

Samuel Johnson



*Thoughts
on Falkland's
Islands*

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Published by Good Press, 2022

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EAN 4064066461508

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To proportion the eagerness of contest to its importance seems too hard a task for human wisdom. The pride of wit has kept ages busy in the discussion of useless questions, and the pride of power has destroyed armies, to gain or to keep unprofitable possessions. Not many years have passed, since the cruelties of war were filling the world with terror and with sorrow; rage was at last appeased, or strength exhausted, and, to the harassed nations peace was restored with its pleasures and its benefits. Of this state all felt the happiness, and all implored the continuance; but what continuance of happiness can be expected, when the whole system of European empire can be in danger of a new concussion, by a contention for a few spots of earth, which, in the deserts of the ocean, had almost escaped human notice, and which, if they had not happened to make a seamark, had, perhaps, never had a name!

Fortune often delights to dignify what nature has neglected; and that renown which cannot be claimed by intrinsic excellence or greatness, is, sometimes, derived from unexpected accidents. The Rubicon was ennobled by the passage of Cæsar, and the time is now come, when Falkland's islands demand their historian.

But the writer, to whom this employment shall be assigned, will have few opportunities of descriptive splendour, or narrative elegance. Of other countries it is told, how often they have changed their government; these islands have, hitherto, changed only their name. Of heroes to conquer, or legislators to civilize, here has been no appearance; nothing has happened to them, but that they