

Andrew Michael Ramsay

(CHEVALIER RAMSAY)

Andrew Michael Ramsay (January 9, 1686 - May 6, 1743), commonly called the **Chevalier Ramsay**, was a Scottish-born writer who lived most of his adult life in France. Baronet in the Jacobites Peerage.

Ramsay was born in Ayr, Scotland, the son of a baker. He served with the English auxiliaries in the Netherlands, and in 1710 visited Francois Fenelon, who converted him to Roman Catholicism. He remained in France until 1724 writing politico-theological treatises. One of these was dedicated to the Jacobites claimant to the English and Scottish thrones, James Francis Edward Stuart. In January 1724, Ramsay was sent to Rome as tutor to James' two sons, Charles Edward and Henry. But his appointment was short-lived; Ramsay was associated with the court party of John Erskine, Duke of Mar, who fell from favor that year. By November 1724 Ramsay was back in Paris. Ramsay was in England in 1730, and received an honorary degree from the University of Oxford. The claim was nominally his discipleship to Fenelon, but in reality beyond doubts his connection with the Jacobites party. He died at St Germain-en-Laye (Seine-et-Oise) on May 6, 1743. He was a Christian universalistic, believing that all people would eventually be saved. He wrote "Almighty power, wisdom and love cannot be eternally frustrated in his absolute and ultimate designs; therefore God will at last pardon and re-establish in happiness all lapsed beings."^[1]

Biography

Albert Chereil (1917, 1926) and G. D. Henderson (1952), from their readings of the archival sources in France, England and Scotland, have greatly contributed to the biography of Ramsay. As a youth Ramsay was attracted to the mysticism of quietism as practiced in the circle of Dr. George Garden at Roseheath, centered around the "teachings" of Antoinette Bourignon in a community along the lines of a similar one in Rijnsburg led by Pierre Poiret, where people from different religious persuasions and social castes lived together. In 1710 Ramsay travelled to Rijnsburg to meet Pierre Poiret and later met Jeanne Marie Bouvier de la Motte Guyon known as Mme Guyon; from there he went on to stay with the elder Fénelon at Cambrai (August 1710). He remained in his household for several years and became steady friends with the Marquis de Fénelon, a young relative of the archbishop and an ardent pupil of Mme Guyon. He wrote his *Vie de Fénelon* in loyal testimony to that period. From 1714 till 1716, Ramsay acted as secretary to Mme Guyon and he was present at Blois on June 9th, 1717 when she died. Although Ramsay himself was converted to Catholicism by Fénelon, conversion was not deemed an option by Mme Guyon who strongly advised the community around her to stick to the principles of their proper faith while meditating on Pure Love. In his *Life of Fénelon* (London, 1723) Ramsay stated his own insights of how Mme Guyon's system had

affected him. Association with Fénelon, who as preceptor of the grandsons of Louis XIV had retained huge influence at Court, caused Ramsay to be remarked by the nobility, in particular by the Comte de Sassenage, whose son he tutored from 1718 till 1722.

In 1722 Ramsay became active in high level negotiations over a tax on assets of Jacobites exiles proposed by the British government. By then Ramsay was already well acquainted with Cardinal Fleury, who after the death of the Regent Philippe II, Duke of Orléans (1723) was to be the power of state behind Louis XV. In 1723 Ramsay was knighted into the Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, which originated as a Crusader military order based in France for the protection of pilgrims. In 1724 he entered the Jacobites household in Rome. Court intrigue and the impracticality of his educational task - Bonnie Prince Charlie was only three-and-a-half years old - caused him to return to Paris in the same year. From 1725 till 1728 he stayed as an invited guest at the Hotel de Sully under the patronage of Maximilien de Béthune, Duc de Sully, the husband of the widowed Comtesse de Vaux (daughter of Mme Guyon). During this period he frequented the Parisian literary club Club de l'Entresol in the company of Rene-Louis Argenson, Lord Bolingbroke and Montesquieu. Against that background he wrote his *Travels of Cyrus* in 1727, which made him a best-selling author in his time, and for the revised edition of which he traveled to London (1729-30) where he was again in touch with Montesquieu. Both were elected Fellows of the Royal Society in December 1729. In 1730 Ramsay became a member of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society in Lincolnshire, a club in correspondence with the Society of Antiquaries of London. Prominent members had included Sir Isaac Newton, John Gay and Alexander Pope. Still another honor was conferred on Ramsay in 1730: the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Civil Law at Oxford.

Prior to the conferment of the academically titles (and apart of his *Life of Fénelon* and *Travels of Cyrus*) Ramsey had been remarked in the intellectual circles of his time. The influential *Memoirs de Trévoux* published several of his tracts - in 1732 his introduction to the mathematical work of Edmund Stone - and remained favorable throughout to his philosophical contributions. In 1719 he had published an *Essai de Politique*, revised in 1721 as *Essai philosophique sur le gouvernement, où l'on traite de la nécessité, de l'origine, des droits, des bornes et des différentes formes de souveraineté, selon les principes de feu M.François de Salignac de la Mothe Fénelon, archevêque-duc de Combray* and published in English translation in 1722.

Ramsay returned to France in 1730 and, following the death of the Duc de Sully, passed into the service of the Comte d'Evreux (the original patron of the Elysée Palace), a prominent member of the family of la Tour d'Auvergne and Bouillon which had ties of marriage with the Jacobites Court, through Charlotte, the elder sister of Queen Clementina (Maria Klementyna Sobieska), and bonds of loyal friendship to the circle around Fénelon, through the Cardinal de Bouillon. It was the Cardinal de Bouillon who is said to have had the inspiration of having the family descend from Godfrey of Bouillon, thus making the Crusader King of Jerusalem the totem rather than the genetic precursor of the family.(Henderson,1952) Ramsay's task in the Evreux household was to tutor a nephew, Godefroy Geraud, duc de Chateau-Thierry, son of the elder brother, Emanuel Theodore de la Tour d'Auvergne, Duc de Bouillon; shifting upon the death of Geraud to the tutorial of the Count's grand nephew, the Prince of Turenne, Godefroi Charles, son of Charles Godefroi, Duc de Bouillon, the head of the house. It was for the Prince's

education that Ramsay wrote the *Histoire du Vicomte de Turenne, maréchal général des armées du Roy*. (1735), using as documentary evidence (authorized by James Francis Edward Stuart) the handwritten *Mémoires du Duc d'York* (James II). These were the *Memoirs of James II* discovered by David Hume in the Scots College in Paris in 1763 in the company of Michael Ramsay, the nephew of the Chevalier. The manuscripts were lost in the French Revolution.

In June 1735 Ramsay married Marie Nairne (1701-1761), the daughter of Sir David Nairne, undersecretary to James III. For the occasion the Chevalier Ramsay was created a Scottish Knight and Baronet (23 March 1735) with remainder to heirs male. He had issue, a son and a daughter. His son (1737-1740) died in infancy and his daughter (1739-1758) from smallpox at the age of 19. Ramsay lived until 1743 under the benevolent protection of the house of Bouillon, in St. Germain-en Laye; writing and studying, but above all preparing his *magnum opus*: *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* edited after his death (1748-49) by his wife and friends, and in Ramsay's words: "a history of the human mind in all ages, nations and religions concerning the most divine and important truths". Some "Chinese Letters" written by Ramsay remained unpublished. Ramsay was associated with Freemasonry since its introduction in France (1725-26). Charles Radclyffe, Earl of Derwentwater, who acted as Grand Master for France since 1736, was present at Ramsay's funeral. It is presumed that Ramsay's being a Mason facilitated his introduction into the Gentleman's Club of Spalding, of which the prominent Masonic propagator John Theophilus Desaguliers was then also a member. In 1737 Ramsay wrote his: *Discourse pronounced at the reception of Freemasons by Monsieur de Ramsay, Grand Orator of the Order*, in which he connected Freemasonry with the Crusades. His own stature as a Knight of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem may have inspired him, or perhaps even his zeal to propagate an alleged tradition linked to the house of Bouillon. In any case Ramsay thought his speech worthy of note by the prevailing religious authority and he send the text to Cardinal Fleury, asking for a Church blessing of the principles of Freemasonry as he had stated them: "The obligations imposed upon you by the Order are to protect your brothers by your authority, to enlighten them by your knowledge, to edify them by your virtues, to succour them in their necessities, to sacrifice all personal resentment, and to strive after all that may contribute to peace and unity of society."

To a Church already in difficulty over the deviating principles of the Society of Jesus, not perhaps the cited reference, but the concept of Masonic ritual was entirely preposterous. To Ramsay's letter of March 20th 1737 came Cardinal Fleury's reply at the end of March interdicting all Masonic reunions.

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