JAMES OSWALD

(1703 - 1793)
JAMES OSWALD (1703-1793)

AND THE APPLICATION OF

THE COMMON SENSE PHILOSOPHY TO RELIGION

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A Thesis

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By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. THE LIFE OF JAMES OSWALD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. JAMES OSWALD AND HIS CENTURY</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. OSWALD AND THE COMMON SENSE PHILOSOPHY</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. OSWALD'S THEOLOGY</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. OSWALD AND CHURCH POLITY</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. OSWALD'S CRITICS</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. AN ESTIMATE OF JAMES OSWALD</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

Apart from the fulfilling of the requirements of the doctor of philosophy degree, this thesis has had a two-fold purpose. It has been our aim, firstly, to reclaim from obscurity the life story of James Oswald, Minister of Methven, and, secondly, to show his contribution to the Scottish Common Sense School of philosophy. The research has been motivated by a genuine interest in Scottish history and the challenge to meet a need. Professor John Baillie had mentioned in the course of one of the conferences between advisor and student that he had often come across Oswald's name in the course of his reading, but little seemed to be known about him. This was a guiding thought in the preparation of the thesis, and it has been our desire to bring to light as far as possible the biographical details of Oswald's life, placing special emphasis on his application of the Common Sense philosophy to religion.

The material for writing the biography has been limited by the fact that there are no diaries, and but few personal letters to draw upon. This has made it necessary to depend, to a very large extent, upon Kirk Session, Presbytery, and General Assembly records for points of character and position in professional life; with the result that many of the connecting details that would give a more distinct "flesh and blood" portrayal of the man are likely to be found wanting. An endeavor has been made to meet this lack by special attention to what is suggested of
biographical interest in Oswald's own writings, a study of the diaries and memoirs in which the period abounded, and visits to the parishes in which Oswald ministered.

I would here like to express my appreciation to those who have been so willing with their guidance help. To Principal Hugh Watt and Professor John Baillie, my advisors, I owe much for their interest and aid in laying out the plan of the work and directing its course. I am indebted to Principal Duthie, of the Scots Congregational College, who, when Professor Baillie had to be away on a mission for the Church, was kind enough to give of his time and the benefit of valuable suggestions. I am grateful for the cooperation I received from the various libraries where many rare and valuable books were made accessible to me; and wish to thank Mr. Primrose and Miss E. Leslie of the New College Library, Dr. Campbell of the Library of the Church of Scotland, and the staff of the Edinburgh University Library for giving me of their time so graciously and freely. Mr. C. Finlayson, of the latter group, is especially remembered for having made the fine photographic reproduction of Oswald's portrait which appears at the beginning of this work. I cannot forget the spirit and interest of many Scots friends who contributed in a real way to the completion of the work, such as Miss I. Brown, the congregation of St. Thomas' Parish Church, Leith, Mrs. Hugh Mackenzie of St. Thomas' Church who voluntarily took on the burden of the typing, and Mrs. George Houston, also of St. Thomas', who cared for young Roderick and Morag Mackenzie while the typing was in progress. If there is any merit I owe much to them. The mistakes are my own.
The plan of the thesis is to portray James Oswald, the man, to show the relation of his life to times in which he lived, and to provide a study of his contribution to the history of thought. The first chapter is biographical, and includes the facts gathered from church records, sermons, and letters. The chapter immediately following makes a rapid survey of the main movements of the century as they were felt in Scotland, and is intended wherever possible to show their direct points of contact with Oswald's life. This was thought necessary in as much as it is a common truth that one can not know a man apart from his time.

The third chapter deals with the philosophy of Common Sense according to the position Oswald held. The organization of it has been to use sections in order to facilitate reference.

Chapter four deals with Oswald's theology. It follows, in general, the plan of his own work. Therefore, it will be noted that a subject such as "Revelation", which is ordinarily accorded a primary place in a theological discussion, is held over to the very last.

The fifth chapter deals with Oswald's contribution to the vexing problem of patronage that caused so much ill feeling within the Church during the latter part of the eighteenth and the opening years of the nineteenth centuries.
The sixth chapter gives the opinions of Oswald's critics, and they are grouped, according to whether they were favorable or unfavorable in their estimate of his work.

A word of explanation may be needed to justify the liberal resort to quotations throughout the thesis. The main reason has been that, due to the fact the study has in many ways broken new ground, it was the desire of the author to try as far as possible to guard against making Oswald conform too closely to the author's own pre-conceptions and prejudices. The motive has been to present Oswald and his thought foremost. Especially in the chapter on Oswald's critics as Professor Baillie suggested, the most valuable contribution would be to allow them to speak for themselves. Some of the quotes which might have been relegated to an appendix, were kept in the body of the text for convenience in reference, as well as supplying illustrative material for the particular points being discussed.

It is the author's modest hope that this thesis will be of practical value, both to the church historian, and to the student of philosophy. Oswald does not belong among those of genius of the century, to be sure. But his life is worthy of study if a true understanding of moderatism is desired, or if one is seeking a possible cure of the ills of the present age. Some modern preachers, such as Dr. John Sutherland Bonnell of New York City, have been pointing out how closely the eighteenth century parallels our own. There is a love of power and materialism today as then. There is a large amount of infidelity and indifference as there was then. There is need for something to be done to change lives.
Oswald was a practical thinker applying himself to the practical problems of a practical age. There is room for someone like him today as well as for another Wesley. Both appealed to the heart, but their methods were adapted to temperament. Who knows but what there may be a revival of some of the old Common Sense philosophy in modern dress. The gaining interest in Personalism in the United States, for example, seems to point this way.
LIFE OF JAMES OSWALD

James Oswald was born in Dunnet, Scotland, on July 23rd, 1703. His father, George Oswald, was the minister of the parish. At just a few miles West of John O'Groats, located close by lovely Dunnet bay, stands the gleaming white house of worship. It is the same one that was there in the days of minister father and son in the closing years of the Seventeenth century and first fifty of the Eighteenth. Though in those days it did not look in such good repair and so freshly white-washed. Simple in its architectural lines, yet strong in construction, it has blended well with the unpretentious crofts and hardworking zeal of the people of that none too thickly populated farm and shipping community, in Great Britain's northernmost mainland county.

The ancestors of this child, who was to be later recognized by certain writers of books as one of the "triumvirate of Scottish philosophers", were of the islands still further north. The origin of the name probably goes back to some early Scandinavian settlers. The first record of a member of the family which James Oswald was a direct descendant, was of James Oswald of Kirkwall (1590-1660) who obtained a charter for some tenements in Kirkwall from the Earl of Caithness.

1 Hew Scott - Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae (New Rev. Ed.) vol.4, p.223.
3 James Coutts - A History of the University of Glasgow, p.324.
Other members of the family also possessed these lucrative means of income, for in a letter to Calder, the historian - about 1850 - Henderson wrote: "There are tenements in Wick and Thurso still known as 'Oswald's tenements', and a burial-place in Thurso as 'the Oswald's tomb'.\(^5\)

James Oswald's grandfather was a Bailie of Wick, and also bore the name "James Oswald". Oswald's grandmother was Barbara Coghill "of that ilk". Her parents were the proprietors of a small estate known as Coghill and Gersay, later acquired about 1698 by Alexander Manson of Watten and becoming part of the estate of Watten. The Coghills were, so far as the historian could say, the only county landholders who bore the designation "of that ilk".\(^6\)

Two sons were born to Barbara and James Oswald; \(^7\) James on the 26th of January 1654,\(^8\) and George, about 1664.\(^9\) Both became ministers of the Gospel, but of different denominations.

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\(^5\) Jas. T. Calder, Sketch of the Civil and Traditional History of Caithness from the Tenth Century, p. 233.

\(^6\) Henderson, op. cit., p. 253.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 232.

\(^8\) Calder, op. cit., p. 234.

\(^9\) Cf. Hew Scott, op. cit., The date given in Henderson, (op. cit.) p. 232 is 1674. This is a typographical error. Another similar mistake appears in the same work, two pages further on, in the date of Oswald's death. It reads 1773, and should be 1793. Scott's source is the Oswald tombstone. Current newspaper records also substantiate the 1793 date.
The profession they chose was in keeping with the old English meaning of "Oswald", i.e., "divine possession". The uncle, later the Episcopal minister of Watten, died some five years before Oswald was born. There are no known records of letters which tell of any knowledge the nephew might have had of his uncle. Yet there is every likelihood that Oswald was told of his uncle's character. The marble memorial tablet in the church at Watten, inscribed in Latin, contained a sincere tribute to the minister. The following literal translation as quoted by the Caithness Historian, Calder, reveals what his people thought of him:

Here reposes the dust of James Oswald, the worthy pastor of the church of Watten, a man of pleasant countenance, and of genius above what is common; who possessed a wonderfully happy power of addressing an audience, and who, while he convinced the understanding, also moved the heart; kind and affable, adorned with sanctity, and all those other virtues which became him as a minister of the Gospel; a friend of the distressed, and a peacemaker. Hence he had great influence among all parties, both in moulding the minds of the ignorant to prudence, and in reconciling those who were at enmity.

The Uncle also had had to his credit an M.A. degree earned at the University of Aberdeen in 1674 when a young man of twenty. In that far off country, away from the centers of culture, one/


11Calder, op. cit.,pp.233-234. In his footnote on p.233 he tells the source of his translation: "I am indebted...to Mr. John Mackay, architect, native of Caithness... In a note to me, Mr. Mackay says - 'It is from a beautifully-framed copy in phonography, translated from the original, in my possession'".

one could hardly expect many of the people to have had the opportunity to go to college or university. A minister so trained could be a source of help and encouragement, not only in his ministry of the word, but in his guidance in the field of education as well. The charity schools were regularly visited by appointees of the Presbytery. Oswald himself was later to act in this capacity for the Presbytery of Caithness.\(^\text{13}\)

Despite the distances that had to be covered, lack of funds, and other possible drawbacks, the standard of training and the distinction attained by clergymen of the county in which Oswald was born was high.\(^\text{14}\) Oswald's father did his part by earning an M.A. degree from Edinburgh University.\(^\text{15}\)

**Oswald's Education and Life in the Manse**

We have little or no light on the boyhood days of young Oswald. There would, in all probability, be the usual games played by the lads of the County. Discipline at home was severe in a Presbyterian household,\(^\text{16}\) and, if we can judge from the conduct of the clergy fathers in the business of the church, there was no exception in the Oswald home. A couple in the parish were charged with contumacy. The man was told to come before/}

\(^{13}\)Caithness Presbytery Records, (24th May 1723).


\(^{15}\)Alexander Morgan, Ed., *Matriculation Rolls University of Edinburgh*.

before the Dunnet kirk session, but did not appear. Whereupon Oswald senior had the Presbytery take the matter up. They first requested Oswald to publicly pray for the man. This, however, caused no change of heart, nor did the man yet come before the kirk session. He thus was ordered to be present at Presbytery. They, in turn, appointed him to appear before the congregation. This so infuriated him that he "in great chaff went off, telling them he would 'rather want marriage all his days than satisfie sic before the congregation'". Such an outburst, however, did not cause the Presbytery to waver. They ordered excommunication for the woman and himself if he did not carry out their appointment. Needless to say, he did as he was directed. 17

Oswald's early education likely consisted of the fare at the Thurso school,—writing, reading, and a good proportion of religious study,—as was customary in most of the parish schools of the day. 18 A report that Oswald's father helped to make with other brethren of the Presbytery on the Charity School in Stroma for the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, reveals the range of tasks done by the schoolmaster, and certain ones which, if he did well, would earn the approval of the committee of visitation. The three ministers were well satisfied with conditions at the Stroma School, especially the master's diligence in "keeping publick exercise of reading and praying/"

17Caithness Presbytery Records, (20th August 1718).
There is no record of any formal secondary school work done by Oswald. It is likely that he profited by the teaching of his father and by a tutor. Alexander Carlyle, a contemporary, tells of being carried through the first book of Euclid in a summer by his father. Oswald would have had the benefit of a University trained father. The Presbytery records of Caithness also tell of money being set aside for the training of young probationers in philosophy, and this could have been another opportunity for learning afforded him. From his Appeal it can be seen that Oswald had great respect for the work of tutors, and makes a number of complimentary references to them. By no large strain of inference, it can be well taken that he wrote out of personal experience.

Oswald's mother also was, in all probability, a helpful guide and teacher for him. She came from a family of landowners in the County. Her father, Richard Murray of Pennyland, had been one of the Commissary deputes of Caithness. Her sister, Mary, had married Oswald's uncle James. There had been eight in Mother Oswald's family, and that in itself would have been a training school for her, to learn how to bring up her own children.

There would be no way of knowing about Oswald's having studied/

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studied at one of the Scottish Universities were it not for one of his writings. 26 It was not necessary in his day to matriculate in order to take courses, and he evidently chose not to. He neither matriculated nor took a degree. 27 In his Letters on Patronage, however, he definitely states having spent time as a scholar under the teaching of "Principal Hamilton". He pays great tribute not only to the splendid teaching ability of Hamilton, but also to the genuineness of his character. "To those who will please to recollect", he writes, "what has passed in our Assemblies since the year 1730, it will occur, that we have been directed by the sentiments and spirit of Principal Hamilton, whose scholars many of us were, or of those who formed themselves upon the plan of this eminent friend of religion and learning. 28 In this he was making a judgment of Hamilton that was not uncommon among many student contemporaries, and which lasted on toward the latter part of the century. For Ramsay of Ochtertyre tells of the opinion of the aged to be that "none was ever better to discharge the important trust of a professor of divinity". Of Hamilton's influence on his students, Ramsay notes that "all of them professed through life the highest veneration for the memory of this excellent man, whom they took for their model." 29


27 This is our opinion after a careful study of the Matriculation rolls of the four Scottish Universities.

28 Oswald, Letters on Patronage, p.23.

Oswald must have noted some contrasts between Dunnet and Edinburgh, for when we travel back from the imaginative scene in the class-room of the kindly professor to some of the "rough and ready" happenings that took place in Dunnet, there is a change of emotion as well as of a few years of time. When only a lad of eight, he would remember his father dealing with three men from Kirkwall who crossed the Pentland Firth and created a disturbance during the time of divine service one Sabbath morning. On the Monday following, Oswald's father intercepted the men on their way home, and had them brought before the session bailiff. The bailiff, together with a quorum of elders and the minister, asked the defendants to explain their "scandal". Their method of replying was to place the blame on their employer. "God judge him that was the cause of it", they said. This only brought more reproof from the elders, and caused the men to lament the more that their master (a Captain Moody) had sent them on the errand in the first place. The events that followed were all put in the Presbytery records:

Mr. Oswald further informs that they did not only cross the Pentland Firth, but also profaned the Sabbath by carrying burdens through the Parish of Dunnet. For which scandal the session bailiff obliged them to give bond that they would satisfy sic for their scandal under the penalty of twenty pounds Scots. Yet when they returned to Orkney, they complained sic to the Justices of the Peace in that country that they were barbarously used, and oppressed by ye minister of Dunnet, and gave into the Lord justices of peace this petition full of scurrilous reflections and most notorious lyes [sic] on Mr. Oswald. The Justices of Peace on this petition presented to them, transmitted the said petition with one letter to ye Justices of the Peace in this country and another to the sheriff full of calumnys against Mr. Oswald in particular,
particular, and full of expressions injurious to the whole church discipline in general. For in it they assert that the justices of the peace are not only judges of all immorality whatsoever, but it is their part and none other to examine and convert them...if such sentiments prevail and take effect, discipline will be entirely ruined. In the said letters they further recommend to ye judges of this country to recover the obligation Mr. Oswald's bailiff took of the men of Walls, and to punish Mr. Oswald as an oppressour sic and breaker of the peace. Mr. Oswald adds that what belongs to himself, he is ready to answer for it; but since the matter shrieks farther, viz., at the subversion of all church discipline, especially in this and the neighboring country of Orkney, it is thought worthy of the Presbytery's deliberation, how such dangerous sentiments and disorderly practices may be curbed and redressed, 30

The outcome of the matter was that the Presbytery decided to have their Commissioner to the General Assembly lay it before them for direction. The Church's highest judicatory stood squarely behind the action of both minister and Presbytery. The decision, however, was not readily acceded to by Captain Moody, and he tried to even the score by involving Oswald's father in a court action over a forgery. The Dunnet session clerk had signed for an illiterate, and Moody charged Oswald as responsible. A special Presbytery meeting was held at Oswald's request, and he was given permission to go "South" (where the court was to meet), a note explaining it was customary to use such a procedure with illiterates in their part of the country, and the full backing of the Presbytery. The incident takes up a considerable number of pages in the Records, and it is illustrative of the points of contact, sometimes heavy-handed, which existed between church and community.

30 Caithness Presbytery Records, (1711-1712).
Occasional resort to physical force was not uncommon in the parishes of Caithness. It was taken as a matter of course, and a necessary measure to keep certain of the more unruly inhabitants in check. Alexander Pope, minister of Reay, whose call Oswald later helped to moderate, "chose as elders, not only the most decent and orderly, but also the strongest men in the parish, the qualification of strength being particularly necessary for the work which they often had to do". 

Qualified to the Ministry

In a country which had a Presbytery that enjoined a standard of conduct from its people as rigorous as the climate, there is no likelihood that one would make a mistake in imagining that the standards for entering the ministry were also exacting. Oswald's probationary trials confirm this. He, however, came through very well. At the age of 22, he delivered a lecture on the 39th Psalm, and answered extemporaneously questions in divinity. His speech and his answers to the questions met with "the several members of the Presbytery's great satisfaction". Before the meeting was over he was assigned a homily on Proverbs 3:11 ("My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction").

The year following, at the March meeting of Presbytery, Oswald/

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Oswald gave a popular sermon, using the assigned test, Titus 2: 15ff. Following this, he and another candidate, a Mr. Robert Milne, were asked to defend their theses. Both did so, and received the Presbytery's approbation, and were accordingly licensed. The final step that they were required to take was to sign the formula appointed by the General Assembly of 1712, thus signifying belief in the doctrine of the Confession of Faith, and their promise that they would support the Church's government and adhere to its rules, regulations, and decisions.

The young licentiates were not allowed to just relax, and rely on the honors won. Further practical assignments were given them, and these included preaching both before Presbytery and congregations. The first day of the June meeting was so filled with business that Oswald's sermon on II Corinthians 12: 9f. had to be held over until the next day. He preached well, and the brethren were pleased with his work. He was then told to "exercise and act on the Presbytery's Ordinary", which was Colossians 1: 8f. ("Who also declared unto us your love in the spirit. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding... "). Besides this, he was appointed to supply

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32 Caithness Presbytery Records. (9th March, 1726)
at Dunnet for the remainder of June and the whole month of July; and give in a report of his activity at the August meeting of Presbytery.

When the time of the meeting came, Oswald was unable to attend because of illness. He sent word that he had supplied Dunnet as appointed, and explained the reason for his absence from the meeting. His sickness could not have been too serious, for six days later he was able to stand the remainder of his trials when the brethren met in the Dunnet church on August 30th. This was the day of his ordination, and the record reads,

The Presbytery this day proceeded to Master James Oswald's extemporized trials, and several questions being proposed by the several brethren to him, and he having given satisfactory answers, the Presbytery did unanimously approve of this and all the former pieces of his trials, and resolved to proceed to his ordination.

The moderator then called for the edict which had been served by the clerk, and published at the kirk door by the officer, and there being no objections made against the life, doctrine, or conversation of Master James Oswald, probationer...the Presbytery resolved to ordain him minister of the Gospel at Dunnet. 34

Ministry at Dunnet

Within a year's time Oswald was taking a very active part in the affairs of the Presbytery. He supplied at Wick, along with his brother ministers, because a vacancy had been left by the death of the Rev. James Oliphant; he served on a committee of/  

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34 Caithness Presbytery Records, (30th August, 1726).
of three to impugn Presbytery candidate, William Mackay's homily on the 119th Psalm; he preached at Thurso; and he helped to moderate at a proposed partition of the church at Canisbay which the heritors were considering. 35

The first Winter in the pastorate was very severe, if we can judge by the references to it in the Presbytery minutes. A December entry explains that the customary diets of prayer were not held "because of the extreme badness of the weather. A February minute tells that Alexander Gibson, minister of Canisbay, reported that the weather was "so boisterous and inconstant these two months bygone they (a committee) could not fix a week of settled weather to go over to visit the school at Stroma". 36 Oswald seems to have suffered no illnesses, serious enough to keep him away from the meetings. But he did have a sickness in the latter part of June of the same year, and requested to be excused from Presbytery for July. Perhaps the dampness of the house and the northern climate had something to do with his, as coughs and rheumatism were not uncommon among the populace of Dunnet. 37

He was soon feeling fit again, and as the years went on he gained more honor and recognition. In February of 1728 he was chosen moderator of the Presbytery, and a month later he was appointed as the Presbytery representative to the General Assembly to meet the following May. Both of these offices were electoral,/

36Ibid., (7th Dec., 1726, 1st February, 1727).
electoral, and each time he won by a plurality of votes. 38

One can imagine that Oswald looked forward with anticipation to attending the Assembly, and seeing Edinburgh again. In those days it was no easy trip. By land it meant travelling a good deal of the three hundred and twenty miles or so, over "tracks of mire, ruts, and stones". Because of the dangers involved in such travel in the 18th Century, a minister's departure and return were almost always accompanied by the prayers of his loved ones. Safely back at home, the traveller "conducted 'family exercises', in which he fervently thanked the Lord for providential deliverance from manifold perils".

Oswald was reported on by the kirk agent, Nicol Spence of Edinburgh, as having attended all the diets of the General Assembly. Spence also informed that Oswald, together with James Ferme, minister of Wick, and John Sinclair, advocate, were appointed members of the Commission. 40 Reporting in person upon his return to Caithness, Oswald told the brethren that he had tried without success to get the General Assembly to send an itinerant preacher to Caithness; that the catechists were only to be continued to November; and that he had endeavored to procure a supply of Bibles similar to the ones Master Macbeath (minister at Olrig) had obtained the year before. The Bibles he found to be given to charity schools only. While in the city he purchased a "well bound paper book for a register which/

38 Caithness Presbytery Records, (7th February and 5th March 1728).
40 Caithness Presbytery Records, (21st June 1728).
which cost him 17 shillings sterling", and for which he pro-
duced the record of the transaction from Master Davidson,
bookseller.41

For the next two years there were the usual tasks to be
done, and in the Presbytery Oswald acted once as moderator pro-
tempore;42 was excused because of "valetudinary" condition for
not having his "exercise" ready;43 supplied at his Uncle's old
parish, Watten; 44 and preached on Colossians 1:17 ("And he is
before all things, and by him all things consist").45 The
Presbytery also decided on a matter of practical concern in the
young pastor's life. They ruled that his manse should be re-
paired, and that the half year's salary that had accrued between
the death of Oswald's father and his own succession to the
charge, should be used to defray the costs. This was agreed
to by the heritors of the parish.46

 Besides his brother, Richard, there were four others in
Oswald's family - all of them girls.47 One of these, Jean, was
a party in an affair which was to occupy a share of the meetings
of the Presbytery for nearly 18 months. In some ways it was
amusing/

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid. (4th February 1729).
43 Ibid. (4th March, 1729).
44 Ibid. (1st April, 1729).
45 Caithness Presbytery Records (1st April 1729).
46 Ibid. (28th June 1731).
47 Henderson, op. cit., p.234ff.
amusing, but it also was a matter of real concern among the more serious brethren; and one which upset Oswald considerably. He was so aroused emotionally on two occasions that he uttered a sharp rebuke on one, and was requested to absent himself from the meeting by the moderator on another.

A young probationer, John Sinclair, had been courting Jean Oswald, who was living at the home of her brother-in-law, the Rev. Andrew Robertson of Ross. Sinclair had stated in writings and in conversation his intentions, but he did not go through with the marriage. The matter got before the Presbytery which, though Miss Oswald expressed a desire through her host, Mr. Robertson, to have the proceedings against Sinclair dropped, decided that Sinclair's conduct merited censure. The motion was passed at their meeting of October 19th, 1731.

Early in March of the following year, the Rev. Alexander Gibson, minister at Canisbay, raised the question of the Sinclair case again, giving his reasons for disagreeing with the Presbytery's action on the matter. Previous to this motion under question, Gibson—who, incidentally, was the uncle-in-law of Sinclair—had had a heated debate with Oswald; and neither he nor Oswald were present when the Presbytery passed its Act of October 1731. They were having such a heated debate that the moderator had "seen cause, in the course of their reasoning on that matter, to remove them both". 49

In/

48 Caithness Presbytery Records (8th March 1732).

49 Caithness Presbytery Records (9th October 1731).
In the debates of this and the ensuing meetings in April there are revealed some interesting flashes of character of the Caithness Presbytery brethren in general, and Oswald and Gibson in particular. One may see that in the latter two their judgment was colored by family ties. Gibson's very first grievance was over the undignified way the matter had been handled. He told of a satirical letter that was supposedly written by the Dumfries Presbytery with their moderator's name, Mr. Alexander Robertson, forged on it. Under the names of "Leander" and "Constantia" the case of Sinclair and Miss Oswald was "dressed up" he felt,

As the authors pleased to represent it, and the issue of the imaginary process before the Dumfries Presbytery, plainly enough declared how the author inclined Mr. Sinclair should be treated by our Presbytery; Thomas Leander's license was recanted and he declared incapable of being ever useful in their bounds, only it supposed a possible case that by running away from his own country he might possibly be useful somewhere else where the unpardonable crime of deserting Constantia might not be known. 50

Gibson's indignation seems more intense with each succeeding thought of his statement as it is chronicled in the records:

To complete the farce, the Rev. Moderator compliments our Presbytery with an inclosed ballad, or copy of verses made on the subject which he very gravely tells us is to be sung to the tune of "Bonnie Jean"!

This letter being commended to the care of our clerk, was by him or some other person broke open, and as I am much assured copies thereof taken out. So that it became a subject of merry entertainment in Thurso before the Presbytery met, and most, if not all of the brethren, excepting only the moderator (Gibson himself), had either seen or heard of it, yet, which may seem very surprising, no one member informed the Presbytery about it, and so the clerk read it in open Presbytery; and/

50 Caithness Presbytery Records (8th March 1732).
and when the moderator, out of just indignation to see the Presbytery so abused, moved that enquiry should be made to find out the author of this scandalous imposture, and that all members should purge themselves of all knowledge of the author, or accession to the deed, this was not only over-ruled, nor offering a second, Mr. Oswald openly justified the letter-writer, saying: 'we might as well condemn Masters Steel and Addison, whose method of promoting virtue and discouraging vice, was much the same with the authors of the letter'. 51

Gibson went on to review more of the details of the October discussion which was punctuated with "long warm reasoning" between Oswald and himself. He recalled how it was brought to the attention of the Presbytery by Mr. Robertson that Jean Oswald had "utterly disclaimed the process against Mr. Sinclair". Also that Miss Oswald had written letters to various people in the country declaring that she held nothing against the man. Her brother, however, was not going to allow the suitor off so easily. He, as it was brought out in the meeting, withheld certain of his sister's letters (which he frankly admitted when openly accused in Presbytery); read "certain excerpts of the promises"; and had given some of the letters to the brethren to look over privately. 52

Still more indignant, Mr. Gibson's statement accused the clerk, Mr. Ferme, of reading "minutes quite different from what was written at the former meeting (previous to the October 19th, 1731, meeting)". He then recounted how Oswald and he had been removed/

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51 Caithness Presbytery Records, (8th March, 1732).
52 Ibid.
removed from the meeting because of their warm argument at the time Mr. Sinclair's defense was read.

Finally he attacked the severity of the censure which was passed by the Presbytery at the close of that heated October meeting. There could be no doubt but that the brethren sympathized with Oswald's view, for the censure read:

'(the Presbytery) Doe sic find that he has been unjust to that young woman and has acted inconsistently with that integrity, honesty, sincerity, and uprightness that becomes a preacher of the truths of the Gospel of Christ. Therefore did and hereby doe sic unanimously suspend him from preaching till the meeting of next Presbytery on the fourth of January next. And in regard the Presbytery were dissatisfied with his qualifications even when they licensed him, and as this late conduct of his has given great offence to many good people, has resolved also not to encourage Mr. Sinclair until by his prudent behaviour and exemplary carriage, the ill impressions people have of him be worn out, and he give us better evidences of his parts and other ministerial qualifications and upon these evidences the Presbytery will encourage him accordingly.

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The Canisbay minister's largest grievance in this, naturally, was the last sentence, in which the Presbytery refused encouragement to Sinclair until he could prove he merited their approbation.

After admonishing the Presbytery for not proceeding in the case according to the example set by Christ, i.e. first privately enquiring into the reason for a man's conduct and future resolutions, Mr. Gibson continued his speech of chastisement by criticising his brethren for not telling Sinclair what they thought/
thought his duty was, and for their refusal to allow Sinclair to do supply preaching until he had fulfilled the terms of the censure. He thought the latter a premeditated design to "wring a confession for sin" and that "probably the Presbytery intended to use it in support and justification of their conduct". At this point Oswald interjected the heated exclamation, "And why not?".  

It was decided by the brethren that an answer should be made to this stinging and, what the Presbytery thought to be, prejudiced statement of Alexander Gibson. Gibson was a minister who had no hesitation in speaking his mind, judging by the whole Sinclair process, and by another action of his, recorded in the minutes. He received a call to Wick, but refused to accept the presentation because, as he said,

The power of lay patrons in pretending to impose ministers upon parishes sic without their consent and approbation has always been considered contrary to our constitution since our first Reformation from Popery and complained of as a yoke and burden upon the Church of Scotland, and an un-due encroach-ment upon the natural rights which the people claim of chusing their own pastors.  

This latter expression of opinion is of interest because it shows how early Oswald would have had acquaintance with the problem of patronage, which was to be faced both personally and otherwise in the years to follow. His stand was never as extreme as Gibson's, but he leaned toward a moderate position.  

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54 Caithness Presbytery Records (8th March 1732).  
55 Ibid., (13th April 1727).
In order to make a formal answer to Gibson's charges, the Presbytery appointed Oswald, and the clerk, James Ferme, to draw up a reply. Ferme and Oswald endeavored to show wherein Alexander Gibson had misunderstood his brethren, and accused him of being prejudiced. Some of the rebuttal is worthy of mention because it demonstrates how already the discipline of philosophical study is making itself apparent in Oswald's thought. One may even go so far as to say that at 29, the seed of what was later to flower into his "Appeal to Common Sense" had already taken root. This is assuming, of course, that Oswald is largely responsible for point four of the "Answers of the Presbytery of Caithness to the Rev. Mr. Alexander Gibson's Reasons of Dissent from the Process of Mr. John Sinclair, Preacher of the Gospel Within Their Bounds".

There can be little doubt of it, especially because Ferme would have been busily occupied drawing up point six, explaining why the word "piety" was allowed to be deleted, and why there was a discrepancy in the minutes. Secondly, Oswald's personal concern in the matter would make the words more appropriately his. And lastly, the very words as they are phrased, are shot through with Oswald's style and thought. Point four deals with the subject of promises, and is introduced by the committee's opinion that Sinclair has a "strange idea as to what a promise means". The following extract from the:

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56 Caithness Presbytery Records (Reay, 23rd April 1732)

57 Ibid.
the committee's report would, it seems to the writer, substantiate what has just been averred:

He (Sinclair) did give his sense of them (promises) in his written defense, given in to the Presbytery ... Mr. Sinclair having committed his thoughts to writing has no further right to sense them, than any other person has. The common sense of mankind, and the generally received acceptation of terms are the standard which must now determine his meaning. But as Mr. Sinclair's import or meaning is what none but himself could have foreseen at that time, so it is very inconsistent with one of the characters of which David gives us of a good man - 'One that sweareth to his hurt, and changeth not:58... Nay Mr. Sinclair's loose notions of promises is better than what is advanced by Hobbes and Spinoza. For as these gentlemen say that faith and probity and all the moral virtues are but arbitrary things, Mr. Sinclair scruples not to own he has a method of explaining which makes his promises binding or not as he sees it his interest. 59

The answers to some of the other points are not quite so forceful. It may be wondered if Oswald and Ferme were not begging the question when, in answer to Gibson's charge that the Presbytery did not follow the "Saviour's Rule" in their process against Sinclair, they made the following statement:

Now not to insist on this affair being known at this time to the whole country: it was you see come the length of the Presbytery. Was it not then very consistent with our Saviour's direction, to hush the house, and send for Mr. Sinclair without a formal citation to hear what he had to say for himself? We do think we acted very agreeably to our Saviour's Rule, as far as Mr. Sinclair would allow us. And the form of process only says it is necessary in some cases to use this precaution, and it is easy to know what it refers to. 60

58 Psalm 15: 4.
59 Caithness Presbytery Records, (6th May 1732).
60 Caithness Presbytery Records, (23rd April 1732).
The outcome of the Sinclair censure may be quickly summarized. Sinclair had received a call from the heritors of Watten in March of 1732 and again in April. The Presbytery, however, refused to allow the first because "it was not orderly transmitted to them". After the second call they decided to pass it on to Synod. In December the Presbytery enrolled him, and set him apart by prayer and the laying on of hands.

On the 4th of January a committee of Synod ordained him; and "most of the members of the committee agreed with the ordination service".

By the Spring of 1734 Sinclair was evidently in good standing, for the Presbytery had appointed him and Oswald to moderate in the call to a minister for the Parish of Reay, "where Master Alexander Pope, preacher of the Gospel was unanimously chosen by the heritors and elders".

The various assignments dealt out to Oswald in the months of 1734 show the confidence that the Presbytery had in him. He was one of the committee to draft the instructions for the Commissioner and clerk to the General Assembly. In August Oswald was elected Presbytery moderator by a unanimous vote. On the fifth day of the month following he was on hand at Reay for/

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61 Beaton, Ecclesiastical History of Caithness, p.293ff.
62 Caithness Presbytery Records, (12th December 1732)
63 Ibid. (6th February 1733)
64 Ibid. (9th April 1734).
for the ordination of Alexander Pope, later to become a famous Gaelic translator and Antiquary.\textsuperscript{65} There were two ordination sermons, one by the Rev. Hugh Corse, of the Parish of Bower, in English, and another by the Rev. James Brodie, of Latheron, in "Irish". This is mentioned because one of the reasons for the heritors disagreeing on a presentation to be given later to Oswald from the Patron of Methven, was the fact that he used the "Irish" tongue.\textsuperscript{66} It seemed almost an essential in the equipment of ministers in these northern parishes, though they were not part of a "distinctively Gaelic-speaking" district.\textsuperscript{67} We can imagine that Oswald and Pope, the adept whisky of "the bailie,"\textsuperscript{68} had many a good conversation together during Presbytery intermissions, or as they made their way over the rough Caithness Roads to make a visitation to one of the charity schools.\textsuperscript{69}

While moderator, Oswald was to have to grapple for the first time with the perplexing problem of patronage, which later he had to wrestle with at Methven, and which was even more stormy a problem when he became moderator of the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{70} The solution finally reached was a happy one.

\textsuperscript{65} Beaton, The Rev. Alexander Pope, p.3.
\textsuperscript{66} Infra. p.28.
\textsuperscript{67} Beaton, The Rev. Alexander Pope, p.3.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid. p.12.
\textsuperscript{69} Caithness Presbytery Records, (17th January 1735).
\textsuperscript{70} Infra. p.165ff.
Sir John Sinclair, Patron of the Parish of Olrig, asked for his right of patronage, advising the Presbytery that he wanted to have a call that was agreeable to the people.

The action taken by the brethren at their next meeting was to state that the Presbytery would do all that it could "in support of the people's rights, but did not think fit to come under any particular obligations which might not afterwards be in their power to fulfil". The final decision, therefore, came in January 1735, when the Presbytery gave leave to moderate in a call "with this proviso that special regard be had to the privileges of the Christian people". David Dunbar, to whom the presentation was given, was duly ordained in April, and continued his ministry for 27 years.

Presentation to Methven

No specific mention of importance outside of attendance or non-attendance at meetings, is made of Oswald for the next thirteen odd years in the Caithness Presbytery Records. Down in Perthshire, however, his name and character were being discussed by the parishioners of Methven. Many of them make their references in a not too complimentary manner. Again it is patronage that enters into the picture. David Smyth, patron of Methven, desired to use his right of presentation to call Oswald there. The presentation reached Oswald early in/

71 Caithness Presbytery Records, (1st December 1734).
72 Ibid. (11th December, 1734).
73 Perth Presbytery Records (9th March 1749).
in December, 1748, and was acknowledged by him in a formal letter of acceptance to the Presbytery of Perth, dated the 26th of the same month, at Dunnet.\footnote{Perth Presbytery Records, (2nd February 1749). Cf. also Appendix 1.} The matter was brought up in Presbytery in February of the following year, and a committee of eight was appointed to meet at Methven the eighth day of March "to inquire into who would join in giving a call to Mr. Oswald". The time, it must be remembered, was mid-18th century, and the whole question of patronage was reaching its climacteric stage. Emotions were stirred amongst the folk of Methven, and a struggle began which was to last two years; and to be shot through with a bitterness that eventually ended with a church split.\footnote{David Small - History of the United Presbyterian Church, p.620.}

The committee of the Presbytery held a meeting after the service, and opportunity was given for an answer to "Are you willing to join in a call for the presentee or not?" One of the heritors (a William Moncrief) not in sympathy with the idea at all, stated, "whereas it appears to me the settlement of a minister in any parish upon a simple presentation without the concurrence of the majority of those who are of the communion of the Church of Scotland, and attend ordinances in the place, or at least a reasonable concurrence of such, doth greatly tend to render the exercise of the ministerial office ineffectual for the end to which it is designed is most likely to be productive of very bad consequences in the present circumstances of the church to the congregation;...and being well informed of the dissatisfaction of the far greater part of the Parish of Methven to Mr. Oswald, and this, judging/
judging that his assumption to be their minister would be attended with bad consequences above-mentioned both to himself and to the parish, I am not willing to join in a call to the presentee.\textsuperscript{76}

At the Presbytery meeting in April, the matter was given much thought and discussion, and a petition was presented by the elders who refused to concur with the presentation. It contains several personal references to Oswald's character and abilities, and so is worthy of noting. It reads,

That the Paton, last Presbytery Day had not only given in a presentation the favors of the Reverend James Oswald, minister of the Gospel at for supplying the vacancy of the parish at Methven: but also that the said Mr. Oswald had simply accept-ed the same without so much as knowing the inclina-tion of the parish towards him!...That he is a person in no wise qualified for being minister of this parish in regard that having an accidental opportunity some years ago of hearing Mr. Oswald preach in the church of Methven your petitioners found his voice so low that above two thirds of the parish did not hear him. Which your petitioners apprehend is a good personal objection against a person at least from being transported from a church where he is full heard to one where he is not!

Besides it is contrary to transport any minister knowing the Irish tongue from the highlands to the lowlands according to the act of Assembly Anno no date. And your petitioners are informed that Mr. Oswald preaches one half the day in Irish and the other half in English...(therefore) Mr. Oswald is a very improper person for supplying the present vacancy.\textsuperscript{77}

One is apt to smile at this petition, especially as it is not hard to see what devices the discontented parishioners resorted to in order to strengthen their case of non-agreement with/
with the patron. It was a serious business to them, however, and is of interest not only because it shows the type of men Oswald would be dealing with on the Kirk session, but because it indicates that he had been travelling quite a bit outside of his native Caithness.

Moncrieff's statement, added to the fact that there were only fourteen heritors and twelve heads of families concurring with the wishes of the Patron, probably had the necessary influence on the Presbytery to cause them to approach Smyth to drop the whole matter. Accordingly, a committee was appointed to talk to him about the problem. Smyth, however, was adamant, and refused to change his choice "unless the parish would offer a valid and legal objection why Mr. Oswald should not be settled".\(^{78}\)

Meanwhile, Oswald had discovered that his former letter of acceptance was not legal because he had qualified before a justice of the peace instead of a sheriff. He sent a letter explaining his mistake, and inclosed a certificate stating that his acceptance was properly legalized.\(^{79}\) The letter was dated at Methven Castle, April 19th, 1749, and was handled by Smyth's writer, William Mercer.\(^{80}\) There was a rebuttal of the petition by those friendly to Smyth. Their "memorialist" stated that/

\(^{78}\) Perth Presbytery Records, (6th April 1749).
\(^{79}\) Ibid., cf. also Appendix, p. ii.
\(^{80}\) Ibid.
that he had been informed that Oswald had often preached in
the largest churches in Edinburgh and Glasgow, always to "the
satisfaction and hearing of the whole congregation". The
matter remained in a deadlock between the patron and the
Presbytery, and so eventually was brought to the attention of
the General Assembly at the meeting held May 18th, 1749.

Both the callers, represented by David Smyth, himself,
and two advocates; and the opposers, represented by William
Moncrief, and an advocate, were given opportunity to state
their view of the case. They were then ordered to remove
from the hall, after which there was discussion. The de-
cision, according to the record was,

The General Assembly after reasoning and without
vote hereby do oppose this Presbytery of Perth to
moderate in a call to the foresaid Mr. Oswald,
presentee, alone, and with all convenient speed
to proceed towards his settlement in the Parish
of Methven, according to the rules of this Church. The
General Assembly also instructed that their Commission
would be impowered to determine on any reference or appeal
in the matter that should be brought before them in November
or subsequent meetings.

This eventually proved necessary, but the Presbytery,
realizing/

81 Ibid.
82 Register of the Actings and Proceedings of the Church
of Scotland, (18th May, 1749), p.491f.
83 Ibid.
realizing the attitude of a large part of the congregation to be more adamant than ever toward acquiescing with the wishes of the patron,84 did not carry out the command of the General Assembly's Commission. Motivated by this indubitable disobedience to the Church's highest judicatory, the patron and his counsellors went to the meeting of the General Assembly of 1750 armed with a strongly worded appeal for justice which they had already lawfully processed through the Presbytery.85 Appended to their appeal was a request that a committee be appointed by the General Assembly to make the settlement. At the same time the complaint was lodged, there was also a statement by the opposition, taking issue with the sentence of the Commission in the affair.

Action was swift,

"The Assembly, without a vote, dismissed the complaint against the Commission, and peremptorily ordained of the Presbytery of Perth to admit Mr. Oswald as minister of Methven on or before the 10th of July next, with certification of their incurring very high censure in case of disobedience".87

Early in April, 1750, the request for Oswald's transportation was made before the Presbytery of Caithness by Mr. Hugo Campbell, acting as drose for David Smyth, the patron of Methven.88

In/

84 Perth Presbytery Records (25th October, 27th December, 1749). Br. also Appendix III.
85 General Assembly Papers (30th October, 1749, Perth).
86 Ibid.
87 Annals of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland - From the Final Secession in 1739 to the Origin of the Relief in 1752. Edited by N. Morren, Edinburgh, 1838, p.168. It is interesting to note that immediately after this Perth Presbytery case it was moved to do something about making the sentences of the General Assembly more effective, p.169.
88 Caithness Presbytery Records (23rd May, 1750).
In Perth Presbytery's meeting of May 23rd, held just seven days after the matter had been brought up in the Assembly, the reaction of Oswald's Presbytery to his transportation orders was read. The Presbytery of Caithness told how, when Oswald accepted the call, he expected little opposition; but "now that the General Assembly has decided for David Smyth's right of presentation he felt under obligation to come". They also stated that "in regard to the great distance between Dunnet and Methven this act of ours loosing Mr. Oswald's pastoral relation and transportation from Dunnet is hereby declared to take place upon the 28th day of June next and no sooner, by which time he may be regularly admitted to Methven.

Ministry at Methven

In the next meeting of the Perth Presbytery there was read a very fine testimonial letter from the brethren in Oswald's Presbytery, which was inclosed with his transportation papers. After stating some opinions about their policy of obedience to the General Assembly, they express their loyalty to Oswald:

"We heartily regret the opposition that Mr. Oswald has met with from your people which can have no other foundation but their not knowing him sufficiently. If you have any regard for our testimonie we do assure you that he is a brother of excellent piety, is a fine preacher and is well qualified as most men are to gain the affections of any people who will give him a fair hearing. We hope you can do much to soften them, and thereby render him both easie sic and useful in his ministry."

These/

89 Ibid.
90 Perth Presbytery Records, (30th May 1750).
These good wishes were in part in vain, for a fair section of the congregation would not be "softened" toward Oswald, and there was begun a new church by those who remained dissatisfied. 91 The brethren of the Presbytery, however, soon warmed in their feeling toward him. He was appointed to be enrolled in the Presbytery by the Assembly's committee, which convened at Methven, on December 12th, 1750; and in the following April was chosen moderator of the Presbytery. Thus in four months he made himself known, and was deemed worthy by the brethren in the Presbytery of Perth. 92

A divided congregation, however, was not to be Oswald's only problem. There was a difficult material disadvantage to be faced in regard to the manse. It was in a ruinous state of repair. 93 Into this house he had to bring his young wife and five children. 94 His wife was Margaret Dunbar whom he had married the year previous (his first wife had died some three years before). He felt it necessary to take the matter up with his brethren of the Presbytery; but no special meeting needed to be held as the patron and the heritors decided to share/

91 Small, History of the U. P. Church, p. 620.

92 Perth Presbytery Records, (26th December 1750, and 24th April 1751).

93 Ibid., (June, July, 1751.).

94 Scott, Fasti, vol. p. 223. Note that there were George (15), Alexander (14), Janet (18), and Margaret (17). Richard had died while a student at Glasgow in 1747. James and Andrew had died in infancy.
share the expense by supplementing the manse fund, to build, according to the plan before them, a "substantial manse".95 John Moncrieff of Tippermalloch, heritor and one of the persistent opposers of Oswald’s presentation, did not wish to contribute to this project and said he would appeal to Synod.96 Though not without a bit of prodding, the work was done on the manse, so that two years later it could be declared sufficient by a visitation committee. They would not, however, approve of the office houses which were in need of repair.97

There was also the question of salary. A perennial problem with many of the clergy of the time, especially in the more rural parishes.98 In 1764 a committee was appointed by Presbytery to investigate the stipend situation in the Methven Parish. It made several recommendations. One was that there should be a specific statement of the amount of vicarage required, and this should be given in a declaration to the sheriff. Another, of real practical value, was that the minister should be discharged from setting any of his gardens to the beadle.99 Freedom from this responsibility would have been welcome to a man who was obviously intent on study and writing, and to whom every minute would be precious.

The/

95 Perth Presbytery Records (26th June 1751).
96 Ibid.
97 Perth Presbytery Records, (11th October 1753).
98 Donaldson, Caithness in the 18th Century, p.57.
99 Perth Presbytery Records, (22nd October 1764).
The following year there was a meeting at the manse, and Oswald gave an account to the committee. Each of the contributing sections of two large estates and several smaller ones are listed, together with the amount of victual, bear bolls, and loads of peats supplied by each. When the tally was taken it was found that in meal, bear, and victuals there was a firlot short; and this was explained by a non-contribution of the land known as the "sands of Cashochee" belonging to Methven. It was also shown that the minister was getting but fifteen weighted pecks for each boll of meal. Forty pounds Scots (£3:8:6 sterling) was still being supplied by Methven for the cost of Communion Elements. In one case it was shown that the minister possessed a "glebe greater than the legal quantity of arable ground" a part of which fell within an inclosure of Lord Methven who was paying a rent of £4 Scots yearly in rental for it.100

As the stipend was finally settled by a decree before the Sheriff of Perth, 1766, the original stipend dated 1650 providing "12 chalders of victual, two thirds meal, and one third bear; with £40 Scots for Communion Elements", was added to by "£5:2:4 Sterling of vicarage; carriages for 54 loads (44 less than Oswald's estimate) of turfs, and 120 loads (15 less than Oswald's estimate) of peats, with other services for plowing the glebe, and carrying the dung."101

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100 Perth Presbytery Records, (25th June 1765).
101 Ibid.
In comparison with Dunnet, Methven was a more prosperous parish. The amount of real rent for Dunnet was 950 pounds Sterling, as compared with 3000 pounds Sterling for Methven. The reason lay largely in the fertility of the land.

Like Dunnet, the church building at Methven was built prior to the Reformation. In all likelihood, however, it is much older. The original church was consecrated by Bishop David DeBernham on August 25th, 1247, but nothing of that building remains. In 1433 the Collegiate Church or Provostry of Methven was "founded by Walter Stewart, the aged Earl of Athole". This is the building which was available to Oswald's parishioners when he was appointed to Methven in 1750. Students of architecture still point to the Methven Church as an example for the crow-stepped-gable, a feature incorporated in very few other churches of the same period.103

Oswald, however, did not have the anticipated numbers that the/


103 David MacGibbon, and Thomas Ross - The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland from the Earliest Christian Times to the Seventeenth Century, vol.III, p.519. It is interesting to note that this year (1947) is the 700th anniversary of the founding of the Methven Church. The writer was making a tour of inspection of the church earlier in the year with the Rev. Maclean Wylie, the present incumbent, and had the happy experience of hearing him exclaim, as we read the framed copy of the Kirk's history which was hanging in the vestry, "My! We have a 700th anniversary coming up this August!" In due course, a special service was held, and the Rev. Principal Hugh Watt of Edinburgh University, preached the sermon for the occasion.
the heritors' representative told the Caithness Presbytery about. 104 The actual number of families remaining in the Parish Church after the split upon his presentation, was fifty-five less than those who joined the band of the seceders. Thus it turned out that he had an even smaller constituency than at Dunnet, or about 1235 to about 769 persons. 105

This state of affairs, however, would probably allow for more time to be given to writing. That Oswald took time off just previous to the publication of the first volume of his An Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion can be seen by the references in the Kirk Session Records of Methven. One instance, for example, is the note: "To David Miller senior, in Methven for maintenance, and lodging afforded by him to the ministers during the vacancy of Methven". 106 The amount was forty-five pounds Scots, indicating the length or frequency of the pulpit vacancy was considerable as the cost of lodging was low. Money went further - the Presbytery Clerk, for example, received as his salary for three years, 9 pounds Scots. 107 The room and board in one of the none too clean Edinburgh inns, yet where the fare was often better than the average manse could provide, was 4 pence for a night. 108

During/

104 Presbytery Records (3rd April, 1750).
106 Methven Kirk Session Records (11th November 1764).
107 Ibid. (35th November 1764)
During the early 1760's when Oswald was working on the first volume of his philosophical work, An Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion, he was considered as a candidate for the chair of Ecclesiastical History at the University of Glasgow. Professor Rouat, "who had held the chair for ten years but had never taught Ecclesiastical History (or anything else) for a single day and had spent his time in London, on the excuse of looking after College interests there, was finally induced to resign and terminate what even for these easy-going days was a scandal". The patronage being with the Crown it fell to the Earl of Bute, as Secretary of State, to exercise it on the Crown's behalf. On October 27th, 1761, the University had a letter from the Earl of Errol, its Rector, saying that he had spoken to Bute about the succession to Rouat and that Bute "is engaged to nobody, but the man who is recommended as the fittest for filling the place properly will be his man".

Taking this as an invitation, the University Meeting on January 1st, 1762, agreed to recommend Oswald "as a person well qualified to be professor of Ecclesiastical History". No further elaboration of Oswald's capacities or attainments is given in the minutes. The general faculty approval would seem to/

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109 Letter to the author from Prof. C.J. Fordyce, M.A., Clerk of Senate, University of Glasgow, dated 29th October 1947. Cf. also Coutts, History of the University of Glasgow, p. 239ff.

110 University of Glasgow Senate Records, (27th October 1761)

111 Ibid., (1st January 1762).
to indicate that one or more had personal acquaintance with him, his character, and his intellectual perspicacity. For whatever reason, however, their recommendation was not accepted. Bute, in spite of his declaration of impartiality, may have been got at by the friends of another candidate. William Wight, dissenting minister in Dublin, was presented by the Crown on May 18th, 1762, and commissioned to be professor of Ecclesiastical History succeeding Rouat. 112

At the meeting of General Assembly in 1765, Oswald and the Rev. David Moncrief, minister at Rogerton, were put upon the List for moderator. Oswald was chosen, and, at the Assembly's request, took the chair. 113 According to a current newspaper report, the choice was unanimous. 114 The same account also mentioned that the Rev. Dr. Gerard, professor at Aberdeen, delivered the opening sermon, and that most of the first day was devoted to prayer.

Before the year was out, on the 10th of December, Principal William Leechman, of the University of Glasgow, proposed Oswald for the degree of Doctor of Divinity. This was done at a meeting of the University Senate. The faculty, "being fully sensible, from their own personal knowledge, of Mr. Oswald's undoubted worth, ingenuity and learning", approved. 115

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113 Records of the General Assembly, (23rd May 1765).
115 University of Glasgow Senate Records (10th December, 1765).
A week later the actual ceremony took place. The fact that Oswald was considered several years previous for a professorial chair would help to explain, in part, how the faculty had obtained their personal knowledge of him. Also Oswald was well on with his Appeal (published in 1766), and would have come in contact with men like Reid and Leechman through a mutual interest.  

While moderator, a portrait was made of Oswald. It gives the impression that he was kindly and gentle. The high forehead suggests intellect, and adds symmetry to the whole facial appearance. His eyes suggest depth but not fire. The freshness of the tabs and collar, the rich material of the gown, and the neat position of the pen, all convey the idea of habits held in high esteem during the eighteenth century, i.e., good taste, manners, and refinement.

A study of the portrait makes it easy to understand how a writer in the Scots Magazine could have mentioned that when Oswald was at work in the parish he was also given to the ministry and kirk session of Midmuir for the poor, and a like amount to the honest church. The meal was to be invested at interest, and the earnings were to be distributed among such mean persons of blameless character, sobriety and industry residing in the said parish as do not receive public charity but are doing useful public service. But this could not have been the case for Oswald. Beattie, in his interview with the King (infra, p. 66) said he had not known Oswald before the publication of the Essay on Truth. It is possible, however, that Reid knew Oswald, for he speaks of his admiration for him as a man (cf. Works, ed. Hamilton, p. 468); but it is likely that their contact was made at Glasgow, rather than at Aberdeen.

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116 Graham speaks of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald as "Aberdonians All", and implies that all three first gave the substance of their works at meetings of the "Wise Club" at Aberdeen (cf. Graham, Scottish Men of Letters in the 18th Century, pp. 250, 253). But this could not have been the case for Oswald. Beattie, in his interview with the King (infra, p. 66) said he had not known Oswald before the publication of the Essay on Truth. It is possible, however, that Reid knew Oswald, for he speaks of his admiration for him as a man (cf. Works, ed. Hamilton, p. 468); but it is likely that their contact was made at Glasgow, rather than at Aberdeen.
Oswald opened the debate on the Schism Overture in the Assembly of 1766, he "spoke as he always does, with great strength and propriety, and with very much dignity". Oswald's appearance in the portrait coincides in a remarkable way with the kind of man he was. He was dignified, but he was approachable; and that would make him beloved by people of all ranks.

During the Winter of 1766 Oswald was at work in the parish. He was greatly concerned with the poor, and the Session Records of Methven list his personal gifts for this purpose to be considerable. He had the vision to see that there was the need to give to those who were not completely down and out, but who for some reason or other were suddenly made destitute, and for the relief of which there was no suitable fund. So firmly did he believe in this policy, that later, upon retirement, he made a Bond of Mortification directing that £100 be given to the minister and Kirk Session of Methven for the poor; and a like amount to the Dunnet church. The money was to be invested at interest, and the earnings were to be distributed among "such needy persons of blameless character, sobriety and industry residing in the said parish as do not receive public charity but are in circumstances as to receive relief... and that in such proportion as the said minister and kirk session shall think proper". 118

When Dowe, Oswald's successor at Methven, received the copy of

118 Methven Kirk Session Records, (18th June 1786).
of the bond he was not quite clear in his mind just how Oswald intended the money to be spent. Oswald's letter in reply to his queries explains the intent. "I have", says Oswald", for several years the high satisfaction of seeing the poor of the parish of Methven properly taken care of, but it occurred to me that almost in all parishes, some worthy persons might be found though not in circumstances that would entitle them to come in on the poor's list nor willing to appear in that light, yet, who might receive considerable relief from a small sum administered seasonably and with care and judgment". The idea proved worthwhile as is evidenced by Dowe's comment on the bequest in a subsequent article written about the poor in Methven: "This (Oswald's gift) surely is a well judged charity".

In February the business of the stipend increase with the various amounts of vicarage and victuals due from the different heritors was reported upon, and Oswald told how a decreet had been obtained before the sheriff of Perth.

Now begins a period of about five years when there is little mention of Oswald in Presbytery or kirk session Records other than the mention of his attendance or absence from the meetings. It is likely that he was using every bit of spare time/

119 Methven Kirk Session Records, (18th June 1786). Cf. also Appendix V.


time not necessary for parochial duties, to finish the work on
the second volume of his "An Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of
Religion" which appeared in 1772. Oswald was getting on in
years. He was 70 when the second volume of his book was published.
Other men were supplying for him in the pulpit at Methven, while
he rested from time to time in the west country, presumably with
his sons or brother. Fraser of Monydie and Bannerman of St.
Martin's, were two ministers in the neighboring parishes who
gave assistance when official business had to be conducted at
Methven. 122

During the Spring and Summer of the second year after his
work had come from the press, Oswald was challenged by Dr. Joseph
Priestley, English Divine and scientist, and a series of letters
were exchanged between them. Priestley published them in con-
nection with his book examining the chief philosophical treatises
of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald. 123 Oswald reveals in the first
one his desire not to enter into controversy, but he does not
seem to be able to resist making a few remarks; and boldly takes
Priestley to task for being so self-confident in casting aside
the/

122 Methven Kirk Session Records, (5th September 1773), also

123 Joseph Priestley - An Examination of Dr. Reid's "Inquiry
into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense", Dr. Beattie's
"Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth", and Dr. Oswald's
"Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion"; hereafter cited as
Priestley, An Examination.
the possibility of "higher evidence" as "possibly belonging to the higher truths of religion". The action thus begun caused a reply to come forth from Priestley, and the discussion went on for some seven letters.

Less and less Oswald is able to be active due to health. The legal process begun by the patron in order to obtain the piece of the glebe land dividing two sections of his own property is finally consummated in March of 1775. Oswald, however, when giving his recommendation to the arrangements, did so by letter because, as he explained to Smyth, "it is not safe for me to go abroad in my present state of health, and in such unseasonable weather". From this time onward Oswald seemed to be almost completely out of the actual parochial duties of the parish; and at the Presbytery meeting of April 30th, 1783, Mr. Archibald Stevenson, minister of St. Madoes Church, gave in Oswald's letter of resignation which was addressed to the moderator of Presbytery and sent from Glasgow. In its introduction Oswald explains that "having been for many years past deprived by infirmity of age" of the opportunity of meeting with the brethren, and for the same reason not being able to discharge the duties of the pastoral office, he wished them to accept his demission.

The/Scotts' History of the University of Glasgow, p. 315.

124 Ibid., p. 348.
125 Perth Presbytery Records, (1st March 1775). Cf. also Appendix II.
126 Perth Presbytery Records, (30th April 1783); also see Appendix VII.
The letter brought forth discussion, and it was decided to table the matter until the meeting of the fourth of June. When this date arrived the brethren had made up their minds, and proceeded to unanimously accept the resignation. The Sabbath following, the Rev. James Moodie, as representative of the Presbytery, intimated to the congregation that Mr. Oswald's resignation having been accepted, the parish of Methven was now vacant.127

The remaining years of Oswald's life were spent in Scots-town. His activity was limited in keeping with the infirmity of age. Most probably he occasionally attended meetings of the University Literary Society of which he was a member.128 He also took care of the distribution of his money in a wise way, especially in regard to the poor of his two former parishes.129 He was a charter member of the "Glasgow Society for Sons of the Clergy", his name appearing at the top of the list by virtue of chronological arrangement. He also had contributed 100 pounds to a similar Society that had been formed the year before in Edinburgh.130

Having outlived his younger brother who died in 1784, Oswald claimed/

127 Methven Kirk Session Records, (8th June, 1783).
128 Coutts' History of the University of Glasgow, p.316.
129 Scott's Fasti, 1923, vol.IV, p.223. Also see above p.41.
claimed considerable lands and heritable debts (one bond alone amounting to £2000) as heir of conquest. These were granted to him. His son George inherited the Estate at Auchincruive, Ayrshire, which passed down through the generations, and was sold within the last decade. The other home belonging to Oswald's brother Richard, was "Cavens" near Dumfries. Oswald's great great grandson, Major Richard A. Oswald, is at the time of this writing occupying the house. In his opinion the descendants of his great great grandfather were "much more prolific in their letter-writing, though far less distinguished" than their forebear.

This would suggest that Oswald did not spend his last years in carrying on work or philosophical discussions or writing, to any marked extent. At the age of 90 Oswald died at Scotstoun, August 2nd, 1793. He had lived a full life within a century to be known by later generations as one of the most fruitful in natural science and letters in all Scottish history.

We will note in the next chapter some of the events which confronted Oswald's life during this great period of enlightenment.

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133 Ibid.
Few centuries in history have demonstrated such far reaching changes in the life of men or nations or have enjoyed such notoriety as has the eighteenth. It was "signalized by a breaking away from the traditions of the past in every department of thought and inquiry". Men's interests turned from battles to books. They "were tired of fighting about religion, and wanted rest". Historians have ably summarized and shown the effects of these forces with the resulting lethargy in morals and religion on the one hand, and the vastly progressive tempo and production in the arts and sciences, on the other. This change in emphasis - of making an altar to "reason" instead of God; and of accommodating religion to the prevailing thought - was due to the impact of that spirit pervading so much of the life of the time; and historically labelled "Newtonianism" in France, "Aufklärung" in Germany, "Latitudinarianism" in England, and "Moderatism" in Scotland.

James Oswald was "Moderate" and a Scotsman, Both of these classifications, though helpful, do not, on their face value, tell us what we want to know. We must look behind them, and see some of the major movements, and, even more important - because we are interested in religious issues - the men of the Eighteenth

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1Hugh Watt, Representative Churchmen of Twenty Centuries, p. 228.

century in Great Britain. Like his great contemporary, John Wesley, the Evangelical, James Oswald's life "saw every decade" of his century, and, like Wesley, he remained true to form until the end; the Methodist continuing his life of action in the movement he helped to begin, and the Moderate retiring to the family home in Scotstoun to publish a series of sermons on "Hypocrisy", and make an occasional visit to the Glasgow University Literary Society.

During the first half of the century Oswald lived in the far north of his native Scotland, in the county of Caithness. From the descriptions given in the tours of Thomas Pennant and Samuel Johnson, and from the accounts of ministers' journeys to General Assembly from the more remote parts, it is apparent that at this time the overland communication between the north and south of Scotland was far from easy. Still this did not prevent the exchange of information and news, nor did it confine the spirit and the ideas of the period to a particular section of the country. For example,

Mr. Ferme of Wick it was who first among the Presbyterian ministers openly taught Arminian doctrine. The truth is, that the long winter of moderation that began to settle on the Church of Scotland about twenty years after the Revolution settlement extended itself to the county of Caithness.

3 Supra, p.46.
4 James Ferme was clerk of the Presbytery of Caithness in 1732. For his work with Oswald on a project appointed by Presbytery see Supra, p.20.
This was also true in the field of politics. The Union of 1707 which later brought material benefits to both England and Scotland, was no more bitterly contested by Scots in any part of their country than in the north. On some issues there were differences. Many in the north were loyal Jacobites, while the opposite was true of a good proportion of the people in the southern counties. But whether there was agreement or not there was interchange of thought, which, aided by the leaven of national prosperity, eventually brought back solid national oneness.

During the risings of '15 and '45 Oswald was in Dunnet; a lad of twelve during the earlier one, and completing the nineteenth year of his pastorate when the second manifestation of Highland "restlessness" took place. The proprietors of Caithness were, in many cases, sympathetic with the rebels, and homes in Thurso (about seven miles west of Dunnet) quartered some of them. "Their headquarters were in Thurso, where they billeted themselves by twos, threes, and fours on the inhabitants...The women in general felt greatly alarmed, but their fears were causeless, for no violence or injury was offered unto any."  

The Revolution created much tension in the north between the Episcopal and Established Church, for there were many who remained loyal to their old ministers. Just four months previous to Oswald's birth, his father, in an endeavour to convert the Earl of...

of Ratter to the Established Church, so incurred the man's wrath that he "shoved the minister out his house by the shoulders". That this physical roughness continued to be a characteristic of the more determined of mind, both in respect to the Established and Episcopal kirk, is borne out by the stories of Alexander Pope of Reay with whom Oswald was often associated in Presbytery work, and who frequently resorted to his 'bailie' to keep the unruly in check. On the other hand, however, there is a side to the people which one misses if only the disciplinary cases of the Kirk records are used as a criterion. There was the hospitality and kindness of which even contemporary Scotland outside of the county had a vague view. Bishop Robert Forbes' Journal of his visit in 1761 to Caithness reveals this:

I had been advised, yea, importuned by some, before setting out, to take a dyed Loaf of some good bread along with me when entering Caithness, being so poor and despicable a Country that I could have no good thing to eat in it. Whereas, upon Trial, I found it though a very bleak, heathy, and mossy Country, yet one of the most plentiful and hospitable Countries in the whole World; inasmuch that, if any Gentleman or Lady, travelling through Caithness, shall chance to put up at an Inn near a Gentleman's House, this Gentleman will take it amiss.

A recent writer on the county has emphasized the comparatively high income of the people and gentry because of the grain trade during the century; and describes the Caithness gentry as a class which "enjoyed a high degree of civilization and culture.

They/

9 Caithness Presbytery Records (24th March, 1703), as quoted in Craven, op. cit., p.192.

10 Supra, p.65.

They spoke and wrote very stylish English... They read the classics, Shakespeare, many-tomed histories of the Rollin variety together with the works of their contemporaries".12 But what of the people? The benefits that came to them as a result of the Agrarian revolution Donaldson holds, over against Graham and other writers, to have been much less because they "had no capital to invest in improvements" as did the landlords.13

The incomes of farm workers - and both of Oswald's parishes were in the country - were, to use an adjective closely associated with the times, moderate. Even taking into consideration the relative cost of living, the term seems synonymous with low". This can be seen from the following description given by Ramsay of Ochtertyre, which also reveals that the power of collective bargaining was not unknown among the farmers:

The wages of our servants were very moderate. About 1730 our best ploughman had only forty shillings a year, beside bounties (clothing) which amounted to a third of the wages. The little man had about eleven pounds Scots; and the ploughman five or six pounds Scots; and the maid-servants eight pounds exclusive of the bounties.... But about fifty years ago the servants entered into a combination to raise their wages. The epithets given to the ringleaders are still remembered by old people, and one of them 'Windy Shaw', is still alive. Their demands were moderate, being only four pounds Scots addition to the big man, and to the other servants in proportion. But in 1760, after several rises, the ploughman's wages did not exceed three pounds sterling, and the women's were about twenty shillings a year.14

This/

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12 Donaldson, op. cit., p.11.
13 Ibid.
This gives us an indication as to why Oswald's philanthropy, both during his active parish life, and afterwards, meant so much to needy parishioners at Dunnet and Methven, and inspired the writer for the Statistical Account to comment: "As the people are, in general, in low circumstances, the weekly collections for the poor are especially small. Hence they would have been very destitute had it not been for the liberality of the late Dr. James Oswald, who was a native of the parish".  

Looking now to the broader economic conditions of the land as a whole, and leaving for a moment the little country towns similar to Kinghorn and Kirkcaldy, which Johnson described as "not unlike the small or straggling market-towns in those parts of England where commerce and manufacturers have not yet produced opulence", we see busy trade out of Glasgow and Leith indicative of the increasing wealth of Scotland as the century wore on. For the Oswald family fortune this had a most direct effect. As early as 1739 Oswald's nephews - Richard and Alexander - were such well-to-do merchants in Glasgow, that they received the thanks of the Provost for paying Prince Charles's army to desist from occupying the city. His brother, Richard, after/

15 Sinclair, Statistical Account, vol.XI, pp.256-257. Also see James Robertson, General View of the Agriculture in the County of Perth, 1799, pp.80-81; 384-386. The latter pages give an interesting account of how the poor of the time were looked after.

16 Samuel Johnson, A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland, Ed. by E. J. James, n.d., p.18.

after getting a good mercantile training in association with the Glasgow relatives, went on to greater success in London. Some of the resulting income was invested in the purchase of the estates of "Auchincruive" in Ayrshire and "Cavens" in Dumfries-shire. Oswald's sons, George and Alexander, were also capable in the profession of commerce, somewhat bearing out Ramsay of Ochtertyre's observation: "The thriving state of Glasgow made many people breed their second sons to trade or manufactures, in preference to the army or the learned professions". In Oswald's case, however, this was only partially true. He loved his profession, and would not have discouraged his sons from the ministry if they had been thus minded. The family bond was close, and it was at the home of his son, George, the tobacco merchant, that James Oswald lived his last years.

Richard Oswald's death occurred in 1784 to be followed four years later by that of his wife. There had been no children, and the property was willed partly to James Oswald's son, George, and partly to his grandson, Richard. It was of the latter, who became M.P. for Ayrshire, that Burns wrote "Next there will be wealthy young Richard. Richard's wife, Lucy Johnston, has also been.

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20 Calder, op. cit., see also Supra, p.46.
21 Robert Burns, "Ballads on Mr. Heron's Election", The Life and Works of Robert Burns, ed. by Chambers, vol. IV, p.144. There is also a tribute given Richard Oswald in Burns' letter to John Syme, ibid., p.154.
been forever recalled for posterity by the great Scottish bard making her the heroine of his song "O Wat Ye Wha's in Yon Town?"\textsuperscript{22}

Thus having seen how closely the rising wealth of Scotland was related to the fortunes of a particular family, it remains to make some generalization of the economic status as a whole. Of this, Sir Walter Scott wrote: "The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers, as the existing English are from Queen Elizabeth's time."\textsuperscript{23} Then for the age that followed close on to Culloden, Terry relates how "the sudden surge of material prosperity carried on its wave a Renaissance of letters the more vigorous because so long delayed."\textsuperscript{24}

To understand the religious and cultural aspect of the century in which Oswald lived, there can be no better approach than by way of this literary wave. Through prose and poetry, philosophical treatise and political pamphlet, Scotland became known for her ideas as well as her manufactures; supporting with fact Voltaire's intended ironical statement: "It is an admirable result of the human spirit that at the present time..."

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., pp.155-156.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
it is from Scotland we receive the rules of taste in all the arts from the epic poem to gardening".  

The Established Kirk provided a "congenial home" for the revival of letters. In fact, at times it became so engrossed in caring for them that there was a tendency to forget the duty of evangelistic witness, and so bringing down the condemnation of posterity upon its leaders for being spiritually dead. Good taste in all things was to be cultivated and sought after, and since "literature even more than religion is an atmosphere which penetrates through all barriers and dissolves enmities" we should not be surprised to find that the influence of English writing was felt not only across the Tweed, but well beyond the Tay as well. Oswald and his brethren in Dunnet had acquaintance with the Tatler and Spectator in the 1730's. On the circulation of these, Ramsay of Ochtertyre makes the interesting comment:

Although the works of the best English poets and prose writers had early found admittance into the libraries of Scotsmen of rank or learning, they do not seem to have been generally read and admired till the 'Tatlers', and 'Spectators', and 'Guardians' made their appearance in the reign of Queen Anne. These periodical papers had a prodigious run all over the three kingdoms, having done more to diffuse taste than all the writers, sprightly or serious, that had gone before them.

25 A statement of Voltaire, as quoted in P. Hume Brown, op. cit., p. 346.
26 Cf. William T. Cairns, "The Religion of Dr. Johnson and Other Essays, p. 85ff.
27 Watson, op. cit., p. 18.
28 Supra, p. 19.
The writings of Lord Shaftesbury, to whom McCosh traces the phrase "common sense" which became so much used by philosophers of the Scottish School, were "extravagantly admired by some of the clergy who wished to be thought polite philosophers". Oswald was not particularly friendly towards his work. In a letter expounding the point in his Assembly sermon on where men have accepted the wrong standard of truth, he lays part of the blame on men of taste for giving encouragement to what their good judgment should have obviously declared foolish, and brings in this mention of Shaftesbury:

What Lord Shaftesbury or Lord Bolingbroke might have done is uncertain; for they thought they had a right to dictate to the public. But I am persuaded that Mr Hume would not have ranked broad shoulders and taper legs among the virtues, would not have offered a demonstration of the impossibility of miracles, nor thrown out a great many crude paradoxical opinions with the freedom he has done, if he had not entertained a meaner opinion of the judgment of the public than he ought to have had; and poor Rousseau would not have been pelted, and treated so contumeliously by an outrageous rabble, if he had been taught to respect the public judgment.

Scottish Universities played a major role during the century in establishing good taste in culture and moderatism in the Church. "The speeches of Principal Tullidelph from St."

30 James McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy, p. 31.
32 James Oswald, "Letter IV", Sermon Preached at the Opening of the General Assembly, 1766, to which are Annexed Letters on points of Importance Contained in the Sermon, p.17; hereafter cited as Oswald, Assembly Sermon and Letters.
St. Andrews were characterized by an ardent and vehement eloquence. Dr. Gerard, Professor of Divinity at Aberdeen, was distinguished for accurate copious reasoning...all supported the moderate interest with great ability", so wrote Somerville of Assembly meetings between 1759 and 1764. That they were happy and content with their seats of learning can be seen by the glowing references made by Ramsay. Of Glasgow he gave the tribute: "No college in Scotland was in higher repute than that of Glasgow from 1745 to the commencement of the present reign (George III), and to that historic citadel of knowledge in the north east of the land he paid tribute, saying: "Nowhere in Scotland did science and the belles lettres flourish more...than in the two colleges of Aberdeen, particularly in the Marischall, where the good seed sown first by Blackwell and afterwards by David Fordyce produced ere long an abundant crop." Finally, under the leadership of Principal Robertson of Edinburgh University, moderatism in the Church of Scotland reached its high water mark.

Oswald took strong exception to two extreme manifestations of the moderate movement - the over emphasis on the belles Lettres and the arbitrary use of its power by the supreme judicatory of the church. In preaching to the brethren at the Assembly/

33 Thomas Somerville, My Own Life and Times, pp.96-97.
Assembly of 1766 he warned them against being more adept in debate than in touching the springs of the human heart.

Speaking candidly of some of the ministers of the Church, he said:

And did they shine in every grace and virtue as much as they do in every branch of literature, — we would not hear so much as we do about the prostitution of conscience, and the little regard had to principle; nor would it be a question, as I am sorry to find it is a question, whether the people of Great Britain are possessed of the spirit of their constitution?" 36

Oswald had courage and independence of mind when he bolted his own party and the leadership of the compelling Principal Robertson in order to support a proposed solution to the patronage struggle which vexed the church on past the close of the century. 37

Patronage had been responsible for the division of the General Assembly into two parties. The one which stressed strict adherence to the patronage act of 1711 had a majority of elders and lay-members and was known as the Moderate Party; the other had in its membership those who supported calls in which a presentee had been approved by the suffrage of the heritors and elders of the parish. Therefore, when Oswald seconded the Schism Overture brought before the Assembly of 1766, he was out of line with party policy. 38

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36 Oswald, Assembly Sermon and Letters, (Sermon), p.41.

37 P. Hume Brown, op. cit., p.351.

38 Somerville, op. cit., pp.85-86.
to save the unity of the church. It could not go on indefinitely just crushing and suppressing opposition in patronage questions. "I am partly grieved, and partly ashamed", he confessed in one of his tracts, "for many ministers of good discernment... have lost all notion of a right of judgment in any ecclesiastical judicatory, and consider these... mere executioners of the patron's will". He concludes his argument by reminding his readers that in holding such a view they "have no shadow of authority that I know of, either in law or gospel".  

Patronage has often been given as the primary cause of the large numbers of ministers and people who seceded from the Established Church during the century, but the more discerning historians and students of the times have seen it more as an outward inflammation of a more serious internal wound. In other words, it was doctrine more than patronage that caused the "torrent of schism" and was disturbing "the unity, the peace and the dignity of the Established Church".

Oswald, as retiring Moderator, was present during one of the great sessions when the General Assembly was at its best for color and influence. An eye-witness to the discussion on the Schism Overture felt that it "was in all its hearings, one of the/  

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39 James Oswald, Letters Concerning the Present State of the Church of Scotland, and the Consequent Danger to Religion and Learning from the Arbitrary and Unconstitutional Exercise of the Law of Patronage, p.6; hereafter cited as Oswald, Letters on Patronage.
the most interesting ecclesiastical affairs that had happened in the course of his whole life. "The discussion..." according to this same man - the minister of Jedburgh - "gave occasion to one of the most learned, eloquent, and interesting debates that had ever occurred in the General Assembly".

One cannot appreciate fully the significance of the honor of the moderatorship during these years (in one of which Oswald held office) between 1750 and 1780, until one bears in mind the dominating position of the Assembly in the nation. At about 1760 it was the supreme judicatory of the Scottish Church which had in numbers its largest constituency since the Reformation. It was renowned for the high quality of its debate which brought forward the leading literary and legal talent of the nation. For many lawyers it was the preparatory school for parliament; and of Henry Dundas, who supported the opposition to the Schism Overture Oswald had seconded, and whom Carlyle described as "a match for all their (adherents of the Schism Overture) lay forces, as Robertson and a few friends were for all the bands of the clergy", there was a squib, penned in 1805:

'Twas in Kirk-Courts he learn'd his airs,
    And thunder'd his oration:
He caught North's ear at the back stairs -
    State-Ladder of the nation.

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41 Somerville, op. cit., pp. 60-61.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., p. 83.
45 Jas. MacLaurin (Lord Dreghorn) Contemporary Verse, as quoted in Terry, op. cit., p. 572.
Carlyle's Autobiography reveals some of the subtle, and often callous ways and means resorted to in order to accomplish desired ends. Some of them would make even our most modern worldly politicians blush. On Thursday, May 28th, 1766, he had dinner with the minister of the Tron Church, Dr. John Jardine, "the oracle of the moderate party", and the astute wielder of political influence. Carlyle and Jardine planned their strategy of defeating the enemies of presentation. The following day, Friday the 29th, things came off as they had designed, but with one exception. Jardine fell from one of the high benches, apparently in a faint. Carlyle describes how he went out in the hall to check on his friend's condition. He learned from the surgeon, Dr. Russell, that Jardine was dead. Yet he returned to the Assembly and informed the brethren that there were "hopes of his recovery". This "composed them", and the defeat of the measure introduced by Bannerman and seconded by Oswald was complete.

Henry Cockburn, an advocate of renown of the generation following Carlyle's, was referring to the Assemblies of the mid-century when he bemoaned the retrogression that had taken place in fifty years:

Its (Assembly's) substance survives, but, in its air and tone, it has every year been degrading more and more into the likeness of common things; till at last the/

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46 Somerville, op. cit., p.91.

47 Carlyle, op. cit., pp.489-491. See also Cairns, op. cit., pp.98-100, for further comment on this.
the primitive features which, half-a-century ago, distinguished it from every other meeting of men in this country, have greatly faded. Yet how picturesque it still is. The royal commissioner and his attendants, all stiff, brilliant, and grotesque, in court attire.48

There were men who were earnest and sincere, and, though not as eloquent as Principal Robertson, or as polished in manners and replete with social contacts as Carlyle, gave a quality of faith that was very much needed. Such, for example, were John Erskine, Greyfriars, and John Witherspoon of Paisley (later of Princeton). Oswald, though not the preacher that either of these was, had a similar lover of genuineness.

Perhaps it was in his retrospect of the doings of some of his colleagues in Assembly, such as Carlyle's band, that he was later inspired to write four sermons on hypocrisy from the text: "For what is the hope of the hypocrite, though he hath gained, when God taketh away his soul?"49 In his closing address to the Assembly of 1765 he showed his regard for the ability the brethren had in the Arts, but reminded them of their first responsibility; and particularly directing his remarks to the younger men, said:

But my younger brethren will indulge me the liberty of putting them in mind that, whilst they are studious of attaining every accomplishment which belongs to their office, they ought to lay the stress of their success on the intrinsic force of that system of truth,


49 Job 27: 8.
truth, so fitly represented in the engine devised by infinite wisdom, and set on motion by almighty power.50

Despite this admonition many chose to follow after the gods of literature and fine conversation. In the ensuing General Assembly debate on the curbing of patronage, the weight of their support went with Principal Robertson who chose in his youth, the motto: "Vita sine literis mors est!" 51

This, no doubt, had much to do with the aversion of most members of the Established Church to the Wesleyan type of preaching which they classified as enthusiasm. "The least apology that can be made for the new teachers", wrote Ramsay of Ochtertyre, "is their being under the influence of an enthusiasm which spurned the dictates of sober reason". 52

Oswald was in agreement with the majority of his brethren in apprehension of enthusiasm.

Still it is to be wondered if a generalization like Dr. Watson's on what the sum of the Gospel was to the Moderates, typified by Blair's sermons - "cleansed of every trace of enthusiasm; because they make no demand upon the spiritual side of a man's nature, or raise awkward questions regarding the supernatural character of Christianity" - doesn't cast a black cloud over all members of the moderate party. 53 Oswald's sermon to the Assembly exhibits style and dignity, but could

"And/


"And behold God's chosen people cast out of his protection, and scattered over the face of the earth for their infidelity and impiety",54 be construed as spiritually "soft" when the analogy was explicitly applied to his own contemporaries? "The contemptuous neglect of religious duties among men of character", he said, "is surely corruption of manners peculiar to this age, and has risen of late to an uncommon height".55 In dealing with the situation he lists among the practical helps, grace. "Grace", he emphasised to be, "the mighty power whereby he is able to subdue even all things to himself".56 Dr. Cairns, whose essay does not paint too "rosy" a picture of moderatism, yet who has given the most helpful insights, makes the wise observation, "We can no more sum up against an ecclesiastical party than bring an inditement against a whole nation".57

The religion of Oswald's century, then, was a curious mixture of color and shade. Too much shade judged by the amount of unbelief in Scotland, England, and on the Continent. It was a religion of accommodation to the times, rather than a virile leader of spiritual thought. Often "the church made a compromise with the world".58 But one must also see that there was:

54 Oswald, Assembly Sermon and Letters, (Sermon), p.27.
55 Ibid., p.29.
56 Ibid., p.37.
57 Cairns, op. cit., p.86.
was brightness too. If the men of the Eighteenth Century differed from their ancestors in having exchanged swords and bullets for books, they still fought battles in the field of thought. "The Church intellectual did good service. The deists and atheists of the beginning of the century - Tindal and Collins, Chubb and Wollaston - and the infidels at its close, of whom Hume and Gibbon were leaders, were met by worthy and competent antagonists - Clarke, Adams, Beattie, and Campbell". And to this list Oswald's name might be added as one who sought to weld culture to faith as a handmaid not a hindrance.

Speaking of the relation of faith and culture, Dr. Watson claims that moderatism at its best prevented their separation, and set "forth a working model of the religious life which secures Christianity without destroying humanity".

Having mentioned some of the main movements of the century it remains to briefly note a number of people contemporary with Oswald, and, as in the first section, concentrating almost entirely on Scotland. From the point of view or angle of approach that one wishes to make there is a difference in opinion as to who was "great" in the century. "High among the century's heroes", says a modern writer, "stand Cockburn of Ormiston, introducing potatoes and turnips, Fletcher of Saltoun, experimenting with winnowing-fans, and the hundreds of forgotten lairds and farmers...who changed the face of Scotland and gave us/

59 Ibid.
60 Watson, op. cit., p.186.
us the Cheviot sheep, the Clydesdale horse, the Ayrshire cow.\(^6\)

From the view of a churchman looking back from our present century:

There were great men both in Church and State during that (18th) century, but if you except Robertson the Historian, Adam Smith the Economist, Hume the Philosopher, and Burns the poet of the Scots people, you have to look closely to find them, and to appreciate their work. \(^6\)

And finally, as a third sample, we draw upon a modern Secular historian of Scottish history:

Within two generations of Culloden, Scotland counted among her sons men of international renown in many fields of intellectual activity - David Hume (1711-76), Thomas Reid (1710-96), James Beattie (1735-1803) in philosophy; Adam Smith (1723-90) in political economy; in history, David Hume and William Robertson (1721-93); in poetry, James Macpherson (1736-96), Robert Burns (1759-96), and Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832). In science, James Hutton (1726-97), Joseph Black (1728-99), Sir John Leslie (1776-1832), all made momentous discoveries. In medical science, William Cullen (1710-90) and John Hunter (1728-93) established new stages of progress in their subjects.\(^6\)

Oswald obviously was not on any of these lists, but he was contemporary with these men. Their lives indirectly influenced his, and in certain instances directly so. Of the "forgotten lairds and farmers...who changed the face of Scotland..." he was a friend of Lord Kinnoul who had given encouragement to Beattie;\(^6\) and his own patron, David Smyth of Methven, was/
was one of "the highly respectable and...leading men", of
Perthshire, "who cooperated with uncommon zeal" in the meetings
held to revive the obsolete statutes for building up the public
roads.  

In the General Assembly he met William Robertson first as
a member of the same party, but parting over the schism issue
which won new laurels for Robertson, who in his speech on the
same was "pleased to make a very handsome encomium on himself,
and his conduct in the management of public affairs;...".

Oswald's Appeal was inspired by a desire to put on trial
infidelity and scepticism which had been abetted by David Hume,
and was having a disastrous effect on the cause of religion:
"And (be the fate of this appeal what it will) whenever
scepticism and infidelity, the reigning folly of the present age
are brought to trial, it will fall into contempt, and disappear".
Throughout his work Oswald makes reference to Hume in an en-
deavor to ridicule scepticism at the bar of common sense. He
does not, however, disrespect Hume's mental acumen, and says,
"Any one the least acquainted with Mr. Hume's writings, will
perceive a genius fitted for making discoveries". His
quarrel, of course, is that Hume did not make some of the dis-
coveries he might have.

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66 "The Scots Magazine", vol.38, p.337, as quoted in
68 Ibid., p.
Once his book was published, Oswald's name was known to the great beyond the borders of Scotland. In England he was read by Dr. Majendie and Archbishop Secker. The former mentioned Oswald's *Appeal* "with commendation" in the presence of the King and Queen during their interview with James Beattie. "The Queen took down the name with a view to sending for it", recorded Beattie in his *Diary*; adding: "I was asked whether I knew Dr. Oswald? I answered, I did not, and said that my book was published before I read his; that Dr. O. was well known to Lord Kinnoull, who had often proposed to make us acquainted".70

Joseph Priestley, English scientist and divine, "discoverer of oxygen", and staunch Unitarian, who first heard of Oswald's *Appeal* by a critic71 of his own works, later said:

> When, finding the work quoted with much respect by Dr. Beattie and others, and hearing it in general well spoken of, I was determined to give it a careful reading; which I did with great astonishment and indignation, but not without some entertainment.72

The outcome of this, of course, was his publication of "An Examination of Dr. Reid's *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles/

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69 Dr. John Jas. Majendie was of French extraction, the father of Bishop Majendie, and a tutor of Queen Charlotte. He was influential in court circles. Cf. Dictionary of National Biography, vol. XII, p. 829.

70 Beattie, op. cit., p. xxxviii. Thomas, Earl of Kinnoull, was president of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and Oswald dedicated his sermon before the Society's Anniversary Meeting of 1770, to him.

71 William Enfield, Remarks on Several Late Publications Relative to the Dissenters, in a Letter to Dr. Priestley.

Principles of Common Sense, Dr. Beattie's Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth, and Dr. Oswald's Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion". At the time of its writing Priestley had begun to concentrate more on matters of metaphysical interest than formerly. As a critic, however, a biographer owns, he is "not enjoyable" to read because of his show of temper and the frequent use of the obnoxious phrase "I flatter myself". 73

Thus, having touched on some of the movements and men of that century in which Oswald lived; and Scotland, his native land, which at the time was enjoying a "period of her most energetic, most peculiar, and most various life", it is now necessary to study against this background his own particular philosophy and theology.

73 Anne Holt, Joseph Priestley, p.112.

Chapter III

OSWALD AND THE COMMON SENSE PHILOSOPHY

Oswald's philosophy, like Reid's, begins with a grievance against the Cartesian system for its notable service to scepticism. He finds it guilty on two counts. One is that it ignores the origin of, and the part played by, first principles; and the other is, that among its dependents - Locke, for example - there is a confusion of the terms reason and reasoning. Oswald's plan is to remedy these "deficiencies" in the foundation of truth, by turning men's attention to something which is practical, down to earth, and which can be easily understood. He makes no claim to originality for his diagnosis of the diseased philosophical hypotheses current at his time of writing, nor for his suggested "Common Sense" cure. His aim is to expound and publicise, for layman and learned alike, the much over-looked, but nonetheless vital, faculty of Common Sense. Here it is in order to bring in review some of Oswald's sources.

For a basis for his first issue with the Cartesian School, he calls his reader's attention to one of Descartes' own country-men, the Abbe de Pluche\(^1\) to support the contention that Descartes did/

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\(^2\) Noël-Antoine Pluche was a Jansenist writer; born in Reims in 1688, and died in 1761. He was director of the College of Laon, but had to resign his duties for refusing to approve of the papal bull, Unigenitus. He tutored the son of Gasville, Commissier of Normandy. Finally he was placed at Paris. Among his works were: Spectacle de la Nature ou Entretiens sur L'histoire naturelle et les sciences, 1732; Harmonie des Psalms et de l'Evangile, 1764; and Concord de la Geographie des differentes Ages, 1765. (From La Grande Encyclopédie Inventaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Les Lettres, et des Arts, vol. XXVI, p. 1134).
did "eminent service to the interest of learning, by banishing the jargon that disfigured and disgraced it", but along with Locke, failed to "cure and correct that intemperate love of reasoning which may be called the epidemical distemper of the human mind". Oswald is in complete accord with the "learned and ingenious" Abbe's words:

I most sincerely value Monsieur Descartes, not indeed on account of his being a Frenchman, (for all men are my brethren), but because he is a very great genius... who encouraged us to shake off the yoke of Aristotle, and to look out for a better method of pursuing sciences than that which followed heretofore...I should have a far greater value for him, if, after having convinced himself that the beaten path leads to nothing, he had not engaged in another road as little sure, and perhaps more dangerous.  

Another source of Oswald's help also came from France in Father Buffier's Traité des Premières Vérités. Reid credits Buffier with having "perceived the defects of the Cartesian system while it was in the meridian of its glory, and to have been aware that a ridiculous scepticism is the natural issue of it". "Father Buffier...has the honour of being the first, as far as I know after Aristotle", Reid further informs, "who has given the world a just treatise upon first principles".

Reid, however, was not correct in supposing that Oswald was

6Ibid., 468.
was among those who had had no acquaintance with the writings of the learned Jesuit. "Some late writers", Reid observed, "particularly Dr. Oswald, Dr. Beattie, and Dr. Campbell, have been led into a way of thinking somewhat similar to that of Buffier; the two former, as I have reason to believe, without any intercourse with one another, or any knowledge of what Buffier had wrote on the subject". On the contrary, Oswald launches his attack on Locke with the heavy support of Buffier's Remarks on Mr. Locke's Essay to the extent of six and one half pages.

Bayle's Dictionary receives no direct quotation from Oswald but Bayle, to whom Hume acknowledged his debt, is mentioned in a tone of ridicule in Oswald's second citation from the Abbé de Pluche's work.

Oswald deals with the ancient philosophers in a somewhat cursory manner,

The sages of antiquity neglected obvious truths of the greatest moment to the interests of virtue, through their absurd inclination to employ their reasoning powers on improper subjects...that the Epicurean scheme was no other than Atheism disguised; that the hypothesis of the Stoics was little different from the Polytheism of the vulgar; and that the faith of the Academics was either none at all, or faint and fluctuating at best, will not be disputed by those who have any knowledge of antiquity.

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7 Reid, Essays, op. cit., p.468. Also in this connection, Oswald, in discussing Kames' answer to Hume (Appeal, vol.I, pp. 144-145), says "This author proves, on the received principles of philosophy, that we have no evidence for the sun's rising tomorrow, yet believe and expect it, etc." Prof. Laing traces this illustration about the Sun's rising as he finds it in Hume to Buffier's Elemens de Metaphysique. Cf. Laing, David Hume, p. 70

8 Oswald, Appeal, vol.I, pp.64-70.

9 B. Laing, David Hume, pp.69-70.

10 Oswald, Appeal, vol. I, pp.41-42.
His bone of contention with them is their failure to recognize the virtue of Common Sense. Yet he reveals elsewhere that beneath his ridicule there is an appreciation of their work. In order to articulate what he means by Common Sense he is obliged to refer back to them frequently; requesting that his readers, for example, "keep in mind the much celebrated advice - 'Know thyself'. He was acquainted with the writings of Cicero, and used them to illustrate the absurdity of unnecessary "reasoning". "Let Cicero's dialogues concerning the nature of God, stript of rhetorical embellishments, and reduced to simple propositions", he tells us, "be put into the hands of some peasant of common understanding, and tolerably acquainted with the Christian revelation, and he will be much astonished at the opinions of the ancients,...and heartily thank his God for bestowing on him the gift of common sense, and of the Holy Scriptures".

Oswald's reading included the works of the notables of British thought in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Hobbes had been familiar to him as a young pastor. Without naming names, but stating in a sentence or two their main theses, Oswald summarizes certain of these, who we may identify as Butler, Cudworth, Wilkins, Campbell, Hutcheson, and Shaftesbury, as "writers of great learning and industry"; but unable to "give satisfaction to the world concerning truth in which all mankind are/

12 Ibid., vol. I, pp.43-44.
13 Supra, Chap.1, p.22.
are concerned, and about which common sense decides at first sight", because they are dependent upon Locke who had made a "mistake about the origin of our ideas".  

Oswald gives more space, however, to Shaftesbury and to Hutcheson. "From the theological writings, and even from the sermons of many divines", Oswald observes, "it would appear that they considered mankind as mere intelligences...determined in all their actions by the decision of their judgment, till Lord Shaftesbury first, and afterwards Mr. Hutcheson, pointed out other handles by which mankind may be managed". Leslie Stephen speaks of the influence of Shaftesbury as "direct and important in this department of thought (appear to common sense) ...Hutcheson transplanted his doctrine to Scotland; and Reid, though far from sharing in Hutcheson's ethical views, takes a somewhat analogous position in philosophy".

The influence for Oswald was to state the negative side of the case. After quoting Shaftesbury's views at length in reference to the meaning of common sense, he stingingly comments:

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15Ibid., pp.156-157.
17It is of interest to note that Oswald preceded Reid in the use of this citation from Shaftesbury. Oswald's Appeal was published in 1766, and Reid's "Essay on the Intellectual Powers of Man, in 1785. Cf. Thomas Reid, Works, ed.Hamilton, p.423.
Are we to wonder that this hero of infidelity should rail so intemperately at the clergy, and make such rude attacks upon the faith of Christians, when we find him indulge his sportive imagination in so licentious a manner in the ridicule of common sense? 18

Shaftesbury, as Oswald saw it, left no corner for variety of opinion, and equated Common Sense with what the majority of people everywhere could agree with. Leslie Stephen was referring to this definition of an appeal to Common Sense - "This thoroughly English conviction, which thus tries to convert the vox populi into the vox Dei, seems to have been first made popular in the eighteenth century by Shaftesbury" 19 - when he described how it was "transplanted" to Scotland. But for Oswald, Shaftesbury's "Common Sense" was the "last intrenchment" of scepticism.

Toward his own countryman, Hutcheson, Oswald was more kindly disposed. He felt Hutcheson had something of the true Common Sense view; but it was defective because it was only a partial view. He contended that if Hutcheson had expanded the power of the rational mind - thinking this a view faculty he had discovered (really common sense) - to "its true extent....he would not have overlooked, as he has done, the perception and feeling that mankind have of ought and ought not; nor would he have been chargeable with putting our moral sense upon a footing with/

18, Oswald, Appeal, vol. I, p.274.
19 Stephen, op. cit., p.61.
with our taste for gardening and architecture".  

Lord Kaimes is linked with Hume as one of the two, along with others, who have "offered a chain of strict reasoning, in proof that man hath, in no case, a power of self-determination; but, in all his actions, determined by what they call a moral necessity".  

To Oswald these are thoughts which should give the world great cause for alarm were it not for the fact that Common Sense views them with disdain.

Adam Smith's "sympathy" was very close to Oswald's meaning of Common Sense, and he praised Smith on his illustrative material. "Mr. Smith", he said, "in his Theory of Moral Sentiments, ought, and might, almost everywhere have put Common Sense in place of sympathy; because his many excellent observations on human life, and human nature, correspond exactly with it, and derive all their source from its authority".

Thomas Reid with whom Oswald's name was linked in the Scottish School, came in for his praise and acceptation. Oswald considered Reid's "An Inquiry Into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense, as heralding the near approach of the victory/

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20 Oswald, Appeal, vol. I, pp.158-159. It is interesting to note that Bernard Mandeville's Fable of the Bees, receives complimentary mention several times in Oswald's work. It is likely that he became acquainted with it through Hutcheson who wrote reproachfully of it in his Remarks on the Fable of the Bees.

21 Ibid., p.94.

22 Ibid., p.165.
victory of truth. He rejoices that it gives "such an account of the operation of our powers, as shews it impossible for a rational being to doubt the reality of the objects of sense", and such an account of the powers of the mind that it will be impossible for anyone "to doubt of the obvious truths of religion and virtue, without being convicted of folly or madness".23

In spite of his disagreement with Locke and Hume, against whom he makes most of his destructive comparison, Oswald has a sincere respect for their acuteness and contribution to learning. It might be argued that he was endeavouring to mitigate the force of some of his more censorious remarks in order not to offend the Scottish literati who held Hume in great esteem. A careful reading of the Appeal, however, gives more support to a contrary opinion. While Oswald kept from much of the vituperation of the third member of the triumvirate - Beattie, he did not hesitate to take Hume to task when his philosophy seemed to threaten adherence to the traditional faith and morals.

Like scores of his contemporaries Oswald made frequent use of the two most popular spokesmen of the eighteenth century, i.e., Addison and Pope.24 They served to clinch within a few words what he had tried to express about a man or about current thoughts. Bolingbroke, for example, whom Oswald wrote off as being/

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24Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, p.5.
being merely a destructive critic of the existing philosophical systems without putting something else in their place, was, Oswald thought, aptly summarized by Pope's couplet:

Or, meteor-like, flames lawless through the void,
Destroying others, by himself destroy'd.

The Nature and Limits of Oswald's "Common Sense".

Having considered some of the sources from which Oswald gained help; it is well now to examine what he believed Common Sense to be; and wherein lay its power and limitations. His approach to a definition is somewhat unique when compared with the usual discourse. His successor, Beattie, retards in true professorial style to the classical use and understanding of the term, quoting Aristotle, Lucretius, and Horace. 25 Oswald launches straight-away into a practical exposition of his subject, believing:

Definitions have their use on disputable subjects; but if one should ask the judgement of another on the difference betwixt black and white, sweet and bitter, he would, in place of all definitions, set black and white before him, and make him taste sweet and bitter: And in the present Appeal, the author shall content himself with setting before his reader the primary truths of religion and morality, with their opposite absurdities. 26

This passage appears in the Advertisement of his second volume, and is, more or less, an apologetic for having omitted a formal definition to his work; thoughtfully calling the reader's attention to several pages which have the meaning of the term in/  

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in a more concise form, and which might afford some satisfaction to any who felt the need for some precise explanation of "Common Sense".

Assuming for the moment the role of such a person, we turn to the first page reference, and note what Oswald has to say about the nature of Common Sense:

We have seen that rational beings are distinguished from the irrational, not so much by the discursive faculty, as by a perception and judgement of certain obvious truths, which for quickness, clearness, and indubitable certainty, is called sense; and on account of its being possessed in some degree by all rational kind, is called common sense. 27

As can be seen the passage refers back to the preceding chapter. In that he discussed the realities in nature, (not objects of sense), which rational beings could perceive and pronounce upon, but which were "hid from the irrational". Rational beings to Oswald were those people who were above the level of idiots and not afflicted with madness, while the irrational consisted of the brute animals and the two excluded types in the first classification. "By the external organ of sight", he tells us, "we have the same perception of bodies in motion which idiots and lower animals have; but by the intellectual sight, we apprehend motion itself". 28 According to Oswald, we may perceive primary truths by "Common Sense" in the same way as we perceive objects of sense through our bodily organs. Thus to him Common Sense is


is the power of a rational human being to discern primary truths through simple apprehension and immediate judgment with quickness and indubitable certainty.

Oswald would agree with Professor Balfour's description of what the world is like to a man who takes the Common Sense view, "It is the world in which we live; it is for all men a real world; it is for many men the real world; it is the world of common sense, the world where the plain man feels at home, and where the practical man seeks refuge from the vain subtleties of metaphysics". 29 He would agree too, that the creed of Common Sense is not summed up in any set list of articles. But he had not advanced to the neat distinction which Balfour makes between self-evident and inevitable belief. To Oswald, all Common Sense truth is self-evident truth, but the speed of its admission to the mind may vary. 30 "There are many truths in nature equally self-evident", he writes, "on which the mind cannot pronounce without long and leisurely attention". 31

To the novice wishing to inquire further into the meaning of Common Sense there almost immediately rises the problem, "What is the difference between 'common sense' and 'common opinion'?" Oswald, anticipating this question devotes a chapter to it; and gives it as the second reference of the Advertisement "apologetic" mentioned above. The chapter heading/  

29 Arthur J. Balfour, Theism and Humanism, 1915, p.149.  
31 Ibid., p.359.
heading boldly states that common opinion is "often on the side of error", whereas "common sense...is always on the side of truth". He finds that the confusion between these two lies in the error of "taking it for granted, that whatever is obvious to all, must be believed by all; and that whatever is not actually believed by all, or the greatest part of mankind, cannot be obvious". In order to sustain this view he suggests a careful review of one's own experience and finds cause for complaint in that, as children we are taught to form our judgments by abstract ideas, rather than matters of fact. He even calls attention to Hume's Natural History of Religion as giving copious illustrative material to prove his thesis. This last is done in such a ways as to cause the modern reader to smile. In regard to Hume's writings on the "prejudices and passions" he says the sceptic "gives such an account of the religious sentiments and practices of all nations, civilized as well as savage, and Christian as well as Heathen, as must be allowed to be extremely nonsensical; and, applied to rational beings, would have passed for a most extravagant romance, if he had not been supported as he is by well-known facts".

Common Sense is not as Shaftesbury would have us believe - "counting of noses" or the unanimity of the largest numbers of mankind. Rather, truth is "to be found with the minority rather than/

33 Ibid., pp.301-302.
34 Ibid., p.305.
than the majority of mankind". Further light is given on what the difference is between common opinion and Common Sense by what he believes to be an obvious observation on human vanity in relation to ancestry. He points out that most men indulge in the fancy of imagining themselves important and exemplary if their progenitors were. But anyone, Oswald holds, who is not an idiot or "crazed by family tales"...if he appeals to himself, will frankly own that all such glorying is silly and nonsensical. Here there is Common Sense in direct opposition to the most common and prevailing way of thinking. Oswald would not allow for overlapping - "the principles of good sense are diametrically opposite to received opinions, and established maxims" - was his bold assertion of his position in the early pages of his Appeal.

**Common Sense and Reasoning**

The most retrograde periods of philosophical thinking have been those in which an unnatural separation was made between the general conception of man's reason, his place and destiny in the scheme of things, and the concrete material presented in his ordinary experience of nature and man.

Oswald's aim in attacking "reasoning" is to show how a dependence upon it to reach the primary truths, by means of deduction/

35 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
deduction, must inevitably end in scepticism. He appreciates the "reformers in philosophy", but they are not less infallible than the reformers of religion. It is his opinion, that what he calls "the modern hypothesis" (deduction of primary truths from sense), makes it impossible to arrive at a satisfactory knowledge of first truths. There is too much danger of error in the reasoning chain. Even mathematicians sure of secondary truths arrived at by reasoning, he contends, would often be ready to admit this possibility.

There is greater need, Oswald holds, to put men in mind of their faculty of judgment than that of reasoning. He distinguishes between reason and reasoning; the former approximating judgment, rationality, and even common sense; the latter a process of train of thinking to demonstrate truth. It is at this point that his contemporary critic, Priestley, feels most derogatory toward Oswald. He thinks Oswald has cavilled with the words; and has encroached with Common Sense into the territory traditionally held by reason. Part of this, it would appear, is due to a somewhat justified complaint against Oswald for not making his meaning of the two words more clear and distinct; but the real issue is how we arrive at our knowledge of God. To Oswald it is not by demonstration, for he writes:

The inspired writers do not offer any proof of the being and perfections of God. They tell us that the invisible things of him are clearly seen from the things which he has made...but never enter into trains of reasoning, to establish a truth that is too obvious to admit of any proof.


In answer to this, Priestley accuses him of misrepresenting the writers of Scripture in order to favor his own system and to disparage reasoning, and asks the rhetorical question, "How do any divines pretend to prove the invisible power of God otherwise than by the visible effects of it; at least I never had recourse to any other argument, and yet I imagine that I have reasoned on the subject". 41 Oswald definitely states that the argument from design is not tenable in the proof of the being of God. Priestley, just as dogmatically, states the contrary. 42

But Oswald's view of reasoning in relation to Common Sense can be best seen in his discussion of Locke. He would have welcomed Adamson's words given at the beginning of this section as a caution to the author of the Essay, Concerning Human Understanding. Oswald admired Locke for being able to show up the defects in the thinking of the schoolmen. Locke's criticism of their intemperate love of reasoning, of their assumption that certain maxims were the source of all knowledge, and of their calling certain propositions maxims which were merely self-evident truths, was heartily agreed to by the Scotsman. However, though Locke seemed to be pointing toward a better method of approaching knowledge, "What a pity it is", Oswald laments, "that he did not go on to shew the distinction between primary/

primary and secondary truths. At this point, "had he distinguished, with due care, those truths which are perceived at once by the faculty of reason, from those that are found out by reasoning", Oswald further observes, "learning would have assumed another appearance...philosophy and theology would have been delivered from many foolish and frivolous cavils...and people of speculation would have kept...within the bounds of common sense.

Common Sense and Perception

The essence of Scottish philosophy, as it appears in Reid, is accordingly a vindication of perception, as perception in contra-distinction to the vague sensational idealism, which had ended in the disintegration of knowledge.

Oswald, in accord with the traditional logic, holds that the capital of human knowledge is obtained from three powers of the mind - perception, judgment and reasoning. Perception is the simple apprehension of a variety of beings, together "with their obvious qualities, which fall within our sphere". The next process to take place is a simple act of judgment. It pronounces "immediately upon all the obvious relations of those beings which are the objects of perception, their relations to one/

The following passage may be cited to show how he distinguishes the two: "That the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, is as true as that all parts are equal to the whole; but yet they are not truths of the same rank. The last mentioned is a primary truth, obvious to every understanding; and therefore an object of common sense. The other truth is secondary, known only to the learned; and therefore a proper subject of inquiry". Cf. Appeal, vol. I, pp.246-247.


Andrew Seth, Scottish Philosophy, pp.92-93.
one another, and the relation they bear to us". Perception and judgment when viewed in their least complicated meaning, and joined in close succession in the observance of objects, give a judgment that is almost infallible. All this provided that the object "is viewed at a proper distance, and there happens to be no casual defect or disorder in the powers".  

Perceptions were of two kinds, animal and rational. The former were perceptions men have in common with brutes and beasts; and the latter applied to those peculiar to all mankind above the level of idiots or madmen. Animals and idiots have eyes that function similarly to ours in the perceiving of motion, for example; but we are beyond them in that we are able to perceive motion itself. We can do this because we have a special "intellectual sight". The perception of motion can be just as distinct as any perception derived by means of the external sense organs. He illustrates this with the familiar six-billiard-balls-in-a-line example.

There is certainly a variety of perceptions not only in the animal division but the rational group as well. However, there is, amidst all the differences, an underlying unity. For the animal perception group there is a difference between a noise that is perceived by the ear and a smell perceived by the/
the nose. Yet noise and the smell are alike in this one respect - they are objects of immediate external sense. All animals equipped with a set of unimpaired sense organs may perceive such objects. For the rational perception group, on the other hand, there are additional sources of knowledge. There are perceptions which the animals do not have; but which, none the less, are just as true and informative. Like the animal perceptions, they have much variety. For example, our perceptions of plant growth and gravitation have little likeness; our perceptions of moral excellence and design also have no obvious affinity. But all agree in one thing - they are not objects of the external sense, and animals, "mere animals", do not have them.  

There are also differences within each group, of degree. Animals perceive with a quickness and clearness according to the excellence of their sense organs. Just as a collie might be good as a watch-dog and a setter for hunting. Both have the power of scent and hearing; but the setter excels the collie in the ability to smell, whereas the collie has the advantage of keener hearing. In like manner, according to quickness, strength, and extent of the rational powers, there are differences of degree in the rational group.

When it comes to necessary reference to objects in order to come by rational perceptions, Oswald steps away from Reid.

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51 Seth states: "There is just one point which is open to criticism (in reference to Reid's analysis) and that is Reid's assertion that we have, or may have, a knowledge of sensation signs apart from any perceptive reference to an external object". Cf. Seth, Scottish Philosophy, pp.87-88.
He is at one with Reid in making a distinction between knowledge and feeling, but holds that sensible objects are an "aid" in bringing the "rational perceptions" to the mind. It is important to study sensible objects because the idea we have of God, moral excellence, of gravitation, etc. - i.e. all the primary truths - comes to the mind as a result of due attention to objects. But such truths are not themselves the objects of sense. "One cannot have the idea of motion, without once and again attending to bodies in motion", Oswald mentions for example. Again, "You cannot form any idea of God by gazing upon his works, without observing their tendency, and entering, as far as your faculties will carry you, into his great, wise, and gracious plan". 52

Oswald gives no precise definition as to what he means by idea. However, he does set certain limits for the use of the term in connection with his philosophy of Common Sense. Sense impressions make traces in the mind that other realities do not. They make a picture which can be retained for days. No such pictures are in the mind, however, when it comes to gravitation, vegetation, or moral conviction. Does that mean then, asks Oswald, that these ideas may not be known and held with equal certainty?

If by idea is meant a lively trace, a sensible impression and picture in the brain, it may be allowed that we have no idea at all of those realities which are not objects of sense. 53

This/


53 Ibid., p.205.
This certainly would not be in keeping with Common Sense, and Oswald meets the difficulty by explaining that when the two types of idea are compared one may be said to be more "obscure and imperfect". This does not mean that "rational" perceptions are one whit less sure or certain. The difference lies in the manner of "conceiving" (synonymous with perceiving); but "the evidence attending our conception of both objects is the same". This is all that we need to know when it comes to our conception of God. Enough comes through Scripture and the simple testimony of phenomena to suit our present needs. If our ideas resulting from non-sensory impressions seem to be obscure, it is because they bear the same relation that our knowledge now bears to a future state, that the knowledge of a child of thirteen bears to an adult. In other words, much of what may seem blurred and out of focus in this life, the same will be sharper and clearer in the life to come.

But Oswald wants no mistake made as to the source of our knowledge of primary truths. The "vulgar" tend to believe that "they not only feel the qualities of matter, but matter itself". This is because they tend to confuse cause and effect from the getting of the one from the other so immediately. Now it is true that we get our rational perceptions as a result of our animal perceptions - "for the one could not be without the other". But from an internal faculty that sets us distinctly apart/

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54 Ibid.
apart from animals, we, who are rational, holds Oswald, can become aware of powers in nature - gravitation, the invisible things of God, etc., which are not the objects of sense. On this subject with reference to Reid, Seth makes the following observation, "The philosophical point is the complete or generic distinction between Perception and Sensation - between Knowledge and Feeling - which for ever precludes the derivation of the one from the other". Here was the battle-ground and the very front line of it, between sceptic and Common Sense philosopher. Oswald realized it, and, no doubt, was encouraged by what his predecessor, Reid, had said.

But what of this internal faculty; and what has it to do with intuition in the school meaning of the word, if the latter be commonly considered as dependent upon reasoning and inference? If one has the approved school meaning of the terms in mind, the answer is in the negative. Common Sense and intuition are not even in the same family. Oswald's Common Sense and its difference from "reasoning" has been discussed above. It is a thorn in the flesh for him, and he comes back to it again and again to show that it has nothing at all to do with primary truths derived from Common Sense. According to Oswald, Hume could have had certain knowledge that fire consumes combustibles, if he had not bound himself to abide by the methods prescribed by philosophy alone, i.e. a chain of reasoning/

55 Seth, Scottish Philosophy, p.87.
reasoning process. With regard to "intuition", Oswald states that primary truths do not come to be part of our knowledge by this means. This is because intuition has to do with our "perception of obvious relations and qualities of being".57

Oswald, later in his work, returns to the question of Common Sense and intuition, and in a letter to a friend, appended to the first volume of the Appeal, he admits having been "too scrupulous" on this point; and in order to satisfy his correspondent offers to own "that our knowledge of primary truths hath equal title with our knowledge of all other self-evident truths, to be resolved into intuition". There remains a difference, perhaps inconsequential, but nevertheless may be noted. Intuition has its sphere in the obvious relations of things; but, asks Oswald, could we have "any ideas of these relations, if we had not first perceived them?"58 Here may be seen a possible parallel to Reid's idea that "apprehensions accompanied with belief and knowledge must go before simple apprehension".59

As to inference, Oswald holds that it plays no part in the acquisition of primary truths. Inference must always depend upon some general truth, the knowledge of which is understood. If we examine a piece of ore, and infer that it contains silver or gold, it is only because we have had previous knowledge of what/

58 Ibid., pp.357-358.
59 Reid, Works, Ed. by Hamilton, p.105; as quoted by Seth, Scottish Philosophy, p.77.
what these metals are that we are enabled to make a satisfactory inventory of the ore's content. In other words, inferences are dependent upon a middle term. Common Sense, on the other hand, passes upon those primary truths within its sphere without reference to a middle term. True, it is common for people to talk about such laws of nature as gravitation being "inferred from phenomena". However, Oswald would ask such people what they really mean. Is there some truth in nature which will justly support such a statement? If they try to say there is, and that it is experience, Oswald will further question: "Experience of what?" One may notice, Oswald continues, that grass grows, and that bodies indeed incline toward the centre, and, therefore, may conclude that there is actually a law of growth and a law of gravity. Isn't this a bit ludicrous? "Does it not approach very nearly saying that you have discovered a thing because you have discovered it?" Oswald, thus having carried his reader to this point, is ready to drive home the central theme of his philosophy. We do not need to quibble with such foolish reasoning. It is not in the picture at all. "Would it not be just as well to say, that on due attention to phenomena, you get acquainted with the laws of nature by a simple act of perception and judgement?" Oswald, now turns his attention again to Hume. This time it is on the question of simple belief. "Never did school-

Common Sense and Belief

Oswald now turns his attention again to Hume. This time it is on the question of simple belief. "Never did school-

divine perplex or puzzle himself more”, he writes, "than Mr. Hume has done in his account of the simple act of belief”. 61 Oswald’s quarrel is that Hume seems to forget that he is describing an act of the human mind. He thus goes far from the truth and even probability, and "resolves the whole into vivid perception; which is often the adjunct, but will never be allowed to constitute the essence of belief". 62 Or in Hume’s own words, "An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defined, a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression". Oswald argues that everyone who is sane will admit that there are objects of which we can have a "vivid, lively, forcible, firm, and steady conviction", and yet know very well that it is not true, does not have reality, is false. All know that there is such a thing as credulity and belief; and realize the importance of guarding against confusing the two. Rational belief, according to Oswald, has only truth as its object. If, through the influence of prejudice or habit, a man holds a belief that is not true, while we agree that the perception is vivid, we contend that he would not be considered as having played a rational part. Oswald would criticise Hume, therefore, not because he ventured out of the common way of thinking, but because he did not have "the courage" to make still another and bolder step:

He/

61 Ibid., p.131.
62 Ibid., p.132.
He (Hume) did well in pointing out the prevailing absurdity of resolving our belief of primary truths into the force of reasoning; but he would have done still better if he had resolved it into the authority of common sense.  

Oswald is not original in his criticism of Hume for showing that there was no link between effect and cause. Reid had suggested this with satire, in his Inquiry; though his fullest treatment of it came later in his Essays, published nineteen years after Oswald's Appeal. Oswald is following Reid when he contends that there is a true relation between cause and effect, not in any demonstrative way, but through immediate perception. Reid made the more penetrating analysis of the logical consequences of Hume's philosophy. As Seth described it, Hume started out by assuming things to be abstract or unrelated particulars; and made it his goal "to show how the illusion of real connections between mutually indifferent units might arise". Oswald, while having the benefit of Reid's work, applied his own thought to the problem and arrived at a position close to Reid's. "A primary truth, or a law of nature, which is the result of our immediate perception and certain knowledge of this principle is the true foundation of the undoubted belief we have of that connection". A set of knavish tricks might suggest there is a knave who perpetrated them. But, as Oswald goes on to explain, it is not due to the number of knavish tricks a man might do, so much/

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64 Oswald, Appeal, vol. I, p.133.
65 Reid, Inquiry, p.57.
66 Seth, Scottish Philosophy, p.57.
much as it is to the disposition of the man to do knavery that makes us believe him to be a knave. He also takes the example of elasticity, and observes that we know that if a piece of spring steel is placed under pressure so as to cause it to curve, it will straighten out again when the pressure is relaxed. The reason for this lies not in the fact that we have seen it done again and again, but in the fact that the steel is possessed of "elastic" power. He also turns the illustration around, and states that we cannot believe a body to have these powers without expecting certain effects to be forthcoming from their operation. "Our expectation of effects, Oswald states, is inviolably connected with the belief of the cause, or principle of action".68 He anticipates Reid here.

"When I perceive a tree before me", writes Reid, "my faculty of seeing gives me not only a notion or simple apprehensions of the tree, but a belief of its existence; and this judgment or belief is not got by comparing ideas, it is included in the very nature of the perception".69 Oswald's position on belief, therefore, not only conforms to the principles laid down by the founder of the Scottish school, but advances a maturer formulation that anticipates Reid's Essays to be published a number of years later, in 1785.70

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70 Cf. Bernard Bosanquet, The Essentials of Logic, p.10;
Common Sense and Identity

All principles of explanation, accordingly, are derived, and must be derived from the nature of the explaining Self; they are transcripts, so to speak, of its own constitution. To seek to penetrate beyond this is really, as Lotze sometimes quaintly puts it, wishing to know how being is made. 71

Oswald's approach to personal identity is to say that primary truths have to be taken on the authority of reason alone, or else the person taking the contrary view must be pronounced a fool. Descartes may have indulged in the folly of trying to prove his existence; but even the boldest sceptics seemed to have learned from his example, and not only take their existence for granted, but actually assert that they believe they do exist.

"We have the same evidence for our identity", says Oswald, "that we have for our existence; for as we know, with the utmost certainty, that we do exist, so with the same certainty we know that we who exist now, are the same persons we were last week, last year, and twenty years backward". 72 He then endeavors to show the nonsense of trying to prove such an obvious truth. He observes that in twenty years time a man may change completely in every "lineament of his countenance" and in every affection and sentiment of his soul, yet remain the identical person.

Oswald follows up his point with the two rhetorical questions "What then is identity?, and wherein doth it consist?"; and, assuming no satisfactory answers can be given, says "In this we are at as complete a stand as we can be on the most abstruse point of/  

71 Seth, Scottish Philosophy, p.105.
72 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, pp.4-5.
of religion and morality". \textsuperscript{73} With a final turn of the screw, he says that sceptics either must believe this truth which defies demonstration or else give up any claim to sanity.

To Oswald there is the same perception of the existence and identity of objects as there is of Self. He sees the same fallacy in contemporary teaching (Hume's\textsuperscript{74}) of trying to separate substance from qualities as the Roman Church's dilemma in holding to a doctrine of the real presence. The Roman Church was under the necessity, he averred, of making a distinction. Protestants hold such a doctrine to be nonsense. And rightly so, Oswald believes. For "it is nonsense to talk of a round, hard, smooth, white nothing"; and to be rational, we must "affirm... that the houses, trees, rivers, and animals, which we perceive, are not mere ideas, but realities existing without us". \textsuperscript{75} Through Common Sense we come to a belief in the existence of Self and the objects around us, and it is at this point that we have reached the foundation upon which knowledge can be built.

Oswald now comes to grips with Hume's view of extension - "As every idea is derived from some impression, which is exactly similar to it, the impression similar to this idea of extension, must either be some sensations deriv'd from the sight, or some eternal impression arising from these sensations". \textsuperscript{76} When we observe/  

\textsuperscript{73} Oswald, Appeal, vol. I, p.5.  
\textsuperscript{74} Hume, Treatise, vol. I, pp.342-343.  
\textsuperscript{75} Oswald, Appeal, vol. I, pp.5-6.  
observe objects, Oswald believes, there are a number of things which first occur to us. Among these are "figure, size, number and situation". Now, while it is true that we cannot look at a tree and a house and pronounce one to be exactly so many feet larger than the other without the use of a measuring instrument, we know that one is not the same height as the other by the simple act of perception and judgment. In other words, the same faculty which gave us the undoubted answer to the question whether we exist or not, also gives the same sure testimony that the objects under observation are not of the same size. Thus he conforms to his predecessor, Reid, who held "all these (qualities), by means of certain corresponding sensations of touch, are presented to the mind as real external qualities; the conception and the belief of them are invariably connected with the corresponding sensations by an original principle of human nature".  

**Common Sense and Psychology**

To me...the psychology of the Scottish thinkers, though imperfect and undeveloped, was yet the fitting precursor of the newer psychology which raises questions as to the whole course of animal and human intelligence, and as to the relation of mental facts to their physical conditions.  

Oswald makes frequent use of comparative anatomy to endorse his statements on Common Sense. It is in the observation of animals that we see certain things which we have in common with them; and other faculties which we have, but they do not.

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science of comparative anatomy did a great deal to broaden our knowledge of the exact structural differences between animals and human beings, he pointed out; but not enough was done along the same line in the study of the human mind. True, metaphysicians alluded to the powers of children, idiots, and lower animals, but the comparison was not studied with the care and thoroughness that its importance demanded. That is why the moral philosophers, Oswald feels, "have not reached a clear and true idea of the characteristic of rationality, or of that power of rational mind which is its prerogative, and by which it is distinguished from idiots and lower animals". 79 Locke's mistake, Oswald believed, was to limit the source of our ideas to two powers which the animal world also participates in. If he had scrutinized human intelligence in comparison with animal intelligence, he would have seen that there were other "inlets to the human mind, which the other animals have not". 80

Oswald makes many comparisons of animal and human intelligence. Today some may appear quaint in the light of modern psychological knowledge. Yet, surprisingly enough, a large number would not seem to contradict the findings. He speaks of the reflective power of animals; and is of the opinion that certain actions which they do that excite our interest may well be the result of compounding, dividing, and abstracting very much in the way we do. Reflection would not be considered a chief distinction between rational kind and animal kind. A

80 Ibid., p.104.
knowledge of beauty, harmony, design that gives so much pleasure to the rational mind, animals seem insensible to. This would be considered a noteworthy distinction, especially because it is only of degree, but of kind.

Under his discussion of animal instincts, he speaks of the birds building their nests, beavers their houses, and hens sitting brooding over their eggs. "On all these things they are utterly ignorant, and we are the spectators, and we only are the judges of that perfection of design by which they act". Man, on the other hand, knows more of what he is about. He regulates things by perception and judgment in a way of which inferior animals are totally incapable. "This perception, then, and judgment, will, upon the strictest inquiry, be found to be the characteristic of rationality." 82

He disagrees with Locke's contention that the power of abstraction is that which "puts a perfect distinction betwixt men and brutes". 83 No, there is a more perfect faculty which pronounces upon "the connection which subsists between qualities and powers, and the subject to which they belong". If the animals had this, then there could be no doubt as to their getting an occasional abstraction similar to the way our minds do.

Animals may see snow, milk, or chalk, and be governed by the idea of

82 Ibid., p.178.
of whiteness. Yet they have no idea of whiteness being a quality of the objects and the connection of the one with the other. It is not readily apparent what Oswald is aiming at here, and whether he has any real ground for disagreement with Locke at all. It would seem, however, that Oswald's point is not so much to show that animals may have a vague ability to perceive abstractions, but mostly to emphasize that the main difference between animals and human beings, the most "perfect distinction", is that power of perception and judgment which human beings enjoy and which the lower animals are not possessed of. This is the recurring thesis that is repeated again and again throughout Oswald's work. He saw the danger to his own philosophical view if Locke's statement was allowed to be held. It would be putty in the hands of the sceptics.

He follows up this series of remarks on Locke's view of abstraction with further discussion of Locke's explanation that it is for want of language that animals are not enabled to have this power in common with us. No, Oswald would say again. "He (Locke) ought to have ascribed it to their not having those ideas that are expressed by our language".84 If supplied with the necessary organs of speech and the words, animals would not be able to use them with propriety because "they neither have nor can conceive the ideas they convey...having no idea of any realities that are not the objects of sense".85 Oswald compares certain/

85 Ibid., pp.180-181.
certain behaviour of dogs and children with reference to fire and malice, in order to clarify his position. Both dogs and children learn that after an experience of being burned by fire, that fire is to be shunned. There is a difference, however. The child rapidly acquires a knowledge of the "invisible powers" of fire, and will, if he desires, employ it to burn others. A dog will not do this. A child and a dog may be equally keen-sighted, and the dog excel the child in catching his prey. Yet the child soon learns about many of the laws of nature which will enable him, but not the dog, to turn keys, open locks, and do many other complicated operations and movements. "It is worthy of notice", Oswald tells his readers, "that brutes never thrust one another over precipices, into ponds, or into fire. They may do it by accident, but never through mirth or malice, as children do...". Priestley would not accept these observations of Oswald. As far as I see, comments the discoverer of oxygen, "brutes both judge and reason as properly as we do, as far as their ideas extend". In this connection he also avers that Oswald does not try to answer possible objections to his (Oswald's) theory on the distinctions between human and animal creatures. The suggestion that there might be any, Priestley complains, is treated with contempt by Oswald. There would seem to be ground for such a criticism, but it is partly mitigated by the tone of the critic. Priestley detracts from the effectiveness of his opinions by resorting to the academic pompousness so common to eighteenth/


87 Priestley, An Examination, pp.323-324.
eighteenth century writing. Here we may let the matter rest.

Therefore, Oswald's Common Sense "psychology" with its emphasis on the study of animal behaviour was in keeping with the characteristic method of the Scottish School - that of observation. He was by no means founding his philosophy on animal physiology. Like Reid, he wanted to show in clear focus the laws, the principles, and the powers of the human mind by the study of human self-consciousness. The contrast of human and animal behaviour served as a means of clarifying his position. He saw the good work Locke had done, but broke company where Locke insisted on steadfastly resolving all our ideas into reflection or sensation. As Professor McCosh so well observed:

His (Locke's) great work may be summarily represented as an attempt to establish by internal facts the pre-conceived theory, that all our ideas are derived from sensation and reflection. To the Scottish school belongs the merit of being the first, avowedly and knowingly, to follow the inductive method, and to employ it systematically in psychological investigation.13

The Nurture of Common Sense

The question comes naturally to mind at just about this stage as one reads Oswald's account of Common Sense, if this power of perceiving and judging is such a distinct and helpful feature of human beings as contrasted with animal kind, why do not men make greater use of it in practice? Oswald gives a two-fold answer. Firstly, man has the power to let in the light of Common Sense to the amount that suits his desires. He draws the parallel between Common Sense and the power of sight. There are/

88 McCosh, Scottish Philosophy, p.3.
are many maxims which are as self-evident as geometric truths; but large numbers of people give little or no assent to them. "Their evidence", Oswald assures his readers, "is as clear as a sunbeam; but as the eye hath a power of letting in more or less of the light of the sun, so the mind hath a power of admitting these truths in greater or less degrees at pleasure". Priestley quotes this passage, and makes it a springboard for a bit of sarcastic word-play at Oswald's expense,

And though no man ever voluntarily shut up his external eyes, except to relieve them, and make them more serviceable to him afterwards; yet men are almost universally disposed to do this with respect to the eye of the mind, taking particular pleasure in the diversion which in the country is called blind man's buff. 

One so familiar with Biblical language as Priestley could not have mistaken the meaning Oswald was trying to convey by his metaphor. Priestley's deliberate and rude bluntness thus detracts from the force of his derogatory judgment that when Oswald compares the operation of Common Sense with that of the human eye, "fact and experience do not exactly tally with the pre-conceived theory".

The second answer to the question asked at the opening of this/

90 Priestley, An Examination, p.234.
91 Cf. Christ's words, "Having eyes, see ye not?", for example. (Mark 8:18).
92 Priestley, An Examination, p.232.
this section is that Common Sense develops through use and nurture. Before this can take place there must be a realization of the power of wrong habits. Though we may make people aware of truths, and they may see them plainly, they cannot adopt them all at once as a simple process. For the vulgar it requires no mysterious explanation. "These unhappy people", writes Oswald, "are not much accustomed to think and judge".93 Similarly, even learned folk who have been grown up with a knowledge of the various ranks in society, and to think of others as superior because of family position; yet, though they know well that they derive no virtue or honor really from mere heredity, they still tune their ears to nobility, and raise the family crest.94 The pressure of habit is a considerable force to reckon with.

Therefore it is necessary that one should nurture the faculty of Common Sense. And though most men of learning state the contrary, Oswald holds that judgment, for example, improves with use. "Do not statesmen, generals, physicians, and even mechanics", he asks, "acquire an exactness as well as quickness of discernment, by exercise, which others cannot pretend to and which they could not have reached, without repeated acts of judgment?"95 Oswald speaks of progress in discernment as being arithmetical, i.e., according to the number of times it is used, so/

95 Ibid., pp.345-346.
so it shows corresponding improvement.

Priestley takes Oswald to task for implying progress ad infinitum, and because Oswald's view does not take into account that man in history has sometimes regressed in knowledge rather than advanced. 96 This would be a criticism well taken were it not for one thing. Oswald guaranteed such progress only on the condition that the bulk of mankind take Common Sense seriously. The heading for the very beginning of the Appeal bemoans the fact that such has not, however, been the case: "Mankind in all ages have paid too little regard to the authority of Common Sense". Priestley seems to assume that mankind tried it, and failed. Again and again Oswald reiterates the need of men to give more attention to that principle which is the very characteristic of rationality (Common Sense). He does not say that all the maxims and axioms of the day are false, either. His point is that

The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light; not because the maxims on which they proceed are more evident or certain, but because they are more attended to than those of religion. 97

Thus by implication, we could grow in spirituality by giving due heed to the spiritual truths that are readily apparent upon the simple operation of Common Sense. Perhaps here we may draw a parallel with Paul's "exercise thyself rather unto godliness; for bodily exercise profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things". 98 This cannot be done as quickly and easily as/

96 Priestley, An Examination, p. 236.
98 I Timothy 4: 7-8.
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96 Priestley, An Examination, p.236.
98 I Timothy 4: 7-8.
as we wish because the training of habit and the blindness of prejudice are a drag, and slow down the process. Nevertheless, Oswald looked forward optimistically to the day when the majority of men everywhere would see through the foolishness of sophism, and make a steadily increasing use of Common Sense.

Common Sense and Morality

The method and the point of view of Common Sense is essentially an appeal to the moral consciousness, as an all-important and incorruptible witness of the truth. 100

Oswald's central theme in dealing with the ethics of Common Sense is to emphasize that belief in moral obligation is in keeping with rationality. To doubt that we have such obligation is nonsensical. To make this more apparent he asks his readers to suppose that some Persian or Indian were to be told that the great men of learning were engaged in such pursuits as to decide whether virtue or vice should be supported. Or in like manner asking one another why, or on what grounds, does mankind accept justice, honesty, and temperance; and not their opposites. Certainly such friends from the East would suspect that people were making sport of their credulity, and be amazed that any such behaviour could take place in a civilized country.

Just as Common Sense pronounces immediately on a perception involving extension, so it gives a ready answer to certain relations between two intelligent beings, making it most difficult to avoid "perceiving certain regards reciprocally due from one to/
to the other". 101 While it is true that there are a variety of relations between men, and many which cannot be determined exactly and which often baffle the wisest of men, it is also true that there are many affinities which are the result of obvious relations, and these come within the scope of Common Sense.

There is also a distinction to be noted between the ability to perceive the obligations incumbent upon us ethically, and a "disposition to fulfil" them. Some men may possess the one, yet be completely lacking in the other. But no man, Oswald maintains, is completely destitute of "all sense of duty". 102

Oswald follows Hutcheson in regard to the acknowledgment of the virtuous qualities in others. We may not receive any benefit from them ourselves, yet we cannot fail in our obligation to pay them due respect. As Hutcheson said:

"Altho' we have kind affections ultimately aiming at the good of others, the success of which is joyful to us, yet our approbation of moral conduct is very different from liking it merely as the occasion of pleasure to ourselves in gratifying these kind affections." 103

Oswald holds a similar view with reference to gratitude or debts. To say one moment that we believe our thanks is due to someone, or that there is some other obligation to them forthcoming from us, and then to hesitate to follow through, not only "shocks Common Sense", but equally the assertion, "A thing may be, and may not be, at the same time:" 104 The reason why such obvious truth/

truth is frequently overlooked is because the passions often
cause men to rush through life and follow vain pursuits. All
that is needed is to remind them of their obligations, "for
moral obligation of every kind is an object of common sense".105

Another keynote of Oswald's ethics in the light of Common
Sense is that "we have a feeling, as well as a perception, of
moral excellence".106 In his large section devoted to the
study of "Conscience", Oswald's introduction pays tribute to
"that philosopher, who laboured to bring down moral obligation
from the thin cold regions of abstract thinking, to its native
seat, the human heart"; but, at the same time, scolds him
(whom we may identify as Francis Hutcheson) "for devising a
moral sense as a supplement to the rational soul; because a
feeling is not less essential to it than a perception of moral
obligation".107 Oswald sees here in Hutcheson the defect
that Seth observed in Reid, viz., that we may have a knowledge
of sensation signs apart from reference to an object. "A pure
intelligence", Oswald maintains, "is a non-entity". That it is
possible, of course, to think of ourselves as endued with purely
thinking powers minus "any emotions or affections arising from
the object" of our mind's contemplation. Yet, Oswald asks,
isn't this a mere "fiction of the brain", which would really
find/

105 Ibid.,
106 Oswald, Appeal; vol. II, p.235.
107 Ibid.
108 Supra, p.87.
find little support from "anything in nature"? 109

The moral feelings are among the "most delicate" of our intellectual powers, according to Oswald. They are found in different degrees in different persons just as the other faculties of mind; and all who are deserving of being called rational have them. At times the moral sense may "totally disappear" as when a person is so severely ill that there seems to be no hope of life. But with the right kind of treatment they may recover, and so it is with the moral sense. It too may be revived to effective usefulness.

When it is in operation a man contemplating "beauty, dignity, or utility" will have a certain feeling of satisfaction; and when, on the other hand, he observes "meanness, misery, and disorder", he will be disgusted. Oswald holds that it is not possible for a thinking being to have any other reaction than appreciation of what gives delight, and dissatisfaction of that which induces disgust. "You must always suppose", he writes, "that rational perception is accompanied with rational feeling in some degree". 110 He also wants it made clear that this moral sense is different from "instinct". As illustrative of this he speaks of the maternal instinct. A mother deserves no special credit, nor do people feel any special honor toward her if she takes care of her young in the conventional protective, careful way. But the picture changes if this same mother is confronted/


confronted with a moral choice. She has the opportunity to indulge in a gay social life, and the temptations for the neglect of her more serious duties for the frivolous fads of her friends are most alluring. Yet she gives preference to the nurture of her children. "Will she not be allowed", Oswald asks - "not only by her family and friends, but by all who are endowed with Common Sense, to have acted a worthy, a virtuous, and a meritorious part?".

Another point is contained in the illustration reviewed above. That is, that "a sense of merit and demerit is essential to a rational being". If the mother had taken the opposite course her conduct would have been censored. Oswald requests that his readers do not consider the discussion of such things "as idle refinements, or apprehend that precision in our ideas will carry us beyond the limits of common sense". Rather,

We ought to know, with all exactness possible, those truths that are the objects of simple perception; and happy it would be for us if we made these our chief study...All actions, good or bad, flowing from a determination of the will upon a free choice, are objects of that perception, and pronounced upon without hesitation, on being fairly presented to the mind.113

Having taken some pains to define some limits to his view of the "moral sense" and its ability to distinguish between merit/
merit and demerit, Oswald carried his readers to the point where consideration of the conscience and its province and jurisdiction seem most apropos. Though related to the "moral sense", conscience is distinct from it. Conscience is an awareness of both merit and demerit in the human mind. One can operate independently of the other. Moral sense may be functioning efficiently at the very time conscience is weak or failing. It is the "Thou Art the Man" idea which explains how this works. But David wasn't the only one, Oswald reminds his readers, who was guilty of this strange paradoxical behaviour. He then gives an account of certain characteristic action common to so many men. A large number of people, says Oswald, learn all about virtue, and become especially acute in discerning its lack in others, but are seldom willing to let their "monitor" pronounce upon their own supply. The description suggests the phraseology of section on "rationalization" in a modern psychology text.\textsuperscript{114}

"Conscience", writes Oswald, "in its true and proper signification, is nothing else than a clear decision upon our conformity or disconformity to the rule of our duty in well-known cases".\textsuperscript{115} That is what it is, and is not to be confounded with the laws by which we judge, or be thought of as independent of God. Thus, according to this definition, there can be no such erroneous term as "evil conscience". It applies not to the technical criticism of words, but to the cases of right and wrong/


\textsuperscript{115}Oswald, \textit{Appeal}, vol.\textit{II}, p.254.
wrong which are widely known. Its meaning is contained in
the words of Paul, when he speaks of the Gentiles, who, unlike
the Jews, had no written law,

"They were a law to 'themselves', in as much as the
commands of God appeared to be engraved upon their
hearts; ...their conscience bearing witness, and
their thoughts accusing or excusing them", as they
did good or evil. 116

Oswald reminds his readers that in other places the Apostle
speaks in language the plain man is used to, "but here",
comments Oswald, "his account of the natural sentiments of the
human mind is strictly just and philosophical". He summarizes
the various descriptions of conscience - "God's vicegerent",
"the voice of God", and "the faculty of reason put into full
exercise in the common course of providence", as being pretty
much different ways of saying the same thing. "The differences",
he writes, "are rather nominal than real". The important
thing is, not that the discovery is made immediately by God, or
through the intervention of some subordinate agent or agency,
but that the discovery is made. The point is not so much "how
the light comes, but Whom it comes from, and that it has come.

Oswald gives an example of how the vulgar worry so much over
the difference between the planets in their regular courses and
an eclipse of the sun; "but", he commented, "a philosopher sees
the hand of God equally in both". 117

Of the province of conscience, Oswald holds that it is "not
to/

116 Romans 2:14-15, as quoted in Oswald, Appeal, vol. II,
pp.254-255.

to prescribe rules of duty, but to bear witness to our fulfilling, or not fulfilling, the obligations we find ourselves under." Conscience doesn't tell you what you should do or should not do; it merely renders the decision on what you have done. It "is not a lawgiver, but a judge". 118 It goes to work immediately when we try to side-step or evade or excuse ourselves from those things which we knew we were obligated to do. Oswald points out how conscience is God's vicegerent. And the sceptic, while he believes in God, will not hear the judgment of conscience, because he holds such an intercourse between God and the human heart to be the "dreams of crazy minds". 119

Oswald's final point is that the "tribunal" of conscience - that "power by which Almighty God executes his moral government" - is inescapable and its authority is impossible to decline. Men may close their eyes to something, the sight of which gives them pain; and they may side-step or shift to avoid confronting their faults; but as soon as the object is squarely confronting them, they "must necessarily submit to the pain" which they have "so industriously avoided". In his summary of the part conscience plays as a power of the mind, he lists four points. The first states that conscience is not subject to our control as the other powers are. The second posits that the blessing of conscience comes from God alone. The third holds that it operates/

118 Ibid., p.258.
119
operates in proportion to our willingness to comply with its orders. And the last emphasizes again, that attempts to avoid its decisions are foolish and in vain. Some, nevertheless, will persist in the latter practice; and this gives Oswald cause for making some poignant remarks on the "truly pitiable" state of mankind. Mention of these will be made later in the section reserved for the study of his theological point of view.

As this chapter on his philosophy draws to a close it may be asked, what is the philosophy's order, what is its system? There has been little apparent underlying structure. Psychology has been resorted to at will to explain and illustrate, and in some places it has gone out of its sphere when compared to our modern pedagogical divisions - but surprisingly enough, it has walled out very few recent findings in that field, even anticipating quite a few. The answer is, that Oswald has not tried to make any system. In over-systematization he saw what happened to Hume and the followers of Descartes. He belonged to the reactionary group that demanded a hearing for Common Sense truths despite the fact that their admission might play havoc with some neatly polished system.120 As Professor Seth pointed out, the Scottish School intended to be unsystematic, for Reid was of the opinion that "system is merely useful for didactic purposes". Seth also was of the opinion that the Scottish Common/

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Common Sense school had a sound approach to ethics,

The business of ethics is to organise into a coherent system our ordinary moral judgments, not to deduce from a metaphysical point of view a system of moral judgment which may or may not tally with the deliverances of moral consciousness itself. 121

Chapter IV

OSWALD'S THEOLOGY

If Dr. Cairns' statement - "It can hardly be said that they (Moderates) had a theology" - be taken literally and as validly applying to all the members of this party, it would be superfluous to dwell at any length on Oswald's theology. Again, if Oswald were simply to be classified as a "Calvinist", that would nullify further discussion also. Oswald, however, is the product of a conservative Presbyterian manse and a century of enlightenment. He is essentially loyal to the central Calvinistic teachings of the church, but liberal with regard to some of the tenets lying near the circumference. Oswald belongs to that group of Moderates which McCosh described as having made use of Common Sense to support their theology. Common Sense, Oswald always maintains, is a supplement to, not a substitute for, revelation. Oswald's method and order of treatment of natural theology and revelation, provide the basis for the plan of the discussion that follows.

When he takes up the problem of the existence of God, Oswald is a true son of his century, for he believes it is absurd to raise the question. "The being of God is too obvious and sacred/

1Cairns, op. cit. p.87.
3In the Middle Ages, "St. Anselm would have been distressed if he had failed to find a convincing argument for the existence of God..."; and this, according to Whitehead was the very antithesis of the eighteenth century. Cf. Whitehead, op.cit., p.71.
sacred a truth", he writes, "to be subjected to the reasonings of men". Throughout his discourse, Oswald is knowingly endeavouring to answer Hume. It is Hume's satire on divines and philosophers who have tried to win over atheists by argument, that Oswald quotes at the beginning of the section entitled, "Of the Being of God". It is Hume's destruction of the demonstrative proofs that inspires Oswald to declare their loss to the faith, negligible. To him, our knowledge of the being and perfections of God may arise from "simple attention to phenomena". And it is by no means to be accounted for by a "process of reasoning, which passes in the mind without being observed". This is a supposition of an arbitrary sort which, Oswald feels, is to be classified among those that give rise to many of the false hypotheses by which mankind have been misled. One of these in particular is that which holds that the connection between cause and effect can be proven by a process of reasoning. This, Oswald warns, "gave occasion to an ingenious writer to introduce an universal scepticism, by exposing the falsity of such reasoning". In conclusion, therefore, the solution is to make greater use of "that perception of obvious truth, by which we are distinguished from idiots and lower animals" i.e., Common Sense. Mere argument will do little good, for an able disputant can continue/
continue to withhold assent, and keep on asking questions for the sake of discussion. This would not be so easy, Oswald contends, if the truth were to be submitted to the judgment of the other person by a simple appeal.

There is an advantage to analogical reasoning, but it is a negative one. When applied to proving the existence of God it is useful for putting "the gross absurdity of the contrary supposition in its full light." At this point Oswald claims that the conviction that results from an analogical proof is due not to the chain of reasoning but to Common Sense.

Cicero among the ancients, and Fenelon and Tillotson among the moderns, have given us the analogical reasoning in all its strength; but to a judge of discernment, the conviction will be found to arise, not from the strength of the reasoning, but from the secret imperceptible influence of common sense. After the same manner when Common Sense is exercised it is easily perceived that there is a readily obvious difference between "design and no design". We become acquainted with the invisible perfection of God from observing the visible perfections. Anyone not an idiot, if he is honest with himself, Oswald holds, will not seriously doubt this.

In regard to the Oneness of God the line of argument from Common Sense seems at its weakest point. "A man of sense", Oswald explained, "will rest in the belief of one God, till he sees ground to suspect that more than one exists". If the question/

7 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.64.
8 Ibid., p.36.
question "Why?" is asked, the answer comes back,

The subject under consideration here is not what

men may conceive, but what they will believe; and

we affirm that without good evidence to the con-

trary, common sense will always rest in the belief

of that single author pointed out by the phenomena;

and that on all subjects it is the province of

common sense to banish chimerical suppositions,

and rest in the belief of realities pointed out by

the works of nature or art.

Therefore, all discussion on the unity of God is unnecessary,

and can be justified only if a person of avowed sincerity con-

tends that he believes he should pay homage to more than one

God, and can give plausible reason.

Once admitting the being of God on the authority of Common

Sense, a person must next acknowledge His attributes, or else

be judged stupid or guilty of prevarication. Oswald's argu-

ment runs for a space of forty pages, and avers that man cannot

acknowledge a being of perfection who at the same time can err

or be unjust. The only exceptions to this, if they can be
called such, are cases where the badness of men's hearts

prejudices their understanding; or the minute quibblings and

disputings of divines and philosophers over things which should

not become subjects of debate, have blurred the issue. It is

in this section also, in a footnote, that Oswald informs his

readers that the problem of suffering as it effects infants and

animals, is not a subject that comes within the sphere of Common

Sense. /

9 Ibid., p. 76.
Sense. Oswald states his view-point, as follows:

For ought we know to the contrary, the sufferings of innocent animals may be strictly due to the system of which they make a part, and may be compensated and overpaid by benefits derived from the same system; but without a revelation, or some data in nature to which we have not access, it is impossible to show how the sufferings of mere animals may be compensated, or should be due to the system in strict justice... To pretend to knowledge we have not, is silly; and to dissemble the knowledge we have, is disingenuous. On this account, we may decline accounting for the sufferings of innocent animals; but must resolve the well-deserved sufferings of moral agents to the justice of God. 10

The question may be asked, what help then is Common Sense to the other problems, namely, the hardness of hearts and the disputings of divines and philosophers? With regard to the first, Oswald contends that though we have not as clear a perception of God's goodness and justice as we have of his wisdom and power, "God has not left himself without witness to his adorable perfections". In every bad heart there is a degree of goodness; and "if we look into the bottom of our minds," writes Oswald, "we shall find a perception with a feeling too, in some degree, both of the goodness and justice of God". 11 These latter attributes, Oswald holds, are those which must be most carefully understood; "because false or injurious notions of the goodness or justice of God, are more offensive to him, and hurtful to ourselves, than any other falsities we admit into our minds".

10 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, pp.94-95.  
As to reasonings on the attributes of God as indulged in by the divines and philosophers, Oswald is of the opinion that little is to be gained therefrom. "Perhaps", he writes, "all reasoning on this subject ought to be dismissed, and all our ideas of God ought to be derived immediately from the simple testimony of the phenomena, and the express declarations of scripture". If this be done, he continues, there is naturally the danger that the ideas may be inadequate, or possibly inaccurate. Yet, Oswald is quick to add, they will be sufficient to give us a reason for living, and will be appropriate to our current state of mind. Oswald's view describes our knowledge of God as exhibiting growth. By way of illustration, he suggests that his readers compare the knowledge of a child of three about his mother, with that of a thirteen year old's conception of his. The knowledge of both is of equal reality, but of different stages of growth. It is at this point that Oswald finds his chief bone of contention with Bolingbroke.

"Lord Bolingbroke", Oswald says rebukingly, "with great appearance of pious humility, has taken upon him to dissuade mankind from entertaining any idea of the moral perfections and moral government of God; and, with no less appearance of zeal, has pronounced a severe sentence on all divines and philosophers, from Plato to Dr. Clarke, who maintain such doctrines". With a perspective of over a hundred years, Dr. Cairns, in his Cunningham/  

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12 Ibid., p.88.  
Cunningham Lectures, took a position not unlike Oswald's when he said, "Among the sceptical writers of this period (Deistic) I have, with some hesitation, ranked the celebrated Lord Bolingbroke, in spite of his own constant profession to rank as a Theist". Oswald maintains, over against Bolingbroke, that we know enough of God to answer our practical needs. Indeed, enough "to fear, and to love him, to trust and obey him". "This", remarks our author, is philosophy; and this is common sense.

One of the broad generalizations made concerning the preaching of the Moderate party to which Oswald belonged, was that congregations heard lectures on morality rather than the Gospel. In Oswald's delineation of men's giving at least as much respect for Deity as for parents, judges, and benefactors, there can be seen something of this strain. He bemoans the state of the times, how men make the interests of society the sole standard of right and wrong: how they regard seriously their position and relation to other men, but give little heed to their duty towards God. Having said this Oswald roundly exhorts those guilty of such inconsistency. "We appeal", he writes, "to common sense; and defy them to offer the shadow of a reason why a man ought not to be as sensible of his obligations to Almighty God as to any inferior being".

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14 Cairns, Unbelief in the Eighteenth Century, p.102.
15 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.89.
two pages Oswald enlarges on what he means, comparing society's condemnation of a man who endeavors to lessen his obligation to his protectors or benefactors by argument, to what should be the obviously greater guilt of the person who seeks to minimize his obligation to God. He concludes,

This is not reasoning; but it is common sense. You may call it preaching; and indeed it is the only way in which a man of sense and spirit would deliver his thoughts from the pulpit on a subject so plain and interesting; and if it is not fit to convince the judgment, which indeed is not necessary, it is fit to reach a better end; namely, to touch the hearts at least of those who are not past feeling. 18

The appeal to the heart is a point that Oswald stresses more than once in his Appeal, and in his sermons. He is of those who reacted against the neat mathematical reasoning of the earlier part of the century. 19 Speaking to his brethren at the General Assembly of 1766, he mentioned that one of the weaknesses of the age was that ministers were more proficient at debate than touching the springs of the human heart. 20

Common Sense and Providence

In appealing to Common Sense in behalf of Providence, Oswald makes three points: (1) Created beings live in constant touch with and dependence upon their Creator, (2) Providence works according to established laws, and (3) All things are so ordered as to "favour our pursuit of virtue and happiness." The/

18 Ibid., pp.116-117.
19 Cf. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, Chapter V.
20 Oswald, Assembly Sermon and Letters, (Sermon) p.41.
The first two are designed to meet the erroneous contentions of infidels and enthusiasts. Both of these, according to Oswald, represented the extremes. The infidels, on the one hand were those who would agree that God's providence was responsible for the great events of life in the world, but were reticent to admit its effect in every minute happening. The enthusiasts, on the other hand, held that every blessing, spiritual and temporal, came as a special interposition of God, unregulated by any special laws.

Oswald took his position between the two in the true moderate spirit. In one of his Letters concerning some points in his General Assembly sermon, he expresses to his friend what he thinks to be the history of man's attitude toward providential care. Men in previous ages, he explains, saw God's hand in all events, but were often drawing conclusions from sources akin to the sages, i.e., heavenly bodies and omens. This false way of thinking, he goes on, has been disgraced and exposed in the current age. But now men go to the other extreme; and the popular man is he that can ascribe events to anything but God. In summing up, he puts to his reader the rhetorical question, "Is This Common Sense?"\(^21\)

According to Oswald there is a moral as well as natural government of the universe, and neither of these is God more likely to break than the other. Within these two complementary spheres/

\(^{21}\) Oswald, Assembly Sermon and Letters. (Letter I) pp.1-2.
spheres man works and exists. In answer to those whom he designates as "ignorant and unthinking" who would say that God would have done more for his own honor if he had set the world going on its own, like a watch, Oswald claims God had a better plan in Mind. In so far as a mechanic, a general, or a statesman set in motion power, they resemble the supreme ruler; but they are subordinate because any power they have or put into some channel, operates according to established law. The power itself existed before man was born. Man simply gives direction and adjustment to it. So that the point Oswald wants to establish over against his opponents, is that the important issue lies not in the length of time a created being exists - whether for ages and ages or a moment - but rather the impossibility of the creature existing independently from the Creator for even one moment. Oswald refused to believe that there is such a thing as divine interposition and supernatural agency in the literal sense. He meets the problem of miracles by saying that they are the result of that "Fiat" that first called the universe into existence; and that we must accept them realizing that there are probably laws known only to God, and in operation all the time; but we just are not, or have not been, aware of them.

We are bound (wrote Oswald) to ascribe the miraculous interpositions, whether of mercy or judgment, that are recorded in scripture, to the hand of the supreme ruler, because we know no subordinate agent or power in nature to which they can be ascribed; but it is not improbable/

22 Hume and the sceptics.
improbable that superior intelligences may see a variety of powers and subordinate agents employed, in exact conformity with established laws, in producing these effects. 24

After the same manner Oswald explains New Birth. 25 Even if it is not possible to understand fully God's plan here, we should have no real difficulty in believing in "The total change of sentiments and inclinations, with new habits of thinking and acting" which can take place in "those who resign themselves to his influence". For the subject, if explained on the basis of good sense and true philosophy, has as much claim to the understanding as many other "productions of nature" of far less consequence. New Birth may be brought about without any infringement of the established laws of nature. To illustrate his point he likens the change wrought by the Holy Spirit in man, to the effect produced by the sun, moon, stars, etc., in giving new qualities to many subjects in nature.

Oswald sums up what we may learn of providential law through the observation of nature, under two kinds of events. Namely, those which result from known causes, and "with uniform regularity, resembling the succession of day and night"; and those which come from "unknown causes, in a manner to us as fortuitous as the shifting winds...and both making essential parts of the divine government". 26 For this reason we should have respect for them, and/  

26 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.139.
and, furthermore, "he only is wise, who, from a sacred regard to the supreme ruler, conforms religiously to those laws with which he is acquainted, and relies implicitly on him for the execution and accomplishment of events that exceed his powers". 27 In doing this, man expresses on the one hand, his obedience; and, on the other, his faith.

It is in connection with his view of Providence that Oswald reveals the influence on his thought of the ideas popular and current in France and America. One of the phrases in which he speaks of our being able to see plainly that things are so ordered as to favor "our pursuit of virtue and happiness", calls to mind a sentence from an historic document 28 held in high esteem by Americans: "We hold these truths to be self-evident...that they (all men) are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". 29 Anticipating the objection that many men are not virtuous, and others have been disappointed in the quest for happiness, Oswald holds that these are problems which only arise because our knowledge of God's providence is not comprehensive enough. By giving attention to the study of virtue and applying it in their lives, men would eventually find the inward contentment that comes from right living. And, in like manner, the happiness/

27 Ibid., pp. 139-140.
28 Declaration Independence (July 4, 1776).
happiness of God is above mere fame, health, and wealth; and "every one who will, in good earnest, enter into his design, shall succeed in proportion to his industry." But Oswald strongly objects to those who have the "presumptuous curiosity" to want to have providence reduced to a scientific explanation, readily apparent. It was zealous of writers to try to answer infidels with "a connected view of the plan of providence," says Oswald, "but...we must censure them for their imprudence." For support of this contention, he quotes from Job31 - "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? &c."; and also Pope's

When the proud steed shall know, why man restrains His fiery course, or drives him o'er the plains: When the dull ox, why now he breaks the clod, Then shall man's pride and dulness comprehend His actions, passions, being, use and end; Why doing, suff'ring, check'd impell'd; and why This hour a slave, the next a deity?"

If men object that some have wealth and others have none Oswald holds that such complaints could easily be silenced; "because they flow merely from the lowness of men's conceptions, and the false judgements they entertain of the chief good". The answer to it all is obedience and faith; and the divine idea of happiness and virtue will become more apparent in this life, and completely so in the life to come when the "wisdom, power, and goodness of the divine economy, shall shine forth in full lustre;"

31 Job 38: lff.
lustre, and God will be justified in all his ways”.

Common Sense and Divine Government

There’s a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There’s a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty. 33

Moral government, according to Oswald, is administered
according to God's justice. His justice is not watered-down
or softened to please the whims of his creatures. The ultimate
end of divine government is not the "mere happiness" of men, but
the greatest possible increase in moral worth. The way God wants
to attain this end is plain enough, Oswald believes, for men of
sense to see. First of all, it is to be understood that God
does not necessarily mean the greatest good for the greatest
number. Rather, the only "tolerable hypothesis" would make
"every individual the ultimate end and object of the divine
government; assuring every one, the devils not excepted, that by
a due course of suffering, they shall be brought to happiness".34
Oswald reveals here his alliance with that movement of individ-
ualism of which Dr. Temple said: "We owe to it the distinctive
blessings of modern life, but also its distinctive ills".35
Secondly, mankind should strive toward the goal of moral perfec-
tion by turning at once to the worship of God. This service

33Frederick W. Faber's hymn, "Souls of Men! Why Will Ye Scatter?", 3rd stanza.
must be begun immediately, even if at first the motive is based on the narrow principle of safety and happiness for self; for in due course this will automatically give way to an obedience and loyalty founded on a far broader and more generous motivation. 36

God's justice must not be taken lightly. This is the theme recurrent not only throughout the section on Divine Government, but the Assembly Sermon as well. From his observation of his times this is a truth Oswald thinks necessary to emphasize. "Anyone the least acquainted with the writings of the learned", Oswald remarks, "will observe a zeal and industry to get rid of the justice of God...and may see, at the same time, the miserable shifts to which they are reduced, in accounting for the evils that are in the world, without having recourse to this awful attribute". Parents, Oswald observes by way of illustration, will do everything in their power for the happiness of their children; often putting their welfare above the idea of justice. This is because they are "more attached to the children's interest than to justice". But there is, according to Oswald, a need to have higher and more noble thoughts of the one who governs the universe. It is Common Sense to believe that there is an obvious difference between virtue and vice, sweet and bitter, etc., and it is Common/ 36 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.185. 37 Ibid., p.152.
Common Sense to believe that God has a far more profound idea of goodness and badness than we do. Therefore Oswald feels no hesitation in strongly saying:

Could we suppose, that the love of his creatures exceeds his love of justice, we might think he would make justice yield and give way to the happiness of his creatures. But this supposition is horrid: and whatever, through the influence of self-love, men may think in their own particular case, it is impossible for a man of sense to entertain this judgement of the divine administration.

Dr. Temple's study (op. cit.) of the "Cartesian Faux-Pas" puts a fresh light on Authority. There seems almost an anticipation of the problem in Oswald's effort to get across the need of respect for God's justice. Not according to individual whim on the one hand, nor on the dictation of a Church on the other; but on the basis of Common Sense man must yield to God's hatred of evil and love of good is what Oswald would have his readers believe. Throughout the discussion there can be sensed an undercurrent of attack against the sceptics and infidels of the day. Oswald is concerned because professional men are holding religion in so little respect, and are indulging with abandon in the vices of the age. "Shall I mention", he writes, "the inhuman perfidy practiced against the most defenseless sex, to their utter undoing, and sometimes gloried in by men of honour?" "Does not every one know", he continues, "that though people of this character must keep at a distance from those vices which immediately affect society, and in which therefore they have the public voice against them; yet by freely abandoning themselves to others equally/

38 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.159.
equally dishonourable to human nature...they are as much as any people the bane of society?"39

The problem of permitted evil Oswald answers by the simple expedient of relegateing it to God’s justice. God allows no more evil than is necessary for his justice. We can be sure that evil is not simply designed for the chastisement of a particular class of people, or for one individual. We must simply recognize that both good and evil exist; and so are inclined to "resolve the latter into his justice, and the former into his fatherly affection", contends Oswald.

In his delineation of the chief end of moral government Oswald holds that men have enough knowledge of it to realize what they are seeking for. That the supreme excellence of moral worth is the chief end of divine government can be summed up in two famous and admired sentences (so adjudges Oswald), namely: "'As gold to silver, virtue is to gold'', and "'An honest man is the noblest work of God'".40 The first of these is adequate, according to the Common Sense view, to silence those who would complain about "the unequal distribution of external blessings". The second, likewise, is strong enough to quiet criticism of the divine government. A belief in the latter would substantially change many a man’s point of view, and /


40 Alexander Pope, Essays on Man, Epis. IV, 1. 28; Satires III, 1.78, as quoted in Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.171.
and certainly correct such a false thought as the idea that mere happiness was the chief end of divine government.

Keeping within the bounds of the Presbyterian confession, Oswald explains why men above the level of brutes, whether they practice honesty and virtue or not, are, nonetheless, aware of it. Mankind in the bulk may be out of sympathy to a certain extent, "yet", insists Oswald, "there is something in man that bears testimony to the supreme excellence of moral worth". And when we compare the man of virtue with the man of vice, we must, "in spite of our hearts, acknowledge that the virtuous and the honest are the excellent ones of the earth". It is therefore incumbent upon us, concludes the author of the Appeal, "to produce as great a number of these, in the highest perfection of which they are capable". Both in this life and the life to come, we will have assurance by results that this is the correct procedure. And with the progress of time as new scenes come to light, faculties are improved, and powers increased, we will have "occasion to think more highly of the plan of God". In this Oswald is displaying two of the tendencies typical of his time. Dr. Baillie has pointed out that men in the 18th and 19th centuries had an unlimited dream of progress. Oswald was sure/

43 Ibid., p.177.
sure, from the advances in science and learning, that like discoveries in man's religious life could be anticipated. The second tendency was to take over the tenets of the deist faith, and make them serve the cause of Christianity as sound to Common Sense. As can be seen when compared, Oswald's emphasis on virtue, and the idea of rewards and punishments, are two points which resemble a like two contained in Lord Herbert's five notitae communes,

Probam Facultatum Conformationem, Praecipuam Partem Cultus Divini Semper Habitam Fulisse, and
Esse Praemium, Vel Poenam Post Hanc Vitam. 45

In fact there are many parallels between the doctrines of Common Sense of the Scottish School, and the common notions of Herbert, Oswald, especially, in his treatment of God's justice, is closer to Herbert than to Calvin. Herbert acknowledged a chief source of his philosophy to be the thought of the Stoics as gained through his reading of Cicero. 46 It is Cicero also that is frequently quoted and referred to by Oswald.

Here we may turn to the words of a modern writer who sees in the relationship of deism and moderatism, unhappy results for the cause of revealed religion. "The deist conception of life", he/

45 Edward Herbert, De Veritate, (1633), p.215 and 219; 'I am indebted to Dr. Cairn's Unbelief in the Eighteenth Century, p.43, for the mention of Herbert's work.

he tells us, "seemed to make impossible the kinship of man with
God; implied in such a phrase (for example) as the mystical
union". But it is not an underlying unbelief that motivates
Oswald's use of certain doctrines peculiar to the deists. It
is rather on the basis of his strong faith that he uses them as
a possible starting point to convince those fallen away from the
practice of religion that they are acting contrary to the rules
of good sense. It is to be noted also, as Dr. Cairns points
out, that all of Herbert's five truths are acceptable to
Christianity. Oswald was endeavoring to start with man where
he thought man was; and if he could just be persuaded to prac-
tice a few of the simple principles of religion (even from self-
fish motives) he would soon find himself growing in the knowl-
dge of it, and acquiring a deeper appreciation for its truth. It
was to be at first, the pursuit of religion for religion's sake.
Oswald implied this formulae from his discussion of what he had
observed in other departments of thought;

The attachments men have, even to frivolous occupa-
tions they have long practised, is truly surprising;
and if you will look to those who have been engaged
in the fine, or even in the useful arts, but espe-
cially to those who have been occupied in a way of life
that gives full exercise to their nobler powers, and
calls forth every generous sentiment of the human soul,
you will find them adhere to it with vast delight, from
a sense they have of its own excellence. They are not
fools enough to disregard the profit or honour that
may attend it; but, independent of that, they feel, and
you may see in them, a true and steady, and strong
attachment to the business for its own sake49 and to
say/

47 Hector MacPherson, The Intellectual Development of
Scotland, p.28.
48 Cairns, Unbelief in the Eighteenth Century, p.44.
49 My italics.
say, or insinuate, that the worship and obedience of God is less fit to attract, engage, and fix the heart of man, is a most injurious slander.\(^5\)

Oswald is here thus giving support to the stream of individualistic thought which, according to Dr. Temple’s thesis, eventually brought the enrichment of art and literature, but also "led through various instances of national self-assertion to the international Hell or Bedlam of the years 1914 to 1918 from which we are now struggling to emerge". And, as for the part played by religion in stemming the tide of individualism run rampant, Dr. Temple writes: "The check which it might have been hoped that Religion would exercise could not be applied, for Religion also had become departmentalized, and was by most people regarded as a 'private affair between a man and his Maker', so that its main if not its only concern, was with personal piety."\(^5\)

Oswald’s use of the appeal to religion for religion’s sake is designed to win men over to duty. For his final point in the discussion of divine government is that a dissatisfaction with one’s duty is a good indication that one is not satisfied with God’s plan. The problem resolves itself into the influence of the Will. Men will readily agree that God’s ways are superior to those of Satan, but when it comes to their opportunity of choosing to conform, many will not budge. "And this in truth", Oswald says, "is the origin of evil, both natural and moral: nor is there any possible remedy, but from correcting the will".\(^5\)

If perplexed by the difficult problems raised by the writers of the age, men should apply the same rules of good sense that they use in other weighty matters. Just as the farmer does his work, tilling the soil, planting his crop and so on, with dependence upon providence for the increase and not the planting; so ought we to apply ourselves in the acquisition of virtue. If anyone will just attempt the experiment, Oswald assures him that he will receive ample help from God. For it follows that if the ultimate end of divine government is the utmost moral perfection, then a man who fights for this cause is surely on the strongest side. The prospect of what can happen when the battle is won comes in for brief mention by Oswald also. It will be "grand"; "for", he writes, "the beautiful allusion to one travelling over the Alps is no less applicable here than to our progress in science, as it is impossible to conceive the height to which an immortal spirit, delivered from the bondage of corruption, may be raised". And with a crescendo Oswald concludes by telling his readers that they may get some grasp of it all in Longinus's ("that noble critic") account of the "sublime".

"Nature never designed man to be a groveling and ungenerous animal, but brought him into life, and placed him in the world, as in a crowded *sic* theatre: not to be an idle spectator, but spurred on by an eager thirst of excelling, ardently to contend in the pursuit of glory. --For this purpose, she implanted in the soul an invincible love of grandeur, and a constant emulation of what seems nearer to divinity than himself. Hence it is that the whole universe is not sufficient for the extensive reach, and piercing speculation of the human mind. It passes the bounds of/

of the material world, and launches forth at pleasure into endless space". 54

Common Sense Applied to Several Orthodox Theological Doctrines

Oswald, as he explains in his Conclusion, puts the most emphasis on natural religion, rather than revelation. But there is considerable overlapping as he deals with such topics as the Divine Person of Christ, the Atonement, and Grace, as related to Common Sense. None of these come under a main division or chapter of their own, but are to be found under broader headings, and scattered throughout the Appeal, particularly the second volume. Oswald does not hesitate to make use of the data of revelation to strengthen his Common Sense appeal to natural religion. He brings in the first topic mentioned above - the Divine Person of Christ - in connection with his point that to believe other than that man is on constant dependence upon the divine will, is not worthy of any person possessed of rationality. Here he takes the offensive and hurls a shaft at the deists of the day. 55 After the method of Calvinism, he begins his footnote with a text from Scripture, "As the father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself". 56 His exposition of the text then follows immediately,

But the Son of God derives life from the Father in a manner totally different from creation; and which

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55 John 5:26, as quoted in Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.126.
we neither understand, nor have occasion to inquire into any further than necessary to assure us, that he is of a rank as much superior to created beings, as he hath obtained a more excellent name than they. Of him, therefore, it is said, that he hath life in himself, even as the Father hath life in himself. But of us it is said, that in him we live, and move, and have our being: and the same may be said of every order of beings who are brought from nothing by the sovereign command of Almighty God.

Priestley takes Oswald to task for this view of the relationship of God—the Father and God the Son, criticising him for "softening" and obscuring the problem by the mere use of words, e.g., saying derivation is different from creation. Besides, goes on this great leader of English Unitarianism, "I suspect that our author’s philosophy and systematical theology do not perfectly tally". To prove this point, he argues that the Church of Scotland catechism to which Oswald must have subscribed in order to get his living, "says that the three persons in the godhead are of the same substance, equal in power and glory, which I (Priestley) should think to be hardly consistent with the notion of the Son deriving life from the Father". In fairness to Oswald it should be noted that his aim in this passage is not primarily to deal with the problem of the equality of the Father and the Son, but to stress the fact that we human beings live, move, and exist in dependence upon God. We do not have our being because of ourselves, but because we are part of God's creation. Oswald candidly confesses that he does not understand how Christ derives life from the Father, and does/


58 Priestley, An Examination, pp.304-306
does not believe it is a question calling for explanation before one can believe. Priestley can be said to have a legitimate complaint in so far as Oswald has not made an attempt to define what he means by "derived". Yet, as was posited above, Oswald is expounding a different point, and does not feel called upon to give a lengthy explanation to qualify his exposition.

Much of Priestley's complaint grows out of his own preconceptions concerning the Godhead, and, as much as admits the orthodox soundness of Oswald's view, when he caustically summarizes the application of Common Sense to the doctrine of the atonement. "With respect to the doctrine of atonement", he wrote, "our author's common sense decides likewise in favour of orthodoxy, which is a great happiness, as it saves him the trouble of considering and answering a great number of shrewd objections to that supposed doctrine of Scripture". 59

Common Sense and Self-Determination

It is in the discussion of moral obligation and the problems it raises in regard to freedom and determination that we find one of the best thought-out sections of Oswald's work. In certain respects it bears some anticipation of the excellent insights Dr. Temple brought out in his Gifford Lectures. Rising his position on Scripture and Common Sense, Oswald holds that we are faced with certain duties; that we have already been given the power by God to carry them out (therefore, it is foolish to wait for a sudden inspiration or interposition from on high);

59 My Italics.

and that we will grow more sure of having chosen rightly as we experiment in the doing of what we ought. One of the chief aims Oswald has in mind is to acquaint men with the fact that they have a power of self-determination that they can and must use. "Otherwise", he writes, "all that has been said, or can be said, in favour of virtue, must go for nothing". It is at this stage in his argument that Oswald endeavors to point out some of the false conceptions men have of their ability to avoid certain vices and carry out certain duties; and where Priestley takes him to task for his unorthodoxy. To substantiate his criticism, Priestley quotes the following passages from the Appeal:

Take one of the vulgar aside, and point out to him some duties he neglects, and some vices he indulges ... He will acknowledge the fact, but will conclude that till God work it in him he can do nothing... To alledge the necessity of an interposition which we have no reason to expect, and which one in an hundred is not favoured with, is a heinous impiety: for it amounts to nothing less than a declaration, that the supreme being looks on, and sees ninety nine of a hundred perish for want of an interposition, which is necessary to determine them to do the right and shun the wrong.62

"This", says Priestley, "is certainly very sound Arminian doctrine, but very unsound Calvinism. If our author holds his Scotch living, I hope he will explain, in his next, how he can do this, and keep clear of a dangerous refinement, and prevarication in matters of religion.63 What is unfortunate here is that Priestley has chosen these passages without a fair appraisal of the whole context of the section from which they come.

As/

62 Ibid., passim, pp.208-212.
63 Priestley, An Examination, p.311.
As the discussion of freedom and determination proceeds, we shall try to show that Oswald's intent was not to stress unlimited freedom of choice and complete freedom from divine control. It was, rather, an emphasis on responsibility with the power already-operative to meet it.

First of all, Oswald wanted the common error or excuse making of the time to be plainly faced. Men were as much as saying "I can't help it", when they over-drunk, or played at gaming, or indulged in the numerous vices of the times. The vulgar were twisting the doctrines they were taught so as to blame God for not interposing at the right moment to keep them straight. The learned also were excusing their conduct on the ground that if they were inclined to do something, and no strong impulse was fighting against it from within, then they really couldn't do much about it. To attack these faulty suppositions Oswald chose as his weapons Scripture and Common Sense. The latter readily showed the nonsense of such a thought as that which asserted that there could be an obligation to God without the power to fulfill it. The former gave graphic illustration of the consequences to be expected when such self-evident truth was ignored. For an example, Oswald referred to the parable of the ten talents. On studying its teaching it would be seen that the man who received the single talent "was punished with severity for not making the improvement that was due and expected".

Oswald's /

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64 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.203.
Oswald's stress of the power of self-determination in matters of vice and virtue reveal the Aristotelian influence. The beginning of his argument recalls Aristotle's words,

Therefore virtue depends upon ourselves; and vice likewise. For where it lies with us to do, it lies with us not to do. Where we can say no, we can say yes. If then the doing a deed, which is noble, lies with us, the not doing it, which is disgraceful, lies with us; and if the not doing, which is noble, lies with us, the doing, which is disgraceful, also lies with us.65

But all of this, Oswald would say, is the result of the process of reasoning. And what has been overlooked is the observation of the phenomena of every day life. For example, men are seldom lacking in a power of self-determination if there are high enough stakes to be won. "Give the covetous man hint about gain, and you command his will", writes Oswald. "Point out", he continues, "a path of preferment to the ambitious, and he will not be stopped by difficulties". These are events which the modern philosophers and divines seemed to have overlooked, continues Oswald, when they declared that if given a willing mind, they could convert all mankind. But he would not have his readers despise the work of these thinkers. "For they", he defends, "have done good, though not all the good that might have been done, or may yet be done, under a better direction".66 By way of illustration, he says, "A man who is naturally disposed to the practice of virtue will, as far as his natural/


natural disposition goes, yield to their reasonings and instructions; but if there is any one duty to which he has a natural aversion... he is not to be won by reasoning".67

What help then had Oswald's philosophy for the guidance of the power of self-determination? What could it say to those men of his time who excused bad conduct by ascribing their inertia to the lack of divine impulse, and thus their inability to do anything about it? Oswald's two-fold answer was Common Sense and good tutoring. In both of these, it seems to us, he has something in common with William Temple. Firstly, in his Common Sense solution, we recall that Oswald asserted that we betray Common Sense if we admit a moral obligation, but not the power sufficient to fulfill it. This seems to us to somewhat anticipate Dr. Temple's statement:

In respect of the mutual relations of the moral agent and his environment the famous Kantian declaration is justified, 'I ought, therefore I can', for no environment can compel me to fail in duty or to do what duty forbids.68

But, though we have the self-determining power, what is going to be the means of making us use it in willing virtue rather than vice? Dr. Temple has pointed out that he noted a "survival of the old faculty psychology" in a letter from Bishop Gore holding that "the existence of a 'central core of personality' was something which 'philosophy must take over from common sense', and in like manner the existence of a Will is regarded as something which/

67 Ibid.
which everyone recognises and can only be denied at the risk of absurdity". Dr. Temple felt this to be the result of simple introspection which conceived the Will by abstraction, and thus opening up the conception to insuperable difficulties. His solution was to re-define Will as

Not an aboriginal endowment of our nature, but...something in the process of formation throughout life under the influence of our environment...It is the name for our personality so far as that is integrated.

Thus education (in Dr. Temple's opinion) is pointed toward the guidance of the process of integration. Desire by itself was disorderly, and was responsible in no small measure of the need of education. The educational scheme had to continue for all of life, not just for a moment. And while it was going on it was possible to note in a schoolboy, for example, differences of reaction under changed environmental conditions. "For this", Dr. Temple remarked, "he (the schoolboy) is sometimes accused of hypocrisy; but that is unjust"; for his reactions can differ widely yet be "perfectly spontaneous and sincere...He is not to be treated as having a perverted will, but as having a will incompletely formed".

we have gone into some detail in outlining, as we see them, some of Dr. Temple's views on the subject of the Will and the training of it, because we believe they have, as has been mentioned/

69 Gore, Can we Believe, pp.151-156; and a Letter from Bishop Gore to Dr. Temple, as quoted in Temple, op.cit., pp.230-231
70 Temple, Ibid., p.235.
71 Temple, op. cit., p.233.
mentioned above, some parallels with Oswald's thought on the same questions. Oswald has by no means dealt with the issues so deeply or so forcefully, but his contentions could, in part, be found to harmonize. This seems especially so in regard to tutorial guidance. Oswald's answer to the problem of getting a person disposed to will that which is good, is to put him under the guidance of a capable tutor:

A wise parent will not trust the virtue of his child to wise rules...but when he sends him out into the world, will provide him a tutor, if he can afford the expense, and one too of fidelity and capacity, who will watch his behaviour, give timely information of danger, check his forwardness, stimulate his good dispositions, urge him to his duty, and, in one word, form and train him with judgement and tenderness. He will not trust the good advice; though this he will not neglect; but at parting, will put full in his view the ability, fidelity, and good disposition of his tutor, with the need he has of his advice, and the dangerous consequences of acting presumptuously, or undutifully towards him; and will lay more stress on possessing his son with a just sense of all these things, than on any other method he could take to form his conduct. Here then is a model fit to be copied by divines and philosophers, and by all who undertake the arduous task of forming mankind to virtue. 73

Oswald believed that teachers, ministers, educators, etc., should think of the human race, especially those not yet having a character approximating virtue, as "thoughtless, giddy, forward youth, whose natural bent is to pleasure, and who do not love restraint". 74 From this starting point the aim of these leaders/

72 My italics.
74 Ibid., p.228.
leaders should be to put under divine guidance all who are in
the formative stage. Thus Oswald's object in describing the
work of the tutor is to illustrate from every day life the need
men have for some direction outside of themselves. The readers
thus "conditioned", are now ready for the key thought of the
chapter. All the means of becoming virtuous should certainly
be employed. This is especially necessary in order to "avoid
the imputation of enthusiasm, the great bugbear of the present
times;" and all will fall short without a "friend" to help and
stimulate one onward. There is but One in the whole universe,
Oswald explains, who can fill this capacity; and we "must
therefore look on every hypotheses in favour of virtue as fan-
tastical, that does not lead us to God". The relation of
God to the human soul is one of real intimacy. He knows in
advance, Oswald contends, what is motivating our souls, where
we will meet danger, and wherein we may make even a slight
deviation from the right. Thus it is obvious that he only can
help us to take the proper precautions in time, and provide the
necessary support in difficult circumstances. Far wiser than
any human tutor, he knows all of the artifices and devices we
will employ to avoid duty; and "he alone is possessed of the
skill of reconciling the will to the object of its aversion,
without the least infringement of its liberty".

Oswald reminds us that the powers of nature are still to be
regarded as useful in the acquisition of virtue; but without
those insights and intimations that come through God's providence,
or/

or through the personal discoveries which some are favoured with, or some heeding of the events which tend to reclaim us from our errors and which can be ascribed to God, all the natural powers, "were they more in number, and greater than they are, will be no better than the gigantic strength of a coward, or the treasures of a miser".  

In concluding his thoughts on this section Oswald seems to answer the objection of Priestley, raised earlier in the course of this discussion - that man is completely self-determining - for he says,

In a word, men must not be suffered to forget that they are in the condition of children under age; who, trained by God, may rise to an inconceivable pitch of glory and happiness; but, left to themselves, must sink, alas! they commonly do, into folly, vice, and misery.

We are put under the direction and tutelage of the Holy Spirit, who, being intimately present with all, observes the manners of good and bad, and treats us as we behave towards him.

On the surface it seems to be a contradiction of his earlier statement, that men should not excuse their inaction because they have felt no direct impulse from above. But the reason for the apparent paradox is understood more clearly when one examines a passage from his fifth sermon on the General Judgement.

He quotes Paul's advice on the importance of obtaining wisdom - "If a man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth liberally to all, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" - but is quick to add that we should not expect God to give us wisdom,

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77 Ibid., pp.233-234.
wisdom, without our "using the means of getting it which he hath prescribed". "What I mean is this", Oswald told his hearers, "that amidst all you do to acquire wisdom, you never forget to apply to God for this gift: for in truth our wisdom is of little worth...therefore, if you will resolve to get wisdom, and to accompany all your endeavours with constant and earnest supplication to God to endow you with wisdom...it will be a good improvement of what you have heard". 78

Common Sense and the Future Life.

But that there was a future life in which rewards and punishments would be meted out for the virtues and vices of this present life was, in the eighteenth century, as firmly believed by the most extreme rationalists as by the most orthodox churchmen. 79

Oswald belonged to the latter group – the orthodox churchmen. His sermons on the General Judgement point in no uncertain terms, and with copious proof texts, to the nature of the flames of Hell for those who are damned, and the joys awaiting the redeemed who are to have Heaven as their home. Of the latter he preached,

Sorrow and sighing fly away the moment you enter this blessed place; and the Lord Jesus Christ, it is said, will wipe all tears from the eyes of the saints. There will be no night there, no storms or tempests, no mists or clouds to intercept the light of God's countenance from those who love him, nor any obstruction or impediment to the exercise of that love, that gratitude, that praise, that cheerful service, which they will perform to the King of Kings. O! my friends, all language, all thought, fails me here. 80

78 Oswald, Six Sermons on the General Judgement, (Sermon V), p. 59.

Such a passage tends to detract from the broad generalization that moderate preaching was lacking in emotion and feeling. Even in cold print the words seem to throw out warmth. Oswald was no less convinced that the judgment of the damned was to be as bad as that of the righteous was to be good. From the same text which he used for the exposition of the destiny of the righteous he also took to remind his listeners of the lot awaiting the damned, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal". The description of the tortures and flames of everlasting punishment are no less vivid than the account of the opposite condition quoted above. Of the punishment awaiting those who are banished from the presence of Christ, Oswald preached:

Now to feel pain in every part of the body, as must be the case of those who are plunged in this lake of fire, and to have our vitals gnawed perpetually by the worm that never dieth, and our ears continually assaulted with the weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, of all around us, gives an idea of misery, to which all that we can suffer here is but a faint resemblance, and of which they are but dark presages and forerunners.  

In his Appeal Oswald also has a lengthy section on the Future Life, and it is his aim to show by Common Sense that the ridicule and contempt poured upon the idea of exact retribution in the future life for virtue or vice in this, is without support from any men of sense. Three names come under review - Bolingbroke, Hume, and Shaftesbury. Of the last Oswald wrote,

It might be proper...to take notice of the many rash attacks/

81 Matthew 25: 46.

82 Oswald, Six Sermons on General Judgement, (V), pp.55-56.
attacks on the doctrine of future retribution made by Lord Shaftesbury in his Characteristics. But his Lordship hath fully answered himself in a few pages of his Inquiry; to which the reader is referred.83

Hume is censured for agreeing with Bolingbroke in the criticism of philosophers and divines in their accounts of the nature and perfections of God. While Oswald agrees that no inference can be drawn from a chain of reasoning from nature concerning these things, he holds that to be no excuse for our not acquainting ourselves with him. "His wisdom, power, goodness, and even his justice", Oswald writes, "are manifestly displayed in the economy of nature, are as much the objects of simple perception, and, to an attentive observer, are as clearly seen by the eye of reason (Oswald's "reason"), as external forms are seen by the bodily eye".84 At the present we do not by any means have a full exposition of God's justice, Oswald explains, but that is not to be until the time of retribution. Then, as is consistent/

83 Oswald, Appeal, vol.II, p.301. The reference is probably to Shaftesbury's Section on the "Future State". It is of interest here how Shaftesbury defends a "friend" for taking issue with the idea of "rewards and punishments". "How can our friend be judg'd false to Religion", he asks, if this is the sum of all (he says): "That by building a Future State on the Ruins of Virtue, Religion in general, and the Cause of a Deity is betray'd; and by making Rewards and Punishments the principal Motives to Duty, the Christian Religion in particular is overthrown, and its greatest Principle, that of Love, rejected and expos'd". Cf. A. Shaftesbury, Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times, (1711), vol. III, p.179.

84 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, p.293.
consistent with Common Sense, we may with sureness expect it. "We agree, therefore", said Oswald, "with Mr. Hume, and all other free-thinkers, in dismissing all reasoning upon this subject; but require, what they cannot justly refuse, their regulating their actions by such plain notices as they have of the divine nature and perfections". 85

Bolingbroke, the first in order on our list, but the last to be dealt with, was the writer to whom Oswald devoted most of his criticism. Oswald believed it most inconsistent to champion the being and providence of God on the one hand, and decry on the other, "our natural notions of moral government, together with the expectation we have of an exact retribution of our good and evil actions". 86 It was such a paradox, Oswald noted by way of illustration, that was held by those who believed in immoral gods. On three other counts Oswald takes Bolingbroke to task. Firstly, Oswald asserts that Bolingbroke overthrew the opinions of the scholastics, and gave no proper basis for truth in their place; peremptorily dismissing all ideas of the moral perfections and moral government of God, along "with our natural hopes and fears of retribution in a future state", thus assuming an authority to which no men of sense would submit. Oswald does not say that Bolingbroke refuses to admit that God has the power to apportion out such rewards and punishments, but rather that the sceptic affirms we/

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p.276.
we cannot be sure that he will do so without some revelation to prove it. The following passages from Bolingbroke seem to give light on the position,

He (God) made us happy here. He may make us happier in another system of being...Since then the first (immortality) cannot be demonstrated by reason, nor the second (death) be reconciled to my inward sentiment, let me take refuge in resignation at the last, as in every other, act of my life. Let others be solicitous about their future state, and frighten or flatter themselves as prejudice, imagination, bad health, or good health, may a lowering day, or a clear sunshine, shall inspire them to do; let the tranquility of my mind rest on this immoveable rock, that my future, as well as my present state, are ordered by an Almighty and Alwise Creator; and that they are equally foolish, and presumptuous, who make imaginary excursions into futurity, and who complain of the present. 87

Secondly, Oswald complains of Bolingbroke's bringing up for no occasion, the fact that our perfections are as different from God's as the finite is from the infinite. This, Oswald argues, can not take away from the fact that we know enough of His justice that we can be sure He will hate the wrong and love the right. This is Common Sense. And thirdly, Oswald resents the way Bolingbroke listed philosophers and divines from Plato to Clarke as visionaries because they indulged in reasoning about future retribution. While Oswald would admit that these thinkers/have tried to prove by the subtleties of logic, what was obvious to the "natural dictates of the rational mind", they were no more guilty of reasoning than was the Lord Viscount himself. "The truth", so Oswald sums up his own view, "is that all/

87 Henry St. John Bolingbroke, Philosophical Works, (1754) vol. IV, pp.397-398.
all mankind are accountable to him who gave and upholds their being, and bound to hold themselves at all times in readiness to render him an account of all their actions."

To Oswald, the idea of looking forward to a Future State with rewards and punishments, was such an obvious truth, that he saw no necessity for resorting either to a demonstrative or a revelatory proof. Apart from them both, Common Sense led one to naturally expect it to be so. And, while it was true that there was cause for holding that virtue had an innate beauty of its own, we were foolish to slight what the consequences of "vice and virtue in this life and the next" might be. It was far easier also to be influenced by the rewards and honors at hand, than by those in the future which are out of sight. The mere mechanical working for a reward was entitled neither to the praise of man nor of God. Oswald refused to agree that the glory and happiness of another life motivated present conduct by hope of selfish gain. Rather, the power of belief in the wonderfulness of the Future State in determining the will was derived from "the free and frequent, and often the long and painful, exertion of our nobler powers, such exertions to wit, as are deemed rational and manly; and discover that greatness of mind, and grandeur of character, which make on a proper object of esteem and love with God and man". Thus Oswald felt he had/

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had answered the chief arguments of the sceptics and free-thinkers, viz., that belief in the idea of rewards and punishments in the Future Life was conducive to vice rather than virtue.

Common Sense and Revelation

Scepticism could only be overcome, without loss of its element of truth, if there were presupposed an absolute communication of truth which excluded man as agent. It would be truth that retained the sentence that 'all men are liars' - i.e., that no human assertion as such merits the predicate of "true" - without thereby involving itself in self-contradiction. 90

It was scepticism which largely called forth Oswald's Appeal in the first place, so he informs in his "Conclusion". He had been conscious of the large amount of impiety and irreligion of the age, and wanted to place the blame for it. As a result he found that the work of the sceptics and free-thinkers of the age was playing a major part in weakening the faith. He held that if it could be shown how foolish and false their assertions were, then men would be better prepared to judge of primary truths. The instrument for this task was applied Common Sense. "It may appear strange", he writes, "that so much of this Appeal should be taken up about the primary truths of natural religion, and no care taken to vindicate the truth of Christian revelation". 91 He gives as his explanation, the fact that controversy on the subject had undergone change just a few years/


91 Oswald, Appeal, p.357.
years previous to his writing. "Dean Swift", he says, "who knew well how to say a shrewd thing, observed some time ago to sceptics, that their reasonings against the truth of Christianity would avail them little, if they did not dismiss all idea of God and religion." 92. And he drolly added that the sceptics seemed to have taken the Dean's hint.

The important thing, therefore, for the age was to get the primary truths of natural religion "understood, believed, and admitted". Having done this - and here is the largest claim for Common Sense so far - "the belief of Christianity will follow of course". 93. For to Oswald, little could be expected from men who were of the opinion that goodness and badness, piety and profaneness, and justice and injustice, were all the same to God. Such people could hardly be said to have any religion at all, and were not any better than Atheists.

But once having made such people aware of the primary truths and of their validity, the claims of revelation will, at the same time, also be validated, for, as Oswald writes:

If the present attempt to vindicate the truths of natural religion has any good effect, it will be followed with a vindication of the Christian revelation, as the author of the Appeal is persuaded that the evidence for both is the same; for if it is allowed to be impossible to give due attention to a few phenomena of nature, and doubt of the natural and moral government of God, he hopes he shall make it appear to be equally impossible, in consistency with common sense, to attend to a few observations/

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid., p.360.
observations arising from the face of the Scriptures, and doubt their divine original. 94

It is difficult to classify Oswald in any one of the four divisions that Gilson makes in his study of Revelation. 95 Oswald himself approaches the problem of truth from the haven of Faith. He is a believer, but his Appeal is aimed at helping to belief, those who have had their road blocked by the argumentation of sceptics and free thinkers. He wants his hearers to realize that there is evidence for the faith from the simple viewpoint of their common sense. He is dealing with men whose faith is being undermined. His thought is more largely indebted to the Thomists than the Augustinians of the Middle Ages, as one compares it with their tenets so clearly delineated in Gilson's work. There are two distinct ways of acquiring primary truth - one through simple perception and judgment, i.e., Common Sense, and the other, through revelation. According to Gilson the separation of faith and rational knowledge as self-contained orders of truth, had its origin in St. Thomas Aquinas. This idea being especially contained in Aquinas's lines,

It is impossible that one and the same thing should be believed and seen by the same person,... it is equally impossible for one and the same thing to be an object of science and of belief for the same person. 96

It/


95 Etienne Gilson, Reason & Revelation in the Middle Ages. hereafter cited as Gilson, Reason and Revelation.

96 Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Pt. IIa-IIae, qu. I, art.5; transl. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, pp.10-13, as quoted in Gilson, Reason and Revelation, p.74.
It is in this expression of St. Thomas' thought that Gilson believes him to be "challenging the distinction more or less confusedly implied in so many theologies, between the simple faith of the common people, and the enlightened faith of the _meliore_, who add to faith its understanding". Gilson explains that such confusion could not be tolerated by Aquinas. For he would say "that which is proposed to be believed equally by all is unknown by all as an object of science: such are the things which are of faith simply". And thus when we are dealing with the things of faith, it would be nonsense to differentiate between the plain man and the learned aristocrat. 97

In common with Aquinas, Oswald distinguishes between the two sources of truth. He also refuses to subject to reasoning the truths that are self-evident, the simple first truths of faith. But Oswald goes further. Truths that Aquinas probably would have owned as objects of science, Oswald would not have allowed to undergo the scrutiny of reasoning. There is another similarity between the great medievalist and Oswald. 98 Both struck at the accepted philosophy of their particular time. Oswald constantly distinguishes between the "real" philosopher and the "minute" philosopher, the former being able to agree with the precepts of Common Sense, the latter always engaged in logical hair-splitting; and blurring for learned and unlearned alike, the chief issues of faith and life. In his discussion of the working of providence in harmony with the laws of nature, Oswald/  

97 Gilson, _Reason and Revelation_, pp.74-74.

98 Ibid., pp.87-88.
Oswald reveals both his view on Revelation and false philosophers.

Besides the laws of nature with which he is acquainted, and the powers of action of which he is possessed, a wise man observes himself subjected to a variety of laws and powers of nature, which affect the health of his body, the soundness of his mind, and the success of his affairs, that to him are utterly unknown; but perfectly known to the supreme ruler, and absolutely under his direction. Besides the natural effects of his industry and endeavours in the acquisition of wisdom and virtue, he finds his progress accelerated and retarded by a thousand incidents, which he can no more trace than he can the course of the winds, or the alteration of the seasons; but which he believes are ordered by the same wisdom, justice, and goodness, which upholds and executes the whole... These things have an uncouth appearance to minute philosophers, are incredible to some, and mysterious to others; but obvious and plain to men of sense, and real philosophers. 99

It should be pointed out that it is in no way Oswald's plan to replace the truths of Revelation with Common Sense. Oswald's ascending order, or progress from scepticism to a saving faith is something like this: let Common Sense act as judge, first of primary truths of natural religion, then of revealed religion; then let the man of sense will to believe; and finally, let him begin to practice the faith. It is summarized in one of his sermons thus,

A man of common sense, and common honesty, may soon attain that satisfaction concerning the truth of the Christian religion which divines call an historical faith, but saving faith is not to be attained without practice; but by repeated acts, under the direction of the Holy Ghost, one may attain a firmness of faith that will prove the joy and support of his life, and not otherwise. 100

100 Oswald, Divine Efficacy of the Gospel-Dispensation, p. 37.
Oswald's aim, as was mentioned above, is to win men from infidelity to faith. He sees the wealth and the corruption, the riches and the power, and the large amount of infidelity that exists in his age. "We are at this day", he writes, "the people in Europe the most highly favoured of God, and the most openly impious". This concerns him very deeply, and reminds him of the fate of the Roman empire, how, when it was on the brink of the abyss, many of the citizens adopted the Epicurean philosophy. He feels that the frustrating thing of his own age is that men can be confronted with the great truths of religion; and agree that they are worthy of acceptation; but unconcernedly pass by on the other side. What is to be done to bring them to their senses? Reasoning certainly is not the answer. For the work of the sceptics and free thinkers already has shown to what further confusion and infidelity that leads. The solution seemed to lie in getting men disposed to believe. "The Saviour of mankind", he said, "made mention of a disposition to conform to his precepts as a requisite to our embracing his doctrine: a maxim little attended to by the generality of his disciples, who, as well as others, lay the great stress on the conviction of the judgement, with little regard to the will".

Perhaps, suggests Oswald, men are waiting for a severe jolt to wake them up. Certainly they all become believers when there is sudden peril, but the zeal of their faith fades as the danger fades. Is this a fair way to act toward one to whom we are/

102 Ibid., p. 373.
are so indebted? Would we be likely to sympathize with a
servant who was ungrateful for his master's protection? Of
course not, avers Oswald. Therefore, "let all who resent
undutiful or contemptuous behaviour towards themselves, think
of their own behaviour towards God".103 Oswald makes frequent
mention of the fact that divines and philosophers should make
more effort than they do to influence the heart rather than the
mind. But this effect should not be brought about by enthu-
siasm. With many of his contemporaries, and with Shaftesbury
in particular, he is in agreement that it is the "great bugbear
of the times".104 In the end Oswald concludes that the best
solution to the problem is to treat the science of religion as
we would the science of prudence. Don't mind idle disputings,
but adhere to the established maxims, and you will soon see how
right you are. Likewise in religion, don't listen to the
sceptics, but lay hold on the truths you can subscribe to with
fidelity and firmness and the rest will follow in due course.
We stand to gain nothing by idle speculating. We must act.
"If we would have the sentiments of honest men", he writes,"We
must speak the truth from our hearts, and, if we would attain
the faith of God's elect, we must regulate our behaviour by a
just regard to his authority".105 If these simple suggestions
are carried out, and if we replace hair-splitting reasoning and
absurd thinking with proper action and just sentiments, "we
shall/

103 Ibid., 384.
104 Oswald, Appeal, vol. II, pp. 230, 102, 126 and General
Assembly Sermon and Letters, Letter XIV, p. 70.
shall, with the help of God, get clear of the idle conceits of sceptics, and attain that perception and feeling of primary truths, which is the privilege of our rational nature, and the true source of our glory and felicity". 106

Oswald's theology, then, is a modified Calvinism adapted to his times. He asks for the acceptance of it first, and then let the questionings, if any, follow afterward. To all men endowed with a degree of rationality above animal or idiot, its primary truths will stand the test of Common Sense. If they have been exposed to scepticism and the teachings of free thinkers it might be necessary to clear the entanglements put up by these absurd ways of thinking first. But subject them to the censorship of Common Sense, and they would soon fade in importance. This done, the truth of both natural revealed religion is vindicated. All that has to be done now is for the person to put the precepts into practice, and there will be an increase in virtue not only for self but for the nation as a whole. Common Sense without revelation, sides with virtue. Common Sense as an ally of Revelation, is Oswald's answer to the need of his time.

106 Ibid.
Oswald's attitude toward the government of the Established church to which he belonged may best be studied in the light of his views on the contemporary patronage problem. He stood for the representative system in actual practice, and opposed those, who with Principal Robertson supported the arbitrary exercise of the law of patronage. His position demanded courage, for it meant that he had to take leave of the Moderate Party, many of its principles which he favored, and also face the condemnation of the ruling and upper class. He had long associated with many in both of these groups, and was on friendly terms with them. In his "Letters on Patronage" Oswald reveals a character exemplary of the best in moderatism, a courageous ahead-of-his-time view of civil liberties and constitutional government, and a devotion to a sincere and well qualified ministry.

Dr. Cairns' opinion that a new study should be made of "Moderation" in order to give a more balanced picture of the century ¹, is in order. And when it is done Oswald's name should be among those worthies which demand that the term designate works of honor rather than reproach. In other words, as Dean Stanley pointed out, "moderation" was used in its highest sense (that of the Apostle Paul), ² when the King's commissioner, Lord Carmichael/

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¹Cairns, Religion of Dr. Johnson and Other Studies, p. 86.
²"Let your Moderation be known among all men", Phil.4: 5.
Carmichael, made his speech to the Assembly on the day of its first meeting after the Revolution Settlement of 1690, saying: "Moderation is what religion requires, neighbouring churches expect from, and we recommend to you". Oswald credited his acquisition of the principles of moderation to his teacher, William Hamilton. Of him, Oswald wrote:

He taught us moderation and a liberal manner of thinking upon all subjects... His friends and favourites were not the smarts and clever fellows, not the flimsy superficial gentlemen, who having pick'd up somewhat of the English language, can read another man's sermon with becoming grace - but such as had drawn their knowledge from the sources of ancient learning, and the Scriptures in the original languages, and who, by a gravity of decorum of behaviour, did recommend the religion they taught. Far from treating those opposed him with insolent contempt, incapable of reproachful language, or the mean and illiberal arts of detraction, this good man gained even his adversaries by the sweetness of his behaviour, the moderation of his principles, and the mildness of his administration.

This complimentary reference to Hamilton served by implication to censure Principal Robertson for his behaviour on the Schism Overture, and other matters as well which he, in Oswald's eyes, had dealt with in a high-handed way. But it also gives a clue to the precepts that guided Oswald in suggesting that support be given to the Schism Overture. Moderation and the Common Sense philosophy are closely allied. He advises his readers to/


to be patient in their efforts to win the landed gentry to a new approach and outlook on the power of presentation. "Give gentlemen of property time", Oswald counselled, "and they will come to an understanding with those who aim at promoting the peace of the country, but they must not be hurried". And, having patiently done your best to show that a more constitutional handling of the patronage power was in the public interest, Oswald contended, you may expect certain results to follow in the behaviour of men of sense. On the one hand they "will own, that patrons are bound from justice, equity, and even good manners, to pay some regard to the judgment, nay, and the inclinations of those who are interested in the settlement". But if, on the other hand, you were to suggest some regulation to insure this effect, Oswald points out, they will become angry and recapitulate their fear of the deliberate opposition of the people. This, however, need not stop you or discourage your efforts, Oswald assures the readers of his Letters. On the contrary,

Let me assure you (wrote Oswald), from my own experience, that it is not in the power of men of sense to hold out long in this way of talking; and if you keep up their attention for some time to the subject, they will agree with you in thinking that, without infringement of any law, and without just offence to any patron, a method of settlement might be devised peaceable and satisfactory, subservient to the interests of religion, and tending to guard the Church against the most dreadful of all evils, an illiterate and immoral clergy.

5 Ibid., p.19.
6 Oswald, Letters on Patronage, p.8.
7 Ibid., p.9.
Having thus seen a brief example of the leaven of moderatism at work in Oswald's thought on the patronage problem in general, we now turn to his position on civil liberties and constitutional government arising out of the same question. Two notable things are readily apparent: Oswald's prophetic insight into what the Church might expect if she ignored the people's constitutional rights, and Oswald's advanced view of civil liberty. If the arbitrary exercise of the patronage act were allowed to go on unchecked, Oswald predicted that the ministerial office would be filled with some of the most worthless and unqualified ministers. He also warned that the republican form of government of which they were so proud in the Church, would soon be a thing of the past if it were going to have to carry on "under a decay of principle and degeneracy of manners". In taking this stand Oswald was among those whom Dr. McCrie described as having "light to read the signs of the times" in a period which Chalmers referred to as the middle ages of the Church of Scotland.

Oswald was not an advocate of the unlimited power of the common people, and it would not be correct to classify him as in sympathy with the Popular party of the Assembly as a result of his break with Principal Robertson. But Oswald's stand on the patronage question was far-seeing, and ahead of his time in its insistence on the protection of the people's civil or ecclesiastical rights. The opposition were constantly bringing up the old/
old cry of disorder and threat to authority that might be expected if any deviation from strict enforcement of the patronage act were contemplated. While trying to appreciate that officers of the crown and others were motivated by what they thought to be their duty, Oswald believed that when the issue was made clear they would see the matter in a different light. Oswald was at one with the Popular party in its support of the Schism Overture, and he wanted it made clear that their intent was to seek a remedy within law for a situation that was causing so much havoc within the peace of the Church.

Oswald had no time for those who would, under the guise of patriotism, use their influence to bring State power to their aid in order to crush all opposition to the "arbitrary exercise of the patron's right, and reduce the Church of Scotland in that respect to the same state with the Church of England". Oswald believed that patriotism in its "pure" form was always a danger to the civil and sacred rights of the people. His pure patriotism has a striking similarity to twentieth century totalitarianism. Everything must be stamped out which would seem to oppose the dominant authority of the State. "I am no politician", he wrote, "but have some small pretensions to philosophy, and in that character affirm that the spirit of faction may do what pure patriotism will not; nay, the civil or sacred rights of no nation in no age of the world, were ever recovered, maintained, or preserved by the pure spirit of patriotism." 11

10 Oswald, Letters of Patronage, pp.33-34.
11 Ibid., p.34.
By way of illustration, he maintained that the progress of civilization could never have been so advanced as to provide ample housing and abundant food if there had had to be a strict adherence to rational principles only. Rather it was Oswald's belief "that all the great and useful works of men are produced by the aid of principles which they do not attend to, or are not willing to acknowledge". With "patriotism" as their motivation, it was Oswald's opinion that certain delegates of the General Assembly had put it out of the power of the Assembly to censure the Seceders who were deserving of such rebuke. This he recognized as an attack on the rightful jurisdiction of the Church. And it is the concluding sentence of another of these Letters which seems to anticipate the spirit that was so prevalent among those in the American Colonies, who ten years later (1776) declared their independence from Great Britain. These were Oswald's words:

I shall live and die in the belief that it will never be wise in any ministry to tamper with, far less to attempt a bare-faced invasion of our civil or ecclesiastical rights: for though they should go on with success for a season, there are times in which all such attempts recoil upon them with a vengeance.

Oswald's review of the history of the law of patronage in his third Letter anticipates an objection to be raised in the long debate.

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12 Ibid.
13 Commager, ed. Documents of American History, "Declaration of Independence".
14 Oswald, Letters of Patronage, p.35.
debate that was to take place on the Overture. 15 Many of the ministers he felt, were not aware of the true nature of the Act, and seemed to be under the impression that the law required the Assembly to proceed immediately to the settlement of presentees; and, further, these same people often were led to believe that all of the Church's judicatories from the lowest to the highest were "mere executioners of the patron's will". 16 To enlighten these uninformed brethren, Oswald reviews the story of the patronage law. How it began "early" and was useful and workable until the time "when the ecclesiastic constitution was subverted", and "the patron's power was made a tool of tyranny in obstructing upon congregations multitudes of clergymen not only highly unacceptable to them, but ignorant also, and scandalously immoral". But when liberty returned to the island, the law was for a time put aside. Soon, however, a wise law was enacted "which", wrote Oswald, "still stands unrepealed, vesting heritors and elders with the power of electing ministers in all parishes; a right of judgment being at the same time left entirely to ecclesiastical judicatories, and the final decision to the General Assembly". 17 The final major move in reference to the patronage law came when there seemed to be a prospect of the return of the abdicated family. A law was passed restoring the patron's right. However, the important thing

15 "The Overture and Opinion was called for and read, and after a very long debate, &c...", cf. Records of the General Assembly, (30th May 1766), Session 8, p.133.

16 Oswald, Letters on Patronage, p.10.

17 Oswald, Letters on Patronage, p.11.
thing to notice here, Oswald emphasized, was that

They (party in control of government) wanted either
judgment or power to rescind the act 1690, or to give
the patron's right the force they intended, by adding
all the sanctions and civil penalties wherewith it is
armed in England. So that, after all, we are just
where we were; we cannot be hurt by the law, though we
are, and often have been, by its abuse and perversion. 18

The above account has been given in detail not only to reveal
Oswald's resort to church history to support his defence of the
Church's ecclesiastical rights, but also to see how closely this
historical survey parallels that which actually was introduced
into the Assembly debate on the Overture. The same reporter for
the Scots Magazine who informed us that Oswald opened the debate,
tells us also "that the history given of patronage and its
effects, did not pass unnoticed". 19 The account is much more
brief, but the treatment is very similar to Oswald's.

Oswald's position on probationers, as expressed in his
Letters, is also that of the supporters of the Schism Overture. 20
He anticipated the argument of the opponents of the Overture -
that since the church qualified people for the ministry, it had
only itself to blame if they were unfit, and not the patron; or
in words closely resembling those spoken in the debate -

In the first place, take care whom you license; then
after they are licensed, keep a watchful eye over their
behaviour. If this is done it will be impossible for
patrons to make a wrong choice. And as for the oppo-
sition of the people arising from mere whim and caprice,
or from groundless prejudice, no regard ought to be
paid to it all; or rather, it is your duty to discourage
and suppress it. 21

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18 Ibid.
21 Ibid., p.335.
This certainly would have offended both Oswald's philosophy of Common Sense, and his spirit of moderation. In his fourth Letter, Oswald showed that he had made ready to answer this argument of the opposition were it to come up in the ensuing Assembly, as it did, in fact. The trials a probationer went under for the Presbytery were all right, agreed Oswald, so far as they went. They tested the competency of the man's knowledge, and the inoffensiveness of his behaviour thus far, certainly. Yet Oswald questioned whether that was enough for people to base a judgment on who were to commit the care of their souls to a young man. Oswald came to the negative conclusion. Further testing was needed, actual contact with the public, i.e.,

By taking a student from the schools, or, from an obscure retreat among his friends, and placing him in the eye of the world, and introducing him into a variety of company, he undergoes a new trial more useful, more necessary, and more severe than that by which he procured his licence: a trial not only of his aptness to teach, and powers of persuasion, but of his piety, prudence, affability, gravity of deportment, and solidity of temper: qualifications no less essential to a man fit to be intrusted with the care of souls, than the knowledge of logic, ethics, and scholastic theology, how necessary soever that knowledge may be. 22

Oswald was in favor of an arrangement whereby the young licencee might serve an apprenticeship in preaching. He said he had heard that in a number of foreign Protestant Churches they permitted ministers to authorize students of divinity to preach/

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preach in their respective churches. This was done previous to the students being licensed. Such a policy would be well worth adopting in the Church of Scotland, Oswald believed. And were it to be in force it would relieve presbyteries from "the necessity...of vesting mere scholars with a public character".23 Besides, he added, he felt the character a student attained in his work in the world was far more trustworthy than the opinion of a few selected judges. "At least", he wrote, "I shall be extremely sorry if any preacher is forced upon a parish before those who are principally concerned, and the most capable judges in the congregation, have access to be satisfied as to those qualifications which always are the result of the before-named probationary trials".24

The view taken by the supporters of the Overture actually answered the Opposition's suggestion for more carefully regulated measures for licensing, by demonstrating its ineffectualness, saying: "it proceeded upon a supposition which the present state of human nature plainly shows to be impossible, viz., that the majority of not one Presbytery in Scotland should ever be deceived, or unfaithful in granting a license to a young man."25 This, as can be readily seen, even in a cursory comparison was in harmony with Oswald's position.

23 Ibid., p.15
24 Ibid., pp.15-16
Thus we have tried to cover in brief compass Oswald's attitude toward the policy of the Church, with special reference to the problem of patronage. These are subjects which call forth the practical application of his Common Sense philosophy, and also the spirit of moderatism he first caught from Principal Hamilton. His championing of civil and ecclesiastical constitutional rights were well abreast, if not in advance of, his age. Certainly if the Assembly had listened to him and those who were one with him in their suggested reform in the matter of patrons and presentations, much of the bitterness, and many of the divisions, might have been averted; and the Church spared many storms and much wrangling for the ensuing eighty years. One brought up in the American tradition with its love of its history, cannot help seeing the striking resemblance between the spirit of the framers of the American Declaration of Independence and that of Oswald. One of these Americans had once been a colleague and fellow member of the Church of Scotland with Oswald—he was John Witherspoon. And lastly, Oswald's thinking on the qualifying of ministers is as sound today as it was then. However, these observations are being made from the perspective of the twentieth century, and should, perhaps, for fair appraisal be postponed until the criticism of Oswald's contemporaries is heard. This will be the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter VI.

OSWALD'S CRITICS

When Oswald's *Appeal* appeared in 1766, it was not hailed with great enthusiasm, but it did receive a moderate welcome. Philosophical works, of course, were notably not among the best sellers. Years before, Hume's efforts had "fallen dead-born from the press". This certainly was not to be, however, indicative of the influence these writings were to have. The leaven had far reaching effect, and, at the time Oswald wrote, the public was seeking some answer to the rapidly spreading scepticism. The effects, both of scepticism's threat and its checks, were first apparent in England. It seemed that she provided the speculative laboratory, while Scotland supplied the scientists who outlined the experiments.

In a fifteen page article, a writer in the *Monthly Review*, published at London, gave a summary of Oswald's thesis, and illustrated it with copious reference to the text. He introduced his account by saying that any sincere attempt to answer infidels and sceptics would certainly meet with favor from the friends of virtue and patriotism. In commenting on the latter part of Oswald's second book, the writer said: "The Reader will meet with many just observations upon some of our most eminent modern philosophers and divines, such as Mr. Hume, the late Bishop of Gloyne, the Author of the Essays upon the principles of morality and religion, Dr. Clarke, &c".¹ When Oswald enters

into the discussion of the real distinguishing feature between rational and non-rational beings, as found in his fourth book, the reviewer states, "What he (Oswald) says upon this subject deserves the attention of the philosophical reader". Several pages more are devoted to excerpts from Oswald's work, and then the reviewer expresses the following conclusions:

As to the merit of the work, we shall only say that it contains many pertinent and judicious remarks in regard to the conduct of modern philosophers and divines, which all who are conversant with moral and religious subjects will read with pleasure; and that many of the author's observations upon the faculties and operations of the human mind are worthy of particular attention. Most readers will probably think that the same ideas recur too often, and that the whole of what the Doctor advances might have been reduced to a much narrower compass; the subject, however, must be allowed to be important, and, consequently, to deserve a full and particular illustration. As the author struck into a new path he was, in some measure, under a necessity of enlarging, in order to do justice to his subject. We shall be the better able to judge of his whole plan when the second part of his work appears, which we shall be extremely glad to see, and which we hope he will soon favour us with. Scepticism and infidelity have made an uncommon progress amongst us, and nothing, in our opinion, seems to bid so far to bring them into discredit, as firmly establishing the principles of common sense. 3

True to his promise, the same author welcomes the publication of the second volume of "An Appeal to Common Sense in Behalf of Religion", six years later. "We gave an account of the first volume of this ingenious and useful performance", he wrote, "and we are glad to see the continuation of it". 4 He goes/

2 Ibid., p. 128.
3 Ibid., p. 129.
4 Ibid.
goes on to point out the probable reception it will receive from the public:

The Author appears in the agreeable light of a serious and candid enquirer after truth, and seems extremely desirous of promoting the interests of religion and virtue. The design and the plan of his work are excellent; and though many of his Readers will undoubtedly differ from him in the application of his general principles to some particular points, yet, we are persuaded, that every competent judge of the subject will look upon the APPEAL TO COMMON SENSE as a work well calculated to bring scepticism and infidelity into discredit with the sober and thinking part of mankind, and will be glad to see the Author's plan completed. 5

Oswald's approach to the subject of the existence of God meets with the approval of the reviewer who felt it to be "very judicious and pertinent". 6 But one section calls forth negative comment. It is where Oswald accuses the "learned" of the error of making "happiness" the "ultimate end and object of the divine government", and where he unleashes some of his most caustic vituperation: "Upon the whole, this hypothesis" Oswald raged, "which, through the faulty negligence of the learned, has obtained universal currency, is fit to be adopted by none but pirates, and robbers, and corrupted statesmen, who show no regard to the difference betwixt right and wrong, beyond what suits the purpose of them and their associates". 7 Exercising some of that restraint which Professor N. Kemp Smith spoke of Hume as having,

6 Ibid., p.50
7 Oswald, Appeal, vol.II, pp.159-160.
and which was not too plentiful in the eighteenth century, the

writer dealt with Oswald's remarks as follows:

We cannot help observing, on this occasion, that our
Author has treated those whom he calls the learned of
our day, with an unbecoming severity, and that he himself
is guilty of the same rashness which he says is
unpardonable in them. He allows that common sense
will hardly authorise weak mortals to fix the ultimate
end and object of divine government, and yet the scruples
not to affirm, with a sufficient degree of confidence,
that all know of the supreme excellence of moral worth,
to silence their murmurs against its being the ultimate
end and object of divine government. Now, without
presuming to affirm what is or what is not, the ultimate
end of divine government, it is obvious that the differ-
ence between the learned of our day and our Author is
very inconsiderable. If moral worth be the ultimate
end and object of the divine government, the all-wise
Author of our frame has established so intimate a
connection between moral excellence and happiness, that
we cannot make improvements in one without promoting
the other. The dispute, therefore, whether moral worth
or happiness be the ultimate end of the divine government,
seems to be a little more, if anything, than a dispute
about words.

But the difference between our Author and those whom
he censures with so much severity, greater or less, it
surely becomes every writer on such subjects to express
himself with great caution, modesty, and diffidence, and
consider seriously whether it is not rashness and
presumption in the most exalted of the human species to
pronounce positively what is the ultimate end of the
divine government. We shall make no apology for these
observations, as we have too high an opinion of our
Author's candour to suppose that he can possibly be
offended with them.

When Priestley came across this same passage of Oswald's writing
he was not so temperate. In dealing with the Springs of Deity

Oswald/

8 N. Kemp Smith, David Hume; p.530. Victor Cousin also
makes mention of Reid's restraint, "La malice et l'ironie v
paraitraient davantage si elles n'étaient contamment tempérées
par la sérénité et la bienveillance", cf. V. Cousin, Philosophie

Oswald, according to Priestley, "contrary to his custom, condescended to overturn by reason a scheme that was founded on reason"; and thus established, Priestley felt, "a scheme entirely his own, which cannot fail to recommend it to my reader, on the foundation of common sense". 10

To return to the reviewer, however, his final sentence is one of commendation. "We can only add", he said with tribute, "that it will give us pleasure to see our Author's Vindication of the Christian Religion, and hope he will soon favour the public with it". 11

Again it was in England that we note that the Scottish Common Sense answer to scepticism was given a royal and popular welcome. Beattie's work met with the King's approval, and, as we saw above, Oswald's Appeal was commended to the King and Queen by Bishop Majendie. Perhaps the answer to why the English were initially interested, lay in the fact that their literati had a distaste for the speculation going on with regard to the problems raised by Hume. Leslie Stephen tells us that "Johnson, for example, represents the most thoroughly national frame of mind. Johnson's love of truth in the ordinary affairs of life was combined with an indifference, or, we may almost say, an aversion, to speculative truth". 13

"if/

10 Priestley, An Examination, p.300.
12 Supra, p. 68
"if you once ask the ultimate question, he seems to have thought you will get no conclusive answer, and he left without a compass in the actual conduct of life". The popularity of the Common Sense school at this time can be further substantiated by some introductory remarks made by one unfriendly to its tenets, and about to attack its authors' arguments. "I am fully aware", wrote Priestley, "how exceedingly unpopular some of the opinions advanced in this work will be, not only with the vulgar, but also with many ingenious and excellent persons for whom I have the highest esteem". Priestley feels sure, however, that though they may not be able to concur with his opinions, they will believe his search for truth is sincere.

Priestley states in his Preface that one of the primary reasons for his book examining the work of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald, was to justify the publication of his (Priestley's) third volume of Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion. "Because", he said, "if this new scheme of an immediate appeal to common sense upon every important question in religion (and which superseded almost all reasoning on the subject) should take place, the plan of my work, with which I had taken some pains and which I had hoped would be of some use to young persons, was absurd from the very beginning."

14 Ibid.
15 Priestley, An Examination, p.xiv.
16 Priestley, An Examination, p.x.
In no uncertain terms Priestley summarizes in his Preface what he thinks of Oswald's Appeal, which he believed he would never have heard of, had it not been for the publication of a pamphlet entitled Remarks on Several Late Publications Relative to the Dissenters.  

As to Dr. Oswald, whom I have treated with the least ceremony, the disgust his writings gave me was so great that I could not possibly shew him more respect. Indeed I think him in general not intitled to a grave answer; and accordingly have for the most part contented myself with exhibiting his sentiments, without replying to them at all. This will probably confirm his opinion which he has already expressed, viz. that he sees I have not studied the subject of this controversy.

Priestley's remarks on Oswald, as contained in the Institutes are fully as strong, and were the precedent for the criticism in his Examination, and cited above. The following passages may be quoted to allow him to speak for himself:

I had intended to have prefixed to this part (Part III of his Institutes) a particular examination of what has been advanced concerning the doctrines and evidences of religion by Dr. Beattie, and especially Dr. Oswald, who represent common sense as superseding almost all reasoning about religion...I am truly sorry to complain of the conduct of any of the sincere friends of revelation, as I believe Dr. Beattie and Dr. Oswald to be, but it appears to me that their writings must necessarily give a great and a very plausible advantage to unbelievers; who, finding that it is not now pretended that religion in general, or Christianity in particular, is founded on argument, will make no difficulty of rejecting them on the principles of common sense also, and will not be displeased to find that Christian writers will argue the matter with them no longer.

17 Written anonymously by William Enfield, (b.1741, d.1797). He was ordained to Dissenting Parish at Benn's Garden, Liverpool. Later a tutor in belles-lettres and rector of the Academy at Warrington (1770-84). Cf. D.N.B., p.787; and A.Holt, op.cit., p.112.

18 Priestley, An Examination, p.xxvi.

After interspersing his arguments with a number of examples to support them, Priestley goes on to quote and comment on the vagueness of Reid, Beattie, and Oswald's exposition of Common Sense, concluding with the following crushing paragraph on Oswald:

I would not be severe upon Dr. Oswald, though he observes no bound in his censures of the most respectable writers of the last and present age, without distinction; but I cannot help saying that, in this loose and rhetorical manner, and with such airs of self-sufficiency, and arrogance, is the greatest part of his two volumes written: consisting of mere declamation, the grossest misrepresentation of the nature of reasoning, and exaggerations of the abuses of it; imputing to Christian divines a conduct that they are not chargeable with, and where argument fails, having recourse to dogmatical assertions, and abuse; at the same time that his tautology is inexpressibly tiresome. I really do not remember that I ever read a work so large as this of Dr. Oswald, that contained so little; I do not mean of truth, but of any thing. That any good should come of this manner of writing is to me incomprehensible. It may indeed, give pleasure to some to see insolence answered by insolence, and sophistry by sophistry; but, alas! truth is no gainer by such a mode of defence as this.

One might wonder what Priestley would have written if he really were severe. It is necessary to allude to one further passage from his writings before leaving the opinions of this eighteenth century minister-scientist, whom a modern biographer derogates as not always pleasant to read as a critic. It takes the form of a regret that duty must needs differ at times with friendship, and borders on sarcasm:

It was not till after the publication of the two preceding parts of this work (his Institutes) that

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20 Ibid., pp.159-160.
21 Supra, Chap.II, p.69.
I had an opportunity of reading Dr. Oswald's treatise; for though I had promised the author of Remarks on my Publications to procure it immediately, upon his recommendation, a variety of pursuits prevented my giving any attention to it. I am sorry that my opinion of this performance should differ so much from that of this ingenious writer, and indeed from that of many other persons whom I much respect.\textsuperscript{22}

Violent as the criticisms of Priestley were, the translator of Pierre Buffier's First Truths, far outdid him. A Roman Catholic, bitter at the treatment accorded members of his communion in Scotland, he unleashes a piercing shower of invective; accusing Reid, Beattie, and Oswald of "plagiarism, concealment, and ingratitude" with respect to their debt to Buffier. The first volley consists of an attack on literary-inclined Scots in general:

Of later years the Transtweedian regions have swarmed with a new species of men, different from their itinerant pedlars in the wares they sell, but similar in the manner of packing them together from the labours of others; these are Writers, or rather Book-makers, 'who obtain but a mediocrity of knowledge between learning and ignorance';...By the ambition of being ranked among the learned of Europe, they are urged to search after subjects on which to employ their pens;...By the mediocrity of their talents and acquirements, they are incapacitated from penetrating to the genuine conceptions of the authors which they read; at the same time being conversant, in their own country only, with men of less, or not of greater, intellects and learning than themselves, they are not encountered by those checks which result from the conversation of such men of superior powers and attainments as are to be found in the more enlightened regions of Europe...\textsuperscript{23}

Now Reid is put in direct line of fire, and immediately afterward/

\textsuperscript{22}Priestley, Institutes, vol.II, p.160.

\textsuperscript{23}Père Buffier, First Truths, Trans., (Anon.) from the French (1780); Citation from translator's Preface, pp.vi-vii.
afterward Oswald gets his share of the translator's canonade of abuse:

The next in order, of the three writers who are indebted to Pere Buffier for all that is contained of common sense in their productions, is Dr. Oswald, in his Appeal to Common Sense in behalf of Religion. Dr. Reid has made free with Buffier by taking his sense only, by conveying it in other terms than those of a regular translation, and by concealing the person whom he has plundered; but Oswald has not only adopted the sense of the French author, but rendered his ideas in a mere translation, and given them as his own, without acknowledging the obligation. In like manner, although he treats of First Truths, through his whole Appeal, in the sentiments of Buffier, in order to conceal the writer to whom he is obliged, he has not only given a title inexpressive of the idea of those first truths; but, by an unpardonable act of injustice to Buffier, of dishonour to himself; and of insult to his readers, he has given a passage from Mr. Locke, as it is adduced and answered by the learned Frenchman, and even quoted the latter as the author of it, under the title Remarks on Locke's Essay, by F. Buffier; whereas no such essay ever had existence. The passage alluded to is contained in the treatise which I have translated; and the world cannot produce a more signal act of consciousness in theft; than his thus adducing a quotation from a work that never had a being, and changing the title of that on which he hath committed this literary felony, in order to escape the ignominy of detection. 24

The translator believes that it is very obvious how Oswald put together his Appeal, and for doing so, the writer feels that Oswald is open to the indignation and severest scorn that thinking men can utter against any author; and expresses himself as follows:

Like/

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24 Ibid., pp.xv-xvi.
Like Reid, Oswald has composed his Appeal by attempting to pull down the edifices of Des Cartes, Locke, Berkley, Bolingbroke, Hume, and others; at least to demolish them in some particular parts, and then to erect a fabric of his own with materials pirated from Buffier, and other authors, composed without order or architecture. In fact, his production is manifestly a compilation of transcripts from a common-place book, incongruous and desultory; like Harlequin's jacket, made of scraps of various colours, sewed together to form a garment, which does not cover the nakedness of the maker. It ought to be acknowledged that Dr. Reid is by much the least culpable of the two, and in various places hath given proofs of his ability to think for himself, although there appeal but few passages which merit the distinction of originality.

This, however, does not suffice. The translator goes on to discuss Oswald's exposition of Common Sense in order to show how the minister "either did not understand, or...intentionally rejected, the idea of it which Father Buffier...adopted". Oswald's definition of Common Sense is the first cause of complaint. Whereas the meaning of Common Sense as expounded by Buffier, the translator tells us, "is that judgment, which the generality of mankind are capable of obtaining by age, and the use of reason"...Oswald seems to conceive Common Sense to be a faculty distinct from reason, and not that degree of it which men of common capacities, by the exercise of reasoning, may easily acquire". The chief difference, as the translator sees it, is that reality for Oswald is discerned intuitively, and for Buffier by inference through "ratiocination". He cannot agree, for example, that if the idea of virtue must be gathered by abstraction it need necessarily be precarious.


26 Ibid., p.xix.

On the contrary, he holds that just as in the case of the ideas of justice and faithfulness, it is acquired by "abstractions drawn from our observations on the conduct of individuals, and then forming a complex idea of virtue absolutely detached from all particulars and personalities, and then acquiesced in, as truths, by that degree of understanding which the learned Jesuit distinguishes by the appellation of Common Sense". His concluding thought under this head is that "the objects of faith are no more the objects of common sense than they are of the sense of seeing".

The next bone of contention is the source of ideas. The translator agrees that from our perceptions come our ideas, but that they should be different from them he will not admit:

The mind, indeed, in all these instances (perception of hot, cold, rough and smooth) from a multiplicity of experience on feeling objects possessed of the preceding properties, does, by abstraction, form an idea of hot, cold, hard, smooth, &c. independent of any specific object; but this is not an immediate perception by a faculty denominated Common Sense, but one arising from the reflection of reason.

Finally, Oswald's treatment of the perception of motion, and of the two classes of perception (rational and animal), come under the translator's castigating surveillance. The Appeal is quoted, and then the writer explains that Oswald has done little more than ascribe to Common Sense what men all along have credited to the ideas resulting from reasoning.

In fact, this Writer (Oswald) seems to have imagined that/

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28 Suffier, First Truths, translator's Preface, p.xx.

29 Ibid., p.xxi.
that new names, applied to old ideas, bequeath a new manner of thinking, although he has not added a perception to the list which has been known for ages, nor a new mode of thinking to that which has been long exercised: at the same time it is evident that his instances are either self-contradictory, or inconsistent with his notion of common sense; that he errs egregiously if he supposes that he has held out new lights and new truths to mankind; and is unpardonable in his endeavours to conceal the name of that Author to whom he is so signally obliged for all the approaches to the merit of common sense.30

The prejudice of this critic that has just been considered is obvious, and borders on humour when read in the twentieth century. The passages mostly speak for themselves. Certainly if Oswald wanted to plagiarize Buffier he would not have been so foolish as to even mention his name. The fact that there was no translation at hand at the time would account for making reference to a specific section rather than the entire work. The French edition has the passage Oswald takes note of in regard to Locke, under the division, "Cinquième Partie, en forme d'appendice", and the further sub-heading, "Remarques sur la Metaphysique du Locke".31 The translator alluded to above, also renders it in English "Remarks on the Philosophical Writings of Des Cartes, Locke, Malbranche, Le Clerc, Crouzas, and Regis"; and places this article after the main body of the text. It is apparent that Oswald had no intention of concealment

30 Ibid., xxiii-xxiv.

31 Claude Buffier, Traité des Premières Vérités, Nouvelle Éd. (1843). The professor writing the notes for this edition is ready to accept Reid's testimony (Works, p.468), and quotes Reid in his introductory "Notice Sur La Vie Et Les Écrits de Père Buffier", cf. pp.xxv-xxv.

32 Buffier, First Truths, p.379.
and it is clear that his Jesuit contemporary treated him libellously and unjustly.

We now pass on to one whose testimony is also negative, but whose reputation and influence have continued down to the present day. Immanuel Kant made only one reference to Oswald, and then only to link his name with two others of the Scottish School - Reid and Beattie, and the critic of the three - Priestley:

Man kann es, ohne eine gewisse Pein zu empfinden, nicht ansehen, wie so ganz und gar seine (Hume's) Gegner Reid, Oswald, Beattie, und zuletzt noch Priestley den Punkt seiner Aufgabe verfehlten und, indem sie immer das als zugestanden annahmen, was er eben bezweifelte, degegen aber mit Heftigkeit und mehrhenhills mit grosser Unbescheidenheit das Jenige bewiesen, was ihm niemals zu bezweifeln in den Sinn gekommen war, seinen Wink zur Verbesserung, so verkannten, dass alles in dem alten Zustanden blieb, als ob nichts geschehen ware. 33

The translation as made by Professor Mahaffy, follows:

We cannot without a certain sense of pain consider how utterly his opponents, Reid, Oswald, Beattie, and even Priestley, missed the point of the problem. For while they were ever assuming as conceded what he doubted, and demonstrating with eagerness and often with arrogance what he never thought of disputing, they so overlooked his indication towards a better state of things, that everything remained undisturbed in its old condition.

It was this paragraph that led Professor Sidgwick to doubt if Kant really examined the work of the "triumvirate". He suggests several reasons for his contention. Firstly, Kant would not have just lumped the three together indiscriminately if

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if he had read their works. In Sidgwick's opinion, Reid was "a thinker of indubitable originality"; Beattie "a man of real but chiefly literary ability, a poet by choice, and a philosopher from a sense of duty"; and Oswald, "a theological pamphleteer". The probable reason for putting them together, Sidgwick thought, was that Priestley had written about the three, and would have given an equally significant place if not more so to Oswald because he (Priestley) wrote "primarily from a theological point of view". 

Secondly, Sidgwick maintained that if Kant had studied Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind, "he could hardly have failed to extend his studies to Hume". Furthermore, Hume as portrayed by Kant, "is a sceptic who ventures modestly to point out the absence of a rational ground for his expectation, the future will resemble the past, while in the same breath hastens to assure the reader that his expectation remains unshaken by his arguments". On the other hand, Reid's Hume is "a sceptic who boldly denies the infinite divisibility of space, who professes to have in his intellectual laboratory, a solvent powerful enough to destroy the force of the most cogent demonstration, and who ventures to tell his fellow men plainly that they are each to all nothing but bundles of different perceptions, succeeding

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36 Ibid., p.149.
37 Ibid.
each other with inconceivable rapidity". It is in this Reid-Hume-Kant relationship that a modern study has some fresh insights, and posits a number of contrasting views. Professor Norman Kemp Smith's Hume is a perspicacious philosopher whose position was misunderstood not only by contemporary critics, but those in the 19th century as well. Ironically they called Hume "clear-sighted" and "thorough-going", observed Professor Smith, yet merely credited him with having delivered "his successors from a bondage to which he himself remained subject". Reid, Dr. Smith goes on, was naive in assuming Hume's principles as "common": and that they could end only in making man a set of "fleeting ideas". Hume was interested in proving the limitations of the theory of ideas, not abandoning it; and could have replied to Reid that was all he was allowing. Simply because a theory is limited, contended Dr. Smith, is not a sufficient reason for scrapping it entirely. It might better serve if only supplemented. That was why Hume did not take the course Reid and his followers pursued, and not because he had a quarrel with such 'common sense' beliefs as "belief in the independent existence of bodies, belief in causes...belief in the existence of the self and of other-selves". Rather, Professor Smith explains,

He/

38Sidgwick, op.cit., p. 148.
39The Philosophy of David Hume by Professor N.Kemp Smith, hereafter cited as N.K.Smith, David Hume.
40N. K. Smith, David Hume, p.7
41Ibid., p.9.
42N. K. Smith, David Hume, p.8.
He (Hume) was no less ready than Reid or Beattie to agree that a philosophy stand self-condemned if it forbids us to indulge in them. Any attempt to displace them either by other beliefs or by sheerly sceptical refusal to entertain any beliefs whatsoever is, Hume has insisted, bound to be self-defeating. If the choice be only between them and a philosophy which denies them, it is common sense that must be held to. 43

Another modern writer also subscribes to the same thesis, i.e., that Hume is not anti-"common sense",

He (Hume) does not in the least wish to impugn the common-sense belief in the existence of an external order - indeed, no one believed in it more firmly than he. He merely denies that this belief is founded upon reason, and that reason alone can account for it. 'Belief', he says, 'is more properly an act of the sensitive than the cogitative part of our natures', and our belief in the order of Nature, though not capable of rational demonstration, is practically valid because it arises from 'the principles of human nature'. But the criterion between 'true' and 'false' ideas remains subjective; it consists, he tells us, in the 'superior force, or vivacity, or firmness, or steadiness' of the true Ideas. 44

Already, above, the reaction of Reid and Oswald to Hume's position on belief has been discussed. 45 How can one account for the discrepancy between their view and that of the two writers quoted latterly? Possibly the answer may lie in the perspective as well as the acute penetrative insight of these modern thinkers. Reid and Oswald were contemporaries, whereas Professor Smith and Professor Willey have a much longer range view. But the definition of "common sense" seems to be at the heart of the difference. Oswald considered the work of Hume of/

43 Ibid.;
44 Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, p.115.
45 Supra, p. 92 ff.
of no mean importance, but did not feel Hume went far enough. Hume, it is correct to say, did have a place for a "common sense" outlook, and, as Professor Smith pointed out, drew a great deal upon Hutcheson - the same man, incidentally, that Reid and Oswald were indebted to. Hume's "common sense" view of belief was dependent upon the "sensative" rather than the "cogitative" part of human nature. Oswald held that "common sense" was dependent upon neither. The sensitive side of human nature acted as an aid, but was not the foundation for "common sense".

There was a third reason that Professor Sidgwick posited for thinking that Kant really did not study the Scottish triumvirate carefully. Hume himself paid tribute to Reid's exceptional ability. When at first he received one of Reid's manuscript, Hume wrote his friend, "I wish that the parsons would confine themselves to their old occupation of worrying one another, and leave philosophers to argue with moderation, temper and good manners". After he read the work, however, he was enthusiastic, commenting, "It is certainly very rare that a piece so deeply philosophical is wrote with so much spirit, and affords so much entertainment for the reader". That he did not regard the three on an equal level can also be seen from a line appearing in the note forwarding the Advertisement prefacing his/

47 As quoted in Sidgwick, op.cit., p.148.
his Essays, to his publishers; Hume wrote: "It is a compleat
cric answer to Dr. Reid and to that bigotted silly fellow,
Beattie".

But if, as Professor Sidgwick would have us believe, Kant
did not really examine the works of Reid, Oswald and Beattie, a
contemporary and fellow countryman - Johann Buhle49 - did. His
reviews reveal a first hand knowledge of the main works of the
Scottish Common Sense School. Twenty-two pages are devoted by
this learned writer to the philosophy of the triumvirate. Six
pages are assigned to Oswald, two for Beattie, and the remainder
for Reid. The following summarizes briefly Buhle's opinion of
Oswald's work:

Was Reid and Beattie nur beiläufig getan hatten, den
gemeinen Menschenverstand also Schutzwälle für die
Religion zu gäbaruchen: das machte sich James Oswald,
ein schottischer Geistlicher, in einem besondern Werke
zum Hauptzwecke. Er schränkte sich nicht blos auf die
natürliche Religion ein, sondern wurde auch Apologet
des Christentums, und selbst mancher ihm eigener positiver
Religionsdogmen. Für diese Absicht entwickelte er die
Theorie seiner Vorgänger noch von manchen Seiten mehr
ohne dass diese sonderlich dabei gewinnt; sowie er über-
haupt durch seinen heftigen declamatorischen Ton mehr
blendet also überzeugt. 50.

48 As quoted in N.Kemp Smith, op.cit., p.531. Prof. Smith
observes that for published writing of Hume, "this was unusually
strong language".

49 Johann Gottlieb Buhle was Professor of Philosophy at the
University of Göttingen. During the French Revolution he spent
some time in Russia, filling several important posts. Later he
returned to Germany, and was a professor at Brunswick. He was
born in 1783, and died in 1821. Cf. Library Catalogue Number One,

50 Johann Gottlieb Buhle, Geschichte der neuern Philosophie,
vol. 5, pp.263-264.
The main principles of Oswald's \textit{Appeal} are then dealt with in five pages. The major emphasis is placed on his use of the Common Sense philosophy to serve as an apologetic for the Christian Religion.

It is significant from the point of view of criticism that no mention is made of Oswald by Victor Cousin in his \textit{Philosophie Écossaise}, published early in the 19th century. Major space is allotted to Reid, and a minor chapter devoted to Beattie and Ferguson. Cousin had a great admiration for the Scottish School, especially in regard to Reid, and the Edinburgh Professor Sir William Hamilton.  

"Oui", he said, "Reid est a nos yeux un homme de génie: c'est une vraie, une puissante originalité que d'avoir élevé si haut le bon sens, et mis à son service tant de pénétration, de finesse, de profondeur". Perhaps it was because Oswald's vehemence caused irritation to Cousin's French sense of the decorous, that led him to omit any notice of Scottish Philosophy, for he eulogizes Reid again, in these words: "La malice et l'ironie v paraîtraient davantage si elles n'étaient constamment tempérées par la sérénité et la bienveillance".

Toward the close of the 19th century, and beginning years of the 20th a number of writers resurvey the contribution of the Scottish/  

\textit{51} This veneration of Cousin for Hamilton may account for the omission by the French Professor of reference to Oswald in his lectures. Hamilton had little admiration for Oswald's \textit{Appeal} (cf. infra, p. 199). Cousin may have just taken his cue from Hamilton.  


\textit{53} Ibid, p.22
Scottish School of Philosophy of the 18th Century. One of these was James McCosh, a native of Scotland, who emigrated to America, and who became President of Princeton University there. In the Preface of his work, which he deemed a "labor of love", he explained a number of the aims he had in mind in doing it. One was to testify to his continuing regard for his country; another to suggest that the "sober philosophy of Scotland" might offer possible satisfaction that current philosophies of the time seemed unable to supply; and, finally, that the work might be a contribution to what may be regarded as a new department of science, the history of thought, which is quite as important as the history of wars, of commerce, of literature, or of civilization.54 In his two page summation of Oswald's work, McCosh draws the following conclusions:

He (Oswald) takes substantially the same line of defense as Reid; but the "Appeal" is less pointed, and is vastly looser than Reid's 'Inquiry'; and one feels it a dreary task to go through its platitudes...Oswald cannot be represented as grappling with the deeper problems of metaphysics, as, for example, the question whether the common sense is subjective or objective in another sense, as the mind in many cases - not all, however, - looks to external objects. He seems to me to be right when he combines two elements in moral apprehension: "we have a feeling, as well as perception, of moral excellence".55

Another Scot, Henry Laurie, also a professor and teaching at a University in a distant land (Melbourne), regarded Scottish philosophy as worthy of a fresh handling in the light of the recent thought of his time. "A philosophy", he wrote, "often discloses/

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54 McCosh, Scottish Philosophy, p. 6.
55 Ibid., p. 230.
discloses its features more distinctly as we are borne away from it; and its history may require from time to time to be re-
written". To Laurie, Oswald was one of those who never
doubted, and thus welcomed Common Sense as "a short and easy way
of putting an end to controversy". "They had only to label the
beliefs which appealed to them as truths of common sense", Laurie
wrote of men of Oswald's type, "and the thing was done". Oswald, along with Beattie were, according to Laurie, representa-
tive of the "popular aspect of Scottish thought". The Melbourne
University professor's three page analysis of Oswald's work con-
cludes with these lines,

Dr. Oswald thinks, in fine, that his views are those of
common sense, and that every man of sound understanding
must agree with him. Thus, in his hands, the theory
of common sense degenerates into a series of well-meaning
but dogmatic statements; and even these are loose and in-
exact. The difficulties which all ages have perplexed
the minds of men are not thus lightly to be swept away;
and it has been justly objected that Oswald's mode of
treatment does not simplify, but destroys, philosophy.

In Scotland itself, the publications both contemporary and
of the century after Oswald's death make little notice of him.
The Scots Magazine devoted a column in its July, 1767, issue to a
brief outline of the main points of the first volume of the
Appeal, but with no critical comment. Likewise, the same pro-
cedure was followed when the second volume was published in 1772.
Oswald had received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Glasgow
University in December, 1765. In May of the same year, he had been/

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57 Laurie, op. cit., Introd.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., p.169.
been elected to the Moderatorship of the General Assembly. Both of these honors, therefore, preceded the publication of his book, and would not have been recognition of his work as an author. His successor at Methven, writing towards the close of the century, mentioned that Oswald was "well known in the literary world". But the general opinion of his own countrymen of more recent times seems to be that he tended toward shallowness of thought.

The two other members of the triumvirate (Reid and Beattie) were kindly disposed toward Oswald, but give us only slight mention of what they thought of his philosophical work. In the Preface of one of the later editions of his Essay on Truth, Beattie stated that he had not read Oswald's Appeal before the publication of his own work. In the same edition, in a Postscript, dated November, 1770, he gives answer to his critics, and, as an aid to his justification of using strong language condemning the work of sceptics, he quotes in a footnote, a passage from Oswald's Appeal,

"There is no satisfying the demands of false delicacy", says an elegant and pious author, 'because they are not regulated by any fixed standard. But a man of candour and judgement will allow that the bashful timidity practised by those who put themselves on a level with the adversaries of religion, would ill become one, who, declining all disputes, asserts primary truths on the authority of the common sense...tribunal to which he appeals".

61 Beattie, Essay on Truth, 8th ed., pp.468-469. The quotation is found on pages 13 and 14 of Oswald's Appeal.
The adjective "elegant" was the stimulation which called forth Priestley's comment (in his introduction to an Examination of Oswald's Appeal),

For whatever my reader may think of him (Oswald) as a reasoner, my quotations cannot fail to verify the character that Dr. Beattie (whose judgment in this case no person will call in question) gives of him, viz., that he is an elegant writer. 62

But if Beattie's reference to Oswald consisted in little more than saying he was an "elegant and pious author", the other member of the triumvirate - Thomas Reid - gives us even less light on his opinion of the author of the Appeal. Reid preferred to make no comment, saying:

The three writers above mentioned (Oswald, Beattie, and Campbell) have my high esteem and affection as men; but I intend to say nothing of them as writers upon this subject, that I may not incur the censure of partiality. Two of them have been joined so closely with me in the animadversions of a celebrated writer, 63 that we may be thought too near of kin to give our testimony of one another. 64

An admirer of Reid, and one of the great professors of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh University in the Nineteenth Century, Sir William Hamilton, made no pretence as to which of the triumvirate he considered the most outstanding. The following lines from one of his paragraphs on Common Sense show how he placed the three:

When rightly understood, therefore, no valid objection can be taken to the argument of common sense, considered in itself. But it must be allowed that the way in which/

62 Priestley, An Examination, p.204.

63 Priestley.

64 Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers, Essay VI, Ch.VII, (Hamilton's Ed.) p.468. I am indebted to Professor P. Henderson of St. Andrew's University for this reference.
which it has been sometimes applied was calculated to bring it into not unreasonable disfavour with the learned... In this country in particular, some of those who opposed it to the sceptical conclusions of Hume did not sufficiently counteract the notion which the name might naturally suggest; they did not emphatically proclaim that it was no appeal to the undeveloped beliefs of the unreflective many; and they did not inculcate that it presupposed a critical analysis of these beliefs by the philosophers themselves. On the contrary, their language and procedure might even, sometimes, warrant an opposite conclusion. This must be admitted without reserve of the writings of Beattie, and more especially, Oswald. But even Reid, in his earlier work, was not so explicit as to prevent his being occasionally classed in the same category.

There may have been others in Scotland who read Oswald's work, but they have left no written record of what help or hindrance he was to them. Perhaps it was because they preferred, as Reid did, to make no comment, or because they agreed in substance with the description given by a Scottish historian of the twentieth century - Henry Graham - that Oswald was "common place"; and, therefore, it was a dull task to read his work. Or they may have felt that he was not precise enough. Another twentieth century writer classifies Oswald as belonging to the revival of "Intuitionalism" which was occasioned by the Scottish school of Common Sense in the eighteenth century;

Reid, the founder of the School of Philosophy, did not himself, however, include knowledge of the existence of the Deity among...First Principles, but regarded it as an inference arrived at by their means..., but Oswald and Beattie included Religious Knowledge within their sphere of Intuitions. These two writers, however, confused...
confused true Intuitionalism with the appeal to Consensus. 67

Whatever other reason may be put forward, including the national temperament of Scots to take a deeper approach to thought, the fact remains that Osweld's work was most favorably received in England. It was William Enfield who made the following comment on the first volume of the Appeal: (from a letter addressed to Joseph Priestley),

If you (meaning Priestley) had read a late valuable publication, entitled, "An Appeal to Common Sense in behalf of religion", you would not have so far misconstrued what I have said concerning the uncertainty of human knowledge, as to conclude that it lays the foundation of universal scepticism. You would then have seen, that by self-evident and primary truths I meant, not merely such as are strictly speaking axioms, but such as are obvious to the common sense and understanding of mankind, without any long deductions of reasoning. And the author of this publication has undertaken to shew, and will, I doubt not, in the sequence of his work, make it fully appear that in this class all the fundamental truths of religion and christianity may be comprized sic. It was my having just read this which led me to express myself in this manner. But the general sentiment is such as wise men in all ages have avowed. 68

Such was the view of an English Dissenting minister; but divines and philosophers in France seemed to take little notice of the work; in Germany they were frankly negative; and in Scotland, only faintly impressed.

AN ESTIMATE OF JAMES OSWALD

Having considered the life and work of James Oswald at some length, it is now our object to try to form some estimate of his contribution to the field of thought. Also to gather together various impressions which the study has made so as to judge whether the removal of the cloak of obscurity has been justified or not. Firstly, the negative side will be considered, i.e., what were the most devastating charges made of his work by contemporaries and critics; and, secondly, the more positive side, or what were the best things that could be said by contemporary and later commentators.

Buffier's translator was perhaps the most negative of the writers who were of the first group. He thought that Oswald was little more than a plagiarist and a thief; but the prejudice of the man is so apparent after just a few of his pages are read that his remarks can be discounted almost entirely. Priestley's study, on the other hand, deserves more attention, though he too bears a grudge against orthodoxy. He accused Oswald of looseness of thought, of confusion of terms, and of poor organization. He held that Oswald should be, of the triumvirate, the one to be taken least seriously.

Kant indiscriminately linked together Reid, Beattie, Oswald, and Priestley, and described their work in philosophy "painful" to read. Sir William Hamilton believed that Reid was the closest to the philosophical view of Common Sense of the entire triumvirate. He, like Kant, found Oswald and Beattie shallow.
Coming closer to our own times, James MoCo, writing in the latter part of the nineteenth century, estimated Oswald's contribution to be of minor value, and allowed Priestley's criticism to summarize, to a certain extent, his own view. Professor Laurie, in his work on the development of the Scottish Philosophy held that Oswald's interpretation of Common Sense destroyed philosophy, rather than made any contribution to it.

Thus we seem to have a very strong case for relegating Oswald's work to the shelves of the great libraries where it has been gathering dust for over a century and a half. There is the positive side, however, yet to be considered. The major amount of criticism favoring Oswald's application of Common Sense to Religion came from England. It was appreciated by Bishop Majendie of the Church of England, and by William Enfield of the Dissenters. The former found it worthy of recommendation to the King and Queen; and the latter used it to support him in argument with Joseph Priestley. It was also received with commendation by a writer in the literary periodical, The Monthly Review. In Scotland, the other two members of the "triumvirate" (Reid and Beattie), though not extensive in their appraisal, nevertheless were in accord with Oswald's position. Reid said that he liked Oswald and Beattie as men, but refused to comment on their philosophy because the three were so closely linked together by the name which their philosophy bore. Beattie considered Oswald an "elegant writer". It was in England, however, as has already been mentioned, that Oswald's work received its widest reading. It was welcomed both within and without the fold of Establishment.
Establishment, and managed to achieve the approbation of the literary critic as well.

But this leaves the main weight of the criticism with the negative side, unless some more points may be put forward to substantiate a higher regard for Oswald and his work. Obviously, Oswald does not belong among the immortals of philosophy. He himself never would have tolerated even the thought of such an idea. However, it is our opinion that he made a definite contribution to the philosophical movement that is identified with his native land, and also contributed to the polity of the Church of Scotland.

In regard to the philosophical side, Oswald appropriated Common Sense to a practical problem of the day. There was a large amount of infidelity and immorality existing in his century. He was no less aware or concerned about this than was Wesley; but his approach to it was different. Oswald analyzed the cause of the religious laxness of the times to be the result of sceptical and free-thinking speculation. He sought to recapture with philosophical weapons, the ground which had been lost to infidelity and deism. It was his opinion that if men could be made to see that the key truths by which they lived were not shrouded behind curtains of deductive reasonings, but were self-evident and readily apprehended, they would not be at the mercy of sceptical argument. In other words, he wished to make men aware of the fact that they were capable of having a direct grasp of outward realities. By means of their Common Sense this was possible. Likewise, this same Common Sense would support the first truths of/
of religion. No resort to Revelation (though Oswald was a believer in it) was necessary. Therefore, mankind need have no more dealings with sceptics or others who would try to destroy belief in the time-honored moral and religious truths. Oswald's contribution, then, lay in making a practical answer to a practical problem.

If the members of the Scottish School were one on any issue, it was this; that a philosophy was always in danger of becoming twisted and distorted if it failed to consider the thought and experience of the "plain" man. Oswald went a step further, and said that it was necessary also for the philosophy to be able to square with the plain man's primary religious truths or else be justly accounted as nonsense. Much of the theism implied in Reid, Oswald brought out in the open, in a clear, understandable way. And what some critics have used as condemnatory in criticizing Oswald's work, viz. that he wrote a popular version of Common Sense, we declare to be worthy of approbation. It is true that often our philosophers have gone so far up into the ether that they have never come near the man in the street, and have merited the adjective of a modern writer - "irresponsible". 1

Oswald was also a man of vision in the church. Like Woodrow/

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1 Archibald MacLeish, librarian of the Library of Congress, wrote a short monograph called The Irresponsibles, in the early 1940's. He attacked as one of his chief targets the Professors, philosophers, and thinkers who were content to retire to their studies and not take a vital interest in the problems at hand.
Woodrow Wilson, World War I President of the United States, however, he was born several generations "too soon". The Church was not ready for his forward moving plan to heal the wounds made by strife over patronage.

With an appreciation of the sacrifices involved for the opposers of the Schism Overture, and with a genuine respect for the landed gentry, Oswald still championed the cause of civil rights and the rightful power of the Church's judicators. The cause he was fighting for received a defeat when the Schism Overture was voted down; but his was a prophetic voice. Years afterward the Church would regret that it had not listened. In our opinion his action on this and other matters are outstanding exceptions to the generalization that under Moderatism, the church and its ministers were cold and lifeless.

Finally, it falls to consider Oswald as a man. Certainly it is refreshing to become acquainted with a man in the Eighteenth Century with such high ideals and such integrity and sincerity. In an age noted for its laxity and promiscuity, Oswald stood for right at the risk of sneering abuse. He attacked hypocrisy among the nobility, and with measured words criticised them for impurity in sexual conduct and intemperateness in drink. He had a happy balance, of an appreciation for purely academical interests, as well as a love of the very down-to-earth concerns of every day life. He was dignified without being pompous. He was a credit both to the Scottish Philosophy and to the Scottish ministry.

Truly/
Truly enough he does not rank among "the great" of Scotland, but he is deserving of an honored place among the triumvirate, and no study of Scottish Moderatism should be made without considering his life and work. It is our contention that history makes one of its most valuable and balanced contributions when it gives space to the lesser great, who, though they are not found among the headlines, are quietly at work strengthening man's faith in his God, his neighbour, and himself.
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For the 2nd of February, 1849, received by Walter Miller, the Methven Session Clerk and presented to the Moderator of the Presbytery to be consigned to the safe keeping.

My, Sir,

Having been informed, that David Scott, of Methven, has given as a presentation to the Church of Methven dated at Methven Castle, the 3rd of December, 1849, and as the same makes my acceptance necessary to be attested to the benefit of the said parish, I hereby accept of the said presentation which heartily praying we may be directed to take such steps as may be most conducive to the interest of Religion and I am ever your affectionate brother and humble servant.

(Hand) James Oswald, 
Irby. 
December 28, 1849.
APPENDIX

A letter of the Rev. James Oswald accepting his charge at Methven as it appears in the minutes of the Presbytery for the 2nd of February, 1749, received by Walter Miller, the Methven Session Clerk; and addressed to the Moderator of the Presbytery to be communicated:

Rev. Sir:

Having been informed that David Smyth of Methven has given me a presentation to the Church of Methven dated at Methven Castle, the 3rd of December, 1748, and as the same makes my acceptance necessary to be entitled to the benefice of the said Parish, I hereby accept of the said Presentation heartily praying you may be directed to take such steps as may be most conducive to the interest of Religion and I am Reverend Sir

Your affectionate brother and humble servant,

(signed) James Oswald,
Dunnet,
December 26, 1748.
The second letter of acceptance, supplementing the first one. It was produced at Presbytery by William Mercer, writer for Smyth, and recorded in the Perth Presbytery Minutes of December 26, 1748, 9th March, 1749.

Sir

I find I was mistaken in thinking that I could qualify myself to the government before a justice of the peace, and have therefore qualified before the sheriff substitute, the certificate of which I send you inclosed with a letter of acceptance bearing date after my being qualified and impower you to offer this certificate to the Presbytery of Perth, and withdrawing my former acceptance, if you find any objection made to it, or otherwise see cause for so doing and am Sir

Your most humble servant,

James Oswald
Methven Castle
April 19th, 1749.
"Reasons of Appeal given to the Clerk, Walter Miller, Presbytery of Perth, by William Mercer, Writer in Perth, appointed by the heritors and heads of families of the Parish of Methven, callers of James Oswald to be minister". (From the General Assembly Papers, 1749):

Perth, 30 October, 1749.

The Reverend Presbytery refused to comply with sentence of the General Assembly of May 1749. They have violated the respect due the General Assembly by them...The Presbytery's conduct tends evidently to strengthen and rivet the spirit of opposition to Mr. Oswald. And as the same is founded on no personal objection to him, but merely leveled against Mr. Smyth of Methven, Patron, there is great reason to believe that the same would have subsided long ago had the Presbytery discovered the least inclination to proceed to settlement...The Presbytery have strongly evidenced their partiality in founding their sentence on the smallness of the congregation in so large a parish, consisting as they are pleased of about 400 heads of families. When there is no judicial evidence to support this fact. Have they thought proper to take notice how many of that number were indifferent who was their minister...
A letter from the Rev. James Brodie, moderator of the Presbytery of Caithness, inclosed with the transportation papers, dated April 25, 1750, and quoted in the Perth Presbytery Records as follows:

"Though it appears from the papers relating to the settlement of Methven transmitted to us by the Patron and callers of Mr. Oswald that we have transported him from Dunnet to Methven, not from any inclination that we have to part with a brother whom we justly love and esteem with all the sincerity that men can love a brother; but because the supreme judicatories of the Church have sustained the call and appointed his transportation to be prosecuted before us. By this maxim of obeying our superiors— even in cases when we could not approve of their judgment, we have always conducted ourselves being persuaded that there is an indispensable obligation upon us to reverence their authority as long as we have the honour to continue ministers of this Church. We do not say these things with any other view but to account for the motives of our own conduct— We have sent you an [esctN] of the process of Mr. Oswald's transportation, and because it would require sometime before your Presbytery can take the regular steps for his
admission to Methven, the transportation is to take place on the 28th day of June next and no sooner. We heartily regret the opposition that Mr. Oswald has met with from your people which can have no other foundation but their not knowing him sufficiently. If you have any regard for our testimonie we do assure you that he is a brother of excellent piety, is a fine preacher and is well qualified as most men are to gain the affections and esteem of any people who will give him a fair hearing. We hope you can do much to soften them, and thereby render him both easie and useful in his ministry. This is in the name and by appointment of Presbytery signified to you from Reverend dear sir, your most affectionate humble servant, James Brodie, Moderator.
Copy of a letter - appearing in the Perth Presbytery Records - from Dr. James Oswald to David Smyth, Patron of Methven. It has to do with a request Smyth made some years before, that Oswald be given permission by the Presbytery in order to enter into a contract of escambion so that he could sell the piece of glebe land which divided two properties belonging to Smyth:

28 February, 1775.

Sir:

I am sorry I cannot attend you to the Presbytery, and introduce you to my brethren, but it is not safe for me to go abroad in my present state of health, and in such unseasonable weather. My brethren will not trust my judgment in the affair they are to judge but I am positive that the acres of meadow are scarce of half value, and that the terms you offer will be advantageous to me and all my successors, with best compliments to Mrs. Smyth and Miss Bell,

I am sir,

Your most humble servant

James Oswald.
God for His blessing on their labours
I am respectfully Rev. Dear Brother,

Your affectionate brother and humble servant,

James Oswald.