” He began very soon to write verses, and we are told that every January he destroyed almost all the productions of the preceding year. And this was just as well, for the little that has escaped the fire contains no promise of his future powers. In 1715 he went to the university of Edinburgh. It is said that as soon as the servant who brought him thither had quitted him, he returned full speed to his father’s house, declaring that he could read just as well at home; he went back, however, and had not been long at college before he lost his father, who died, according to one remarkable but highly improbable story, in the attempt to lay a ghost. The incident should have left more impression than we can trace upon the mind of the poet, at this date nervous and afraid of the dark; but in his *Winter* he writes of all such stories with a quiet contempt for “ superstitious horror.” He made friends at the university with David Mallock, who afterwards called himself Mallet, and with Patrick Murdoch, his future biographer. In 1719 he became a divinity student, and one of his exercises so enchanted a certain Auditor Benson, that he urged Thomson to go to London and there make himself a reputation as a preacher. It was partly with this object that Thomson left Edinburgh without a degree in March 1725. His mother saw him embark, and they never met again; she died on the 10th of May of that year. There is sufficient evidence that on his arrival in London he was not in the extreme destitution which Dr Johnson attributes to him; and in July 1725 we find him engaged, as a make-shift, in teaching “ Lord Binning’s son to read.” This son was the grandson of Lady Grizel Baillie, a somewhat distant connexion of Thomson’s mother. She was the daughter of Sir Patrick Home, whom, after the defeat of Argyll, she fed in his conceal­ment near his own castle; she was also, like other Scottish ladies, a writer of pretty ballads. This heroine and poetess is supposed to have encouraged Thomson to come to England, and it is certain that she procured him a temporary home. But he had other friends, especially Duncan Forbes of Culloden, by whom he was recommended to the duke of Argyll, the carl of Burlington, Sir Robert Walpole, Arbuthnot, Pope and Gay. Some introductions to the literary world he may have owed to Mallet, then tutor in the family of the duke of Montrose.

Thomson’s *Winter* appeared in March 1726. It was warmly praised by Aaron Hill, a man of various interests and projects, and in his day a sort of literary oracle. It was dedicated to Sir Spencer Compton, the Speaker, who rewarded the poet, to his great disgust, with a bare twenty guineas. By the nth of June 1727 a second edition was called for. Meanwhile Thomson was residing at Mr Watts’s academy in Tower Street as tutor to Lord George Graham, second son of the duke of Montrose, and previously a pupil of Mallet. *Summer* appeared in 1727. It was dedicated in prose, a compliment afterwards versified, to Bubb Dodington. In the same year Thomson published his *Poem to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton,* with a fulsome dedication to Sir Robert Walpole, which was afterwards omitted, and the verses themselves remodelled when the poet began to inveigh against the ministry as he did in *Britannia,* published in 1729. *Spring* appeared in 1728, published by Andrew Millar, a man who, according to Johnson, dealt hand­somely by authors and “ raised the price of literature.” It was dedicated to the countess of Hertford, afterwards duchess of Somerset, a lady devoted to letters and the patroness of the unhappy Savage. In 1729 Thomson produced *Sophonisba,* a tragedy now only remembered by the line “ O Sophonisba, Sophonisba, O,” and the parody “ O Jemmy Thomson, Jemmy Thomson, O,” which caused him to remodel the unhappy verse in the form, “ O Sophonisba, I am wholly thine.” A poem, anonymous but unquestionably Thomson’s, to the memory of Congreve who had died in January 1729, appeared in that year. In 1730 *Autumn* was first published in a collected edition of *The Seasons.* It was dedicated to the Speaker, Onslow. In this year, at the suggestion of Rundle, bishop of Derry, one of his patrons, he accompanied the son of Sir Charles Talbot, solicitor-general, upon his travels. In the course of these he projected his *Liberty* as “ a poetical landscape of countries, mixed with moral observations on their government and people.” In December 1731 he returned with his pupil to London. He probably lived with his patrons the Talbots, leisurely meditating his new poem, the first part of which did not appear until the close of 1734 or the beginning of 1735. But meanwhile his pupil died, and in the opening lines of *Liberty* Thomson pays a tribute to his memory. Two months after his son’s death Sir Charles Talbot became chancellor and gave Thomson a sinecure in the court of chancery. About this time the poet worked for the relief of Dennis, now old and in extreme poverty, and induced even Pope to give a half-contemptuous support to the bitter critic of the *Rape of the Lock. Liberty* was completed in five parts in 1736. The poem was a failure; its execution did not correspond with its design; in a sense indeed it is a survey of countries and might have anticipated Goldsmith’s *Traveller.* It was not, however, the poem which readers were expecting from the author of *The Seasons,* who had taken them from the town to the country, and from social and political satire to the world of nature. It is in the main a set of weari­some declamations put in the mouth of the goddess, and Johnson rightly enough remarks that “ an enumeration of examples to prove a position which nobody denied as it was from the beginning superfluous, must quickly grow disgusting.” The truth is that Thomson’s poetical gift was for many years perverted by the zeal of partisanship.

He was established in May 1736 in a small house at Richmond, but his patrou died in February 1737 and he lost his sinecure; he then “ whips and spurs ” to finish his tragedy *Agamemnon,* which appeared in April 1738, not before he had been arrested for a debt of £70, from which, according to a story which has been discredited on quite insufficient grounds, Quin relieved him in the most generous and tactful manner. Quin, it is said, visited him in the sponging-house and “ balanced accounts with him ” by insisting on his accepting a hundred pounds as a return for the pleasure which the actor had received from the poet’s works. The incident took place probably a little before the production of *Agamemnon,* in which Quin played the leading part. The play is of course modelled upon Aeschylus and owes whatever of dignity it possesses to that fact; the part of Cassandra, for instance, retains something of its original force, pathos and terror. But most of the other characters exist only for the purpose of political innuendo. Agamemnon is too long absent at Troy, as George is too long absent in Germany; the arts of Aegisthus are the arts of Walpole; the declamations of Arcus are the declamations of Wyndham or Pulteney; Melis- ander, consoling himself with the muses on his island in Cyclades, is Bolingbroke in exile. Thomson about this time was introduced to Lyttelton, and by him to the prince of Wales, and to one or the other of these, when he was questioned as to the state of his affairs, he made answer that they were “ in a more poetical posture than formerly.” *Agamemnon* was put upon the stage soon after the passing of Walpole’s bill for licensing plays, and its obvious bias fixed the attention of the censorship and caused Thomson’s next venture, *Edward and Eleanora,* which has the same covert aim, to be proscribed. The fact has very generally escaped notice that, like its predecessor, it follows a Greek original, the *Alcestis* of Euripides. It has also, what *Agamemnon* has not, some little place in the history of literature, for it suggested something to Lessing for *Nathan der Weise,* and to Scott for the *Talisman.* The rejection of the play was defended by one of the ministry on the ground that Thomson had taken a *Liberty* which was not agreeable to *Britannia* in any *Season.* These circumstances sufficiently account for the poet’s next experiment, a preface to Milton’s *Areopagitica.* He joined Mallet in composing the masque of *Alfred,* represented at Clieveden on the Thames before the prince of Wales, on the 1st of August 1740. There can be little question that “ Rule