

**LETTERS FROM JOSEPH
RITSON, ESQ., TO
MR. GEORGE PATON**

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Letters from Joseph Ritson, Esq., to Mr. George Paton by John Pinkerton & Joseph Ritson

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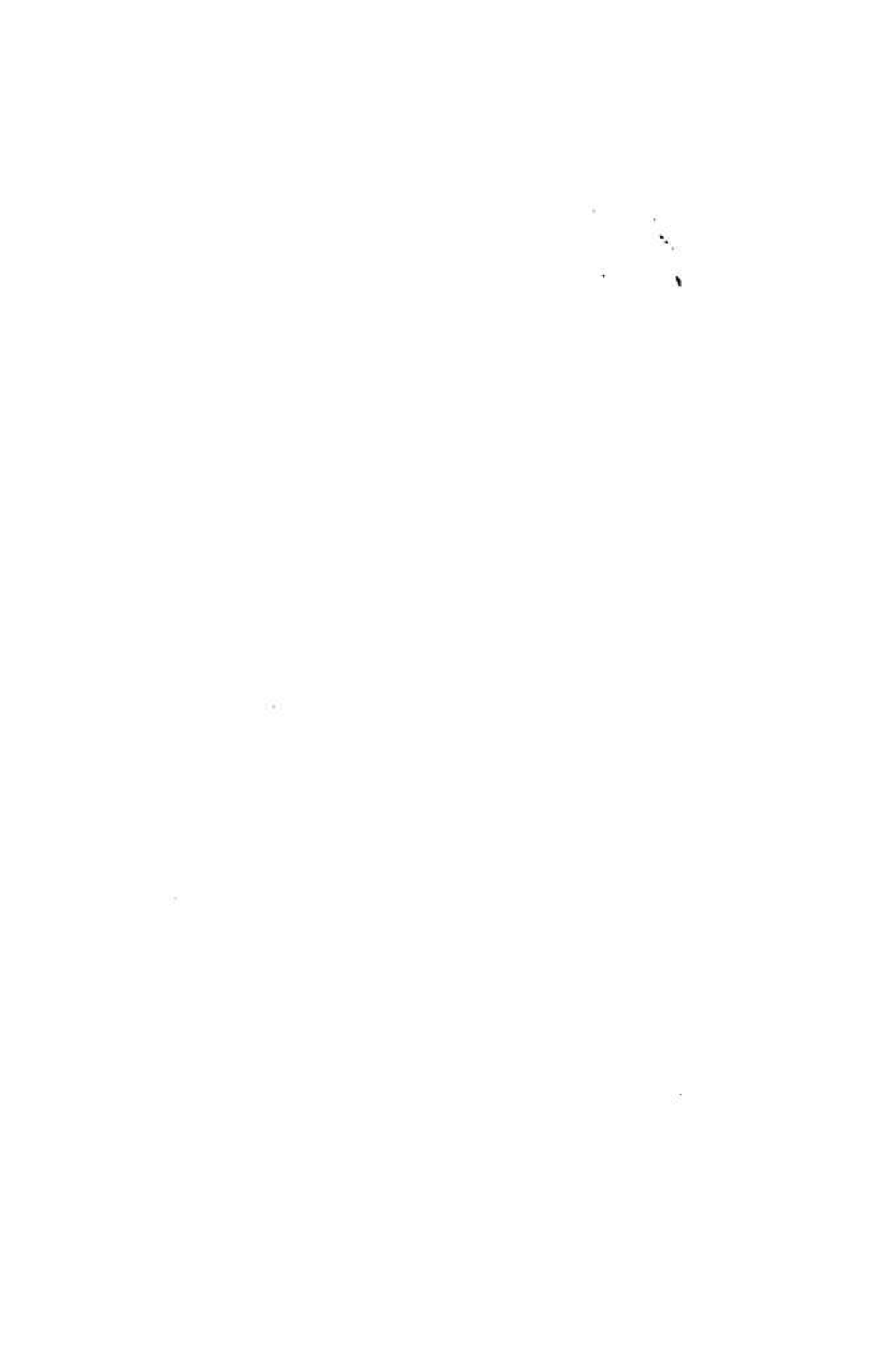
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JOHN PINKERTON & JOSEPH RITSON

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LETTERS

FROM

JOSEPH RITSON, ESQ.

TO

MR. GEORGE PATON.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

A CRITIQUE BY JOHN PINKERTON, ESQ.

UPON RITSON'S SCOTISH SONGS.

^c
EDINBURGH:

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M.DCCC.XXIX.

PREFATORY NOTICE.

THE following Letters, from the pen of Ritson, and addressed to the late Mr George Paton, of the Custom-House, Edinburgh, are now for the first time printed:—and it is presumed no apology is necessary for laying before the public these interesting remains, of an individual who was so much, and so justly celebrated for his literary attainments.

Mr Paton had, for a long series of years, devoted himself to the study of Scottish antiquities. From his father, who was a bookseller in Edinburgh, he acquired a large collection of books, to which the unremitting industry of a long life enabled him to make large and important additions. Although his means were limited, (his income as a clerk in the Custom-House for many years not exceeding the small pittance of £60,) he was enabled, by frugality, and perhaps by some small sum left him by his father, not only to subsist in a reputable manner, but gradually to increase his valuable library.

He died upon the 6th of March 1807, at an advanced age, and greatly regretted by those who had the pleasure of being acquainted with him. In the Gentleman's Magazine for October the same year, the following notice of his demise occurs:—

“ At Edinburgh, in his 87th year, Mr George Paton; who, notwithstanding he held no higher rank than the place of a clerk in the Custom-House, had a mind and a library enriched with a fund of antiquarian knowledge of North Britain, historical and topographical, confessed by the obligations which all had to his varied stores, and by the peculiar pains which certain of his neighbours took to conceal his death and the destination of his books. Among the many who experienced his friendly aid, none has more gratefully expressed it than the editor of the new edition of the *British Topography*, and of Camden's *Britannia*; in the Preface to the first of which, he speaks of him, as “ having spared no trouble or expense to enlarge the article of Scottish topography; which, in the course of ten years from the first edition, by the indefatigable attention of his very ingenious and communicative friend, Mr George Paton, of the Custom-House, Edinburgh, he was enabled to nearly double.” There is a small portrait of him, a private plate, etched in 1785; when he was “ et. 64, nat. 1721.” Mr Paton's brother

was minister at Ecclesfechan, where he died lately, possessed also of a valuable library."

The correspondence between Paton and Gough, is preserved in the Advocates' Library, and it affords the most decisive proof of the value of the information given. Of its importance, Gough was fully aware; and the kindly and affectionate tone of his letters, shews, how grateful he felt for the assistance afforded. There is a manly and affectionate sincerity about them much to his credit, and they present a remarkable contrast to the letters from Bishop Percy, who was under equally great obligations to Paton, but who, courtier like, proffered much more than he ever intended to perform; and probably imagined, that the unmeaning compliments he paid him were a sufficient return for the favours conferred.

Paton's communications were not, however, relished by one of the individuals, whose productions were by his means brought in a somewhat unfavourable point of view before the public, in that valuable work, for assisting him in which, Gough had paid him such deserved compliments; as Captain Armstrong, who had engraved some maps of the more southern counties of Scotland, and whose productions had been to a certain extent censured, thought proper to favour the respectable old gentleman with the following most extraordinary epistle:—

Norwich, May 19. 1782.

SIR,

It was not till very lately that Mr Gough's two volumes of British Topography fell into my hands. As he acknowledges himself beholden to you for the Scottish anecdotes, I cannot suppress a strong inclination to congratulate the public on the joint labours of two gentlemen, remarkable for their depth of understanding and impartial criticisms, which I shall most certainly do (in gratitude for your very liberal account of my publications) before I am a twelvemonth older: but, as I am now writing in confidence, I still will be more friendly.

The whole work is a stupid, ill-digested, ignorant, and illiberal jumble of scraps and opinions, too contemptible for serious perusal.

It certainly was not the original intention of the compiler of this *Catalogue* of twopenny halfpenny pamphlets and prints to become a *Reviewer*! By whose advice he has presumed to swell the books with his and your characters of publications, I know not; but he owes great obligations to the Monitor for rendering the work a base, libellous, rascally performance, evidently calculated to injure individuals, and impose on the public a surreptitious detail of things, in a manner partly uninteresting, and partly flagitious.

I will not condescend, *at present*, to enter into a refutation of such of the articles as come within my own knowledge, but will rest my opinion of the *whole* by those. I cannot, however, pass over one item, *the Map of Peebleshire*, to which you have tacked some observations totally *false*, as may be proved by the opinions of every gentleman in that county.* For this, and many other invidious assertions to be found in the books, you and the affected Mr Gough deserve more than I have an opportunity at this distance of bestowing. I remain to both personally a stranger; and am, Sir, one who holds you both in proper contempt!

MOSTYN JNO. ARMSTRONG. *

Armstrong did not limit his abuse to Paton, but at the same time transmitted the ensuing letter to Gough.

* The offensive passages are as follow: "A Survey, in two sheets, by Armstrong and Son, 1774: a copy from Edgar, the plate lost."—"A Companion to the Map of the County of Peebles, or Tweeddale, published 20th June, 1775, Edin. Bro. by Armstrong. This was certainly composed by some proprietor in this county, although assumed by Armstrong." Vol. ii. p. 706.