

Ballad Collections of the Eighteenth Century

Author(s): Grace R. Trenery

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BALLAD COLLECTIONS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

The folk-ballad had to wait long in this country before coming in to its own. Professor Child's collection is the consummation of work begun two centuries earlier. His volumes represent the total achievement of all previous toilers in the same field; their scattered gleanings are absorbed in his patiently garnered harvest, a harvest which involved much sifting of wheat from tares, and the tares were false growths of many kinds. A glance through his pages is enough to show the peculiar difficulties that beset ballad editors. From the beginning they have had no easy task, but the motives and ideals which actuated their work have varied from age to age; hence the differences discernible in their methods.

It is unnecessary here to follow the ballad through the earlier stages of confusion. The course of its struggle for existence and recognition has been traced already more than once¹. Briefly, the steps were these. First came the gradual decay of traditional ballads, when, from the changed conditions of social life, the composition of 'folk poetry' became almost an impossibility. Then followed the rise of a debased kind of balladry, not dependent on oral tradition, but offered to the public in the form of chap-book versions and broadsides. Neither popular nor literary in style, these productions were commonly regarded as one species with the folk-ballads and brought them under the same condemnation. At length, in the opening years of the eighteenth century, may be seen a tardy recognition of the claims of popular poetry, resulting in a few cautious eulogies, some rather disappointing collections, and a handful of imitations.

This was the position when Allan Ramsay took the field, and he did less for the cause of the popular ballad than has generally been supposed. The collections of James Watson (1706, 1709, 1711), of Thomas

¹ See Bibliography, II.

D'Urfey (1719) and of the anonymous editor of *A Collection of Old Ballads* (1723, 1725, 1727), though not of great intrinsic value, had all helped to break ground for succeeding explorers. But Ramsay did not venture far into the untried ballad territory; his collections served mainly to bring the ancient songs of Scotland into notice. In the Bannatyne MS., whence he gathered 'that store which fills his *Ever Green*,' there is not a single folk-ballad, and the few which he saw fit to add are of suspicious authenticity. 'The Battle of Harlaw' is quite unlike the traditional poem on the same subject. Of his version of 'Johnie Armstrang' Ramsay says that it is the 'true old ballad,' and that he has been informed that 'it was ever esteemed the genuine Ballad, the common one, false.' But Motherwell remarks that 'the common ballad alluded to by Ramsay is the one which is in the mouths of the people'.¹ 'The Ballat of the Reid Square,' first published in *The Ever Green*, was altered by Ramsay from the Bannatyne MS., and 'what is altogether unpardonable,' as Scott tells us, 'the MS., which is itself rather inaccurate, has been interpolated to favour his readings'.² The chief contributions to ballad poetry in *The Tea-Table Miscellany* are the first versions printed of 'Johnny Faa' and 'Sweet William's Ghost,' which has a few modern touches, notably in the last two stanzas; a short and very beautiful copy of 'Rare Willie drown'd in Yarrow' from the *Orpheus Caledonius*; and good, uncorrupted versions of 'Bonny Barbara Allan' and 'The Bonny Earl of Murray.'

It is hardly too much to say that the modern imitations published by Ramsay did more than the genuine ballads to awaken interest in the traditional poetry of Scotland. Two of these imitations, 'The Braes of Yarrow' and 'Hardyknute,' are the most pleasing artificial ballads that appeared before the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. This seems inexplicable considering that the writers of the last half of the century had many more genuine models than were available in the first quarter. It may be that Percy's tinkering did more harm than has been estimated and that public taste, depraved by his polished specimens, neglected the finer pieces in his collection and demanded sentiment and elegance at all costs. It may be that Lady Wardlaw had more traditional stuff to work on than has come to light; Hamilton's poem, we know, was founded upon an ancient fragment. Whatever the reason, no imitation of the century has the spirited swing of 'Hardyknute,' or the pathos and strangeness of 'The Braes of Yarrow.'

¹ *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern*, 1827. Introduction, p. lxii, note 3.

² *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 1802. Introduction to 'The Raid of Reidswire.'

Neither piece, it is true, succeeds very well as an echo of the old style. The latter is sometimes commended as having caught the very breath of popular song¹. But what ancient ballad of love and murder and despair, and there are many such to choose from, is told in this melancholy, fantastic strain of grief, in these echoing, dirge-like lines, which so slowly unfold the tragedy? Something of the mysterious reserve of a folk-ballad is rendered in 'The Braes of Yarrow,' but nothing of its speed and directness.

'Hardyknute,' printed by Ramsay in both his collections, has a rather complicated history and the truth concerning its authorship never seems to have been satisfactorily cleared up². Whatever the exact facts may be, and there is little reason to doubt that Lady Wardlaw was responsible for the fragment as it first appeared, this is a surprisingly good poem, considering the date of its composition. The language is picturesque and seldom over-strained, the story, so far as it goes—not too far, fortunately—is interesting and the metre well managed. But there is too much padding and too little energy. Compared with ancient battle pieces the style lacks virility, and the tale moves forward too leisurely.

Many failures, less creditable than these two early attempts, show how difficult a task it is to imitate the manner of the traditional ballad.

¹ Courthope, *History of English Poetry*, vol. v, p. 410; vol. vi, p. 111 (note).

² 'Hardyknute' was first published by James Watson in Edinburgh, 1719. It was printed by Ramsay in *The Ever Green*, 1724, with two additional stanzas and some minor alterations. In the first edition of the *Reliques* Percy gave an account of the authorship of the poem, supplied by Lord Hailes, who stated that Lady Wardlaw had acknowledged it to be her own composition and as proof had produced three more stanzas (*Reliques*, ed. 1765, II, pp. 87-88). Lady Wardlaw died in 1727. A new edition of the poem was prepared for the press by John Clerk, M.D. of Edinburgh. This included twelve new stanzas. Pinkerton, in his *Scottish Tragic Ballads*, 1781, published a continuation of the poem and, with it, another account of the authorship, also supplied by Lord Hailes. This nobleman sent to Pinkerton a letter, supposed to have been written by Sir John Bruce of Kinross to Lord Binning about the year 1719. Sir John states that he is sending a 'true copy' of the poem, which he had found in a vault at Dunfermline, 'written on vellum in a fair Gothic character.' This letter is clearly a forgery: the passion for vaults and Gothic characters had not yet arisen in 1719, but it is not easy to decide whether Pinkerton or Lord Hailes was responsible for it. The former seems the more likely culprit; he would be anxious to establish the authenticity of the piece so that his own forgery might pass undetected. But Lord Hailes was still alive in 1781, and the double forgery would seem too daring even for Pinkerton. Percy believed in the story and remarked in the 1794 edition of the *Reliques* that the letter 'plainly proves the pretended discoverer of the fragment to have been Sir John Bruce himself.' Ritson did not attempt to decide between the rival claimants; it was enough for him that 'the bantling is certainly spurious' (*Gentleman's Magazine*, November, 1784). In the introduction to 'Sir James the Ross' in Anderson's *Poets* (p. 290), the editor says of this poem of Bruce that 'it challenges a place with the 'Hardyknute' of his countryman, Sir John Bruce of Kinross.' Scott took it for granted that Pinkerton invented the story of Bruce and ignored Lord Hailes' part in the affair. (*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. Henderson, Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry, p. 44.) Since Scott's time Lady Wardlaw seems to have been left in possession.

It seems easy. Andrew Lang gives the following 'Recipe to forge a Border Ballad'¹—'Take the *Border Papers*, edited by Joseph Bain (1890). Select a good, rousing incident, say the slaying of Ridley at the Newcastle football match (May, 1599). Write it with as many rhymes in "e" as possible. Avoid profusion of obsolete words. Carefully abstain from dropping into poetry. Add a few anachronisms and distort historical facts to taste; employ the regular ballad formulae sparingly and with caution, strain off, dish, and serve up with historical notes, adding to taste fables about your source, à la Surtees. Remember that nothing can be less like an old ballad than the ballads of Mr D. G. Rossetti.' This is a flippant way of approaching the subject; moreover the instructions are inadequate. A cook might as well have all the ingredients of a cake ready to hand, without the fire to bake it. It is because modern balladists have relied too much on the externals of metre and style that they have failed. How is the old vividness to be revived; the old, fierce cry of eager hearts, storm-swept by the elemental passions of mankind; the child-like, unquestioning outlook on life which, once gone, is gone for ever? A modern poet may perhaps be fairly successful in describing some such 'rousing incident' as Mr Lang suggests, for in this an impersonal attitude is more easily maintained. But let him try his hand on some theme, not of combat, but of human emotion, and he will find it impossible to combine the stark simplicity of the popular ballads with their force and intensity. The old world has passed away and with it the wild, semi-barbarous conditions of life which made the composition of folk-ballads possible. In the most carefully faked counterfeits the deliberate literary intention is evident; the first fine careless rapture cannot be recaptured. Percy failed in his attempts, so did Pinkerton and Chatterton and Hogg and Surtees and many others. And at last even Scott failed, and what Scott failed to do with his magic sympathy and his delicate, supple handling of forgotten legends, no other poet need hope to accomplish.

The other modern compositions included in *The Tea-Table Miscellany* do not need lengthy consideration. 'William and Margaret,' claimed by Mallet, turns out to be a genuine old ballad, revised and spoilt for the printing press². 'Lucy and Colin,' by Thomas Tickell, and 'Henry and Katharine' both belong to the type of imitation that is frankly modern in style and diction and makes no attempt to catch the ancient manner.

¹ J. A. Farrer, *Literary Forgeries*, 1907. Introduction by Lang, p. xxv.

² Phelps, *The Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement*, Appendix.

Many scores of such poems were turned out later in the century, and may best be studied in the pages of Evans's collection. Scott draws a distinction between these 'legendary tales,' as they came to be called, and the deliberately wrought pastiches of the old style, such as were attempted by Pinkerton, Hogg and Jamieson¹. Scott himself essayed both types.

Popular as Ramsay's books were it seems strange that no further attempt at ballad editing should have been made for nearly half a century. Probably the learned men of the time thought such a task beneath them, while the few whose spirits might have been stirred by the rousing echoes of early song had not material enough to work upon. Herein lies the supreme importance of the *Reliques*. For future generations a starting point was given, a priceless foundation of genuine traditional verse upon which to build up other collections. Herd, Pinkerton and Evans, as well as Ritson, who was malignantly anxious to show the world how ancient poetry ought to be edited, all owed to Percy the impulse which set them collecting. And the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, with its far-reaching influence, was directly inspired by the *Reliques*.

Percy's editorial methods are well known, but, before condemning them too harshly, it should be remembered that he was aiming at something quite different from the modern ideal of faithful reproduction. His object was to publish a book which should appeal to the general reader of his day. He himself had been unexpectedly interested in the torn pages of his folio manuscript and it occurred to him that some of the pieces were worth printing². At the same time he realised that it would be useless to offer them to the public in their rough and fragmentary condition. So he set to work to repair them. Possibly the pleasure and amusement afforded by this occupation led Percy further than he intended, for it cannot be denied that his handling of many of the old pieces is little less than profane.

Only one poem, 'The Boy and the Mantle,' is given verbatim from his manuscript, and 'a more modern copy of this ballad' is appended for such readers 'as have no relish for pure antiquity.' Several poems

¹ *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. Henderson, Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad, vol. iv, pp. 13, 14.

² Forty-five of the 175 pieces printed in the *Reliques* were extracted from the folio MS., which itself contains 150 poems. (Bishop Percy's Folio MS., ed. Hales and Furnivall, vol. i, Forewords, p. xxii.) The other chief sources drawn upon were the printed broad sheets, Scottish ballads sent by Lord Hailes, and various collections, printed and manuscript. In addition to the 'reliques' were included 'little elegant pieces of the lyric kind,' a concession to the polite readers of the day.

have not one stanza exactly as in the original, others are twisted into quite new settings, while the vivacity of nearly all is weakened by unnecessary emendations.

There is a curious conflict of taste visible, not only in the many notes and illustrations scattered through the book, but also in the very various handling meted out to the ballads. As a rule the eighteenth century craze for elegance and smoothness swept away all scruples and Percy pruned with a heavy hand. Occasionally, however, his conscience asserted itself and forbade any interference. The matchlessly beautiful 'Child Waters' is hardly touched, and one notes this with especial gratitude, remembering the way in which later editors treated this ballad, remembering also that Percy could seldom resist a sentimental opening, which is clearly offered here. There are about half a dozen other poems from the manuscript with only slight verbal alterations—rhymes corrected, constructions made clearer, metrical roughnesses smoothed away. Less excusable emendations are in the cause of refinement or ingenuity. The 'salt water' within fair Bessye's eyes is crystallised into 'pearlie dropps'; the three messengers of the queen, slandered by Sir Aldingar, become a 'faire damselle'; old Robin of Portingale hides twenty knights within his chamber, and so the irony of the original situation is lost.

Emendations and corrections, however extensive, do not cover the whole extent of Percy's handiwork. Some of the ballads he made over again into quite new poems; 'Valentine and Ursine' is entirely his own composition; there is only one verse in 'The Child of Elle' given exactly from the MS.; the latter half of 'Sir Cauline' is invention, and the conclusion of 'The Heir of Linne' a clever piece of forgery. The different quality of editorial workmanship in these three poems is remarkable. There is hardly a false note in the last named. Though only a few lines of the original are given verbatim, there is no impression of unreality in the diction; the ballad manner is copied carefully and with excellent effect. On a much lower plane are the modern parts of 'Sir Cauline' and 'The Child of Elle': it was generally the primrose path of romance that led Percy astray. The style of the former throughout is hopelessly artificial. The inappropriately tragic conclusion illustrates the eighteenth century inability to realise how a ballad should end, a weakness apparent also in 'The Child of Elle,' where a happy finish is tacked on to an obviously tragic story. This is an even more depressing example of Percy's worst manner than 'Sir Cauline,' though Scott says that the emendations are 'in the truest

style of Gothic embellishment¹. This may be taken as a fair sample of the embellishing process.

The strong and moving lines:

he leaned ore his saddle bow
to kisse this Lady good;
the teares that went them 2 betweene
were blend water and blood.

are replaced by the following stanza:

And thrice he claspde her to his breste,
And kiste her tenderlie:
The teares that fell from her fair eyes,
Ranne like the fountayne free.

Of course it was much that Percy should himself have seen the beauty of the fragment and it was clearly impossible for him to have printed it without a certain amount of manipulation. In 1765 public taste was divided against itself; it demanded two things not easily reconcilable, romantic wildness and a smooth, elegant style. The old ballads provided situations picturesque and thrilling enough to gratify the most exacting palate. But their style was rough and unpolished, entirely without ornament and the conventional graces of poetic diction. Percy understood the taste of his time and, only half realising that it was a perverted and jaded taste, he set himself to make his 'parcel of old ballads' as attractive as might be. Scott puts the matter with his usual fairness when defending Percy from the violent attacks of Ritson². 'It is, no doubt, highly desirable that the text of ancient poetry should be given untouched and uncorrupted. But this is a point which did not occur to the editor of the *Reliques* in 1765, whose object it was to win the favour of the public, at a period when the great difficulty was not how to secure the very words of the old ballads, but how to arrest attention upon the subject at all.' This needs emphasis: had Percy printed his manuscript with absolute faithfulness its influence would have been delayed quite half a century, if indeed it had not been discounted completely at the outset³.

It is surprising that the first collection directly inspired by the *Reliques* should contain some of the most trustworthy work of the

¹ *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Introduction to 'Erlinton.'

² *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. Henderson, Introductory Remarks on Popular Poetry, vol. 1, p. 38.

³ The folio MS. itself is of course priceless. But of all the ballads in the *Reliques* only five are accepted by Child as Percy prints them, and these five perforce, because the originals are lost. 'Edward,' 'Sir Patrick Spens,' 'The Jew's Daughter' and 'Lord Thomas and Fair Annet' were contributed by Lord Hailes. 'King Estmere' was torn from the folio by Percy, sent to the press and never recovered.

century. David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs* was published anonymously in 1769. A second edition in two volumes came out in 1776. This would have appeared earlier, but the MSS. had been lent to Percy, who promised not only to furnish 'a good number of old Scots songs and poems' transcribed from the Maitland MS., but also to fill up some of the imperfect pieces 'in the manner that old broken fragments of antique statues have been repaired and compleated by modern masters'¹ (letter to Paton, August 22, 1774). It all came to nothing. After nearly a year Percy returned the papers, with no poems from the Maitland MS. and, fortunately, no emendations from his own facile pen. He had been appreciative of the value of the first edition, and wrote in praise of it to Paton, not knowing then who was the editor (Feb. 9, 1769)². In the same letter he suggested that notes would have been useful, giving the sources, history, locality and authorship of the poems whenever possible. Both in the Preface and Advertisement to the 1769 edition Herd promised notes, to be inserted in the second volume, which he intended to appear as an additional series of poems, though it finally entailed an entire re-arrangement of the collection. However, when the second edition appeared, there were no notes, and the Glossary, also promised, was hastily compiled by Wotherspoon³. This is typical of Herd's casual methods: to use Dr Hecht's words, 'it shows how little interest Herd himself took in the publication of the volumes. He collected carefully and transcribed carefully but could not be bothered with editorial cares.' He laboured for his own delight and disregarded equally public praise and censure. His volumes are a mixture of good and bad, genuine old fragments and modern trash, thrown together without distinction and with no account of authorship or sources. It was too early to leave the general reader to discriminate for himself and the value of Herd's zeal as a collector is impaired by his negligence as an editor.

A later generation can better appreciate the importance of Herd's work. Whether borrowed from some earlier printed collection or copied from his manuscripts, the poems in his book are nearly always given with perfect fidelity. Occasionally slight alterations are made, but these are of trifling importance and it is significant that they occur far more frequently in the poems taken from printed than from manuscript sources. From Ramsay and Percy he borrows a good deal. 'Edom o' Gordon,' with the orthography slightly changed, 'Young Waters,'

¹ *Songs from David Herd's Manuscripts*, ed. Hans Hecht, 1904. Introduction, pp. 20-22.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

'Edward,' 'Waly, Waly,' and 'Gil Morice,' with its ugly modern excrescences, all come from the *Reliques*. In his choice between the two versions given by Percy of 'Bonny Barbara Allan' and 'Lord Thomas and Fair Annet,' Herd shows his fine taste, selecting the more dramatic piece in each case. 'Sir Patrick Spens' he also gives from the *Reliques*, though he had another unpublished copy among his MSS., a longer and less poetically perfect version. What other ballad editor would have had the same self-restraint? From Ramsay he borrows 'Johnie Armstrang' (this also with the spelling changed), 'The Bonny Earl of Murray,' 'The Battle of Harlaw,' 'Sweet William's Ghost,' and 'The Battle of Reid-Squair.' He also gives 'Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament' in its most lengthy form from *The Tea-Table Miscellany*; Percy wisely printed only seven verses; Pinkerton, more wisely still, only four.

Among the ballads first printed by Herd are 'The Braes of Yarrow,' 'Fine Flowers of the Valley,' 'Bothwell,' 'Lizie Wan,' 'May Colvin' and 'The Wee Wee Man.' In the interesting group of 'Fragments of Heroic Ballads' are also found for the first time in any printed collection: 'Lammikin' (there was an older version among the Percy papers but it was not published), 'The Bonny Lass of Lochroyan,' 'Clerk Colvill,' 'Kertonha,' 'Earl Douglas than quham nevir knight' ('Jamie Douglas'), 'She has call'd to her bower maidens' ('Young Hunting' or 'Earl Richard'), 'Who will bake' ('Fair Annie') and 'The Cruel Knight.' The 'Fragments of Comic and Humorous Songs' include 'The Bonny Lass of Anglesey' and, very strangely, a few verses from the tragic piece known as 'The Cruel Mother'—'And she's lean'd her back to a thorn.'

This long list of traditional ballads first published by Herd is sufficient proof of the value of his work. In however fragmentary a state the poems may be, they are all precious and are transcribed by the editor from his manuscripts with scrupulous accuracy. Together with other good versions of ballads printed earlier, they all find a place in Child's collection, where the printed copies are named with the MS. versions as being equally reliable. Had the volumes been edited more carefully they would have proved a useful antidote to the *Reliques*. The evil effect of Percy's upholstering was already evident, and Herd's promiscuous arrangement of ancient and modern compositions doubtless helped to strengthen that false conception of folk-poetry which gave rise to the prolific growth of the 'legendary tale,' now beginning to flourish apace.

Of these imitations included by Herd, the most important—‘Hardy-knute’ and ‘The Braes of Yarrow’—had been several times published. ‘Duncan’ and ‘Kenneth’ are the work of Henry Mackenzie, as Scott informs us¹, and in both poems the man of feeling is more apparent than the man of action. In each, just as the story reaches the climax and we expect the clash of arms, there is a significant hiatus and the narrative returns with relief, in the one case to the ‘weeping Mary’ and in the other to ‘fair Margaret with her maidens.’

‘The modern and extremely vapid ballad of Frennet Hall,’ as Child characterises it, is an anonymous poem on the mysterious fire of Fren-draught. It deserves harsh criticism so far as the diction is concerned, but the conclusion is unusually restrained. The whole catastrophe is implied in the last verse:

The lady slee with honeyed words
Entic’d thir youths to stay:
But morning sun ne’er shone upon
Lord John nor Rothemay.

Certainly, this is not exactly what we should find in a traditional ballad, but it is better than the protracted scenes of anguish or the ill-timed moralisings with which most imitations end. Modern writers have failed nearly always in the conclusions of their ballads. To begin in the old, reckless manner, plunging straight ‘in medias res,’ is a difficult task. But it is infinitely harder to end in the rapid, unexpected way of popular song—to pull up short without any comments on the story or any reflections on life and its vicissitudes. Almost invariably a modern poet betrays himself by some conventional mannerism, by a desire to moralise his song, by a mistaken notion of emphasis or by some irrepressible note of egotism breaking through the reserve that should hide a singer of ballads.

The Reprint of 1791 includes most of Pinkerton’s forgeries, also the version of ‘The Child of Elle,’ published in the *Reliques*: the substitution of these pieces for much genuine stuff seems to show that this issue did not receive Herd’s personal supervision. The only poem in the first edition, omitted from the second, is ‘The Heir of Linne,’ Percy’s most successful piece of patchwork.

One looks in vain for any hopeful signs of integrity in John Pinkerton’s collection, first published in 1781 as *Scottish Tragic Ballads*. A second edition in two volumes came out in 1783, under

¹ *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, ed. Henderson, *Introductory Remarks*, vol. 1, p. 43.

a slightly different title—*Select Scottish Ballads*. Translations of four Spanish romances were added in the second edition¹; also the following ballads: 'Gilderoy,' 'The Child of Elle,' 'The Gypsies came,' 'The Cruel Knight,' and 'Young Waters.' Pinkerton gave no account of his authorities, borrowed from Percy, Herd and Ramsay without acknowledgment; and, to the intense wrath of Ritson, who exposed him in *The Gentleman's Magazine*², he palmed off several inventions of his own as traditional ballads.

Considering the style of these forgeries it is surprising that Pinkerton did not alter the genuine ballads more extensively. 'Child Maurice,' 'Edom o' Gordon' and 'The Child of Elle' are given almost verbatim from Percy or Herd. From 'Young Waters,' from 'Lady Bothwell's Lament' and probably from 'Sir James the Rose,' verses are judiciously dropped, the last being handled freely but with discretion. 'The Earl of Murray' and 'The Gypsy Laddie' are close to Ramsay's versions. The most unforgivable corrections are those in 'Edward,' which, as given by Percy, is perfect and unapproachable, though the archaic spelling was better simplified. 'The Earl of Murray' is similarly tampered with, though here the spelling is Scotticised and that with better effect than usual. Already it is clear that different motives are beginning to animate the collectors. Percy altered for greater elegance and ingenuity; he hoped to make silk purses out of sow's ears, but, mistaking his material, too often he reversed the process. Pinkerton's emendations were for the sake of consistency and common sense. He liked a Scottish ballad to live up to its name and changed the 'gates of London' into the 'hichts of Lundie,' 'Highlands' into 'Hielands' and so on. He lends a few corrections to 'Sir Patrick Spens,' where 'palpable absurdity seemed to require them,' and the things which struck him as palpably absurd were cork-heild shoon; hats, wet in the sea; ladies with fans in their hands and gold kems in their hair. Again, in 'Sir James the Rose,' he supplies a motive for the woman's perfidy, so following the common practice of eighteenth century editors, who could not digest the causeless acts of treachery and violence so often related in ballad poetry and felt constrained to make events seem at least possible.

¹ These four romances were translated by Pinkerton from the *Historia de las Guerras Civiles de Granada*. Percy had already published two translations from the same source in the *Reliques* (Series I, Book II, Nos. 16 and 17). In Evans's *Old Ballads* is found another and much worse rendering by Carter of the third romance attempted by Pinkerton. (Vol. III, No. 18.)

² November, 1784.

'Binnorie' shows Pinkerton at work in a different way. Usually he kept fairly close to his originals or else invented entirely new poems. 'Binnorie' he acknowledged to be 'one half from tradition and one half by the editor,' though, as Child says, 'one fourth and three fourths would have been a more exact apportionment.' There are only about seven verses that correspond with traditional versions; the conclusion which recounts the elder sister's suicide and the squire's sententious remarks upon the occurrence are Pinkerton's invention, and the whole beautiful story is spoilt in the telling. Such lines as :

Up raise he sune in frichtfu' mude;
Busk ye, 'my meiny,' and seek the flude,

and the last stanza :

But I'll main for the my Isabel deir
Full mony a dreiry day, bot weir

stamp the thing at once as Pinkerton's. His phraseology cannot easily be mistaken after a single perusal of the second part of 'Hardyknute.'

This is his most elaborate imposture, and so far as externals go, it was well carried out. The notes are written guilelessly and in seeming good faith. The passages chosen for special commendation are, it is true, from the original fragment, but, in the extravagant praise bestowed upon the poem as a whole, naturally no distinctions are drawn. To make the two parts hang together Pinkerton changed the second half of verse eighteen and inserted another stanza, with the remark that it 'was surprising its omission was not marked in the fragment formerly published.' As a poetical achievement the continuation is far below the original. The story is incoherent and leads on to an impossible conclusion, and the language is pitched in a theatrical key that merits Ritson's scorn. 'Neither the lady, nor the common people of Lanarkshire, from whom you pretend to have recovered most of the stanzas, will deprive you of the honour of its procreation. The poetry is too artificial, too contemptible, the forgery too evident¹.'

Pinkerton's other forgeries are on a par with this. 'The Laird of Woodhouseslie' seems to have been founded on the grim story of the murder of the Lord of Wariston. Genuine ballads on this subject were later printed by Jamieson and Kinloch, and it is probable that Pinkerton was familiar with some traditional scraps and on them embroidered his own handiwork. Many of the lines seem genuine

¹ *Gentleman's Magazine*, November, 1784.

but the treatment is laboured and the metre gives a very different effect from the usual ballad swing:

Shyning was the painted ha
 Wi gladsum torches bricht:
 Full twenty gowden dames sat there
 And ilk ane by a knicht:
 Wi music cheir,
 To please the eir.
 Whan beautie pleased the sicht.

'Lord Livingston,' containing the reconciliation between the two knights, is worse than this; the sentimental note is more pronounced. Again, in 'The Death of Menteith' and 'Lord Airth's Complaint' we find the same conventional ideas expressed in the same spuriously archaic Scots, with the constant recurrence of favourite phrases and words. One cannot escape the conviction, when reading this sophisticated language, that the author was well pleased with it. The poem beginning 'I wish I were where Helen lies' is one of the many imitations inspired by the haunting elegy, of which this is the first line.

There was no gainsaying Ritson's charge, and in the List of Scottish Poets, prefixed to a *Selection of Poems from the Maitland MS.* (vol. 1, 1786), Pinkerton acknowledged his forgeries. He was a learned man, but so devoid of both taste and integrity that his collection is the most worthless of the century.

Thomas Evans's *Old Ballads*, published in two volumes in 1777, and in four volumes in 1784, is more interesting than many collections of greater intrinsic value. One wonders much what the editor was aiming at, his one apparent object being to exclude everything that Percy published, and to include everything he did not. Herd frankly calls his collection *Ancient and Modern Scots Songs*; Evans gives his the misleading label of *Old Ballads*, though to this is added on the title page: 'Historical and Narrative, with some of modern date and several originals, none of which are inserted in Dr Percy's collection.' His Preface adopts the usual apologetic tone towards eighteenth century readers. 'A polished age will make allowances for the rude productions of their ancestors.' After all, this cringing humility on the part of the editors was unnecessary. The general mass of the people needed no propitiation, they were ready to accept any 'parcel of old ballads' on its own merits; while the austere scholars who, like Dr Johnson, could not tolerate ballad poetry, would be proof against the deprecatory appeals of Percy, Herd, Pinkerton, Evans and Ritson.

The contents of the first of Evans's volumes and part of the second are arranged in chronological order, the poems covering the ground of English history from King Arthur to George III. The most valuable part of the first volume consists in the twenty-seven Robin Hood ballads, all of which, with one exception—'Robin Hood, Wil Scarlet and Little John'—were later printed by Ritson and in exactly the same order. The majority of these ballads are immeasurably below the 'Little Geste,' and barely deserve the name of popular poetry, but they form the one contribution of any worth in the whole of this collection. The sources are not given, but, so far as they have been traced by Professor Child, it seems that Evans copied the poems carefully and abstained from emendations. Indeed, he was even more precise than Ritson, who named his originals and so laid himself open to ready detection. The first volume also contains a number of poems found by the editor in *The Garland of Delight*, but first published in Deloney's *Strange Histories*.

The second volume contains the only two genuine folk-poems, except those already mentioned, in this collection of Old Ballads. One of these, 'Johnny Armstrang's Last Goodnight,' is the same version as appeared in *A Collection of Old Ballads*, 1723. The other, 'Child Waters,' is given also by Percy, so one may suppose that it was included by Evans for the sake of comparison with the paraphrase that follows, an instructive example of the eighteenth century ideal of refined simplicity. One quotation will suffice. In the original Burd Ellen says:

And I had rather have a twinkling
Child Waters of your eye,
Than I would have Cheshire and Lancashire both,
To take them mine own to be.

Mrs Pye's version reads thus, and it is significant that she borrows the first line straight from Pope's 'Eloïsa':

One glance of those deluding eyes
More rapture can bestow
Than should our monarch quit his throne
And that to me forego.

The semi-historical ballads come to an end half way through the second volume, which is filled out with modern imitations. The third volume opens inauspiciously with two lengthy productions, Percy's 'Hermit of Warkworth' and Blacklock's 'The Graham,' but there is a certain interest attaching to this volume in the testimony it bears to the

newly awakened enthusiasm for foreign literature. There are several poems from the French, two of Gray's translations from the Welsh, and a very bad version, taken from Carter's *Journey from Gibraltar to Malaga*, of one of the Spanish romances previously attempted by Pinkerton. In the fourth volume there is also a translation by Sir W. Jones from the Persian of Hafiz. Both the third and fourth volumes contain a number of seventeenth century ballads printed from stall copies and garlands, some very interesting Elizabethan poems, and a whole host of imitations.

Of all the collections of the century this of Evans contains the largest number of artificial ballads, and the characteristics of this tedious species may best be considered in connection with his work. With two exceptions, both forgeries, not one of these poems makes any serious attempt to reproduce the old style; or, if it does, the attempt fails ludicrously. Most are vaguely historical, as stray references to battles and kings serve to indicate, but the atmosphere of the past is never revived. The all-pervading moral tone is entirely opposed to the spirit of popular poetry, in which the narrator effaced himself, offering no personal reflections, intent only on getting his story told. The anticipated joys of a future world, the stress laid on the obligations of filial piety, and the unconvincing praises of rusticity, are all out of harmony with the frankly pagan conception of life found in the old ballads. In this vanished world death brought pain and separation, but no gladness of reunion; children most often mated against their parents' wishes and would turn with a curse on their lips against either father or mother who had crossed their hopes; and the men and women lived the simple life without knowing it, so that they saw no delights in poverty, no beauty in asceticism. Even the supernaturalism, so consciously revelled in by many of the eighteenth century balladists, is very different from that abiding fear and fascination of the unknown which inspired such poems as 'Tam Lin,' 'True Thomas,' or 'The Wife of Usher's Well.'

But the worst feature of these legendary tales is the characteristically feeble use made of the ballad metre. The old ruggedness is planed away—the old irregularity that added so much to the blithe vigour of popular ballads and saved them from monotony. An intolerable sing-song is the result. The favourite mark of punctuation is the dash. The pitch generally rises towards the end of the poems and the death of the heroine—for the heroine almost invariably dies, and the hero too, if he is faithful and virtuous—is described in short, jerky clauses,

presumably meant to convey the stress and hurry of emotion. Such verses as the following are common :

She knew—she sunk—the night-bird screamed;
—The moon withdrew her troubled light,
And left the fair—though fall'n she seemed—
To worse than death—and endless night¹.

This is another example, open to criticism on more grounds than one :

'And art thou him?'—exclaimed the mayde,
'And dost thou live?'—she cry'd:
'Too cruel love!'—she faintly sayd—
Then wrung his hand—and dy'd—²

We may compare this hysterical movement with the nervous, onward rush of ancient verse :

Late at e'en, drinking the wine,
And ere they paid the lawing,
They set a combat them between,
To fight in the dawning³,

or with the swift-flowing rhythm of *The Ancient Mariner*, which is the supreme triumph of modern ballad poetry :

The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop,
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.

There is no need to give further examples illustrating the various peculiarities of the artificial ballad; almost any single poem would serve to display them all. 'Edwin and Ethelinde,' 'Edwin and Emma,' by Mallet, 'Edwin and Eltruda' (Edwin was a favourite name, we have also the famous 'Edwin and Angelina'), 'Matilda,' 'William and Fanny'—their titles betray them. In them all there is the same sentimentality, the straining after effect, the superficial morality, and the false, colourless diction.

The *Reliques* form the connecting link between the legendary tales and the genuine old ballads. Percy cannot be held entirely responsible for the former. Polished and refined as his specimens undoubtedly were, they yet retained virility enough to have inspired something better than these effusions. Had their authors possessed traditional versions of every folk-ballad, then or since published, it is not likely that they would have written anything very closely resembling 'Clerk

¹ 'The Field of Battle.' Penrose, *Old Ballads*, vol. III, no. 2.

² 'The Brydal Bed.' *Old Ballads*, vol. IV, no. 14.

³ 'The Braes of Yarrow.' *Popular Ballads*, ed. Child, 214 (E).

Saunders' or 'Sir Patrick Spens.' Nevertheless, it was the style of the more extensively 'improved' ballads in the *Reliques*, which served as a model for the majority of imitations published after 1765, and which was to blame for their artificial diction, if not for their weakness in narrative power.

Neither of the two deliberate attempts to copy the old style deserves more than passing mention, though both forgeries were accepted by Evans as genuine. Chatterton's *Bristowe Tragedy; or the Dethe of Sir Charles Bawdin* shows the influence of the *Reliques* only too clearly. It is written in the manner of the stall copies, overlaid with a coating of Percy's false refinement. 'The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heughs' is printed by Evans as a 'ballad, five hundred years old, made by the mountain bard, Duncan Frasier, living in Cheviot, A.D. 1270.' This minute account of the authorship of what purports to be an ancient ballad is enough to betray the hand of the impostor. The poem was sent by the Rev. Mr Lambe, of Norham, to Mr Hutchinson, who inserted it as genuine in his *History of Northumberland*. The author must have heard some traditional lines, for the story has traces of several genuine ballads which were printed later ('Kempion,' 'Allison Gross,' 'The Laily Worm and the Mackrel of the Sea'). The modern workmanship is, however, unmistakable, especially in the conclusion, which is contrary to the unwritten law forbidding a ballad singer to speak in the first person.

This collection of Evans is worthless from the point of view of the antiquarian, but it is an interesting storehouse of miscellaneous poetry, and not without value as an indication of the taste and judgment of the time¹.

Very different is the work of Joseph Ritson, the last of the eighteenth century editors. His 'atrabilious, furious and obstreperous abhorrence of every kind of forgery'² made him a much hated man among his contemporaries, but his editorial methods, if not his temper in debate, are above reproach. His *Select Collection of English Songs* (1783), *Pieces of Ancient Popular Poetry* (1791), *Ancient Songs* (dated 1790, published 1792), *Scottish Songs* (1794), and *Robin Hood* (1795), are among the few works of the century which unite enthusiasm with scholarly methods of editing.

¹ In 1810, R. H. Evans, the son of Thomas, issued another four-volume edition of *Old Ballads*, of great interest as showing the advance made during the past quarter century. This edition is 'considerably enlarged from public and private collections'; many of the modern pieces are omitted, and the older poems carefully revised.

² Jamieson, *Popular Ballads*. Advertisement, p. xv.

There are comparatively few popular pieces in *The Select Collection of English Songs*, and they serve mainly to show how far superior Scottish ballad poetry is to English. The volume entitled *Pieces of Ancient Popular Poetry* contains only one ballad, 'The King and the Barker,' and the editor of the second edition states that Ritson had intended to suppress it. The text is very corrupt and the ballad metre seldom recognisable. *Ancient Songs and Ballads* is perhaps the most interesting of Ritson's publications. It is arranged chronologically in five classes and contains some fragrant old English lyrics, some battle songs, and a number of carols and later love songs. But the book, as first published, was not rich in ballads; in the second edition a number from the *Select Collection of English Songs* were incorporated with the poems in Class IV. 'The Ungrateful Knight and the Flower of Northumberland' is put down to the account of Thomas Deloney, but, though first published by that writer in his *Jack of Newberie*, this poem undoubtedly belongs to the folk. Class IV also contains 'The Heir of Linne,' with a prefatory note to the effect that Percy had restored several ancient readings from his folio MS. in the 1794 edition of the *Reliques* and that 'if one could obtain a sight of that tattered fragment, it is highly probable that some modern interpolations still remain.' Had Ritson realised how large was the proportion of editorial workmanship in this poem he would hardly have printed it; it is a distinct tribute to Percy's powers that he did so.

Another testimony to the patience and zeal of Ritson is his *Robin Hood*. These two volumes contain thirty-three ballads, and Child was able to add only five more in his collection. One of these five, 'The Bold Pedlar and Robin Hood¹,' was known by Ritson to be in existence, and he twice asked Scott for it, apparently with no result². Another, 'Robin Hood and the Monk,' was added in the Appendix of the 1832 edition, the editor stating that Mr Ritson 'had anxiously preserved' a small fragment of the poem. The other three pieces are not of importance. They are 'Robin Hood and the Pedlars' (printed from a MS. in a nineteenth century hand, containing some ballads supposed to be forgeries, of which this may be one), a feeble production called 'Robin Hood and the Scotchman,' and the piece already mentioned, 'Robin Hood, Will Scarlet and Little John' (otherwise 'Robin Hood

¹ 'The Bold Pedlar and Robin Hood,' and we may presume this is the ballad that Ritson was seeking, is given by Child as a traditional version of 'Robin Hood Newly Revived,' which Ritson has under the title, 'Robin Hood and the Stranger.'

² *The Letters of Joseph Ritson, Esq.*, 2 vols. 1833. 1. Letter to Scott, April 10, 1802 (p. 220). 2. Letter to Scott, July 2, 1803 (p. 241).

and the Prince of Arragon'), probably excluded by Ritson because he thought it spurious.

Ritson aimed solely at accuracy. 'Truth—simple majestic Truth—was the goddess whom he worshipped', as Sir H. Nicolas elegantly expressed it in his Memoir. In consequence, his publications failed to please the public ear. That sensitive organ was not yet attuned to the wild music of popular poetry and inclined rather to the softened strains piped by the less scrupulous editors of the century. They, and the majority of nineteenth century collectors, made a bid for popularity and won it. It is easy to judge their work too harshly. They had to face a position whose difficulties they hardly realised themselves. Folk-poetry, as soon as ever it is written down, ceases to be folk-poetry in the strictest sense. Written words never have precisely the same effect as words chanted or sung; they become a different, to some extent a new thing. However dimly the editors may have realised this, at least it was clear to them that some manipulation was necessary before the majority of popular ballads could find acceptance with the public. In their newly acquired, uncongenial form of print, gaps and inconsistencies were apparent which would have passed unnoticed in recitation, which indeed, might not have existed in earlier stages of oral transmission. It was a difficult question for the editors to decide how far they were justified in removing these defects. Ritson was right in denouncing the depravity of those editors who mingled so much of their own handiwork with the ancient texts that the two styles of writing were confused and the public wholly deluded. On the other hand, the general reader of the eighteenth century preferred well rounded poems to incomplete fragments, however carefully transcribed. In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August, 1793, 'Nugator,' referring to the *Reliques*, ventures to predict that it 'will remain a standard book, while the *more strictly accurate* compilations of a *peevish* antiquary or two are forgotten.' Nugator was right; Percy's diluted specimens remained first favourites with the people until ousted by Scott's, and it must be remembered that the texts of the old poems were treated with as much freedom in the *Border Minstrelsy* as in the *Reliques*, though with infinitely finer taste.

A list of ballad collections from Ramsay's to Child's would serve as a fruitful text for a sermon on the growth of the literary conscience. The eighteenth century closed hopefully with the scientific methods of Ritson, but the good effects which his example might have produced

¹ *Letters of Joseph Ritson. Memoir*, p. xix.

were swept away by the success of Scott's brilliant but unfaithful workmanship. Most of the collections inspired by *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* were edited on the same somewhat lax principles. Not until the publication of Child's great collection were the rights of the popular ballad fully established. Then, for the first time, the anonymous old poems were treated with the same respect as is paid to the writings of known authors. Every extant version of each ballad is given and, wherever possible, modern growths are ruthlessly lopped away. But in cases where the originals are lost, as happened with some of the pieces published by Percy and Buchan, ballads are necessarily given entire though the hand of the interpolator is evident.

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GRACE R. TRENER.

LIVERPOOL.