

*Observations on the Vision ;*

*A Poem first Published in the Miscellany, or Collection of Scottish  
Poems called the Evergreen,—by Allan Ramsay, anno 1724.*

*By William Tytler of Woodhouselee, Esq;*

IN reading an anonymous work of merit, with which one is pleased, that pleasure carries with it a small alloy, in the disappointed curiosity and desire we have to know the author, and to give him the tribute of praise due to his merit.

The fine fragment of the heroic ballad of *Hardiknute* has been the subject of curiosity, and much conjecture, amongst the literati, both with respect to its author and the aera of its composition. As to the first we are still in the dark; as to the last, the public seems now to pronounce it a modern performance, coeval with the beginning of the present century, when it first appeared.

The public seems also to have decided the question, and to pay its just tribute of praise, to the genuine author of the poems of *Chatterton*, a neglected youth of genius, whose hard fate it was to starve and despair under the frown of fastidious tastelessness!

The *Vision*, that fine poem published in Allan Ramsay's *Evergreen*, has of late been the subject of much speculation. The poems in the *Evergreen* were, by the editor, selected from the old MS. collection of George Banantyne in the Advocates Library. The *Vision*, however, and another poem, entitled the *Eagle and Robin Red Breast*, both bearing at the end the signature of A. R. SCOT. are not to be found in Banantyne's MS. nor in any other collection, prior to Allan Ramsay's producing them in his *Evergreen*, anno 1724.

Lord Hailes and Dr Beattie conjecture, justly, the *Vision* to have been the composition of some friend to the cause of the house of Stuart, and written about the aera of the rebellion 1715. This was truly the case. I flatter myself that I can now produce the author, who was no other than the first editor of the *Vision*, under the signature of A. R. SCOT. *i. e.* Allan Ramsay Scotus. As the poem is to be found in no other collection prior to the *Evergreen*, this, of itself, affords a presumption, which comes very near to certainty, in pointing out the author: Other circumstances enforce this presumptive proof, and complete the evidence. Allan Ramsay's political principles may, in a great measure, be gathered from his writings. In his family, and amongst his intimate friends, he was known to be warmly attached to the Stuart family. As he was a man of pleasant humour, and patronised by most of the wits and men of genius of his time, many of whom were eminent in the service of government \*, he was cautious.

\* Amongst these, particularly, may be mentioned the late Lord President Forbes, Sir John Clerk of Pennycuik, one of the Barons of Exchequer, Josiah Burchet, Esq; Secretary of the Admiralty, &c.

tious of giving offence by his political principles; and, although it is now known that he was the author of several poems in favour of the ancient race of our Scottish monarchs, yet these were published without a name, and omitted by him in the printed collection of his works.

On perusing lately the *Vision*, and considering the signature at the end, I flattered myself that I had made the discovery of its real author. This led me to a further research: The result was, that, upon particular inquiry, I found, that both that poem, and the *Eagle and Robin Red Breast*, were known by the friends of Ramsay's family to be of his composition, though only tacitly owned for the above reason. Of this fact I had a positive acknowledgment from Miss Ramsay, eldest daughter of the poet now alive, who informed me that her father was the author of both the pieces above mentioned. 'The Roman letters,' said that lady, 'plainly point out the name and surname of the author, with the addition of his country, which he always was proud to acknowledge.'

As to the last poem, I have heard that it was written on the occasion of some injury done to the author, which he did not choose to mention.

The *Vision* was not the only poem which Allan Ramsay wrote upon the same principles, without giving his name. As he was, in opinion, an enemy to the Union of the two kingdoms, he wrote a burlesque satyrical poem of four canto's, professedly on that subject, under the title of 'A Tale of three Bonnets.' This was published without a name, though well known to be his amongst his most intimate friends.

It will probably be objected, that none of Ramsay's other poems abound with such grandeur of imagery as the Vision. This, in some degree, may be granted; and yet, without any great portion of credulity, the author of the Gentle Shepherd, one of the finest pastoral comedies that any nation has produced, may not be thought unable to write the Vision. The two poems cannot, indeed, be compared together. It would have been as preposterous to have introduced the grand and sublime in the dialogue of shepherds, as to have dressed them in silk, with hats and feathers, and to have made them speak the language of a court.

The subject often elevates the genius of the poet beyond his usual flight. Ramsay's natural genius led him to pastoral poetry: His fort was in picturesque rural description, in which he displays a rich fancy. He may be stiled a Poetical Landscape Painter. The scenery of his Gentle Shepherd may, and actually has, furnished subjects for many a beautiful landscape.

Some of his pastoral songs breathe a Virgilian strain. The Yellow Hair'd Ladie is beautiful and classical. Although no scholar, yet, in his attempt to paraphrase some of the odes of Horace, he has caught the spirit of his master.

The paraphrase of the 1st, 9th, and 31st, are close and poetical. His Address to the Whin-bush Club, and his Rose Tree, are original and elegant.

It must be confessed that our poet is often unequal to himself: He could not resist a ludicrous thought when it occurred; and often stood in need of a temperate hand to guide the rein of his fancy; but, when his subject naturally prompted him, he rises up to it with becoming dignity; as in his Clyde's Welcome to his Native Prince,  
his

his Ode to Sir William Bennet, &c. I shall conclude the argument with a quotation from his Prospect of Plenty; which, as the subject would admit, shows that our poet could soar *non usitata nec tenui penna*.

Now Nereus rising from his watry bed,  
The pearly draps hap down his lyart head,  
Oceanus with pleasure hears him sing,  
Tritons and Nereids form a jovial ring,  
And dancing on the deep attention draw,  
While all the winds in love, but fighting blow.  
The sea-born poet sang, in sweetest strain,  
Britons be blyth,—&c.

Our poet no doubt had one of the most sublime of Horace's Odes, *Pastor cum traheret*, in his eye; but the figure and noble appearance of the sea-born prophet, old Nereus, and the train of nymphs and tritons, is original and sublime.—To return to the Vision: As the poem is not in every body's hands, I shall annex a few of its stanzas.

The subject is pathetically introduced in the 1st stanza, and strongly impresses the mind of the reader with the miserable state of Scotland in the beginning of the 14th century, the aera in which the poem is supposed to be written.

The storm in the 2d stanza is described with all the powers of poetry; nothing but nature itself can surpass the grandeur of the scene described.

The air grew ruck, with boisteous thuds.  
Bauld Bcreas branglit outthrow the cluds:  
Maist lyke a drunken wight;

The

The thunder crackt, and flaughts did rift  
 Frae the black visart of the lift,  
 The forrest schuke wi fright;  
 Nae birds abune their wing extenn,  
 They ducht not bide the blast.  
 Ilk beist bedeen bang'd to thair den  
 Until the storm was past.—

In the 4th and 5th stanzas, the Guardian Genius of Scotland, under the figure of St Andrew, with his silver locks, armed, and leading in his hand the lion, the armorial emblem of Scotland, is finely painted. His appearance and speech are becoming the Genius of a warlike nation. I cannot omit quoting it.

Great daring dartit frae his e'e,  
 A braid sword shogled at his thie,  
 On his left arm a targe;  
 A shynand speir fill'd his right hand,  
 Of stalwart mak, in bane and brand  
 Of just proportien large;  
 A various rainbow colourit plaid  
 Owir his left spaul he threw,  
 Doun his braid back, frae his quhyt heid,  
 The silver wympers grew:  
 Amaisit, I gaisit  
 To se led at command,  
 A strampant and rampant  
 Fers lyon in his hand,  
 Whilk held a thistle in his paw,—&c.

In the 15th stanza, the decisive battle of Bannockburn, which fixed the crown on the brow of King Robert Bruce, and gave liberty to Scotland, is described with poetical fire.

In the 17th and 18th stanzas, the convention of the guardian powers of the several nations, and the splendour of the hall, glow with the richest colours of painting and poetry.

But,

But, amidst the beauties of the piece, it must be acknowledged there are several blemishes. The subject of the poem is grave and solemn. To a people groaning under slavery and oppression, the descent of a guardian spirit, to announce the period of their misery, and their restoration to liberty, by the fortitude and virtue of their native hero, is one of the noblest subjects that can fill the mind of a poet. It is *dignus vindice nodus*. Accordingly, it is rehearsed by our poet with becoming dignity, from the beginning to near the end of the 18th stanza, at

Then roundly and foundly we drank like Roman gods.

Here follows a ludicrous description of a riotous debauch of Jupiter and his drunken compeers, the heathen gods of the ancients! After which is introduced, in the same ludicrous strain, the guardian genii of modern nations at their cups! There may be fancy and humour in the characters, but they are caricatures misplaced, and unsuitable to the solemn dignity of the subject. To introduce buffoonry into such a piece, has the effect of turning the whole into ridicule. Ramsay's natural turn led him to drollery; and when the fit seized him, his vein of humour ran freely, and without controul. Here he stood in need of a friend to have *pinched his ear*. If I mistake not, were the verses from the passage above quoted, to the beginning of stanza 23d, to be lopped off, the poem would lose none of its beauties. A few lesser faults, and vulgarisms of expression, strongly characteristic of the author, might be pointed out; but these are lost in the general splendour of the whole composition.

The poet, in the 23d stanza, resumes his solemn strain, and proceeds with suitable dignity to the end of the poem. The concluding stanza is so beautiful, that by those that have not the poem at hand I shall be forgiven for here inserting it.

E e e

Now

Now Flora in her clene aray  
 New washen with a shower of May  
     Luket full sweit and fair,  
 Quhyle hir cleir husband frae abuve  
 Sched down his rayis of genial luvē,  
     Hir sweits perfumit the air;  
 The windis wer hushit, the welkin cleir'd,  
     The glumand cloudis wer fled,  
 And all as saft and gay appeir'd  
     As an Elyfian sched,  
     Quilk heifit, and bleifid  
     My hert with sic a fire  
     As raisis thir praisis  
     That do to Heven aspire.

Quod ALLAN RAMSAY Scotus.