

**THE GENTLE
SHEPHERD; A
PASTORAL COMEDY**

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A PASTORAL COMEDY

By ALLAN RAMSAY

EDITED, WITH A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR, AND A
REFERENCE GLOSSARY BY

J. R.



EDINBURGH
JOHN ROSS AND COMPANY
1875

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PREFACE.

THE rare excellence of *The Gentle Shepherd*, and its claim to a place in the foremost rank in pastoral poetry, have been pronounced upon by so many competent judges, whose verdict is confirmed by the public appreciation for a century and a half, that it may now be accepted, beyond question, if not in the words of Burns, as "the noblest pastoral in the world," at least as the first in British Literature. There is one conspicuous exception to the uniformly eulogistic opinions passed upon it by the accredited literary authorities, which, coming from a countryman of the author's, may be supposed to have some weight. It is unnecessary to assume any other motive for Mr Pinkerton's censure* than that of regard for the conscientious discharge of his function of professed patriotic critic; yet apart from a purely personal attack on Ramsay, as a man and a poet, which can only be accounted for by a crotchety sensitiveness, his strictures are wholly directed against his language, and are equally applicable to all who have used it since. In his zeal for the dead language of his country he seems to have forgotten that it too was once spoken by the mob; and that a language that has ceased to be the medium of the thoughts and feelings of ordinary men and women, however suited for the practice of antiquarian anatomy, is not fit for moulding living thoughts and feeling into the forms of

* *Ancient Scottish Poems*, 1786.

undying verse. It is no extenuation of his error, though it diminishes our surprise at his confidence, that he wrote in 1786, when the genius of Burns had hardly dawned upon the world, to show what the language of Ramsay was capable of.

The Gentle Shepherd being a living classic, still largely read and enjoyed, it appeared to the present Editor a not unworthy task to undertake the production of an edition regarding which he can honestly say that he has used every effort to make it worthy of the high estimation in which he holds it. Its present form has been attained through a considerable process of development; its germ being the eclogue "Patie and Roger," which first appeared in 1718, and now forms Scene I. Then followed, in 1721, the duet, "Patie and Peggy," now Song XI.; which was succeeded in 1723 by "Jenny and Meggy," now Scene II., and headed "Peggy and Jcuny." Although written at considerable intervals, a unity of design runs through the two larger fragments, as if a dim outline of the whole were conceived at the beginning; for the characters of the second part are projected in the first, and three of those of after scenes appear in the background of the second: making altogether seven of the twelve *dramatis personæ* of the play. The two chief pieces of scenery, too, are described, and when the whole comes to be put together no alteration is necessary to make them fit in the most natural way into the additional framework.

In June 1725 appeared the first complete edition, a small 12mo. volume, now exceedingly scarce, not badly printed, but containing a great many typographical, orthographical, and other errors. It contains only

four of the songs in the present edition, viz :—Nos. IX., XI., XVI., and XXII., has only the prose dedication to the Countess of Eglington, and wants the glossary. A quotation from Spenser on the title-page points distinctly to the origin of the title "The Gentle Shepherd." Its text has been taken as the standard for what is considered the best edition of Ramsay's Works—that of 1800, edited by George Chalmers, and several others.

The next edition, so far as a considerable revision of the text constitutes such, is the quarto of 1728; but simultancously, or it may be earlier, there must have been issued a common edition with the additional songs. The success of "The Beggars' Opera," which appeared in 1727, is said to have induced Ramsay to add the eighteen new songs which now form part of 'The Gentle Shepherd; but Gay's comedy cannot have suggested the idea of having it put upon the stage, for the first edition bears unmistakable evidence of such an intention. It is not known, however, to have been represented before 1729; and the success of the "Beggars' Opera" doubtless stimulated and facilitated the accomplishment of the author's wish to see it acted.

The quarto edition is not a separate publication, but part of the second volume of his complete works. The text differs in several places from that of the 1st edition, and, in our opinion, everywhere for the better. The volume is also more correctly printed, and has the glossary of the first volume enlarged. It contains a dedication to his patrons, the subscribers to the first volume, in which, referring to his poems, he says: "I have examined them over and over with care, and have struck out everything that I thought a blemish; since nothing

is so capable to ruffle my tranquillity as your finding any production of my muse imperfect or deformed." It is the text of this edition that has been adopted by the well known Foulises of Glasgow in the 10th edition of *The Gentle Shepherd*, published in 1750, eight years before Ramsay's death; and again in the better known 4to of 1788, with David Allan's famous illustrations. In the Advocates' Library there is a copy of the same edition dedicated in Ramsay's autograph to the "Countess of Eglintoun." Being part of the complete volume, it has no separate title-page, and this is supplied in the same hand as the dedication, thus, "*The Gentle Shepherd, a Pastoral Comedy by Allan Ramsay, with an Italian Translation.*" It wants the prose dedication, but has Hamilton's poetical one, scored across however, evidently by the same hand. The Italian translation is wanting in the volume,* and we have not been able to obtain any account of it; being unknown to Dr David Laing, we conclude that it never was published. Along the margin of the first page of the text, in Ramsay's writing, is the following: "*Note—If this Pastoral should be reprinted with the Italian Translation it would be proper to introduce this scene, as the translator has done, by a short song—that is by the first stanza of 'My Peggy is a young thing,'—in the common editions.*" If this copy be that presented to the Countess of Eglinton, the note must have been written shortly after publication; but that it is such, however, may be doubted from this consideration.

* It is bound in red morocco, of recent workmanship, and has Lord Murray's arms stamped in gold on the side.

The last page, containing the closing song and four lines of the text, is pasted down to the fly-leaf, on which, when looked through, is seen to be written a title exactly similar to that on the fly-leaf at the beginning. This circumstance, with the fact that the book is defaced by the note and other alterations, and wants the Italian translation, make it possible that it is not the copy presented to Lady Eglinton, though meant to be. The author seemingly mistaking the end for the beginning, and having written the title, on turning the leaf to write the dedication discovered his mistake, and retained it as a spoiled copy for making corrections. Nor is the probability of this conjecture lessened because the title and dedication in the right place must have been written, and the misplaced title pasted down, after. One thing we gather from the latter circumstance is, that the author did not then wish that the last song should form part of a future edition; for of the four last lines of the text, printed on the same page, and pasted to the fly-leaf, two are reproduced in MS. with the folio, on the back of it, followed by "Finis." As a new edition was issued in 1729, in 8vo., the note must have been written before then; but that any of the alterations of the copy in question were adopted in it is improbable, for we have seen no after edition in which they appear—a fact, of course, against the theory of its having been retained as conjectured. The note shows conclusively that the additional songs formed part of a common edition, in circulation previous to the issue of the 1729 8vo. edition; and a more exact determination of the time when they were first introduced is of less consequence, as there