Britannia,” a song in this drama, was the production of Thomson. The music of the song, as of the whole masque, was composed by Arne. In 1744 Thomson was appointed surveyor-general of the Leeward Islands by Lyttelton with an income of £300 a year; but his patron fell into disfavour with the prince of Wales, and in consequence Thomson lost, at the close of 1747, the pension he received from that quarter. For a while, however, he was in flourishing circumstances, and whilst completing at his leisure *The Castle of Indolence* produced *Tancred and Sigis­munde* at Drury Lane in 1745. The story is found in *Gil Blas,* and is ultimately to be traced to *The Decameron.* It owes much to Le Sage in language, plot and sentiment, and the conflict of emotion, in depicting which Thomson had some little skill, is here effectively exhibited. He was assisted herein by his own experience. The “ Amanda ” of *The Seasons* is a Miss Elizabeth Young, a lady of Scottish parentage, whose mother was ambitious for her and forbade her to marry the poet, anticipating that she would be reduced to singing his ballads in the streets. The last years of his life were saddened by this disappointment.

*The Castle of Indolence,* after a gestation of fifteen years, appeared in May 1748. It is in the Spenserian stanza with the Spenserian archaism, and is the first and last long effort of Thomson in rhyme. It is not impossible that his general choice of blank verse was partly due to the fact that he had not the southron’s ear and took many years to acquire it. The great and varied interest of the poem might well rescue it from the neglect into which even *The Seasons* has fallen. It was worthy of an age which was fertile in character-sketches, and like Gay’s *Welcome to Pope* anticipates Goldsmith’s *Retaliation* in the lifelike presentation of a noteworthy circle. There is in it the same strain of gentle burlesque which appears in Shenstone’s *Schoolmistress,* whilst the tone and diction of the poem harmonize with the hazy landscape, the pleasant land of drowsy- head, in which it is set. It is the last work by Thomson which appeared in his lifetime. In walking from London to his house at Richmond he became heated and took a boat at Hammer­smith; he thus caught a chill with fatal consequences and died on the 27th of August 1748. He was buried in Richmond churchyard. His tragedy *Coriolanus* was acted for the first time in January 1749. In itself a feeble performance, it is noteworthy for the prologue which his friend Lyttelton wrote for it, two lines of which—

"He loved his friends—forgive the gushing tear!

Alas! I feel I am no actor here ”—

were recited by Quin with no simulated emotion.

It may be questioned whether Thomson himself ever quite realized the distinctive significance of his own achievement in *The Seasons,* or the place which criticism assigns him as the pioneer of a special literary movement and the precursor of Cowper and Wordsworth. His avowed preference was for great and worthy themes of which the world of nature was but one. Both the choice and the treatment of his next great subject, *Liberty,* indicate that he was imperfectly conscious of the gift that was in him, and might have neglected it but that his readers were wiser than himself. He has many audacities and many felicities of expression, and enriched the vocabulary even of the poets who have disparaged him. Yet it is difficult to believe that he was not the better for that training in refinement of style which he partly owed to Pope, who almost unquestionably contributed some passages to *The Seasons.* And, except in *The Castle of Indolence,* there is much that is conventional, much that is even vicious or vulgar in taste when Thomson’s muse deals with that human life which must be the background of descriptive as of all other poetry; for example, his bumpkin who chases the rainbow is as unreal a being as Akensidc’s more sentimental rustic who has “ the form of beauty smiling at his heart.” But if Thomson sometimes lacks the true vision for things human, he retains it always for things mute and material, and whilst the critical estimate of his powers and influence will vary from age to age, all who have read him will concur in the colloquial judgment which only candour could have extorted from the prejudice of Dr Johnson— “ Thomson had as much of the poet about him as most writers. Everything appeared to him through the medium of his favourite pursuit. He could not have viewed those two candles burning but with a poetical eye.”

For the day of Thomson’s birth see the Aldine edition of his poems (1897). In the same volume (pp. 189 seq.) is discussed the question of Pope’s contributions to *The Seasons.* These Pope, if the handwriting be his, made in an interleaved edition of *The Seasons* dated 1738, and they were for the most part adopted by Thomson in the edition of 1744. The writer seldom makes more than, verbal changes in passages of pure description, but sometimes strikingly enhances the scenes in which human character comes into play, adding, for example, the comparison, in *Autumn,* of the fair Lavinia to a myrtle in the Apennines, of which the first suggestion can be found in *The Rape of the Lock.* But whereas many years ago the. opinion of experts at the British Museum pronounced the handwriting of these notes to be Pope’s beyond a doubt, their successors at the present day are equally positive that it is not. Some account should be taken of the cramping of the hand, due to writing on a curved surface, and of the letters at Blenheim (see *Palt Mall Magazine* for August 1894), which bear a greater resemblance to the disputed handwriting than any specimens in the British Museum.

The first collected editions of *The Seasons* bear dates 1730, 1738, 1744, 1746. Lyttelton tampered both with *The Seasons* and with *Liberty* in editions after his friend's death. Among the numerous lives of the poet may be mentioned those by his friend Patrick Murdoch, by Dr Johnson in *Lives of the Poets,* by Sir Harris Nicolas (Ald. ed., i860), by Μ. Morel, *James Thomson, sa vie et ses œuvres* (Paris, 1895), and *James Thomson,* in the English Men of Letters Series, by G. C. Macaulay (1908). See also Dr G. Schmeding’s *Jacob Thomson, ein vergessener Dichter des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts;* the life prefixed to the Aldine edition of his works in 1897; and an excellent edition of *The Seasons* in the Clarendon Press Series by J. Logie Robertson. (D. C. To.)

**THOMSON, JAMES** (1834-1882), British poet, best known by his signature “ B.V.”, Was born at Port-Glasgow, in Renfrew­shire, on the 23rd of November 1834, the eldest child of a mate in the merchant shipping service. His mother was a deeply religious woman of the Irvingite sect. On her death, James, then in his seventh year, was procured admission into the Caledonian Orphan Asylum. In 1850 he entered the model school of the Military Asylum, Chelsea, from which he went out into the world as an assistant army schoolmaster. At the garrison at Ballincollig, near Cork, he encountered the one brief happiness of his life: he fell passionately in love with, and was in turn as ardently loved by, the daughter of the armourer­sergeant of a regiment in the garrison, a girl of very exceptional beauty and cultivated mind. Two years later he suddenly re­ceived news of her fatal illness and death. The blow prostrated him in mind and body. Henceforth his life was one of gloom, disappointment, misery and poverty, rarely alleviated by episodes of somewhat brighter fortune. While in Ireland he had made the acquaintance of Charles Bradlaugh, then a soldier stationed at Ballincollig, and it was under his auspices (as editor of the *London Investigator)* that Thomson first appealed to the public as an author, though actually his earliest publication was in *Tait’s Edinburgh Magazine* for July 1858, under the signature “ Crepusculus.” In i860 was established the paper with which Bradlaugh was so long identified, the *National Reformer,* and it was here, among other productions by James Thomson, that appeared (1863) the powerful and sonorous verses “ To our Ladies of Death,” and (1874) his chief work, the sombre and imaginative *City of Dreadful Night.* In October 1862 Thomson was dismissed the army, in company with other teachers, for some slight breach of discipline. Through Bradlaugh, with whom for some subsequent years he lived, he gained employment as a solicitor’s clerk. From 1866 to the end of his life, except for two short absences from England, Thomson lived in a single room, first in Pimlico and then in Bloomsbury. He contracted habits of intemperance, aggravated by his pessimistic turn of mind to dipsomania, which made a successful career impossible for him. In 1869 he enjoyed what has been described as his “only reputable appearance in respectable literary society,” in the acceptance of his long poem, “ Sunday up the River,” for *Fraser's Magazine,* on the advice, it is said, of Charles Kingsley.