

Eating and Tea-drinking*

SIR JOHN HAWKINS

Johnson looked upon [eating] as a very serious business, and enjoyed the pleasure of a splendid table equally with most men. It was, at no time of his life, pleasing to see him at a meal; the greediness with which he ate, his total inattention to those among whom he was seated, and his profound silence in the hour of refection, were circumstances that at the instant degraded him, and showed him to be more a sensualist than a philosopher. Moreover, he was a lover of tea to an excess hardly credible; whenever it appeared, he was almost raving, and by his impatience to be served, his incessant calls for those ingredients which make that liquor palatable, and the haste with which he swallowed it down, he seldom failed to make that a fatigue to every one else, which was intended as a general refreshment.¹ Such signs of effeminacy as these, suited but ill with the appearance of a man, who, for his bodily strength and stature, has been compared to Polyphemus.²

NOTES

On Hawkins, see p. 171.

1. The editor of *Johnsonian Miscellanies* cites for comparison the following passage from John Knox's *Tour through the Highlands* (1787) p. 143:

[At Dunvegan] Lady Macleod, who had repeatedly helped Dr Johnson to sixteen dishes or upwards of tea, asked him if a small basin would not save him trouble, and be more agreeable. 'I wonder, Madam,' answered he roughly, 'why all the ladies ask me such impertinent questions. It is to save yourselves trouble, Madam, and not me.' The lady was silent and went on with her task.

2. The one-eyed giant of Greek legend.

* *Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.*, p. 355.