



From a post and low ground in West, MS, 1937, ES, recorded to a copy of the  
 Western Manuscript Commission and printed about 1937. In the drawing above by J. J. Foy  
 is also shown the same pennant as the original. The drawing was made by J. J. Foy in  
 1937. The drawing is the work of the artist J. J. Foy. The drawing was  
 made by J. J. Foy in 1937.

Doctor! He gart kings ken that they had a lith in their neck - he taught kings that they had a joint in their necks'. Jamie then set to mediating between his father and the philosopher, and availing himself of the judge's sense of hospitality, which was punctilious, reduced the debate to more order."<sup>23</sup>

## *"This is truly the patriarchal life: this is what we came to find"*

(Johnson to Boswell on Raasay). What did they come to find and why?

Address to the Boswell Society at Auchinleck, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2011.

DAVID EDWARD

In 1831 John Wilson Croker published his new edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. This gave rise to Macaulay's diatribe against Boswell in the *Edinburgh Review*, which conditioned people's views of Boswell for years to come and seems to have played some part in John Murray's refusal to publish the *Journals* when they were discovered.

In the following year, 1832, Thomas Carlyle published his review of the *Life of Johnson* in *Fraser's Magazine*. He discussed at some length all Bozzy's failings, oddities and shortcomings, but he also said "The man, once for all, had an 'open sense', an open loving heart, which so few have". Then he turned to the book:

"Which of us but remembers, as one of the sunny spots in his existence, the day when he opened these airy volumes, fascinating him by a true natural magic! It was as if the curtains of the past were drawn aside, and we looked mysteriously into a kindred country, where dwelt our Father; inexpressibly dear to us, but which seemed forever hidden from our eyes. For the dead Night had engulfed it; all was gone, vanished as if it had not been. Nevertheless, wondrously given back to us, there once more it lay; all bright, lucid, blooming; a little island of Creation amid the circumambient Void. There it still lies; like a thing stationary, imperishable, over which changeful Time were now accumulating itself in vain, and could not, any longer, harm it, or hide it."

The same might be said of the house in which we meet today where the past has been 'wondrously given back to us'. Auchinleck is not, admittedly, as it was in Boswell's day. But it was here that there occurred, on the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1773, the monumental row between Johnson and Boswell's father which inspired one of Rowlandson's *Picturesque Beauties of Boswell*. Johnson threatens to bring a large tome entitled *Liturgy* down on the head of old Auchinleck, while Bozzy stands terrified in the background with his thumbs in his mouth.

Bozzy forbears to describe that row 'for the entertainment of the publick'. But Scott gave Croker a version of it that had probably been handed down amongst the advocates in Parliament house in Edinburgh. According to Scott,

"Johnson pressed upon the old judge the question, what good Cromwell --- had ever done to his country. After being much tortured, Lord Auchinleck at last spoke out: 'God,

I will come back to the underlying reason for this famous altercation. Boswell's account of it gives us a delightful sidelight on his father's character and his relationship with his son:

"Dr Johnson challenged him --- to point out any theological works of merit written by Presbyterian ministers in Scotland. My father, whose studies did not lie much in that direction, owned to me afterwards that he was somewhat at a loss how to answer, but that luckily he recollected having read in catalogues the title of *Durham on the Galatians*, upon which he boldly said, 'Pray, sir, have you read Mr Durham's excellent commentary on the Galatians?' - 'No, sir,' said Dr Johnson. By this lucky thought my father kept him at bay, and for some time enjoyed his triumph, but his antagonist soon made a retort, which I forbear to mention."<sup>24</sup>

Boswell's relationship with his father is usually depicted as dry and disapproving. But here we have old Auchinleck confessing to his son that he had never read *Durham on the Galatians* and had only picked up the name in a catalogue. That was enough to score a temporary victory over the Doctor. Boswell does not, even in his private Journal, record what Johnson's retort that he 'forbore to mention', perhaps because it was a cheap gibe unworthy of the Doctor.<sup>25</sup>

It is in preserving for us stories such as this that Boswell's *Life* is so special. It is one such story that suggested to me my topic for today.

The visit to the island of Raasay was perhaps the high point of the Tour both for Johnson and for Boswell. It is certainly one of the passages in which, as Carlyle said, 'The past is wondrously given back to us --- all bright, lucid and blooming'.

On the day following their arrival in Raasay, Boswell went out for a walk with the Laird. When they returned Johnson went with them to see the old chapel.

"He was in fine spirits. He said, 'This is truly the patriarchal life: this is what we came to find.'"

I have searched in vain for anything in the *Life*, the *Tour* or Johnson's *Journey* where either of them explains that they came on purpose to find something special, other than to see the islands that had fascinated Johnson since he had read Martin Martin's *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland*.

So, was Johnson's exclamation about 'what we came to find' just a *jeu d'esprit* because he 'was in fine spirits?' or were they really looking for something which Johnson

<sup>23</sup> Scott to Croker 30<sup>th</sup> January 1829, *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. Grierson, Vol XI, page 114.

<sup>24</sup> *Life* 6<sup>th</sup> November 1773.

<sup>25</sup> Pottle cites Malone's recollection of the retort: "At Auchinleck, when old Mr Boswell pretended to recommend *Durham on the Galatians*, he concluded, 'You may buy it at any time for half a crown or three shillings'. JOHNSON 'Sir, it must be better recommended before I give half the money for it'" (*Journal*, ed. Pottle and Bennett, p.443).

felt they had found in Raasay? If so, what was it? And what was the significance to both of them of 'the patriarchal life'?

I hope to show that Johnson's remark was more than a chance remark on a day when he was in fine spirits. It reflects an aspect of Johnson's life and his relationship with Boswell which, in this secular age, we may find it hard to understand.

The eighteenth century is often depicted as the age of enlightenment in which Britain threw off the shackles of autocracy represented by the Stuart Kings. According to that account, the Jacobite rising of 1745 was the last gasp of the old order.

Johnson himself is often depicted as the archetypal common-sense Englishman, his down-to-earth attitude being typified by an incident in Harwich when he was seeing Boswell off to Holland:

"When we came out of church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter --- I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I shall never forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone --- 'I refute it thus.'"<sup>26</sup>

Those who have this vision of Johnson as the archetypal common-sense Englishman seem to have difficulty in reconciling it with Boswell's depiction of an argumentative High Tory who frequently expressed Jacobite sentiments. They attribute all that to Boswell's perfervid imagination.

But we know from Johnson himself that he was constantly perturbed by a fear of Hell. He found it impossible to believe that David Hume had died a peaceful death without recanting his lack of religious faith. According to Scott, this was the occasion of another row, this time with Adam Smith who had written a letter describing Hume's death.<sup>27</sup>

All this may seem irrational in this rational age, but we tend to forget the extent to which, in the eighteenth century, religion was not only a part of life but also intimately bound up with politics and philosophy. Let me illustrate by two examples.

At the beginning of *The Life*, Boswell recounts the story told by Miss Mary Adye of Lichfield:

"When Dr Sacheverel was at Lichfield, Johnson was not quite three years old. My grandfather Hammond asked Mr Johnson how he could possibly think of bringing such an infant to church, and in the midst of so great a crowd. He answered, because it was impossible to keep him at home; for young as he was, he believed he had caught the publick spirit and zeal for Sacheverel, and would have staid for ever in the church, satisfied with beholding him."

In his recent biography of Johnson, Peter Martin says that

"[This] iconic story makes Johnson out to be a type of saintly visitant to the temple, eagerly taking in the scholarly and spiritual wisdom of the church elders. --- Like many fathers who have to drag their children to certain events because they

cannot at the moment do anything else with them, Michael [Johnson] may well have listened while his son gaped in boredom from above. It is more plausible that the boy was gaping at other gaping children."

With great respect, that is not at all plausible. If Dr Sacheverell was simply a church elder dispensing scholarly and spiritual wisdom (like some sort of early 18<sup>th</sup> century Rowan Williams), why does he earn a chapter all to himself in Trevelyan's history of England under Queen Anne?<sup>28</sup> The answer is that, as told in the *Dictionary of national Biography*,

"Both in pamphlets and sermons [Sacheverell] advocated the high church and tory cause, and violently abused dissenters, low churchmen, latitudinarians and Whigs. --- Not less violent than his pamphlets, his sermons on political and ecclesiastical matters attracted special attention owing to his striking appearance and energetic delivery."

In 1702 Sacheverell preached a sermon in Oxford saying that

"the throne was based on the altar; that heresy and schism [by which he meant the Glorious Revolution] must lead to rebellion; and that, rather than strike sail to a party that is so avowed an enemy of our communion, he would hang out the bloody flag of defiance."

Seven years later, in the year of Johnson's birth (1709), Sacheverell was impeached in respect of two sermons, one in Derby the other in St Paul's, which were described as 'malicious, scandalous and seditious libels, highly reflecting upon Her Majesty and her government, the late happy revolution, and the protestant succession'.

When Queen Anne went privately to attend his trial in the House of Lords, she was greeted by the crowds with shouts of 'God bless your majesty and the church. We hope your majesty is for Dr Sacheverell'. Riots followed, meeting-houses were attacked and the houses of several leading Whigs were threatened.

The following year, Sacheverell was convicted and the two offending sermons were ordered to be burnt by the common hangman. Sacheverell was suspended from preaching for three years. News of the sentence was felt to be a triumph for him and the high-church and Tory party. The ladies were specially enthusiastic, filled the churches where he read prayers, besought him to christen their children, and called several after him.

So imagine the excitement in Lichfield when Dr Sacheverell came to preach in the Cathedral. If that happened when Johnson was only three<sup>29</sup>, then Sacheverell was still under suspension, so Johnson may in fact have been a year or two older. But he was decidedly not at the cathedral as 'a saintly visitant to the temple, eagerly taking in the scholarly and spiritual wisdom of the church elders'.

Dr Sacheverell was indeed no Rowan Williams - more like Ian Paisley in his earlier days. In truth, young Samuel was at his first political meeting and of course he couldn't keep his eyes off Dr Sacheverell with his 'striking appearance and energetic delivery'.

<sup>28</sup> Vol.3, *The Peace and the Protestant Succession*, chapter III

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<sup>26</sup> *Life* 6<sup>th</sup> August 1773

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix to this paper, "The Row between Dr Johnson and Adam Smith".

It is often worth resorting to the *DNB* to find out what Johnson's harangues were really about. My second example comes from much later in his life when he expressed admiration of Charles Leslie as 'a reasoner, and a reasoner who was not to be reasoned against'.<sup>30</sup>

Charles Leslie was the son of an Irish Bishop who became a vehement pamphleteer and preacher. Two of his pamphlets were entitled *The Snake in the Grass*, an attack on the Quakers, (1696) and *A short Method with the Jews* (1689). In 1695 he published *Gallienus Redivivus, or Murther will out*.

Macaulay identified *Gallienus Redivivus* as one of the principal sources for the facts of the Massacre of Glencoe. The target of the pamphlet was King William III - King Billy - whom Johnson described as 'one of the most worthless scoundrels that ever existed'.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Macaulay, the great exponent of the Whig interpretation of history, described the death of King William as 'the noble close of [a] noble career'.

Charles Leslie followed the Old Pretender to St Germain, Bar-le-Duc and Rome, but before doing so, he published *The Finishing Stroke, being a Vindication of the Patriarchal Scheme of Government*. This was an imaginary battle royal between, on the one hand, two apologists for the Glorious Revolution and, on the other, Hottentot, who stands for man in the supposed state of nature.

According to the *DNB*, "This is probably the most plausible presentation ever made of the older form of the patriarchal theory of the origin of government".

Here, I think, is the clue to what Boswell and Johnson 'came to find' in the Hebrides.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century a great deal of political and philosophical writing was devoted to the origins of civil society. The explanation put forward, in various forms, by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau was that civil society is the result of some sort of compact ('the social contract') by which men sought to avoid the consequences of living in the state of nature where, Hobbes says, 'the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.<sup>32</sup>

An alternative view was that civil society was ordained by God. Bear in mind that it was natural, in a pre-Darwinian age, to look for a divine origin of civil society since there had not been much time for civil society to develop from a state of nature. According to the calculations of Archbishop Ussher, God had created the world on Sunday 23 October 4004 BC.

The patriarchal theory of government defended by Leslie had been developed by Sir Robert Filmer during the 17<sup>th</sup> century in a book called *Patriarcha or the Natural Power of Kings* (published posthumously in 1680). Filmer's theory is founded upon the proposition that government of a family by the father is the true origin and model of all government. In summary, his theory was that God gave authority to Adam, who had complete control over his descendants. From Adam this authority passed to Noah, and from him to Shem, Ham and Japheth, from whom the patriarchs inherited the absolute power which they exercised over their families and servants. It is from these patriarchs that all kings and governors derive their authority. That authority is therefore absolute, and founded upon divine right.

<sup>30</sup> Boswell's footnote in *Life*, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1784

<sup>31</sup> *Life* 6<sup>th</sup> April 1775.

<sup>32</sup> Hobbes *Leviathan*, Chapter 13.

Filmer's theory still held considerable interest for Jeremy Bentham - no High Tory - more than a century later. He wrote:

"Filmer's origin of government is exemplified everywhere --- In every family there is government, in every family there is subjection, and subjection of the most absolute kind: the father sovereign, the mother and the young, subjects.

--- Under the authority of the father, and his assistant and prime minister, the mother, every human creature is ensured to subjection, is trained up into a habit of subjection. But, the habit once formed, nothing is easier than to transfer it from one object to another. Without the previous establishment of domestic government, blood only, and probably a long course of it, could have formed political government."<sup>33</sup>

So it is easy to see why, in 1773, when they came to the Hebrides, the last surviving home of the clan system, the patriarchal theory of government should have been a hot topic of discussion between Johnson, the High Tory, and Boswell, the son of a Scottish laird - the Scottish laird being, as Carlyle reminds us, 'the hungriest and vainest of all bipeds yet known'.

A day or two before crossing to the delights of Raasay, they had spent a distinctly less agreeable couple of days with Sir Alexander Macdonald at Armadale. They were appalled to hear of Macdonald's policy of racked rents and forced emigration. Boswell records that:

"My endeavours to rouse the English-bred Chieftain, in whose house we were, to the feudal and patriarchal feelings proving ineffectual, Dr Johnson this morning tried to bring him to our way of thinking. [Note: 'our way of thinking'] *Johnson*: 'Were I in your place, sir, in seven years I would make this an independent island. I would roast oxen whole, and hang out a flag as a signal to the Macdonalds to come and get beef and whisky'. --- We attempted in vain to communicate to him a portion of our enthusiasm. He bore with so polite a good-nature our warm, and what some might call Gothick, expostulations, on this subject, that I should not forgive myself, were I to record all that Dr Johnson's ardour led him to say."<sup>34</sup>

That is what Boswell wrote in the published *Tour*, but we know from his private *Journal* what 'Dr Johnson's ardour led him to say':

" 'Sir, we shall make nothing of him. he has no more ideas of a chief than an attorney who has twenty houses in a street and considers how much he can make of them. All is wrong. He has nothing to say to the people when they come about him.' My beauty of a cousin<sup>35</sup>, too, did not escape. --- Mr Johnson said, 'This woman would sink a ninety-gun ship. She is so dull ---'."

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Clark *English Society: 1688-1832*, pages 75-6.

<sup>34</sup> *Tour* 4<sup>th</sup> September 1773.

<sup>35</sup> Lady Macdonald, formerly Miss Bosville of Yorkshire

Incidentally, it is worth noting that the criticism of Macdonald in the later eighteenth century has echoes in the later criticisms of the landowners who were responsible for the Clearances.

Raasay was a total contrast to Armadale. Their stay there inspired one of the few lyrical passages in Johnson's *Journey*:

"Raasay has little that can detain a traveller, except the Laird and his family: but their power wants no auxiliaries. Such a seat of hospitality, amidst the winds and waters, fills the imagination with a delightful contrariety of images. Without is the rough ocean and the rocky land, the beating billows and the howling storm: within is plenty and elegance, beauty and gaiety, the song and the dance. In Raasay, if I could have found an Ulysses, I had fancied a Phaeacia."

Phaeacia in Homer's *Odyssey* was the land where Odysseus, the epic Wanderer, came to shore after being shipwrecked and the king's daughter Nausicaa, came down to the beach with her handmaidens to play beach ball. It was at Phaeacia that he told the story of his wanderings after the fall of Troy. I will come back to that passage later.

I'm afraid it rather takes the shine off Johnson's lyrical praise of Raasay to know that the extravagance of the Laird in creating his Phaeacia caused his grandson, in an effort to fend off his creditors, to evict the crofters from part of the island and eventually, when that failed, to abdicate and emigrate.

That however, lay in the future and in 1773 Johnson was able to say that 'This is truly the patriarchal life. This is what we came to find.' The old clan system, exemplified by Macleod of Raasay and betrayed by Macdonald of Sleat, was the very embodiment of the patriarchal life.

If we bear in mind that this was all part of what Boswell called 'our way of thinking', then I believe many other aspects of their journey to the Hebrides and other aspects of Johnson's strongly expressed opinions become more comprehensible - notably his fairly frequent expressions of sympathy with Jacobitism.

Before coming to Johnson's views on the subject, it is worth recalling an anecdote noted by Croker. Princess Augusta Sophia, the second daughter of George III was the 'handsomest of all the Princesses'. In spite of propositions she never married. In his diary for 10 February 1828 Croker records:

"[A] curious anecdote, which explains several particulars in the conduct and feelings of the Hanover family since their accession. Princess Augusta said lately to a private friend: 'I was ashamed to hear myself called Princess Augusta, and never could persuade myself that I was so, as long as any of the Stuart family were alive; but after the death of Cardinal York [in 1807], I felt myself really to be Princess Augusta.'" <sup>36</sup>

The story is illustrative of an ambivalence that persisted long after Culloden - in some circles at least - about the legitimacy of the so-called Glorious Revolution and the Hanoverian Succession, whatever their merits and advantages in other respects.

The execution of Charles I and the expulsion of James VII & II were assaults on the divinely ordered state of civil society, the throne being, as Sacheverell said, based on the

<sup>36</sup> *The Croker Papers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1885) Vol. 1, p.406, cited in Clark, *cit. sup.*, at page 161.

altar. That was, for a Tory, a matter of principle, and it explains Johnson's violent reaction to Boswell's father saying that Cromwell had done good to his country by teaching kings that they have a joint in their neck.

When Boswell pointed out to Johnson that David Hume, 'some of whose writings were very unfavourable to religion', was a Tory, Johnson replied,

"Sir, Hume is a Tory by chance, as being a Scotchman; but not upon a principle of duty; for he has no principle. If he is anything, he is a Hobbist" <sup>37</sup>

Outside St Clement Danes Church in the Strand, there is a statue of Johnson, who worshipped there. Back in 1771 the church was in the news for its handsome new picture of Charles I. A new altarpiece installed in 1725 was said to depict Clementina Sobieska, mother of Bonnie Prince Charlie, as an angel. There was an outcry and it was removed.

Prince Charlie himself is said to have been received into the Church of England at St Clement Danes during a clandestine visit in 1750. He is also said to have attended a Jacobite meeting in one of Johnson's favourite haunts - the Crown and Anchor Tavern opposite the Church.

Jacobitism was not simply a sentimental adherence to a lost cause but a matter of religious and therefore political principle. It is not necessary to say that Johnson was a Jacobite or that he was not. It is enough to say that he was ambivalent, as when he said that 'if holding up his right hand would have secured victory at Culloden to Prince Charles's army, he was not sure he would have held it up'. <sup>38</sup>

If he was ambivalent, it becomes easier to understand some of his outbursts, and Boswell's rather laboured attempts to prove that he didn't believe in the divine right of kings and that he was not a Jacobite.

Possibly, like the Duchess's baby in *Alice in Wonderland*, Johnson sometimes only did it to annoy because he knew it teases. Possibly, as Boswell says, he did it 'to exercise both his pleasantry and ingenuity', as when he took Mr Langton's niece by the hand and said "My dear I hope you are a Jacobite". Mr Langton was greatly annoyed, and Johnson replied:

"Why, Sir, I meant no offence to your niece, I meant a great compliment. A Jacobite, Sir believes in the divine right of Kings. He that believes in the divine right of Kings believes in a Divinity. A Jacobite believes in the divine right of Bishops. He that believes in the divine right of Bishops believes in the divine authority of the Christian religion. Therefore, Sir, a Jacobite is neither an Atheist nor a Deist. That cannot be said of a Whig; for Whiggism is a negation of all principle." <sup>39</sup>

Note, even there, the same theme of Jacobitism (or if you like, Toryism) as a matter of principle.

Surely it was not solely to exercise his pleasantry and ingenuity that, at Coirechatachan, Johnson kept up

<sup>37</sup> *Life* 30<sup>th</sup> September 1773 (italics added).

<sup>38</sup> *Life* 1<sup>st</sup> July 1763.

<sup>39</sup> *Life* 1<sup>st</sup> July 1763.

"a close whispering conference with Mrs Mackinnon [Flora Macdonald's sister], which however was loud enough to let us hear that the subject of it was the particulars of Prince Charles's escape. The company were entertained and pleased to observe it. Upon that subject there was a warm union between the *soul* of Mr Samuel Johnson and that of an Isle of Skye farmer's wife. It is curious to see people, though ever so much removed from each other in the general system of their lives, come close together on a *particular point which is common to each*. --- We were merry with Coirechatachan on Mr Johnson's whispering with his wife. She cried, 'I'm in love with him. What is it to live and not to love?' So she humoured our merriment. At the same time, she was really most heartily taken with his conversation. Upon her saying something which I did not hear or cannot remember, he seized her hand keenly and kissed it. Here was *loyalty strongly exemplified*."<sup>40</sup>

That is the version in Boswell's Journal. The last sentence about 'loyalty strongly exemplified' was omitted in the published version. Also omitted in the published version was a comment in Boswell's Journal on their hearing Flora Macdonald's account of the Prince's escape:

"Mr Johnson and I were both visibly of the *old interest* (to use the Oxford expression), kindly affectioned at least, and perhaps too openly so."<sup>41</sup>  
Flora Macdonald does not take up too many lines in Johnson's Journey. But his meeting with her caused him to write two sentences which, in their classic simplicity, are (I think) amongst the most moving in English literature:

"We were entertained with the usual hospitality by Mr Macdonald and his lady, Flora Macdonald, a name that will be mentioned in history and, if courage and fidelity be virtues, mentioned with honour. She is a woman of middle stature, soft features, gentle manners, and elegant presence."

The Macleods of Raasay, too, father and son, were closely involved in the Prince's escape. So, when Johnson wrote 'In Raasay, if I could have found an Ulysses, I had fancied a Phaeacia', is it too fanciful to suggest that the Ulysses of his imagination was that other Wanderer, Prince Charles? The presence of the Prince would have completed the picture of the patriarchal life which they had come to find.

As I suggested earlier, it is difficult for some of us at least, in this secular, post-Darwinian age, to imagine ourselves in the mindset of people who believed that God created the world on Sunday 23rd October 4004 BC and who believed literally in the fires of Hell. It is difficult to accept as a tenable political argument that the form of civil society has been divinely ordained. And it is even harder to be remotely ambivalent about the divine right of kings.

Some may still be less enthusiastic than others about the Glorious Revolution. But there are not many who see it as such an offence to true religion as to justify, in the words of Dr Sacheverell, hanging out the bloody flag of defiance. Such disputes seem terribly remote from our world. And it is sometimes difficult to understand why Johnson, the

<sup>40</sup> *Journal of a Tour 28 September 1773.*

<sup>41</sup> *Journal 13<sup>th</sup> September 1773.*

supposedly down-to-earth common-sense Englishman, got so worked up about them, or why Boswell thought some of his tirades worth recording for the benefit of posterity.

But, if we think that, we miss the point. As Carlyle said, when he 'opened these airy volumes',

"It was as if the curtains of the past were drawn aside, and we looked mysteriously into a kindred country --- inexpressibly dear to us, but which seemed forever hidden from our eyes."

I hope that in some small way, I have offered some signposts to help you find your way in that inexpressibly dear, hidden but kindred country.

## APPENDIX

### The Row between Dr Johnson and Adam Smith.

Scott gives a highly circumstantial account of the row between Dr Johnson and Adam Smith:

"At Glasgow Johnson had a meeting with Smith, which terminated strangely. John Millar used to report that Smith, obviously much discomposed, came into a party who were playing cards. The Doctor's appearance suspended the amusement, for as all knew he was to meet Johnson that evening, everyone was curious to know what had passed. Adam Smith, whose temper seemed much ruffled, answered only at first "He is a brute! He is a brute". Upon closer examination it appeared that Dr Johnson no sooner saw Smith than he brought forward a charge against him for something in his famous letter on the death of Hume. Smith said he had vindicated the truth of the statement. "And what did the Doctor say?" was the universal query. "Why, he said --- he said ---" said Smith, with the deepest impression of resentment, "he said --- 'You lie'." "And what did you reply?" "I said: 'You are the son of a b---h!' On such terms did the two great moralists meet and part, and such was the classic dialogue between them."<sup>42</sup>

John Millar, to whom Scott refers as the source of the story, would have been Professor John Millar, who was Professor of Law at Glasgow and, like Scott, a member of the faculty of Advocates. However, as Croker pointed out,

"This story is *certainly* erroneous in the particulars of the *time, place* and *subject* of the alleged quarrel; for Hume did not die for nearly three years after Johnson's only visit to Glasgow; nor was Smith there then."

<sup>42</sup> Scott to Croker, cited above, footnote 1, pp. 113-15. This story seems too circumstantial to have been made up, and it is certainly true that Boswell records Johnson as having said "Sir, I was once in company with Smith, and we did not take to each other" (*Life* 14 July 1763).

Yet the relationship between Johnson, Boswell and Adam Smith is a curious one. The chronology of meetings between Johnson and Hume is uncertain, but there is little doubt that some sort of row did occur.

Boswell matriculated at Glasgow University in 1759 expressly to attend the lectures of Adam Smith who was then Professor of Moral Philosophy. He spoke very warmly of them:

"My greatest reason for coming hither was to hear Mr Smith's lectures (which are truly excellent). His Sentiments<sup>43</sup> are striking, profound and beautiful, the method in which they are arranged clear, accurate and orderly, his language correct perspicuous and elegantly phrased. His private character is really amiable. He has nothing of that formal stiffness and Pedantry which is too often found in Professors. So far from that, he is a most polite well-bred man, is extremely fond of having his students with him and treats them with all the easiness and affability imaginable."<sup>44</sup>

Smith in turn wrote Boswell a friendly letter 'which he never tired of quoting'.<sup>45</sup> In *The Life*, under the date 14 July 1763 (only two months after Boswell met Johnson for the first time), Boswell narrates:

"He enlarged very convincingly upon the excellence of rhyme over blank verse in English poetry. I mentioned to him that Dr Adam Smith, in his lectures on composition, when I studied under him in the College of Glasgow, had maintained the same opinion strenuously, and I repeated some of his arguments. JOHNSON. 'Sir, I was once in company with Smith, and we did not take to each other; but had I known that he loved rhyme as much as you tell me he does, I should have hugged him.'"

This discussion does not appear in Boswell's *Journal* for that date.

The next reference to Adam Smith is in *The Tour* (Friday 29) October 1773) when Johnson and Boswell were in Glasgow:

"Mr Anderson accompanied us while Dr Johnson viewed this beautiful city. He told me, that one day in London, when Dr Adam Smith was boasting of it, he turned to him and said, 'Pray, Sir, have you ever seen Brentford?' This was surely a strong instance of his impatience, and spirit of contradiction. I put him in mind of it today, while he expressed his admiration of the elegant buildings, and whispered to him, 'Don't you feel some remorse?'"<sup>46</sup>

Next, in his *Journal* for 17 March 1776, Boswell records Johnson saying to him that

<sup>43</sup> Smith's *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* was published in 1759.

<sup>44</sup> *Correspondence of James Boswell and John Johnston of Grange*, ed. Walker, p.7, cited in Phillipson, *Adam Smith: an Enlightened Life*, p. 135

<sup>45</sup> Pottle *The Earlier Years* p.43. See, for example, *Journal* 22 December 1765 and 3 April 1775, and letter to Belle de Zuylen 9 July 1764 (Boswell in *Holland* p.308).

<sup>46</sup> This story is repeated as one of 'Johnson's sayings' towards the end of *The Life* (Hill, revised Powell, Vol. IV, p.186).

"Adam Smith was a most disagreeable fellow after he had drank some wine, which, he said, 'bubbled in his mouth'."

Lastly, in *The Life*, under the date 29 April 1778, Boswell quotes William Robertson, Principal of Edinburgh University, as saying of Johnson,

"He and I have always been very gracious; the first time I met him was one evening at Strahan's [the publisher's], when he had just had an unlucky altercation with Adam Smith, to whom he had been so rough, that Strahan, after Smith had gone, had remonstrated with him, and told him that I was coming soon, and that he was uneasy to think that he might behave in the same manner to me."

Whatever happened at Strahan's on this occasion, it cannot have been anything to do with Adam Smith's description of Hume's death since Hume did not die until 1776 and Robertson met Johnson in Edinburgh in 1773 (after meeting him for the first time at Strahan's in London).

Adam Smith, for his part, had a 'very contemptuous opinion' of Johnson whose eccentricities offended his sense of propriety:

"I have seen that creature, said he, bolt up in the midst of a mixed company and, without any previous notice, fall upon his knees behind a chair, repeat the Lord's Prayer, and then resume his seat at table. He has played this freak over and over perhaps five or six times in the course of an evening. 'It is not hypocrisy, but madness.'"<sup>47</sup>

So there is no doubt that there was already bad blood between them before Smith wrote his *Letter to Strahan* describing Hume's death which was published in 1777 as a supplement to Hume's autobiography *My Own Life*. There is also no doubt that the publication of the *Letter* caused outrage among the High Church party in England and in The Club, founded by Johnson, of which Smith had been a member.<sup>48</sup>

So, even if the chronology, place and subject matter of Scott's story may be wrong, it is possible that the account is true at least to this extent, that there was a formidable row between Johnson and Smith for some reason connected with Johnson's High Church opinions and Smith's religious scepticism. It is also possible that Boswell refrained from publishing an account of it, or even noting it in his *Journal*, because of the affection he felt for both men and the debt he owed them. If so it is another example of what Carlyle called his 'open loving heart'.

<sup>47</sup> Phillipson, *op.cit.*, p.210

<sup>48</sup> Phillipson *op. cit.*, pp.246-47.