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R E M A R K S  
ON THE  
JOURNAL OF A TOUR  
TO THE  
H E B R I D E S,  
IN A LETTER TO  
JAMES BOSWELL, Esq.

---

Think me thy friend, and I am truly so;  
Nor dare to scorn me, lest I prove thy foe.  
My heart is honest, and my generous soul  
Ne'er stoop'd to give, nor take a mean control.  
Untouch'd with envy, and unknown to spite,  
I judge with candour, and with freedom write.

ANONYMOUS.

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R E M A R K S

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JOURNAL OF A TOUR

TO THE

H E B R I D E S,

IN A LETTER

TO MR. BOSWELL.

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S I R,

W H E N I first took your Journal into my hand, I thought to have met with a number of curious and valuable anecdotes, with some important reflections of the late Dr. Johnson; but I am sorry to say, that I had palpably deceived

A 2

myself

myself in forming such a pleasing expectation : the few incidents, and those in general very trivial, added to the inelegancy of style, and a dull disgusting sameness, which pervades the whole, made me at first dubious of its authenticity ; especially as I could not find in the several parts, which relate immediately to yourself, as being your own sentiments, that boldness of thought, nor that manliness of expression which characterize the History of Corsica. The extemporal speeches of Dr. Johnson, so far as they are consistent with experimental knowledge, are certainly worth preserving ; yet I cannot think them equal to what might have been reasonably expected from a man, so habituated to reflection, and who possessed such an association of ideas, that one might suppose he could never have been at a loss to speak with fluency, and uncommon pathos, on any subject. In the most pertinent and the most sententious remarks, contained in the Journal, we can discover no particular energy of language, nor philosophical penetration into human nature, which  
you

you, Sir, have ostentatiously asserted, were peculiarly conspicuous in the Doctor at all times. However advantageously his abilities may appear, on a comparison with those of his contemporaries, I will venture to maintain, that he would have been a much greater man, had he never left his \* closet to join the convivial circle of witty and polite geniuses. A natural melancholy and moroseness, which were rather increased than lessened by intense study, with a voice at once rough and displeasing to the ear, were circumstances not in the least calculated to make a favourable impression on the minds of others : yet under all these disadvantages, he was frequently in company with men of the first rank in literature ; and deservedly esteemed, not for his agreeable fallies of wit in conversation, but on account of his valuable productions, which will convey his name to the latest posterity.

I would

\* The author would not be understood, as wishing the Doctor had secluded himself from all social, but critical, converse.

I would neither depreciate the merit of the illustrious Doctor, nor attribute qualities to him he never possessed : the same principle of justice, that encourages us to give praise, when it is due, ought to prevent our bending at the shrine of fulsome adulation. You tell us, “ His mind was so full of imagery, that he might have been perpetually a poet.” However fertile his fancy, and however correct his judgement, from a survey of his prose writings, may appear to have been, I think his few poetical pieces afford an unquestionable demonstration, that he was no poet in grain. If we compare his London, a satire, with the productions of a Pope, the inferiority of the former in every respect will appear too obvious to justify a particular detail of its imperfections. The poem is like London itself, in which there is a concretion of heterogeneous subjects. The same observation may be extended to the “ Vanity of Human Wishes” with much truth and propriety. Johnson had not the requisites of a good poet : he had the cold, yet exact, taste of a true critic, with a deep  
and

and penetrating judgement ; but he wanted that fire of imagination, that originality of genius, that easiness of style, and that smoothness of versification, which are essential to a fine poem. He was doubtless conscious of this himself, else his attempts in that line would have been more frequent : had he considered poetry as his *forte*, such was his inflexible disposition, that the opinions of others, however different from his own, would never have been able to have turned his bias or his studies another way. He was above being controlled ; and always seemed hurt when his judgement was called in question. But happily for him, he was either displeas'd with his own poetry, or could not write it with pleasure and facility : one or both of these reasons might induce him to relinquish the muses. He was sometimes majestic without intending it ; but wanted in general more wit, than he display'd, and less logic, to become an agreeable companion. Good poetry is a kind of magical charm that eases the heart and pleases every one ; 'tis the offspring of a lively and luxuriant imagination, clothed in a  
 happy



happy combination of words, which having a certain affinity with each other, produce the most agreeable and the most exquisite feelings the mind is capable of enjoying. The gift of poetry is the dispensation of Heaven; it is coeval with our birth, and can never be eradicated. The spirit of the true bard is naturally endued with a vigorous faculty of generating vivid conceptions: it glows with a celestial fire, which nor the keen winds of contempt, nor the cold damps of poverty have power to extinguish. Many a person has mistaken "a strong impulse for a natural genius," and been led away with a false notion of excellence, till time and a fatal experience have evinced his error, and rectified his opinion. That this was literally the case with Dr. Johnson I will not fully assert; neither will I admit of his being a poet by nature. Had his abilities in poetry been equal to his judgement in criticism, he would have rivalled even the Grecian bard: but that torpid languor, which crept through his frame, and gave a fullen gloominess to his features, checked the versatili-

lity

lity of his fancy ; and he crouched when he should have soared, and grew dull when he strove to please. I shall add nothing farther relative to his poetical character at present, but turn my attention to the Journal. To note every particular passage that is objectionable would be tedious, I shall therefore confine myself to a few only.

In page 78, when speaking of emigrating to America, the Doctor said, “ a man of any intellectual enjoyment would not easily go and immerse himself and his posterity for ages in barbarism.” Such a remark from a man of such extensive knowledge is truly ridiculous. Did the Doctor imagine the natives of America were, like the wild Indians, strangers to the arts of a civilized people, having nothing to denote their being rationals, but their figure and their voice? or did he forget that a nation, rapidly rising to perfection in arts, manners, manufactures and commerce, was the best place for a man of abstracted thinking to exert his abilities, and display his knowledge, in the several

departments of life? The more we contribute to the general happiness of mankind, the nearer our mental enjoyment approaches to perfection: and so intimately connected is our private with the public welfare, that we are bound individually as well as collectively, to promote the growth of the latter, and fix it on as permanent a basis as we can. But what could the Doctor mean by "barbarism," which closes his famous speech? the Americans are as civilized and polite, as hospitable and enlightened, as the English, though not so celebrated for literary men. And who will venture to assert, that they are not as bold and persevering, as magnanimous and politic, as jealous of their honour, and as ready to fight for their liberty, with less duplicity, and more probity? Experience tells us, they are not our inferiors in any thing essential to glory and well-being. Arts, sciences, and literature, are not the instantaneous productions of any age or country; they rise gradually; and, now the American  
empire

empire is no longer convulsed with a cruel and destructive war, we may naturally expect to see them transplanted thither, and flourishing with increasing splendor every day. So pleasing is the thought, imagination springs forward to that happy time, when the fire of genius and the rays of knowledge shall blaze forth in a Newton, a Locke, a Milton, a Pope, and an Addison; and give to that nation a glory equal to our own. America is of all places in the world the most congenial to a philosophical mind: the face of the country, the rise and progress of the several states, the inhabitants themselves, their manners, their immunities, their laws, their religion, together with the introduction of the fine arts, the improvement of agriculture, and the extension of commerce, are subjects of inexhaustible fecundity to an active and patriotic genius; and deserve the deepest and profoundest investigation. Such, Sir, is my opinion of America; and I blush that the great Dr. Johnson was so

narrow in sentiment, and so wanting in respect, towards that country.

In page 129 you tell us, “ the Doctor would not hear Principal Robertson preach, unless he got up into a tree,” alledging in justification of his obstinacy, that “ he would not give a sanction by his presence to a Presbyterian assembly.” However bigoted he might be in his religious, as well as political principles, to treat with so much contempt the established mode of worship of a people among whom he was travelling, and from whom he received every mark of esteem, was not only repugnant to politeness and good breeding, in which he ought to have shewn himself an exemplary ; but was likewise a positive insult to the country ; and reflects great disgrace on him, as a scholar, a gentleman, and a Christian. Had he attended their religious assemblies in general, I should never have thought his presence an honour ; since there may be found of that persuasion some, whose learning and piety may be equalled,  
but

but never excelled. I expect ' the Doctor would have convinced us by a liberality of conduct, that his mind was superior to all those trivial distinctions, which set mankind at variance; but my expectations were too sanguine: he could detect the failings of others, without being guarded against them himself; and preach with much more ease than he could practice.

In page 131 you say, " Mr. M'Aulay gave us a letter of introduction to Mr. Ferne, master of the stores of Fort St. George. He shewed it to me: it recommended two celebrated gentlemen, no less than Dr. Johnson, author of his Dictionary, and Mr. Boswell, known at Edinburgh by the name of Paoli. He said, he hoped I had no objection to what he had written; if I had, he would alter it. I thought it a pity to check his effusions, and acquiesced; taking care, however, to seal the letter, that it might not appear, that I had read it." Here, Sir, you have given us a proof of your egregious vanity, in permitting the contents of this letter

to

to pass, which had an immediate reference to yourself. Yet I must do you the justice to add, that you discovered a consummate share of prudence, in sealing it up, and afterwards divulging it to the world. We are certainly indebted to you for this curious piece of information: it shews us at one view, how little, how vain, and how artful a man will render himself to secure the praises of others. Great minds are capable of performing great actions, and should always be directed towards great objects; but in the evolution of things, we frequently find them guilty of meannesses, that even lesser minds would blush to be seen in. The same discriminative powers of intellect, with which they investigate the most abstruse and problematical subjects with philosophical precision and moral certainty, are often the secret and primary cause of their open degradation. When a man is conscious of his own merit, he should never suffer himself to be diverted by eulogiums from others; they may be paid to him in expectation of their  
their

their being returned ; and not as they ought to be, from a full conviction of his deserts. But so weak is the human mind in general, that it is very rarely found to be proof against flattery ; it swallows the delicious poison with avidity ; grows inflated ; becomes a stranger to its own natural powers ; and at last excites the ridicule, if not the contempt, of all. — In page 144, you tell us, “ the Doctor was curious to know “ whereabouts a poor woman slept in her hut :” and to be satisfied, she was by one of the guides interrogated in Erse : but from her excessive modesty, which you were pleased to term *coquetry*, she refused to tell ; saying she thought you wanted to go to bed to her ; this you considered as truly ridiculous in so wretched a being ; but surely, Sir, your merriment on the occasion, and the plebeian inferences you drew from it, were still more so : you would have shewn more wisdom, if you had suppressed your risibility ; and passed an encomium on her prudence and virtue in withstanding the fascinating influence of your personal accomplishments.

She



She deserved praise instead of contempt ; for the question was sufficient to alarm any woman of delicacy and uncorrupted simplicity. And you, Sir, might have spared yourself the trouble of examining the place where her bed stood : the adventure “ was ridiculous ;” the discovery not in the least interesting ; and the relation itself is flat and insipid. We are not, like children, amused with every little circumstance that occurs, and lost in admiration when a tale is told, or a few words jumbled together of more sound than meaning ; we look for something of importance, that is either pleasing or surprising. When gentlemen of abilities travel for information, we expect to find them return well stored with valuable acquisitions ; and not with a *journal* swelled with a circumstantial detail of minute and petty occurrences, inferior to what may be found in “ the history of Tom “ Thumb,” or “ Goody Two Shoes.” The desire of being pleased, and acquiring a greater degree of knowledge is as prevalent in the generality of readers as in authors : and though  
the

the latter may sometimes find themselves hurt at the cool reception their works meet with, yet if they have any intrinsic merit, posterity will award them their due share of praise: but when the former purchase a book, to receive entertainment or instruction; and find nothing in it but a dull and tedious recital of childish transactions; they will with a warm, but just, indignation cast the book aside; and consider the author as having offered an insult to their understandings. If this should happen to be the case with your readers, I would have you tell them, that of a Scotchman they may always have water gruel in perfection, but few rich soups well seasoned with attic salt. Your account of Prince Edward, after the battle of Culloden, is generally interesting; and I think this part, and the few more passages in the Journal which deserve attention, if thrown together, would make a very pretty twelve-penny pamphlet. It is curious to observe what a happy promptitude some people discover, in conceiving a great deal where there is but lit-

tle meant, and less to be wondered at. If the Doctor spoke but one word, with you, Sir, it was *multum in parvo*; you were always in raptures when in his company: and in one of your moments of exultation, you aptly enough compared yourself to a dog in a corner carousing on a piece of meat without any fear of its being taken from him. And in order to elucidate your familie, you added, “ In London, Reynolds, Beauclerk, AND ALL OF THEM, are contending, who shall enjoy Dr. Johnson’s conversation, while we are feasting upon it undisturbed at Dunvegan.” But pray, Sir, whom do you mean by that elegant expression, “ and all of them ?” They are surely some coffee-house loungers, old maids, or buxom widows, else you would have done yourself the honour of mentioning their names: for you are wonderfully fond of telling the world what an extensive circle of acquaintance you have; I suppose, that you may insure to yourself the more respect, and be thought a person eminently distinguished in the republic

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lic of letters : And so indeed you are ; and long may you remain so ; but not at the expence of my taste or my judgement. I would not be thought invidious : I love and venerate true greatness of intellect : and I think it never appears so amiable, so pleasing, and so striking, as when it is shaded with the veil of modesty. Ostentation is an author's greatest enemy : it lays open his weaknesses to the attacks of others ; and, like a canker, it preys upon the bud of genius, and destroys every thing that is truly estimable. We lament, when we find great talents devoted to bad purposes ; and we blush when they are rendered subservient to vanity. You, Sir, have been riding on the shoulders of your illustrious friends with a pompous parade peculiar to your wishes ; and with an air of self consequence, you have forced upon the Public a six-shilling book replete with small talk and ill-natured remarks. Such, Sir, is my opinion of your Journal.

I shall now venture to make an observation on duelling, the rationality of which you say the

Doctor fairly owned he could not explain. To appear an advocate for a practice, at which humanity shudders, and which religion itself forbids, may perhaps subject me to censure: yet as there is a principle of honour in man, that ennobles his actions, and gives a dignity to his nature, so for him to suffer with passive submission an infringement on that principle, is rendering himself a mere nonentity. If I am insulted by a gentleman, I am bound in justice to myself and my friends to challenge him; this alone restores the honour of my family; and if he refuse to accept the offer, I may then think myself amply revenged in having it in my power to declare to the world, his want of two of the best and most respectable principles of the human mind, honour and courage: but if, on the contrary, he should embrace my offer, he then, in fact, makes me some concession for the affront I had received, and we stand upon an equality in defence of our mutual courage and honour. If a man will not risque his life in defence of these, we may safely say he is ignorant

ignorant of their true value, and pronounce him a very despicable being.

In page 283-4, the Doctor tells us that “Gratitude is a fruit of great cultivation, and is not found among gross people.” If, Sir, by gross people, he mean the poor, I must beg leave to dissent from his opinion — gratitude is the spontaneous effusions of a heart sensible of a benefit received; and is more conspicuous in that class of people, than in any other: oblige a poor man, and he will never forget the kindness; his prayers will be perpetually ascending to the throne of Heaven for your welfare; and even his children will rise up and call you blessed. I was happy to find you differing in sentiment with the Doctor on that head: you would have done well to have combated him in other particulars; then we might have had two volumes instead of one; and honest Dilly (for I cannot suppose that you derive any advantage from the sale of the book) would have pocketed double the sum  
that

that he now has. You can advance nothing, Sir, in favour of the trait you have given us in page 321-2 of the Doctor's wanton and indelicate behaviour, when in company with some of your Scottish ladies. Such gross familiarity would have been compatible with a profest buck in one of the London bagnios; but it was highly reprehensible in the sage and philosophical Dr. Johnson. This little sketch, and a few other collateral circumstances, sufficiently evince, that in spite of all his abilities, he was sometimes as lax in thought and as weak in conduct, as men of less knowledge.

A little farther on, in the same page, we are told, that the Doctor read a great deal of your Journal; and said, the more he read of it, the more highly he thought of you. This, Sir, rests entirely on your own *ipse dixit*; yet I shall not be so unpolite as to question your veracity: that would be touching your feelings too closely. The Doctor is dead — and there is

no appealing to him for the truth on either side; therefore your word must be implicitly taken; and I shall rest satisfied with the assertion. But I must entertain my doubts of his sincerity: he could only say so to amuse, or keep you in good humour, finding you were troubled with the *cacoethes scribendi*; and had but a small stock of ideas of your own to work upon. This, Sir, I believe, was the true state of the case: for no one can imagine that he ever suspected your intentions of printing every thing he repeated. If such an event had struck him, as carrying the least shadow of probability with it, he would have consigned two thirds of what we are now in possession of to the flames; or ever after remained silent in your company. Guess, Sir, how great would be the Doctor's indignation, could he be made sensible, that during his life, a man of moderate abilities, and some learning, had artfully assumed the character of a friend; and by the help of a retentive faculty, made himself master of every word, he had spoken; not with a view



to do honour to his memory, by judiciously selecting the best and most striking of his sentences, but with a design to shew his own assiduity, in exhibiting the Doctor in the most glaring colours of inconsistency. If, Sir, you examine this with attention, I am certain you will find it a true picture in miniature; and your own conscience, like the prophet Nathan, will exclaim, "Thou art the man." Were there many men to be found as found in memory and as sterile in imagination as yourself, we should have volume upon volume of coffee-house chit chat, or amorous *tête à têtes*, and the prices of waste paper would, of course, be considerably reduced; this, though it would be a fortunate circumstance to a set of industrious tradesmen in town, yet it would be a dreadful calamity to the booksellers in general; their shops would be continually filled with petty-fogging authors, inquiring the fate of their respective performances; and a man of good sense would be ashamed to be seen amongst them, lest he should likewise be looked upon

as

as one of the votaries of dulness. In short, Sir, on re-considering the supposed case, it appears to be in a great manner realized; and I am happy to inform you, that there is a large body of authors sailing down the stream of Contempt, to shoot the gulph of Oblivion; and you need be under no apprehension of wanting good company. With your present octavo frigate you will be fully able to keep along-side of them: and when you launch forth in your mighty \* quarto or second-rate ship, which has been upon the stocks these twenty years, and is composed of the best materials, you may possibly overtake your countryman, Mr. M'P--r--n, who, no doubt, will be very glad to see you. Indeed, Sir, I congratulate you on your intended expedition; and you have my best wishes for your safe arrival on the Lethean shore; and my hearty prayers that you may remain there in humble quietude. Here, methinks, you will say I

\* Mr. Boswell intends giving the Public the life of Dr. Johnson, in one vol. quarto, the materials of which he has been collecting for twenty years past. Oh rare J-m-my B-sw-ll! Vide Ben Johnson's bust in Westminster Abbey.

am too ungenerous : In defence of myself I must add, that when an author gives us a favourable specimen of his abilities, I would have every degree of encouragement shewn him to which he may be justly intitled : but if he afterwards attempt to croud upon the Public a heap of crude or common-place thoughts, with an affected air of vanity, and a singular presumption, I think he then forfeits all claim to respect, and deserves a homely castigation.

The friendly civilities you paid the Doctor, I dare say, he very gratefully acknowledged, and you should have remained satisfied ; but praise, which is nothing more than the breath of others, acts very powerfully on your vitals, and seems somewhat necessary to your existence. Hence you thought, to enumerate every little kindness would entitle you to the thanks of the Public, without once considering that you were taking the most effectual means to excite our disgust. You might as well have told us when the Doctor took a diuretic or cathartic medicine ; and to show your skill in the medical profession, (for  
you

you know a little of every thing) you might have observed their effects on his constitution, and perhaps made some fortuitous discovery, that would have been of service to the Doctor, if not of general utility. But not to be tedious, I shall now take a view of the Doctor in a new light. You say " he appeared to you, like a great mill, into which a subject is thrown to be ground:" and that " it requires, indeed, fertile minds to furnish materials for this mill." So then the once-celebrated Dr. Samuel Johnson, LL. D. is metamorphosed into a wind-mill, which never moves, unless some fertile minds throw in materials to work it. We will now, Sir, take a survey of the liberal contributions you have made, to keep this wonderful mill in motion. Poor Billy Shenstone and the much-admired Hammond, and that most lively and most elegant of all lyric bards, Hanbury Williams, were popt in, and crushed to atoms in an instant. To these succeeded a Nightcap; and though it had an elastic as well as a compressive quality, we find it was equally as unfortunate as the three pre-

ceding victims. The mill being now in full play, it was thought expedient to provide more subjects : accordingly a very worthy member of the House of Commons was hauled into the hopper, and sacrificed without mercy : the gloomy Night Bard was also summoned ; and though he happily escaped, by the assistance of \* Brunetta and Stella, yet he received a contusion on the head, which made him dizzy ever after. Several others were afterwards destined to the same fate, particularly the pious Mr. Hervey : he, poor man, was cast in, with his sublime Meditations ; and though we neither heard nor saw any thing of him after, still, to our utter astonishment, his favourite performance, by some mysterious process, was changed to one of the finest rhapsodies on a pudding, that was ever produced in any language, or ever will be. The several parts are described with so much simplicity and classical elegance, that with a little application, you, Sir, will be one of the first pudding-makers in the world : and  
if

\* Vide page 333.

if His Majesty should think proper to constitute you one of his worthy domestics, I have not a doubt of your being found a very useful and quiet being.

I shall now take my leave of you with remarking, that I cannot help admiring the manner of your selecting materials for your mill. You paid no respect to friendship, good nature, and common civility: these are virtues you were totally ignorant of. Your intimate acquaintance, and even the ladies, were the objects of your insatiable rapacity, as well as those who neither knew, nor wished to have the honour of knowing you.

I here subjoin an elegy, which a friend of mine (personating the Doctor) wrote on the loss of his large oak stick\*.

I am, Sir,

Your most obedient,

And most humble servant,

VERA X.

London,  
October 27, 1785.

\* Vide page 398.

ELEGY.

## E L E G Y.

ATTEND ye lovers of the Muse's strain,  
 Who mourn in secret o'er at the tale of woe,  
 Whose tender bosoms, if a wretch complain,  
 At once with ev'ry social feeling glow.

Oh! hear the sorrows of a plaintive bard;  
 No vulgar subject claims your pitying tear;  
 Loft is my favourite walking stick and † yard,  
 On which I lean'd for many a circling year.

By that supported, up the mountain's height  
 Full oft I clamber'd at the break of day;  
 With that I travell'd thro' the gloom of night,  
 Nor started if a villain cross'd my way.

By all 'twas noted for its make and size,  
 The like ne'er grew throughout the Hebrides,  
 Where nought but hills and deserts meet our eyes,  
 Uncloth'd with verdure, unadorn'd with trees.

† Mr. Boswell tells us it had the properties of a yard,  
 having a nail driven in at the length of one foot, and ano-  
 ther at the length of three feet.

Alas!

Alas! to ease me of its weight, one day  
 I simply gave it to a Scottish cull,  
 And while we journied on our dreary way,  
 From him 'twas stolen by a thief of Mull\*.

If e'er again I grasp it in my hand,  
 I'll safely hold it till I reach my home;  
 Then in some fam'd Museum it shall stand,  
 And be rever'd for ages long to come.

But ah! unconscious of its native worth,  
 That wretch may burn it, in a fit of rage;  
 Or madly cry, when fir'd with social mirth,  
 This stick was stolen from a London sage.

Weep, reader, weep with me, my luckless fate,  
 And, if a Scotsman, ne'er of Scotland boast,  
 Of all the knaves, a *Highland knave* I hate;  
 Of all the thieves, a *Scottish thief* the most.

\* Vide page 139 of the Journal.

T H E E N D.



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\* \* \* At the desire of several Persons of distinguished Abilities and Rank, this work was undertaken. The favourable Reception it has met with during the whole of the two last Parliaments, not only demands the most grateful Acknowledgements of the Editors, but encourages them to a Continuation of the same through the present Parliament. For this Purpose, and to prevent Misrepresentation, they beg Leave again to solicit the Assistance of their former Friends, and every other Gentleman. A strict Attention will be paid to all their Commands and Favours; nor will any Assiduity or Care be wanting to preserve that Truth and Accuracy, for which this Work has hitherto been distinguished.

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