

# **ANSTER FAIR**

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Anster Fair by William Tennant

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**WILLIAM TENNANT**

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BY

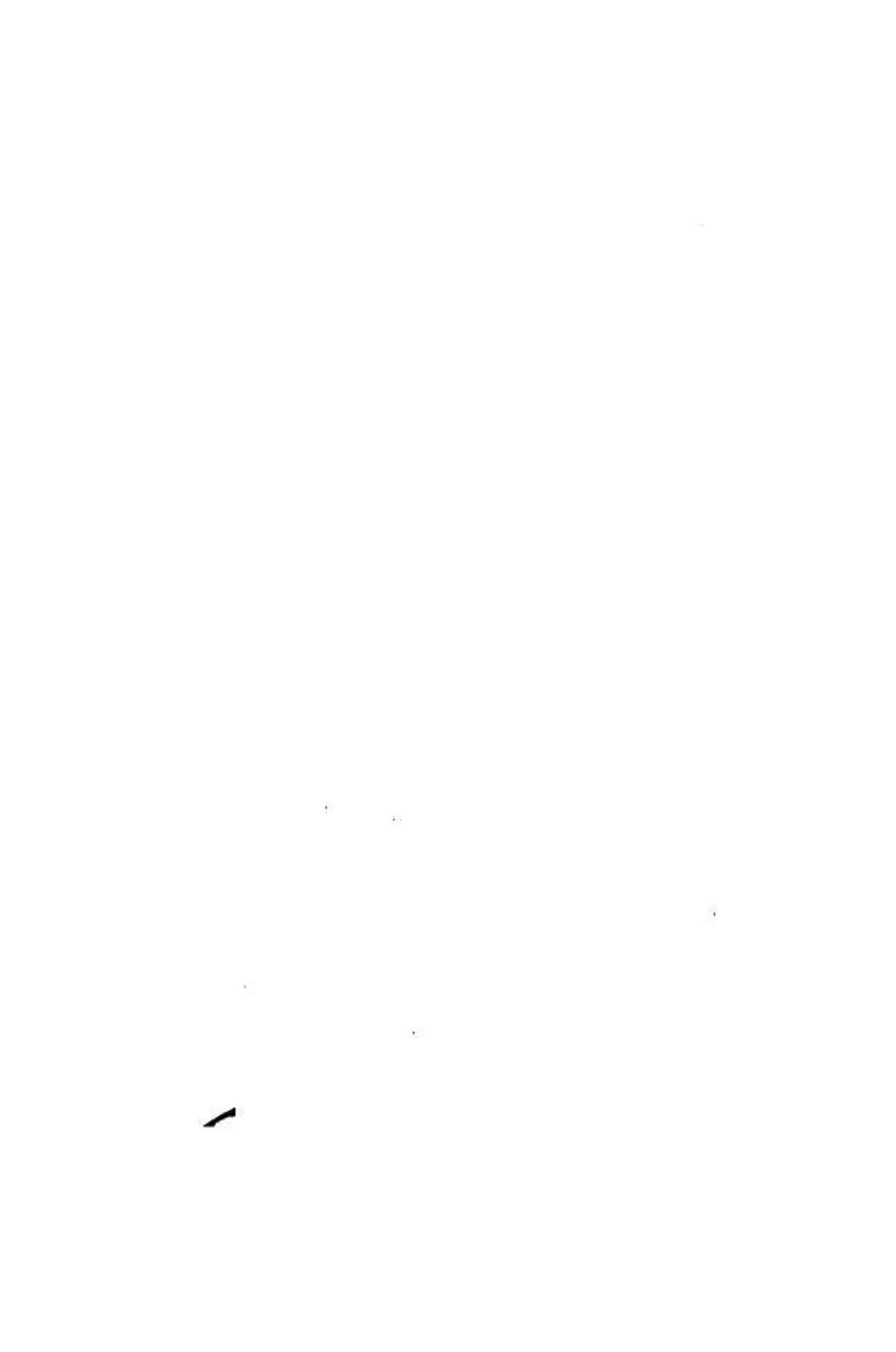
WILLIAM TENNANT, LL.D.

WITH MEMOIR AND NOTES



EDINBURGH  
JOHN ROSS AND COMPANY

1871



## PREFATORY NOTE.

IN "Anster Fair," the author had no other end in view than the creation of pure fun—innocent, aimless enjoyment, as its own end. We have ceased to consider this an unworthy motive, and only ask, is it well done?

The poem is unique in English Literature; and though its machinery is familiar enough, yet the structure and treatment are quite original. The sub-plot is kept in admirable proportion, and its evolution so depends on that of the main plot that there is nothing discordant in their relative development. The adjuncts, too, are appropriate and relevant; and the variety and life with which the action is hurried on keep the reader's interest unflagged till the end.

Though to some extent cast in a local mould, it is, nevertheless, so perfectly catholic, that it would suffer little depreciation by having its names changed to those of any locality in the Kingdom. That it has hitherto been little known beyond Scotland, is greatly owing to causes referred to in our memoir of the author—his own unobtrusive modesty, and literary isolation; and the luxurious growth of passionate and brilliant poetry in the midst of which it first appeared. Now, however, that the poetic excitement of the first half of the present century has subsided, and that the heavier matter which that ferment kept suspended has sunk to the bottom, this new edition of "Anster Fair" is launched with strong faith in its permanent buoyancy.

The text has been carefully collated with all the editions published by the Author, and a few slight grammatical oversights, and slips of measure, are corrected.

EDINBURGH, 1st December 1871.

#### AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE following poem is presented to the public with that diffidence and anxiety which every young author feels when the good or bad fate of his first production must check his rashness and vanity, or enliven his future efforts with the confidence arising from popular approbation.

The poem is written in stanzas of octave rhyme, or the *ottava rima* of the Italians, a measure said to be invented by Boccaccio, and after him employed by Tasso and Ariosto. From these writers it was transferred into English poetry by Fairfax, in his translation of "Jerusalem Delivered," but since his days, has been by our poets, perhaps, too little cultivated. The stanza of Fairfax is here shut with the Alexandrine of Spenser, that its close may be more full and sounding.

In a humorous poem, partly descriptive of Scottish manners, it was impossible to avoid using Scottish words. These, however, will, it is hoped, be found not too many. Some old English words are likewise admitted.

The transactions of ANSTER FAIR may be supposed to have taken place during the reign of James V.—a monarch whom tradition reports to have had many gamesome rambles in Fife, and with whose liveliness and jollity of temper the merriment of the FAIR did not ill accord. Yet a scrupulous congruity with the modes of his times was not intended, and must not be expected. Ancient and modern manners are mixed and jumbled together, to heighten the humour, or variegate the description.

EDINBURGH, 5th May, 1812.



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MEMOIR OF  
WILLIAM TENNANT.

THE antiquated little town of Anstruther, situated at the mouth of the Firth of Forth, on its Fife-shore, has within one generation, been the birth-place of three eminent men—Thomas Chalmers, William Tennant, and John Goodsir. There appears to have been nothing in the local circumstances or in the time, to account for the almost simultaneous appearance of this distinguished group, beyond what was the common condition of all similar burghs in Scotland, since parish and burgh schools were instituted all over the country. Apart from the influence of this beneficent and happily common boon to all, nothing could have been more spontaneous, and left to its natural growth, than the social and intellectual life of these out of the way little burghs that fringe the coast of Fife; yet they have contributed their fair quota of famous names to the annals of Scotland.

William Tennant, the second of the above group, was born on the 15th of May 1784, a year before the birth of David Wilkie at the Manse of Cults.\* He was the second son of Alexander Tennant, a small Merchant and Farmer, in Anstruther, of which his

\* These two sons of Fife are here associated, not on account of the nearness of their birth, but because their genius chose the same subject for its first and brightest manifestation, namely the Fairs of their respective birth-places.