

Classic Poetry Series

Allan Ramsay

- 4 poems -

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Allan Ramsay (15 October 1686 – 7 January 1758)

Allan Ramsay was born at Leadhills, Lanarkshire to John Ramsay, superintendent of Lord Hopetoun's lead-mines and his wife, Alice Bower, a native of Derbyshire. He was educated at the parish school of Crawford, and in 1701 was apprenticed to a wig-maker in Edinburgh. He married Christian Ross in 1712; a few years after he had established himself as a wig-maker (not as a barber, as has been often said) in the High Street, and soon found himself in comfortable circumstances. They had six children. His eldest child was Allan Ramsay, the portrait painter.

Ramsay's first efforts in verse-making were inspired by the meetings of the Easy Club (founded in 1712), of which he was an original member; and in 1715 he became the Club Laureate. In the society of the members he assumed the name of "Isaac Bickerstaff," and later of "Gawin Douglas," the latter partly in memory of his maternal grandfather Douglas of Muthill (Perthshire), and partly to give point to his boast that he was a "poet sprung from a Douglas loin." The choice of the two names has some significance, when we consider his later literary life as the associate of the Queen Anne poets and as a collector of old Lowland Scots poetry.

By 1718 he had made some reputation as a writer of occasional verse, which he published in broadsheets, and then (or a year earlier) he turned bookseller in the premises where he had hitherto plied his craft of wig-making. In 1716 he had published a rough transcript of Christ's Kirk on the Green from the Bannatyne manuscript, with some additions of his own. In 1718 he republished the piece with more supplementary verses. In the following year he printed a collection of Scots Songs. The success of these ventures prompted him to collect his poems in 1722. The volume was issued by subscription, and brought in the sum of four hundred guineas. Four years later he removed to another shop, in the neighbouring Luckenbooths, where he opened a circulating library (the first in Scotland) and extended his business as a bookseller.

Between the publication of the collected edition of his poems and his settling down in the Luckenbooths, he had published a few shorter poems and had issued the first instalments of *The Tea-Table Miscellany* and *The Ever Green* (both 1724-1727). *The Tea-Table Miscellany* is "A Collection of Choice Songs Scots and English," containing some of Ramsay's own, some by his friends, several well-known ballads and songs, and some Caroline verse. Its title was suggested by the programme of *The Spectator*: and the compiler claimed the place for his songs "e'en while the tea's fill'd reeking round," which Addison sought for his speculations at the hour set apart "for tea and bread and butter."

In *The Ever Green*, being a Collection of Scots Poems wrote by the Ingenious before 1600, Ramsay had another purpose, to reawaken an interest in the older national literature. Nearly all the pieces were taken from the Bannatyne manuscript, though they are by no means verbatim copies. They included his version of Christ's Kirk and a remarkable pastiche by the editor entitled the Vision. While engaged on these two series, he produced, in 1725, his dramatic pastoral *The Gentle Shepherd*. In the volume of poems published in 1722 Ramsay had shown his bent to this genre, especially in "Patie and Roger," which supplies two of the dramatis personae to his greater work. The success of the drama was remarkable. It passed through several editions, and was performed at the theatre in Edinburgh; its title is still known in every corner of Scotland, even if it be no longer read. In 1726 he published anonymously *Poems in English and Latin, on the Archers and Royal Company of Archers*, by several Hands for the Royal Company of Archers. He wrote the words to the Archer's March,

Sound, sound the music, sound it,
Let hills and dales rebound it,
Let hills and dales rebound it
In praise of Archery.
Used as a Game it pleases,
The mind to joy it raises,
And throws off all diseases
Of lazy luxury.

Now, now our care beguiling,
When all the year looks smiling,
When all the year looks smiling
With healthful harmony.

The sun in glory glowing,
With morning dew bestowing
Sweet fragrance, life, and growing
To flowers and every tree."

Tis now the archers royal,
An hearty band and loyal,
An hearty band and loyal,
That in just thought agree,
Appear in ancient bravery,
Despising all base knavery,
Which tends to bring in slavery,
Souls worthy to live free.

Sound, sound the music, sound it,
Fill up the glass and round wi't,
Fill up the glass and round wi't,

Health and Prosperity

To our great chief and officers,
To our president and counsellors,
To all who like their brave forbears

Delight in Archery.

Ramsay wrote little afterwards, though he published a few shorter poems, and new editions of his earlier work. A complete edition of his *Poems* appeared in London in 1731 and in Dublin in 1733. With a touch of vanity he expressed the fear lest "the coolness of fancy that attends advanced years should make me risk the reputation I had acquired." He was already on terms of intimacy with the leading men of letters in Scotland and England. He corresponded with William Hamilton of Bangour, William Somerville, John Gay and Alexander Pope. Gay visited him in Edinburgh, and Pope praised his pastoral—compliments which were undoubtedly responsible for some of Ramsay's unhappy poetic ventures beyond his Scots vernacular. The poet had for many years been a warm supporter of the stage. Some of his

prologues and epilogues were written for the London theatres. In 1736 he set about the erection of a new theatre, "at vast expense," in Carrubber's Close, Edinburgh; but the opposition was too strong, and the new house was closed in 1737. In 1755 he retired from his shop to the house on the slope of the Castle Rock, still known as Ramsay Lodge. This house was called by his friends "the goose-pie," because of its octagonal shape. He is buried at Greyfriars Kirkyard, Edinburgh.

Work

Ramsay's importance in literary history is twofold. As a pastoral writer ("in some respects the best in the world," according to James Henry Leigh Hunt) he contributed, at an early stage, to the naturalistic reaction of the 18th century. His *Gentle Shepherd*, by its directness of impression and its appreciation of country life, anticipates the attitude of the school which broke with neo-classical tradition. It has the "mixed" faults which make the greater poem of his Scots successor, Thomson, a "transitional" document, but these give it an historical, if not an individual, interest. His chief place is, however, as an editor. He is the connecting-link between the greater "Makars" of the 15th and 16th centuries, and [Robert Fergusson](http://poemhunter.com/robert-fergusson/) and [Robert Burns](http://poemhunter.com/robert-burns/). He revived the interest in vernacular literature, and directly inspired the genius of his greater successors. The preface to his *Ever Green* is a protest against "imported trimming" and "foreign embroidery in our writings," and a plea for a return to simple Scottish tradition. He had no scholarly interest in the past, and he never hesitated to transform the texts when he could give contemporary "point" to a poem; but his instinct was good, and he did much to stimulate an ignorant public to fresh enjoyment. In this respect, too, he anticipates the reaction in England which followed securely on the publication of Percy's *Reliques*.

Works:

The Tea-table Miscellany(1724)
The Ever Green
The Poems of Allan Ramsay
The Gentle Shepherd (1725)
Kirk

Give Me a Lass with a Lump of Land

1 Gi'e me a lass with a lump of land,
2 And we for life shall gang thegither;
3 Tho' daft or wise I'll never demand,
4 Or black or fair it maks na whether.
5 I'm aff with wit, and beauty will fade,
6 And blood alane is no worth a shilling;
7 But she that's rich her market's made,
8 For ilka charm about her is killing.

9 Gi'e me a lass with a lump of land,
10 And in my bosom I'll hug my treasure;
11 Gin I had anes her gear in my hand,
12 Should love turn dowf, it will find pleasure.
13 Laugh on wha likes, but there's my hand,
14 I hate with poortith, tho' bonny, to meddle;
15 Unless they bring cash or a lump of land,
16 They'se never get me to dance to their fiddle.

17 There's meikle good love in bands and bags,
18 And siller and gowd's a sweet complexion;
19 But beauty, and wit, and virtue in rags,
20 Have tint the art of gaining affection.
21 Love tips his arrows with woods and parks,
22 And castles, and riggs, and moors, and meadows;
23 And naithing can catch our modern sparks,
24 But well-tocher'd lasses or jointur'd widows.

Allan Ramsay

Katy's Answer

1 My mither's ay glowran o'er me,
2 Tho she did the same before me,
3 I canna get leave
4 To look to my loove,
5 Or else she'll be like to devour me.

6 Right fain wad I take ye'r offer,
7 Sweet Sir, but I'll tine my tocher,
8 Then, Sandy, ye'll fret,
9 And wyt ye'r poor Kate,
10 When e'er ye keek in your toom coffer.

11 For tho my father has plenty
12 Of siller and plenishing dainty,
13 Yet he's unco sweer
14 To twin wi' his gear,
15 And sae we had need to be tenty.

16 Tutor my parents wi' caution,
17 Be wylie in ilka motion,
18 Brag well o' ye'r land,
19 And there's my leal hand,
20 Win them, I'll be at your devotion.

Allan Ramsay

My Peggy Is a Young Thing

My Peggy is a young thing,
Just enter'd in her teens,
Fair as the day, and sweet as May
Fair as the day, and always gay.
My Peggy is a young thing,
And I'm not very auld,
Yet well I like to meet her at
The Wawking of the Fauld.

My Peggy speaks sæ sweetly,
When'er we meet alane,
I wish næ mair to lay my care,
I wish næ mair of a' that's rare.
My Peggy speaks sæ sweetly,
To a' the lave I'm cauld;
But she gars a' my spirits glow
At Wawking of the Fauld.

My Peggy smiles sæ kindly,
Whene'er I whisper Love,
That I look down on a' the Town,
That I look down upon a Crown.
My Peggy smiles sæ kindly,
It makes my blythe and bauld,
And naithing gi'es me sic delight,
As Wawking of the Fauld.

My Peggy sings sæ softly,
When on my pipe I play;
By a' the rest it is confest,
By a' the rest, that she sings best.
My Peggy sings sæ softly,
And in her songs are tald,
With innocence the wale of Sense,
At Wawking of the Fauld.

Allan Ramsay

The Young Laird and Edinburgh Katy

1 Now wat ye wha I met yestreen
2 Coming down the street, my Jo,
3 My mistress in her tartan screen,
4 Fow bonny, braw and sweet, my Jo.
5 "My dear," quoth I, "thanks to the night,
6 That never wish'd a lover ill,
7 Since ye're out of your mither's sight,
8 Let's take a wauk up to the hill.

9 "O Katy wiltu gang wi' me,
10 And leave the dinsome town a while,
11 The blossom's sprouting frae the tree,
12 And a' the summer's gawn to smile;
13 The mavis, nightingale and lark,
14 The bleeting lambs and whistling hynd,
15 In ilka dale, green, shaw and park,
16 Will nourish health, and glad ye'r mind.

17 "Soon as the clear goodman of day
18 Bends his morning draught of dew,
19 We'll gae to some burnside and play,
20 And gather flowers to busk ye'r brow.
21 We'll pou the dazies on the green,
22 The lucken gowans frae the bog;
23 Between hands now and then we'll lean,
24 And sport upo' the velvet fog.

25 "There's up into a pleasant glen,
26 A wee piece frae my father's tower,
27 A canny, saft and flow'ry den,
28 Which circling birks has form'd a bower:
29 When e'er the sun grows high and warm,
30 We'll to the cauller shade remove,
31 There will I lock thee in mine arm,
32 And love and kiss, and kiss and love."

Allan Ramsay