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978-1-107-42907-9 - The Beggar's Opera: Its Predecessors and Successors

Frank Kidson

Frontmatter

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The Beggar's Opera

*Its Predecessors and
Successors*

By FRANK KIDSON



CAMBRIDGE

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1922

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To my friend
ALFRED MOFFAT
in memory of Auld Lang Syne

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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PREFACE

TO the late Victorian *The Beggar's Opera* is but a name; to his father or grandfather it may have been a memory of some imperfect representation—perhaps as cut down to an after-piece—given at a provincial theatre.

Apart from its dramatic appeal, the opera quickly became a classic. Its vigour, its picturesqueness, its unfolding of a bygone life, its association with Pope, Swift, and others of that coterie have made it of permanent interest to the literary man.

This little volume aims at presenting in a handy form such facts as bear upon the inception of Gay's masterpiece and its influence upon the English stage; and secondly at giving a brief account of the Italian operas that preceded it and of the ballad operas for which it led the way.

The recent production has caused a renewed interest in *The Beggar's Opera* and given to the twentieth century a glimpse of the dramatic art which delighted generations of our ancestors.

F. K.

MAY, 1922.

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JOHN GAY FRONTISPIECE

From the mezzotint by Milvus after the portrait by
William Aikman.

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SCENE FROM *THE GENTLE SHEPHERD* 30

From the illustration by David Allan in the edition
of 1788.

BURLESQUE OF *THE BEGGAR'S OPERA* 36

By William Hogarth. The opera is being performed at a fair. Ballad-sheets are on the wall to the left, and gallows in the background. The orchestra consists of a dulcimer, a hum-thrum (a bladder on a bowstring), a bag-pipe, a salt-box and other rude instruments. *Harmony* is flying from the scene and the following verse is appended to the picture:

Britons attend—view this harmonious stage,
And listen to those notes which charm the age;
Thus shall your taste in sounds and sense be shown,
And Beggar's Operas ever be your own.

SCENE FROM *THE BEGGAR'S OPERA* . 58

From William Hogarth's picture, showing Mac-heath in Newgate and Polly and Lucy appealing for him. The fashionable audience of the first night are seen in the stage boxes.

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- TITLE-PAGE OF *THE BEGGAR'S OPERA* 86
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- SCENE FROM *THE BEGGAR'S OPERA* . 90
 From Francis Hayman's frontispiece to the edition of 1765, showing Lucy, Macheath, and Polly with Peachum in the prison scene. The Newgate 'Ordinary,' or Chaplain, is in the background. (Act II.)
- THE ENRAGED MUSICIAN* 98
 By William Hogarth. Pietro Castrucci, the leader and first violin of the Italian Opera, is seen at the window. A playbill of *The Beggar's Opera* is pasted on the wall and a ballad-singer is chanting the ballad *The Ladies' Fall*.

