THE JOURNAL OF A TOUR TO CORSICA

JAMES BOSWELL

(In the dress of an armed Corsican Chief)

The *Journal* of a Tour to Corsica; & Memoirs of Pascal Paoli

By James Boswell, Esq.

Olim meminisse juvabit.
Virg.

Edited, with an introduction,
by S. C. Roberts

Cambridge
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1929

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107502192

First edition 1923
First published 1923
Reprinted 1929
First paperback edition 2015

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-50219-2 Paperback

CONTENTS

NOTE
ON THE
SECOND IMPRESSION

In this impression I have taken the opportunity of correcting a chronological error on p. viii and of recording a small bibliographical discovery on p. xvii.

S.C.R.

January 1929

INTRODUCTION

AT a time when James Boswell is coming into his own, it seems fitting that the work which won him his earliest literary fame should once more be made available.

The Journal of a Tour to Corsica was first published, together with *An Account of Corsica*, in February, 1768. A second edition appeared in the June of the same year and a third, with corrections and a congratulatory letter from Lord Lyttelton, in 1769. Since that date, the *Tour* has been reprinted but once and then only in company with, and somewhat under the shadow of, the *Letters between Erskine and Boswell* which Dr Birkbeck Hill edited in 1879.

Such is the bibliographical justification for the present edition, in which the *Tour* appears by itself for the first time. For thus tearing it out of its original context there is, of course, the highest authority:

"Your History," wrote Johnson to Boswell on 9 September 1769, "is like other histories, but your Journal is in a very high degree curious and delightful. There is between the History and the Journal that difference which there will always be found between notions borrowed from without, and notions generated within. Your History was copied from books; your Journal rose out of your own experience and observation. You express images which operated strongly upon yourself, and you have impressed them with

great force upon your readers. I know not whether I could name any narrative by which curiosity is better excited, or better gratified."[1]

The first point to be remembered about the early career of James Boswell is that, as Birkbeck Hill remarks, he was 'Corsica' Boswell long before he was 'Johnson' Boswell.

The famous meeting in Tom Davies's back parlour took place in May 1763. In the August of the same year Boswell left for Utrecht. During the intervening months the friendship had quickly ripened; Boswell had visited Johnson in his chambers and had entertained him at the Mitre. When Boswell left for Harwich, Johnson insisted on accompanying him. "I hope, Sir," said Boswell when they parted, "you will not forget me in my absence." "Nay Sir," replied Johnson, "it is more likely you should forget me, than that I should forget you."

Still, though Johnson had thus early surrendered to Boswell's good humour, the friendship was only just begun; Boswell had only just achieved the supreme intimacy of accompanying Johnson on his late, tea-drinking visits to Mrs Anna Williams.

The primary object of Boswell's foreign travel was a course of legal study at Utrecht; but he was of the age when the eighteenth-century gentleman

[1] It is, however, worth remark that the *Account of Corsica* has recently found a defender in Mr Leonard Whibley (*Blackwood's Magazine*, March, 1923).

properly made the grand tour—and much of Boswell's life was a grand tour in quest of famous men.

Growing tired of the law schools of Utrecht, he passed from Holland into Germany. From Berlin he wrote: "I may either steer to Italy or to France. I shall see Voltaire. I shall also see Switzerland and Rousseau; these two men are to me greater objects than most statues or pictures."

All these aims were duly accomplished. In Italy Boswell contrived to meet John Wilkes, then in exile, and together they made the ascent of Vesuvius; at Ferney he visited Voltaire with whom he discussed the subject of natural religion; and at Motiers he presented himself before Rousseau. In Professor Tinker's recent book we are enabled to read for the first time Boswell's remarkable letter of self-introduction:

> Open your door, then, Sir, to a man who dares to say that he deserves to enter there. Trust a unique foreigner. You will never repent it[1].

It was Rousseau who gave Boswell an introduction to Pasquale Paoli, the Corsican hero, and it was Paoli who inspired Boswell's first literary achievement.

It is not easy to appreciate fully at the present

[1] See *Young Boswell*, pp. 49–58. After Boswell had left, Rousseau wrote to him at Geneva, enclosing a letter to Deleyre at Parma. The enclosure was not sealed and Boswell characteristically thanked Rousseau for this mark of confidence. "Il se trompe," wrote Rousseau, "ce n'est qu'une marque d'étourderie" (Rousseau to Deleyre, 11 Feb. 1765).

day the appeal of Corsica to Boswell's romantic sensibility. There were several elements in this appeal: first, there was Boswell's characteristic desire for novelty, for something that would make him personally conspicuous—"I wished for something more than just the common course of what is called the tour of Europe; and Corsica occurred to me as a place which no body else had seen"; secondly, there was the attraction of a heroic figure to be interviewed and Boswellised; and lastly, there was the peculiar appeal of Corsica itself. Throughout his tour Boswell was agreeably conscious of the feeling of a return to a simpler way of life, to that 'state of nature' which was the theme alike of the explorers and the philosophers of the period: "it was just being for a little while one of the 'prisca gens mortalium, the primitive race of men,' who ran about in the woods eating acorns and drinking water."[1] Boswell was as ill-fitted for the 'simple life' as he could be, but that does not impair the sincerity of the emotions which his Corsican travel aroused within him.

Moreover, the political condition of Corsica in 1765 had its own romantic attraction. The island was, as usual, in a state of revolt against the Republic of Genoa and the national cause was being upheld by one who was to become a Garibaldi of his own generation. Pasquale Paoli had been made

[1] p. 24 of this edition. See also Professor Tinker's Vanuxem Lectures, *Nature's Simple Plan* (1922).

General of the Corsicans in 1755 and had in a short time driven the Genoese "to the remotest corners of the island." The Genoese, failing to "allure the Corsicans to a pacifick submission," made a treaty with France by which certain towns were to be garrisoned by French troops. These troops, however, under the command of the Count de Marboeuf, acted only on the defensive and it was during this comparatively peaceful period of occupation that Boswell visited the island.

In Corsica, which Rousseau described as the one country still capable of legislation, Boswell found a people "actually fighting for liberty." "Europe," he writes, "now turns her eyes upon them, and with astonishment sees them on the eve of emancipating themselves for ever from a foreign yoke." *The London Chronicle* for 1766 is full of paragraphs (no doubt written or inspired by Boswell himself) advertising both the claims of Corsica and the importance of Boswell's tour: "Nothing," says a letter from Leghorn of 3 January, 1766, "can be a greater proof of the weak and desponding spirit of the Genoese than the apprehensions which Mr Boswell's tour to Corsica has occasioned"; "We are in great hopes," says a letter from Turin of 6 January, 1766, "that from what he has seen, he will be able to undeceive his countrymen with regard to the Corsican nation."

Boswell's book was no mean instrument in fanning the flame of enthusiasm for Paoli and his compatriots: Lord Lyttelton, Horace Walpole, Mrs Macaulay and David Garrick wrote him

"noble letters" about it; Gray declared that Paoli was a man born two thousand years after his time; Mrs Barbauld wrote a poem on Corsica in which she celebrated

> ...the working thoughts which swelled the breast
> Of generous Boswell.

Nor was Boswell content with the writing of a single book. He supervised the publication of a volume of *British Essays in behalf of the Brave Corsicans*; he raised a subscription in Scotland; he preached the cause in Ireland; clad in the costume of a Corsican chief he made a striking appearance at the Shakespeare festival at Stratford-on-Avon in 1769, an event duly chronicled—by himself—in the *London Magazine*[1]; wearing the same costume, he sought, and obtained, an interview with Chatham. But it was to no purpose. Corsica was ceded to the French in 1769 and England was not sufficiently enthusiastic to intervene. "Foolish as we are," said Lord Holland, "we cannot be so foolish as to go to war because Mr Boswell has been in Corsica." Paoli resisted for a while and then took refuge in England, where he quickly became a *persona grata* in the Johnsonian circle.

But though the *Tour* has a definite place in the literature of travel, its real interest lies in its early exemplification of the literary qualities and methods of James Boswell.

He had begun to keep a journal as early as 1758

[1] See frontispiece.

and throughout his tour he was busy with his notebook, recording his impressions every night and afterwards making a selection at leisure. His Corsican adventures were begun under what were for him the most agreeable conditions. He was a figure; he provoked comment; he was thought to be engaged upon a political mission. With that exquisite sensitiveness to his surroundings which is one of his most engaging qualities, Boswell could, with complete sincerity, yearn for "the serenity and peace of mind to be found in convents"; he could acquit himself wittily and well in the rôle of Protestant apologist; he could lecture the Corsicans on the dangers of luxury and refinement; he could allow himself a "momentary pride" as he rode out on Paoli's horse, "with rich furniture of crimson velvet, with broad gold lace"; he could feel a supreme elevation of mind as Paoli argued for "the being and attributes of GOD"; he could fancy himself, as he sang his 'Cuore di quercia,' to be a recruiting-officer with his chorus of Corsicans aboard the British fleet.

Of the genuineness of these and other emotions there can be no question, and they are recorded with that unaffected good humour which made Boswell irresistible to his own, as to later, generations. Gray's verdict that the *Tour to Corsica* was an example of how "any fool may write a most valuable book by chance, if he will only tell us what he heard and saw with veracity," will not hold. On all Boswell's literary work there is the

mark of the conscious artist; his sense of selection, as well as of composition, is sure; and the *Tour to Corsica* abounds in those vivid touches, both descriptive and introspective, with which readers of the *Life of Johnson* are familiar.

What could be more economical, or more effective, than Boswell's description of his servant: "an honest Swiss who loved to eat and drink well"? What more picturesque than the few lines about the little boy who ran to his mother to bring the great seal of the kingdom? What more engaging than the account of how the 'ambasciadore Inglese' got a Corsican dress made and walked about in it "with an air of true satisfaction"?

No wonder Boswell's gay ideas relaxed Paoli's severity and brightened up his humour.

"For my part," writes Boswell in his *Preface*, "I should be proud to be known as an authour ... of all possessions I should imagine literary fame to be the most valuable."

Seldom has an ambition been so completely fulfilled; "I have obtained my desire" he was able to write in the *Preface* to the third edition, and it is high, but not extravagant, praise to say that the *Tour to Corsica* is not unworthy of the author of the *Life of Johnson*.

NOTE ON THE TEXT

The text used for the present reprint is that of the third edition (1769), certain obvious misprints (including one in the quotation on the title-page) being corrected. A collation of the first and third editions has revealed the following variant readings in the former:

p. 4: footnote omitted.
p. 9, l. 7: *lay my account with instant death.*
p. 12, bottom: *advices.*
p. 18, bottom: *joked them with the text.*
p. 23, l. 1: *hath* omitted.
p. 27, l. 7: *droll enough.*
p. 37, l. 17: *I came in to pay.*
p. 62, l. 10: *the lively nobleman.*
p. 71, l. 6: *with a keenness.*
p. 91, l. 1: *Signor Buttafoco, who proved superiour to the character I had conceived of him from the letter of M. Rousseau. I found in him the incorrupted virtues of the brave islander, with the improvements of the continent. I found him in short, to be a man of principle, abilities and knowledge; and at the same time a man of the world. He is now deservedly raised to the rank of colonel of the Royal Corsicans, in the service of France. I past some days with Signor Buttafoco, from whose conversation I received so much pleasure, that I in a great measure forgot my ague.*
p. 102, l. 1: *a total expulsion.*

It will be observed that the only important

textual change arises from Boswell's revised estimate of the qualities of Signor Buttafoco[1].

The very considerable differences in punctuation have not been recorded, but what is more interesting is Boswell's failure to carry out, *au pied de la lettre*, his own explicit injunctions as to the preservation of his original spelling.

"Of late," wrote Boswell in his *Preface*, "it has become the fashion to render our language more neat and trim by leaving out k after c, and u in the last syllable of words which used to end in our. . . . I have retained the k and . . . wherever a word originally Latin has been transmitted to us through the medium of the French, I have written it with the characteristical u. . . . If this work should at any future period be reprinted, I hope that care will be taken of my orthography."

In spite of this, Boswell would appear to have passed *domestic* (p. 42), *authentic* (p. 56), *legislator* (p. 94), *public* (p. 108) in the proofs of the third edition.

In the interests of consistency as well as of fidelity to Boswell's intentions, it has seemed best to restore the original forms of these and other words (*risque*, *chearful*, *compleat*, etc.) in this reprint.

Finally, two small points with regard to the text of the first edition may be noted: first, there are two 'states' of this edition, since certain copies

[1] Fitzgerald's bibliographical note (*Life of Boswell*, II, 276), implying that the third edition corresponds page for page with the first and second, is curiously inaccurate.

contain a misprint on p. 296[1] (*my own of* for *of my own*); secondly, the leaf Z 3 is a cancel. Professor Tinker, who has been fortunate enough to find the leaf in its original state, informs me that it is of little interest. It appears to have been cancelled in order to correct the spelling of 'Mariani.'[2]

[1] p. 33 in the present edition.
[2] p. 38 in the present edition.