

James Boswell
Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides
Thursday, 19th August

We went and looked at the castle, where Cardinal Beaton was murdered, and then visited Principal Murison at his college, where is a good library-room; but the principal was abundantly vain of it, for he seriously said to Dr Johnson, 'you have not such a one in England'. The professors entertained us with a very good dinner. Present: Murison, Shaw, Cooke, Hill, Haddo, Watson, Flint, Brown. I observed, that I wondered to see him eat so well, after viewing so many sorrowful scenes of ruined religious magnificence. 'Why,' said he, 'I am not sorry, after seeing these gentlemen; for they are not sorry.' Murison said, all sorrow was bad, as it was murmuring against the dispensations of Providence. JOHNSON. 'Sir, sorrow is inherent in humanity. As you cannot judge two and two to be either five, or three, but certainly four, so, when comparing a worse present state with a better which is past, you cannot but feel sorrow. It is not cured by reason, but by the incursion of present objects, which wear out the past. You need not murmur, though you are sorry.' MURISON. 'But St Paul says, "I have learnt, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content."' JOHNSON. 'Sir, that relates to riches and poverty; for we see St Paul, when he had a thorn in the flesh, prayed earnestly to have it removed; and then he could not be content.' Murison, thus refuted, tried to be smart, and drank to Dr Johnson, 'Long may you lecture!' Dr Johnson afterwards, speaking of his not drinking wine, said, 'The Doctor spoke of lecturing' (looking to him). 'I give all these lectures on water.'

He defended requiring subscription in those admitted to universities, thus: 'As all who come into the country must obey the King, so all who come into an university must be of the Church.' And here I must do Dr Johnson the justice to contradict a very absurd and ill-natured story, as to what passed at St Andrews. It has been circulated, that, after grace was said in English, in the usual manner, he with the greatest marks of contempt, as if he had held it to be no grace in an university, would not sit down till he had said grace aloud in Latin. This would have been an insult indeed to the gentlemen who were entertaining us. But the truth was precisely thus. In the course of conversation at dinner, Dr Johnson, in very good humour, said, 'I should have expected to have heard a Latin grace, among so many learned men: we had always a Latin grace at Oxford. I believe I can repeat it.' Which he did, as giving the learned men in one place a specimen of what was done by the learned men in another place.