THOMSON (James), an excellent Britiſh poet, the ſon of a Scotch divine, was born in the ſhire of Roxburgh in 1700, and was educated in the univerſity of Edinburgh with a view to the miniſtry. But his genius inclining him to the ſtudy of poetry, which he ſoon found would be in­compatible with that of theology, or at leaſt might prevent his being provided for in that way in his own country, he relinquiſhed his views of engaging in the ſacred function, and repaired to London in conſequence of ſome encourage­ment which he had received from a lady of quality there, a friend of his mother.

The reception he met with wherever he was introduced, emboldened him to riſk the publication of his excellent poem on Winter.—This piece was publiſhed in 1726 ; and from the universal applauſe it met with, Mr Thomſon’s acquaintance was courted by people of the first taſte and faſhion. But the chief advantage which it procured him was the acquaintance of Dr Rundle, afterward biſhop of Derry, who introduced him to the late lord chancellor Tal­bot ; and ſome years after, when the eldeſt ſon of that no­bleman was to make his tour on the continent, Mr Thomſon was choſen as a proper companion for him. The expecta­tions which his Winter had raiſed, were fully ſatisfied by the ſucceſſive publications of the other ſeasons ; of Summer, in the year 1727 ; of Spring, in the following year ; and of Autumn, in a quarto edition of his works, in 1730. Beſide the Seaſons, and his tragedy of Sophoniſha, written and acted with applauſe in the year 1729, he had, in 1727, publiſhed his poem to the memory of Sir Iſaac Newton, with an account of his chief diſcoveries ; in which he was aſſiſted by his friend Mr Gray, a gentleman well verſed in the Newtonian philoſophy. That ſame year the reſentment of our merchants, for the interruption of their trade by the Spaniards in America, running very high, Mr Thomſon zealouſly took part in it, and wrote his Britannia, to rouſe the nation to revenge.

With the Honourable Charles Talbot, our author viſited moſt of the courts in Europe, and returned with his views greatly enlarged ; not only of exterior nature and the works of art, but of human life and manners, and of the conſti­tution and policy of the ſeveral ſtates, their connections, and their religious inſtitutions. How particular and judi­cious his obſervations were, we ſee in his poem on Liberty, begun ſoon after his return to England. We ſee at the ſame time to what a high pitch his care of his country was raiſed, by the compariſons he had all along been making of our happy government with thoſe of other nations. To inſpire his fellow-ſubjects with the like ſentiments, and ſhow them by what means the precious freedom we enjoy may be preserved, and how it may be abuſed or loſt, he employed two years in compoſing that noble work, upon which he valued himſelf more than upon all his other writings. On his return to England with Mr Talbot (who ſoon after died), the chancellor made him his ſecretary of briefs; a place of little attendance, ſuiting his retired indolent way of life, and equal to all his wants. From this office he was removed, when death, not long after, deprived him of his noble patron. He then found himself reduced to a ſtate of precarious dependence. In this ſituation, having created some few debts, and his creditors finding that he had no longer any certain ſupport, became inexorable ; and imagi­ned by confinement to force that from his friends, which his modeſty would not permit him to aſk. One of theſe occaſions furniſhed Quin, the celebrated actor, with an op­portunity of diſplaying the natural goodneſs of his heart, and the diſintereſtedneſs of his friendſhip. Hearing that Thomſon was confined in a ſpunging houſe for a debt of about 70 l. he repaired to the plate; and, having inquired for him, was introduced to the bard. Thomson was a good deal diſconcerted at ſeeing Quin, as he had always taken pains to conceal his wants ; and the more ſo, as Quin told him he was come to ſup with him. His anxiety upon this head was however removed, upon Quin’s informing him, that, as he ſuppoſed it would have been inconvenient to have had the supper dressed in the place they were in, he had ordered it from an adjacent tavern ; and, as a prelude, half a dozen of claret was introduced. Supper being over, and the bottle circulating pretty briſkly, Quin ſaid, “ It is time now we ſhould balance accounts.” This aſtoniſhed Thomson, who imagined he had ſome demand upon him ; but Quin perceiving it, continued, “ Mr Thomſon, the pleasure I have had in perilling your works I cannot eſtimate at leſs than a hundred pounds, and I inſiſt upon now acquitting the debt.” On laying this, he put down a note of that value, and took his leave, without waiting for a reply.

The profits ariſing from his works were not inconſiderable; his tragedy of Agamemnon, acted in 1738, yielded a good ſum. But his chief dependence was upon the prince of Wales, who settled on him a handsome allowance, and honoured him with many marks of particular favour. Notwithſtanding this, however, he was refuſed a licence for his tragedy of Edward and Eleanora, which he had pre­pared for the ſtage in the year 1736, for ſome political reaſons. Mr Thomſon’s next performance was the Maſque of Alfred, written in the year 1740 jointly with Mr Mallet, by the command of the prince of Wales, for the entertainment of his royal highneſs’s court at Cliſden, his ſummer reſidence.

Mr Thomſon’s poem, entitled the Caſtle of Indolence, was his laſt work publiſhed by himſelf ; his tragedy of Co­riolanus being only prepared for the theatre, when a fatal accident robbed the world of one of the beſt of men and beſt of poets. He would commonly walk the diſtance be­tween London and Richmond (where he lived) with any acquaintance that offered, with whom he might chat and reſt himſelf, or perhaps dine by the way. One ſummer evening being alone in his walk from town to Hammersmith,he had over-heated himſelf, and in that condition impru­dently took a boat to carry him to Kew ; apprehending no bad conſequence from the chill air on the river, which his walk to his houſe, towards the upper end of Kew-lane, had always hitherto prevented. But now thc cold had ſo ſeized him, that the next day he was in a high fever. This, however, by the uſe of proper medicines, was removed, ſo that he was thought out of danger ; till the fine weather having tempted him to expoſe himſelf once more to the even­ing dews, his fever returned with violence, and with ſuch ſymptoms as left no hopes of a cure. His death happened on the 27th of Auguſt 1748.

Mr Thomſon had improved his taſte upon the fineſt ori­ginals, ancient and modern. The autumn was his favourite seaſon for poetical compoſition, and the deep silence of the night he commonly choſe for his ſtudies. The amuſement of his leiſure-hours were civil and natural hiſtory, voyages, and the beſt relations of travellers. Though he performed on no inſtrument, he was paſſionately fond of muſic, and would sometimes liſten a full hour at his window to the nightingales in Richmond gardens ; nor was his taſte leſs exquiſite in the arts of painting, ſculpture, and architec­ture. As for the more distinguishing qualities of his mind and heart, they beſt appear in his writings. There his de­votion to the Supreme Being, his love of mankind, of his country, and friends, ſhine out in every page ; his tenderness of heart was ſo unbounded, that it took in even the brute creation. It is not known, that through his whole life he ever gave any perſon a moment’s pain, either by his