DR CAMPBELL’S DIARY
DR. CAMPBELL'S
DIARY
OF A
Visit to England
IN 1775

Newly edited from the MS. by
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With an Introduction by
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Dr Thomas Campbell Frontispiece
Facsimile of the first page of the Diary p. 37
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J. L. C.

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INTRODUCTION

On 5 April 1775 Johnson and Boswell were guests of the Dillys at dinner. Boswell took with him an Irish clergyman, Dr Thomas Campbell, who was said to have come to England 'chiefly with a view to see Dr Johnson, for whom he entertained the highest veneration'. Campbell had, in fact, already met Johnson at the Thrales' and was to meet him again on several occasions. Like Boswell, he kept a journal; but, unlike Boswell, he had no vision of himself as a Johnsonian chronicler. In a small pocket-book he made notes of his visits to London, Paris, and Brighton, the greater part of them being devoted to the period 23 February—9 May 1775. These notes were unknown to the world until in 1854 there was published in Sydney the Diary of a Visit to England in 1775, by an Irishman (the Reverend Doctor Thomas Campbell, author of 'A Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland') and other papers by the same hand. With notes by Samuel Raymond, M.A., Prothonotary of the Supreme Court of New South Wales.¹

In his Preface the editor explained that the manuscript had been found in the offices of the Supreme Court at Sydney, but that he had no knowledge of how it had come there. Of the imperfections of his editing he was fully aware; but of the authenticity of the Diary he had no doubt. Whether copies of the book reached England

¹ There were two issues of the book. The first bore the imprint on the title-page, SYDNEY: PRINTED BY DANIEL LOVETT WELCH, ATLAS OFFICE; the second, SYDNEY: WAUGH AND COX, BOOKSELLERS AND PUBLISHERS, III, GEORGE STREET. Some copies of the second issue also contained a page of ERRATA AND ADDENDA.
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through the ordinary channels of trade is uncertain, but on 21 May 1859 Macaulay wrote in his Diary:

A letter from Sydney with a curious little pamphlet printed there—a Diary of Dr T. Campbell, mentioned in Boswell’s Life of Johnson. The Diary contains an account of what the Dr saw during a visit to England in 1775. It by no means gives the notion of a blind fanatical worshipper of Johnson, as I had supposed Campbell to be from Boswell’s narrative. There are some odd things as coming from a clergyman; and some passages still more indecorous have been omitted. I observe that Johnson could swear and swear even before a parson when in a passion. The history of the Diary is curious. Mr Raymond, Prothonotary of the Supreme Court of N.S.Wales found the MS. behind an old press in his office. Nobody knew how it came there, or could guess. That it is genuine is quite certain. The internal evidence is more than sufficient. I looked into Nichols’s Illustrations of Literary History and found that Campbell’s eldest nephew went in 1810 to Sydney with letters of recommendation to Governor Macquarrie. As Campbell left no children, this nephew no doubt had his papers and took them to New South Wales. Answered Mr Raymond and told him what I had discovered.¹

From this last sentence it seems clear that Macaulay had received his copy of the Diary direct from Samuel Raymond, the editor. It is also clear that he spoke of the book to his friends, among them Henry Reeve, editor of The Edinburgh Review. On 1 June he noted in his Diary:

Reeves [sic] wants me to review T. Campbell’s Diary. I will do no such thing. He may, if he likes.

But in a letter to Reeve, written on the same day, he was more conciliatory:

¹ The extracts from Macaulay’s Diary, now in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, are quoted by kind permission of the Master and Fellows.
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Before you determine anything about Dr T. Campbell’s Diary, you had better read it. I have lent my copy, which is probably the only copy in England, and do not expect to get it back until next week. When it comes, I will send it to you, and we will then talk further.¹

Macaulay read the Diary again on 12 June and on the 27th wrote to Reeve:

If I were to renew my connexion with the Edinburgh Review after an interval of fifteen years, I should wish my first article to be rather more striking than an article on Campbell’s Diary can easily be. You will, no doubt, do the thing as well as it can be done.

The Diary, after all, was small beer; Macaulay had been a giant amongst Edinburgh reviewers and he was now a sick man. Nevertheless, his interest in the little book was keen (had not Raymond convicted Croker of yet another blunder?)² and the article which appeared in the Review for October 1859, written no doubt by Henry Reeve, was based upon the material Macaulay had supplied. It was an article of considerable length—longer, in fact, than the review of The Virginians in the same number—and surveyed the Diary in detail, with liberal quotations. It also contained a summary of what is recorded of Campbell in the seventh volume of Nichols’s Literary Illustrations; the Percy-Campbell correspondence in that volume providing the clue, as Macaulay had

¹ For this and the following letters, see J. K. Laughton, Memoirs of Henry Reeve (1898), ii, 31–6. Macaulay was wrong in regarding his copy as unique. A copy was given to the Athenaeum by A.T. Holroyd on 21 May 1855.
² Both Croker in his edition of Boswell and Forster in his Life of Goldsmith had followed Nichols in identifying Campbell with the flashy Irishman of Mrs Thrale’s letter to Johnson of 16 May 1776.
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noted, to the connection between Campbell and New South Wales. For Thomas Campbell had had a nephew, John Thomas, about whom his younger brother, Charles, had written to Percy in 1810 that he was 'just embarking from the Cape of Good Hope...for New South Wales, with strong recommendation to Colonel Macquarrie, who is the Governor of that settlement'.

'We hope', wrote the reviewer, 'to ascertain that this gentleman afterwards held some office in the Supreme Court', and in conclusion:

Dr Campbell’s diary has been walled up behind that ancient press in the Supreme Court at Sydney, until, like a pipe of Madeira laid in on the birth of an heir and forgotten on his majority, it has acquired the flavour of a curious liqueur. The world is extremely indebted to Mr Raymond for having brought this document to light; and in any future edition of the Life of Johnson, Dr Campbell’s notes cannot fail to be inserted. That paragraph, if not actually written by Macaulay, has acquired the flavour of a curious distillation of Macaulay’s style.

The first of the reviewer’s hopes was quickly fulfilled and again with the aid of Macaulay, who wrote to Reeve on 11 November:

I have just received the enclosed letter which may, perhaps, interest you. It might be worth while to put a short note at the end of the next number of the Edinburgh Review.

It was Macaulay’s last communication to the Edinburgh. He died on 28 December, and at the end of the January number there appeared, following a tribute to Macaulay, the following note:

Since the publication of our last Number we have received from the Editor of Dr Campbell’s Diary, who resides at Sydney, some further particulars which complete the identification of
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the nephew of Dr Campbell as the person by whom the Manuscript Diary was conveyed to New South Wales.... Mr Raymond now informs us that he had previously ascertained that the Diary had been in the possession of John Thomas Campbell, brother of the Rev. Charles Campbell of Newry. This gentleman was Provost Marshal and for some time Colonial Secretary at Sydney. He died in 1829, and it appears from his will registered in the Supreme Court of New South Wales, that he bequeathed a considerable property to his sisters resident in Ireland. These facts complete the explanation of the singular removal of the Manuscript Diary from Ireland to the place where it was discovered at the Antipodes. It will be interesting to our readers to know that the materials for the article on Dr Campbell's Diary were communicated to us by Lord Macaulay, and that this very note was, in fact, his last contribution to these pages, made within a short time of his death.

It is curious that this explanation seems not to have been noticed by later editors of Boswell. Alexander Napier gives a good account of Thomas Campbell in an appendix to his second volume, but attributes the completed identification of the nephew, John Thomas, to an industrious reviewer in the Sydney Morning Herald.1 In the supplementary volume of Johnsoniana, edited by Mrs Robina Napier, Campbell's Diary was for the first time reprinted, though not in its entirety; there were some passages which, even in Raymond's bowdlerised version, offended the good taste of 1884.

Birkbeck Hill approached the Diary with less enthusiasm. In 1882, when his proposal for a new edition of Boswell was first submitted to the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, Benjamin Jowett had written:

There is also a book about Johnson published by a Dr Campbell, or rather professing to be written by him and pub-

1 Life of Johnson, ed. Napier (1884), ii, 551.
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lished about 80 years ago in N.S. Wales. It contains accounts of Conversations with Johnson—which I believe to be forgeries, though I remember Lord Macaulay reproving me for doubting them.¹

Birkbeck Hill himself accepted, with some reluctance, the genuineness of the Diary and printed extracts from it in his Johnsonian Miscellanies; but he regarded Macaulay’s enthusiasm as excessive and, in particular, could not believe that Johnson could ever have said ‘Damn the rascal’. If he could have seen the full text of the passage, he would no doubt have dismissed the Diary in toto.²

Some years ago, having with difficulty obtained a copy of the original edition of the Diary, I had a mind to re-edit it on the basis of Raymond’s text. But an examination of the text made it clear that a new edition would be worth while only if it could be based on the original manuscript, and the chances of recovering the manuscript seemed remote indeed. But the resolution of Mr Clifford, with whom I discussed the project, was of sterner quality. Undaunted by preliminary discouragement, he persisted in his inquiries and in July 1934 Miss Ida E. Leeson, librarian of the Mitchell Library, Sydney, wrote to inform him that she had found the original Diary. The manuscript had not wandered; it had been given to the Australian Library, the forerunner of the Public Library of New South Wales, by Raymond in 1854 and had remained uncatalogued for many years. Photostats were made in due course and thus Mr Clifford has been enabled to present for the first time a complete and accurate text of Campbell’s narrative.

¹ Birbeck Hill, Talks about Autographs (1896), pp. 49–58.
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Perhaps it would be more accurate to refer to Campbell’s ‘notes’ rather than to his ‘narrative’. Clearly, what he has left is his day-to-day impression of England and the English, hastily recorded and lacking the polish of a finished composition. Jowett mistrusted the record because it ‘agreed too much with Boswell’. Similarity to Boswell would surely be as valid an argument for authenticity as for plagiarism; but, in fact, Campbell’s record bears no striking resemblance in detail either to the text of Boswell’s own Journal or to that of the Life.

About Johnson, Campbell is frank enough. He had heard of his prejudices and mannerisms and, when the first meeting took place, he was on the look-out for them. He was not disappointed. One of the less palatable references to Johnson occurs in the account of the dinner at the Thrales’ on 1 April 1775. Readers who have had access to the Private Papers of James Boswell are of course already familiar with the unfamiliar bawdiness of the anecdotes and the fact that they are reported by both diarists points not to their authenticity but to the probability that they were common tittle-tattle amongst certain members of Johnson’s circle.¹

But Campbell was more than a sightseer or a collector of gossip. He wanted to hear Johnson talk and, in particular, to hear his views about Ireland. The conversation on this topic is duly recorded under the date 11 June 1781, but a fuller account is included in the Sketch of the Constitution . . . of Ireland appended to Campbell’s Strictures on the . . . History of Ireland² and it was

¹ See pp. 68–9 and Mr Clifford’s note 114.
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characteristic of Johnson that, after a violent explosion against the rebellious Irish, he should conclude by saying:

Why, Sir, I don’t know but I might have acted as you did, had I been an Irishman, but I speak as an Englishman.

Johnson apart, Campbell was an interested, and interesting, observer of English men and manners and especially of English players and preachers.

Few manuscripts have had a more curious history than Campbell’s. Laid down in obscurity for half a century, it was brought to light by Raymond. Macaulay stamped it with a vintage character, but other connoisseurs in Johnsoniana were less confident. Now, thanks to Mr Clifford’s assiduity, the old wine has been re-discovered. It deserves its new bottling.

S. C. R.