

**JAMES BOSWELL, HESTER LYNCH
PIOZZI**

**ANECDOTES OF
THE LEARNED
PIG**

James Boswell

Anecdotes of the Learned Pig

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James Boswell and Hester Lynch Piozzi Anecdotes of the Learned Pig / With Notes, Critical and Explanatory, and Illustrations from Bozzy, Piozzi &c. &c

ANECDOTES OF THE LEARNED PIG ¹

THE great and learned Pig, of which it is our hap to speak, was produced in a fty belonging to an old Tory, bookfeller, in² *Moorfields*. At that time *Moorfields* was diftinguifhed by rails which³ fluttered with party writings and libels of every fort; and it is remarkable that his mother, during her pregnancy, tore down from thofe rails, and fairly devoured one whole volume of *Filmer* and all *Sacheverell's* fermons at a meal; after which fhe was obferved to grunt more and louder, and to lie longer in the fun, and deeper in the mire, than it had before been her cuftom to do. She was delivered of our Pig on the morning of the *tenth of June*. He was ftrong and bony, but of an inelegant form, and betrayed a very uncommon roughnefs in his squeak; and it was foon after remarked by the neighbours, that his trotings after his mother were made in⁴ zig-zags, and not in ftraight lines as is ufual with other pigs. After his mother, however, he refolutely trotted, and one morning, as ill fortune would have it, into a garden which had belonged to the great *Milton*, and was now in the poffeffion of one of his daughters. Here he fed voracioufly upon *white rofes*, whilft his lady mother was bufily employed in rooting up all the *red ones*. He was in this place feized by the owner, and fo feverely whipped, that he thought no other than that fhe was whipping him to death in preparation for a luxurious meal. Of this whipping he retained through life the higheft repentment, and bore ever after the moft inveterate hatred of the whole *Miltonic line*. On the fifth of November following he was taken up, without any warrant, by the rabble, for the ufes of a *Whig feaft*, and was very near being *roafted* at the fame fire with the *Pope*, the *Devil*, and the *Pretender*; but this being difcovered to be fomething *meafly*, he was turned loofe to be cured, as they deridingly faid, by the⁵ *royal touch*. Of this event he retained the

¹ “He was not at all offended, when, comparing all our acquaintance to fome animal or other, we pitched upon the elephant for his refemblance, adding, that the probofcis of that creature was like his mind moft exactly, ftrong to buffet even the tyger, and pliable to pick up even the pin.” – Piozzi, p. 205. – N.B. For elephant our author probably read *pig*.

² We have fought for information concerning this fact, that the gentleman defignated in the text was born in *Moorfields*, or that his father was a bookfeller there, which, however, we confefs to have heard, but when or where we can by no means remember.

³ Cloath fpice, line trunks, or fluttering in a row, Befringe the rails of *Bedlam* or *Soho*. POPE'S IM. OF HORACE, Ep. I. B. 2.

⁴ “When in company where he was not free, or when engaged earneftly in converfation, he never gave way to fuch habits, which proves that they were not involuntary.” I ftill, however, think, that thefe geftures were involuntary; for furely had not that been the cafe, he would have refrained them in the public ftreets. – Boswell's Tour, p. 9.

⁵ The pretence of a miraculous power in the cure of the evil was the moft extraordinary ftrain of that King-craft of which James the Firft fo loudly boafed. No manly man, under the circumftances of the cafe, would have fet up this pretence, or have expected any effect from it but that of public derifion and contempt; but weak and credulous men take, perhaps, the beft meafure of human weaknefs and credulity, and fo deep did this fraud ftrike its roots, that, authenticated as it was by the clergy, and annually certified by the furgeons and phyficians of the royal houfehold, it furvived the civil war, was reftored with Charles the Second, extended beyond the revolution, and was only extinguifhed by the act of fettlement, which, taking the principles of the Britifh government out of the clouds, placed them on the firm bafis of the earth. The pretentions of Alexander were of a bolder and more rational fort, and held to be fo important, that his fucceffors, who had no kindred intereft in the horns of Ammon, yet mingled them in their crowns and tiaras, till at laft the Roman Titans tumbled from their feats one after another thefe fictitious gods. The moft deceitful glimmer of divine claim feems to have had more influence on the mind of the perfon who feems to have been defignated in the text, than the

strongest sensibility, and considered ever after his fellow sufferers, the *Pope* and the *Pretender*, with great complacency, if not affection; but as to the other party, though exposed to the same dishonours, there was something in his horns and his tail which he could never be brought to endure. The touch already mentioned, though profanely sneered at by the *Whig rabble*, was soon afterwards in good earnest applied; but so great an obliquity of head had by this time taken place, that it could never be perfectly restored. Upon this memorable occasion there was placed about his neck a ribband of *true blue*, to which hung a silver coin, displaying royal lineaments of the *Stuart line*, making so strong an impression on his young fancy, that for that line he ever after retained the most⁶ passionate regard. Thus decorated, he considered himself, and was considered by others, as a kind of⁷ *Tantony*, or *St. Anthony's Pig*, belonging to the Crown. Not long after this period he was heard one morning as he lay in the sun to grunt forth, portentously the following rhymes:

Gruntledum, gruntledum, gruntledum, squeak,
I hope very soon to be able to speak;
Through my griftly proboscis, I find, that I can
Already cry Ay like a Parliament man:
Like a maid I squeak, like a lover can whine,
And snort like an Alderman laden with wine.
Gruntledum, gruntledum, gruntledum, squeak,
I hope very soon to be able to speak.

This being publicly known, the neighbours now put on him a human coat, in which condition he appeared as if the *Hog in armour* had descended from his sign-post to mingle in society, and converse with man. Nor did they stop here, but ventured also to recommend him for a pension to the great *ministerial hog*, though, for the present, however, without effect; for though it was evident enough that our learned Pig could say Ay, yet it did not follow that he would be always disposed to do so. He was therefore turned loose into the foil of this great town to subsist as he could, where, *idling* and *rambling*, he picked up sometimes flowers, and sometimes thistles, a great number of Greek and Hebrew roots, with an immense quantity of verbiage of every sort⁸. It is for his honour that he roused in this rich compost for years without giving any offence, except that, through resentment to the Miltonic line, he associated rather too long with a very obscene animal of the pig kind, called a⁹

most solid principles of political right.

⁶ "I mentioned Lord Hailes as a man of anecdote – He was not pleased with him for publishing only such memorials as were unfavourable for the *Stuart* family." – Boswell's Tour, p. 312.

⁷ Tantony pigs were pigs who belonged formerly to the Convent of St. Anthony in the city. Collars were placed about their necks, inscribed *St. Anthony*. They fed all over the town, and out of respect to the fathers of that convent, it was usual for the passengers to give them biscuits, and other things carried for that purpose in their pockets. The pigs of course followed the passengers in this expectation; and hence came the expression of one person's following another like a Tantony pig.

⁸ The person here designed is allowed by the courtesy of the times to possess a nervous and elegant style; but so unhappy is the writer of this note, that he can by no means concur in the general praise. He has a notion of Saxon simplicity, from which all departure, not enforced by necessity, and regulated by taste, assimilating, as much as may be, foreign words to the genius of the Saxon tongue, is to him intolerable. But the writer here spoken of was wholly deficient in taste, and appears to refer his English to some foreign standard chanting forth polysyllables, and tiring the ear with dull returns of the same cadences, for ever advancing like a post horse, two up and two down, and incapable of changing his pace, without throwing both himself and his rider in the dirt. But hack writers, like hack horses, find it for their ease to practise an uniform rate.

⁹ *There is*, says a remarker on the life of Milton, *a high degree of prepollent probability that the letter in the Gentleman's Magazine for the month of August 1747, page 363 and 364, signed William Lauder, came from the amicable hand of the writer of that life*. I do not, however, believe that the writer of Milton's life was in the secret of Lauder's forgeries, the fact itself being of so extraordinary a nature, that it is not probable that any two persons, separately capable of committing it, should so fortuitously meet together; yet such was his malevolence towards Milton, that we must admit it to have greatly clouded his understanding. He undoubtedly wrote the preface and the postscript to Lauder's publication: in allusion to which, Doctor Douglas says, *that 'tis hoped, nay 'tis expected, that the the elegant and nervous writer, whose judicious sentiments and inimitable style point out author of Lauder's preface and postscript, will no longer allow one to plume himself with his feathers, who appears so little to have deserved his assistance*. Lauder confesses his guilt

Lauder; and except, that he was taken sometimes with strange freaks, and fancied once that he saw something in the¹⁰ shape of a found of a knocking; and excepting also his too sonorous gruntulations, and that long concatenation of foamy bubbles which usually frothed from his mouth¹¹. In the midst of these researches he had one morning the good fortune to throw up this sentiment in rhyme:

Say, what is a Tory? A Tory is he
Who thinks kicking should pass through every degree;
And that all political motion should go
From the toe to the bum, from the bum to the toe.
Then what is a¹² Whig? A dog full of knavery,
A rascal, a scoundrel impatient of slavery,
A malignant, a thief; – then tell me if Whig
Be any more better than gruntedum pig?

There needed no more; a pension was immediately hung about his neck, and the letters L. L. D. soon afterwards impressed on his rump¹³. And now who but our Pig? lying in the sun, cheek by jowl, by the great ministerial Hog, routing in the political foil, and throwing up daily the most delicious pig-nuts with his snout; nor did these discoveries rest wholly in himself; for the great Hog would sometimes let fall, from behind, certain rich, but often crude and ill-digested, materials, which were taken up in the Westphalian mode by our Pig, and delivered again better concocted to the many-headed beast:

in a letter to Doctor Douglas, and takes all the obloquy on himself; but in a subsequent letter he declares, that the penitential one was written for him by that very gentleman, who has since written the life of Milton, and makes some complaints of a breach of friendship, *in which he had placed the most implicit and unlimited confidence*; but as he never charged, that I know of, the writer of Milton's life with any participation in the forgery, we impute to him nothing but a strange malignity which darkened his understanding. It must be owned, however, that he cut off the wreck of *Lauder* with great management, as well as competent success. I remember that he boasts in his life of Milton of his having written a prologue to the *Comus* of Milton, for the benefit of one of his grand daughters. This, I suppose, he would pass for his benevolence; but he must excuse me; I am not so much the dupe of charity as to believe, that he who so brutally calumniates Milton, his father, mother, uncles, wives, and children, *and all unfortunate souls that trace him in his line*, would be moved by any charitable disposition towards any descendant of Milton's, as being such. The fact, I believe, is, that, finding Milton reduced by the labours of his friend *Lauder* to a level with his wives, he practised, in concurrence with Mr. *Lauder*, one further act of malice, and endeavoured to fix an obligation on Milton in the person of his granddaughter, conferred by his most inveterate foes as the effect of fatiated vengeance, converted into mingled pity and contempt. If there is any harshness in this note, let it be remembered, that it speaks of a man who, in the instance mentioned, let loose the most outrageous malignity against one, who, whatever political errors he might have imbibed in common with a great majority of the nation, was, however, as a private man, of so exemplary a virtue, as to do the highest honour to literary pursuit, and whose genius, as a poet, conferred celebrity on the nation itself, and in whose protection therefore we ought to have taken a greater share.

¹⁰ The history of this knocking is curious; it forms such a drama of comedy, tragedy, and farce, from its first commencement in Cock Lane, passing through the solemn vaults of Clerkenwell, and then to Westminster Hall, as, I believe, never was exhibited in any other country; a drama wherein childifness and age, gravity, dignities, folly, fraud, superstition, and credulity, were all largely and confusedly thrown in to thicken the plot. That the person here designated should carry out of this scene any respectability of character, is a proof that either he must have possessed great intrinsic worth, who could bear such large deductions, or that public opinion has ceased to be the test of merit, if any base metal can in this manner pass current for gold.

¹¹ Our biographer should have told us also, that once he joined the train of fancy, and passing the limits of fact, entered by the Shakespearean gate into fairy land. But in an evil hour, "No favouring Sybil marked the devious way." Never was man or pig so aftounded! and no wonder. He had stumbled unaccountably on the creations of sensibility, and found no corresponding emotions within; yet, unconscious of defect, he pretended a knowledge of the country, and even offered himself as an unerring guide; but not long; for, tired with the maze, he gave way, at length, to new adventurers, and fled as another Gulliver out of Lilliput, where he had only encumbered the land.

¹² "No man, however, was more jealously attached to his party; he not only loved a man the better, if he hated a *Whig*. Dear Bathurst, said he to me one day, was a man to my very heart's content; he hated a fool, and he hated a rogue, and he hated a *Whig*; he was a very good hater." – Piozzi's *Memoirs*, p. 83. "*Pulteney* was as paltry a fellow as could be. He was a *Whig*, who pretended to be honest; and you know it is ridiculous for a *Whig* to pretend to be honest." Boswell's *Journal*, p. 424. Talking of Granger – "The dog is a *Whig*: I do not like much to see a *Whig* in any dress; but I hate to see a *Whig* in a parson's gown." —*Ibid.* p. 312.

¹³ Our author dashes away from thing to thing with very little method or order. He might, however, have touched on the occupation of a schoolmaster, so honourable for a *pig*; in proof of which, we could have furnished him with the following document: "At Edial, near Litchfield, in Staffordshire, young gentlemen are boarded and taught the Latin and Greek languages by Samuel Johnson." ADVERTISEMENT IN THE GENT. MAG. 1736, p. 428.

and hence we were taught, that Taxation was no Tyranny, and that a good American war was a very commodious and salutary thing. Great applause ensued, but not unattended with envy, there being at the time many snarlers who have said, and now say, that it were better if our Pig had been, before this period, well soured in the pickling tub, and that even the great ministerial Hog himself had been hung up for bacon. I decide nothing on these brawls; yet, having respect to a certain supposed dignity in our Pig, it may, perhaps, excite some wonder, that he, whose politics were of no older a date than his pension, and who had hitherto never routed out of the moral track, should all at once lend himself out in this manner, and make his conscience responsible for measures, of the principles or effects of which he must have been so incompetent a judge. But I answer in few words, that, like all other politicians, he had his propensities; that it was, perhaps, the nature of the animal, and that mingling his humours and his reason together, there might have been a competent sincerity in the case. But what shall we say to the indecency of his turning up the graves of *Pope*

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