

7-1-1965

Some Problems Regarding A Series of Letters Between Francis Hutcheson and Gilbert Burnet

John J. McManmon
University of Notre Dame

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McManmon, John J. (2013) "Some Problems Regarding A Series of Letters Between Francis Hutcheson and Gilbert Burnet," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, 61–62.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol3/iss1/5>

This Notes/Documents is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Notes and Documents

Some Problems Regarding A Series of Letters Between Francis Hutcheson and Gilbert Burnet¹

The first reactions in print to the first edition of Francis Hutcheson's *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (published at the end of February or the beginning of March, 1725) seem to have been a letter from "Philopatris" in the *London Journal* of March 27, 1725, and a series of letters exchanged by "Philaretus" and "Philanthropus" between April and December, 1725, also in the *London Journal*. The letters were collected and published as *Letters Between the Late Mr. Gilbert Burnet, and Mr. Hutchinson [sic], Concerning the True Foundation of Virtue or Moral Goodness. Formerly published in the London Journal* (London, 1735). The preface to this collection, supposedly, and probably, written by Burnet, the son of the bishop of Salisbury, reveals that "Philaretus" was Burnet and that "Philanthropus" was Hutcheson. However, there is cause for much confusion over these letters.

First, the initial letter in the collection is signed "Philopatris," who remains unidentified. The letter is merely an objective, uninvolved, though careful, account of the purpose of Hutcheson's *Inquiry* as described in its preface, and of the content of Treatise II of the *Inquiry*. It is possible that "Philopatris" was either Burnet or Hutcheson.

A second problem: Burnet, or the one who completed the task of editing the *Letters Between . . .*, either from oversight or by intent, omitted two of the letters which actually appeared in the *London Journal*. One of the letters is signed "Philanthropus," and appeared June 19, 1725. The other is signed "Philaretus" and appeared September 18, 1725.

A third problem comes from the dating of the letters. Burnet does not specifically date the *Letters Between . . .* In the preface of the 1728 and 1730 editions of *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections*, Hutcheson, the author, merely refers to "SOME

¹ The Editor regrets that this Note was printed incomplete in the last issue of *SSL*. It is here reproduced complete.

STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Letters in the *London Journals*, subscrib'd Philaretus . . ." (London, 1728, p. xx). But in the editions of 1742 and 1756 (Hutcheson died in 1747), the letters are referred to in the preface as "SOME Letters in the *London Journals* in 1728, subscribed *Philaretus*" (London, 1742, p. xix). The subsequent dating of these letters seems to be based on Hutcheson's dating of them. For example, William R. Scott (*Francis Hutcheson: His Life, Teaching and Position in the History of Philosophy* [Cambridge, 1900]) accepts 1728 as the year in which the letters between Hutcheson and Burnet appeared in the *London Journal*. Whether or not Hutcheson is responsible for this date, it is wrong. Simple examination of the *London Journal* itself reveals that the correspondence between Burnet and Hutcheson appeared in 1725. To my knowledge, this error has never before been noted.

JOHN J. McMANMON

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

A SCOTTISH SOURCE FOR WORDSWORTH

Wordsworth's "To the Cuckoo" may be ultimately indebted to "Ode to the Cuckoo" by Michael Bruce (1746-1767), a Scottish poet of strong Romantic tendencies. Wordsworth undoubtedly knew the poem only in the plagiarized version of the Leith minister John Logan. Supposed friend of Bruce and guardian of his posthumous manuscripts, Logan passed off the young poet's work as his own in a volume of poems published in 1781. He had made some minor variations in the "Ode" which had not, however, clouded the beauty of Bruce's masterpiece.¹

Hail, beauteous Stranger of the *grove*
Thou Messenger of Spring!
Now Heaven repairs thy rural seat,
And woods thy welcome sing.

¹ Following is Bruce's poem as Logan presented it, the italicized words indicating the changes made by Logan. He deleted one stanza entirely, the next to the last.