A Presentation Copy of Kames's Sketches of the History of Man

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NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

A Presentation Copy of Kames’s
*Sketches of the History of Man*

Presentation copies of books by Henry Home Lord Kames are scarce. Ian Ross, the author of the recent study, *Lord Kames and the Scotland of his Day* (1972), reports knowing only of one other presentation copy, a third edition of the *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751; 3rd ed.: 1779) given to John Anderson, the Professor of Natural Philosophy at Glasgow University. I have recently acquired a presentation copy of the first edition (1774) of the *Sketches of the History of Man* that sheds some light on Lord Kames, his daughter Jean Home and her husband Patrick Heron of Heron (or Kirroughtrie).

Jean Home married Patrick Heron in late October or early November 1761, before she was seventeen years old. Within a month of the marriage, in December 1761, she had cuckolded him, with the seemingly ubiquitous James Boswell. This affair commenced in her father’s house and continued in her own home when Boswell visited there at the invitation of Patrick Heron. Thus Boswell was having an affair with the daughter of a man whose approval and admiration he sought and with the wife of a man whose hospitality he had accepted. While Jean’s affair with Boswell remained — surprisingly — a secret, she was not so fortunate some ten years later. In early 1772, Patrick Heron sought and obtained a divorce from Jean, granted on 23 January 1772. She was charged with adultery, the correspondent being Ensign Alexander Macnought, the son of a miller at Minnigaff, a village near the Heron’s home in Kirroughtrie. Jean did not deny the charges and apparently declined to play the role of the weeping daughter. Lord Kames sent her to France, refusing ever to see her again.1

Yet what of his reaction to his injured son-in-law? How was the unfortunate Patrick Heron to be treated and regarded? That Lord Kames showed more compassion to him than to his daughter is indicated by the inscription on the copy of the *Sketches of the History of Man* presented to him in 1774, two years after the divorce. The inscription in

Kames's hand is on the half-title of volume one and reads: "From the Author/ to his select Friend/ Patrick Heron". On the front free endpaper Heron has written "Patrick Heron of Heron/ Given by Henry Home Esqr. the Author 1774". Kames continued to hold his former son-in-law in high regard. Heron had been involved in the collapse of the Ayr bank in 1772, and Kames seems to have supported him after that. In 1781 Heron was on the verge of bankruptcy, and Kames again provided financial support, though by 1782 he was petitioning to have his "select Friend" put on the footing of a creditor.²

The recipient of the book, the inscription, and the subject matter of Sketches of the History of Man have some complementary interest. Kames had contemplated the book as early as 1765, and by 1769 he was able to say to his good friend Mrs. Elizabeth Montagu that he was immersed in his subject and giving particular attention to the historical role of women in society.³ A note "To the Reader" immediately following the Preface gives a further measure of Kames's concern about the role of women in society: "As one great object of the Editor is to make this a popular work, he has, chiefly with a view to the female sex, subjoined an English translation of all the quotations from other languages" (I. vii).⁴

The subjects of chastity and adultery are introduced early in Sketch VI, "Progress of the Female Sex." Women are found to be peculiarly modest but to a purpose: "Nature hath provided them with it [modesty] as their chief defence against the artful solicitations of the other sex before marriage, and also as the chief support of conjugal fidelity. It is held to be their capital virtue; and a woman who surrenders her chastity is universally despised . . ." (I, 169). The implications, of this argument are developed, with further emphasis on the necessity of fidelity in marriage and the dangers of adultery. Not surprisingly, adultery in the wife is, in Kames's view, more heinous than in the man: "Adultery however is a deeper crime in the wife than in the husband: in him it may happen occasionally, with little or no alienation of affection; but the superior modesty of the female sex is such, that a wife does not yield, till unlawful love prevails, not only over modesty, but over duty to her husband. Adultery therefore in the wife, is a breach of the matrimonial engagement in a double respect: it is an alienation of affection from the husband, which unqualifies her to be his friend and companion; and it tends to bring a spurious issue into

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2. Ross, p. 42.
4. All quotations given in text are from the first edition of 1772.
the family, betraying the husband to maintain and educate children who are not his own” (I, 202-203).

The last stricture would presumably not have applied to Jean Heron. During her affair with Boswell, she had confessed to him, “I love my husband as a husband, and you as a lover, each in his own sphere. I perform for him all the duties of a good wife. With you I give myself up to delicious pleasures. We keep our secret. Nature has so made me that I shall never bear children. No one suffers because of our loves.” Clearly, Jean Home regarded her duty towards her husband quite differently from what her father regarded as the duty of all wives to their respective husbands.

Since Kames was writing this book during the time in which he must have had knowledge of his daughter’s behaviour and, later, when she was divorced, it seems possible that some of the observations regarding chastity, marriage, and adultery have not only a biographical emphasis but are an oblique apology to Patrick Heron. The section on the female sex is concluded with, among other observations, one to which the reader having knowledge of the author’s daughter can add an ironic tone: “Gratitude to my female readers, if I shall be honored with any, prompts me to conclude this sketch with a scene that may afford them instruction, and cannot fail of being agreeable; which is, the figure a woman is fitted for making in the matrimonial state, where polygamy is excluded” (I, 216). Kames is chiefly interested in educating the female sex to a far greater degree than hitherto, and though the tone is that of “male chauvinism,” the direction of Kames’s arguments is towards female emancipation and away from subjugation. Yet the final description of an “ideal marriage” is not without its irony: “By such refin’d education, love would take on a new form, that which nature inspires for making us happy, and for softening the distresses of chance: it would fill deliciously the whole soul with tender amity, and mutual confidence. The union of a worthy man with a frivolous woman can never, with all the advantages of fortune, be made comfortable: how different the union of a virtuous pair, who have no aim but to make each other happy! Between such a pair emulation is reversed, by an ardent desire in each to be surpassed by the other” (I, 219).

Such sentiments could not have been written without some awareness of his own domestic tribulations. Perhaps in writing such sentences Kames tried to atone for his daughter’s failure to follow the prescriptions outlined for the female sex in his book. In presenting a copy of

5. Potte, p. 5.
this particular book to his "select Friend" Kames can be seen to be upholding his moral principles at the expense of a father's loyalty to his daughter. The presentation copy suggests both Kames's loyalty to Heron and his desire to compensate in some way for his daughter's behaviour. It would be interesting to know if he considered presenting a copy to Jean and directing her attention to the relevant passages in Sketch VI, "Progress of the Female Sex."

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