KENILWORTH

SIR WALTER SCOTT

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Sir Walter Scott – A Biographical Primer

By Hugh Chisholm

Sir Walter Scott was a Scottish poet and novelist, was born at Edinburgh on the 15th of August 1771. His pedigree, in which he took a pride that strongly influenced the course of his life, may be given in the words of his own fragment of autobiography. “My birth was neither distinguished nor sordid. According to the prejudices of my country it was esteemed gentle, as I was connected, though remotely, with ancient families both by my father's and mother's side. My father's grandfather was Walter Scott, well known by the name of *Beardie*. He was the second son of Walter Scott, first laird of Raeburn, who was third son of Sir William Scott, and the grandson of Walter Scott, commonly called in tradition *Auld Watt* of Harden. I am therefore lineally descended from that ancient chieftain, whose name I have made to ring in many a ditty, and from his fair dame, the Flower of Yarrow — no bad genealogy for a Border minstrel.”

In a notice of John Home, Scott speaks of pride of family as “natural to a man of imagination,” remarking that, “in this motley world, the family pride of the north country has its effects of good and of evil.” Whether the good or the evil preponderated in Scott's own case would not be easy to determine. It tempted him into courses that ended in

commercial ruin; but throughout his life it was a constant spur to exertion, and in his last years it proved itself as a working principle capable of inspiring and maintaining a most chivalrous conception of duty. If the ancient chieftain Auld Watt was, according to the anecdote told by his illustrious descendant, once reduced in the matter of live stock to a single cow, and recovered his dignity by stealing the cows of his English neighbours, Scott's Border ancestry were sheep-farmers, who varied their occupation by “lifting” sheep and cattle, and whatever else was “neither too heavy nor too hot.” The Border lairds were really a race of shepherds in so far as they were not a race of robbers. Scott may have derived from this pastoral ancestry an hereditary bias towards the observation of nature and the enjoyment of open-air life. He certainly inherited from them the robust strength of constitution that carried him successfully through so many exhausting labours. And it was his pride in their real or supposed feudal dignity and their rough marauding exploits that first directed him to the study of Border history and poetry, the basis of his fame as a poet and romancer. His father, Walter Scott, a writer to the signet (or attorney) in Edinburgh — the original of the elder Fairford in *Redgauntlet* — was the first of the family to adopt a town life or a learned profession. His mother was the daughter of Dr John Rutherford, a medical professor in the university of Edinburgh, who also traced descent from the chiefs of famous Border clans. The ceilings of Abbotsford display the arms of about a dozen Border families with which Scott claimed kindred through one side or the other. His father was conspicuous for methodical and thorough industry; his mother was a woman of imagination and culture. The son seems to have inherited the best qualities of the one and acquired the best qualities of the other.

The details of his early education are given with great precision in his autobiography. John Stuart Mill was not more minute in recording the various circumstances that shaped his habits of mind and work. We learn from himself the secret — as much at least as could be ascribed to definite extraneous accident — of the “extempore speed” in romantic composition against which Carlyle protested in his famous review of Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. The indignant critic assumed that Scott wrote “without preparation”; Scott himself, as if he had foreseen this cavil, is at pains to show that the preparation began with his boyhood, almost with his infancy. The current legend when Carlyle wrote his essay was that as a boy Scott had been a dunce and an idler. With a characteristically conscientious desire not to set a bad example, the autobiographer solemnly declares that he was neither a dunce nor an idler, and explains how the misunderstanding arose. His health in boyhood was uncertain; he was consequently irregular in his attendance at school, never became exact in his knowledge of Latin syntax, and was so belated in beginning Greek that out of bravado he resolved not to learn it at all.

Left very much to himself throughout his boyhood in the matter of reading, so quick, lively, excitable and uncertain in health that it was considered dangerous to press him and prudent rather to keep him back, Scott began at a very early age to accumulate the romantic lore of which he afterwards made such splendid use. As a child he seems to have been an eager and interested listener and a great favourite with his elders, apparently having even then the same engaging charm that made him so much beloved as a man. Chance threw him in the way of many who were willing to indulge his delight in stories and ballads. Not only his own relatives — the old women at his grandfather's farm at Sandyknowe, his aunt, under whose charge he was sent to Bath for a year, his mother — took an interest in the

precocious boy's questions, told him tales of Jacobites and Border worthies of his own and other clans, but casual friends of the family — such as the military veteran at Prestonpans, old Dr Blacklock the blind poet, Home the author of *Douglas*, Adam Ferguson the martial historian of the Roman republic — helped forward his education in the direction in which the bent of his genius lay. At the age of six he was able to define himself as “a virtuoso,” “one who wishes to and will know everything.” At ten his collection of chap-books and ballads had reached several volumes, and he was a connoisseur in various readings. Thus he took to the High School, Edinburgh, when he was strong enough to be put in regular attendance, an unusual store of miscellaneous knowledge and an unusually quickened intelligence, so that his master “pronounced that, though many of his schoolfellows understood the Latin better, *Gualterus Scott* was behind few in following and enjoying the author's meaning.”

Throughout his school days and afterwards when he was apprenticed to his father, attended university classes, read for the bar, took part in academical and professional debating societies, Scott steadily and ardently pursued his own favourite studies. His reading in romance and history was really study, and not merely the indulgence of an ordinary schoolboy's promiscuous appetite for exciting literature. In fact, even as a schoolboy he specialized. He followed the line of overpowering inclination; and even then, as he frankly tells us, “fame was the spur.” He acquired a reputation among his schoolfellows for out-of-the-way knowledge, and also for story-telling, and he worked hard to maintain this character, which compensated to his ambitious spirit his indifferent distinction in ordinary school-work. The youthful “virtuoso,” though he read ten times the usual allowance of novels from the circulating library, was carried by his

enthusiasm into fields much less generally attractive. He was still a schoolboy when he mastered French sufficiently well to read through collections of old French romances, and not more than fifteen when, attracted by translations to Italian romantic literature, he learnt the language in order to read Dante and Ariosto in the original. This willingness to face dry work in the pursuit of romantic reading affords a measure of the strength of Scott's passion. In one of the literary parties brought together to lionize Burns, when the peasant poet visited Edinburgh, the boy of fifteen was the only member of the company who could tell the source of some lines affixed to a picture that had attracted the poet's attention — a slight but significant evidence both of the width of his reading and of the tenacity of his memory. The same thoroughness appears in another little circumstance. He took an interest in Scottish family history and genealogy, but, not content with the ordinary sources, he ransacked the MSS. preserved in the Advocates' Library. By the time he was one and twenty he had acquired such a reputation for his skill in deciphering old manuscripts that his assistance was sought by professional antiquaries.

This early, assiduous, unintermittent study was the main secret, over and above his natural gifts, of Scott's extempore speed and fertility when at last he found forms into which to pour his vast accumulation of historical and romantic lore. He was, as he said himself, “like an ignorant gamester who keeps up a good hand till he knows how to play it.” That he had vague thoughts from a much earlier period than is commonly supposed of playing the hand some day is extremely probable, if, as he tells us, the idea of writing romances first occurred to him when he read Cervantes in the original. This was long before he was out of his teens; and, if we add that his leading idea in his first novel was to depict a Jacobitic Don Quixote, we can see

that there was probably a long interval between the first conception of *Waverley* and the ultimate completion.

Scott's preparation for painting the life of past times was probably much less unconsciously such than his equally thorough preparation for acting as the painter of Scottish manners and character in all grades of society. With all the extent of his reading as a schoolboy and a young man he was far from being a cloistered student, absorbed in his books. In spite of his lameness and his serious illnesses in youth, his constitution was naturally robust, his disposition genial, his spirits high: he was always well to the front in the fights and frolics of the High School, and a boon companion in the “high jinks” of the junior bar. The future novelist's experience of life was singularly rich and varied. While he liked the life of imagination and scholarship in sympathy with a few choice friends, he was brought into intimate daily contact with many varieties of real life. At home he had to behave as became a member of a Puritanic, somewhat ascetic, well-ordered Scottish household, subduing his own inclinations towards a more graceful and comfortable scheme of living into outward conformity with his father's strict rule. Through his mother's family he obtained access to the literary society of Edinburgh, at that time electrified by the advent of Burns, full of vigour and ambition, rejoicing in the possession of not a few widely known men of letters, philosophers, historians, novelists and critics, from racy and eccentric Monboddo to refined and scholarly Mackenzie. In that society also he may have found the materials for the manners and characters of *St Ronan's Well*, From any tendency to the pedantry of over-culture he was effectually saved by the rougher and manlier spirit of his professional comrades, who, though they respected *belles lettres*, would not tolerate anything in the shape of affectation or sentimentalism. The atmosphere of the Parliament House (the law-courts of Edinburgh) had

considerable influence on the tone of Scott's novels. His peculiar humour as a story-teller and painter of character was first developed among the young men of his own standing at the bar. They were the first mature audience on which he experimented, and seem often to have been in his mind's eye when he enlarged his public. From their mirthful companionship by the stove, where the briefless congregated to discuss knotty points in law and help one another to enjoy the humours of judges and litigants, “Duns Scotus” often stole away to pore over old books and manuscripts in the library beneath; but as long as he was with them he was first among his peers in the art of providing entertainment. It was to this market that Scott brought the harvest of the vacation rambles which it was his custom to make every autumn for seven years after his call to the bar and before his marriage. He scoured the country in search of ballads and other relics of antiquity; but he found also and treasured many traits of living manners, many a lively sketch and story with which to amuse the brothers of “the mountain” on his return. His staid father did not much like these escapades, and told him bitterly that he seemed fit for nothing but to be a “gangrel scrape-gut.” But, as the companion of “his Liddesdale raids” happily put it, “he was *makin' himsell* a' the time, but he didna ken maybe what he was about till years had passed: at first he thought o' little, I dare say, but the queerness and the fun.”

His father intended him originally to follow his own business, and he was apprenticed in his sixteenth year; but he preferred the upper walk of the legal profession, and was admitted a member of the faculty of advocates in 1792. He seems to have read hard at law for four years at least, but almost from the first to have limited his ambition to obtaining some comfortable appointment such as would leave him a good deal of leisure for literary pursuits. In this

he was not disappointed. In 1799 he obtained the office of sheriff-depute of Selkirkshire, with a salary of £300 and very light duties. In 1806 he obtained the reversion of the office of clerk of session. It is sometimes supposed, from the immense amount of other work that Scott accomplished, that this office was a sinecure. But the duties, which are fully described by Lockhart, were really serious, and kept him hard at fatiguing work, his biographer estimates, for at least three or four hours daily during six months out of the twelve, while the court was in session. He discharged these duties faithfully for twenty-five years, during the height of his activity as an author. He did not enter on the emoluments of the office till 1812, but from that time he received from the clerkship and the sheriffdom combined an income of £1600 a year, being thus enabled to act in his literary undertakings on his often-quoted maxim that “literature should be a staff and not a crutch.” Scott's profession, in addition to supplying him with a competent livelihood, supplied him also with abundance of opportunties for the study of men and manners.

It was as a poet that he was first to make a literary reputation. According to his own account, he was led to adopt the medium of verse by a series of accidents. The story is told by himself at length and with his customary frankness and modesty in the *Essay on Imitations of the Ancient Ballad*, prefixed to the 1830 edition of his *Border Minstrelsy*, and in the 1830 introduction to the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The first link in the chain was a lecture by Henry Mackenzie on German literature, delivered in 1788. This apprized Scott, who was then a legal apprentice and an enthusiastic student of French and Italian romance, that there was a fresh development of romantic literature in German. As soon as he had the burden of preparation for the bar off his mind he learnt German, and was profoundly

excited to find a new school founded on the serious study of a kind of literature his own devotion to which was regarded by most of his companions with wonder and ridicule. We must remember always that Scott quite as much as Wordsworth created the taste by which he was enjoyed, and that in his early days he was half-ashamed of his romantic studies, and pursued them more or less in secret with a few intimates. While he was in the height of his enthusiasm for the new German romance, Mrs Barbauld visited Edinburgh, and recited an English translation of Bürger's *Lenore*. Scott heard of it from a friend, who was able to repeat two lines —

> "Tramp, tramp, across the land they speed;
> Splash, splash, across the sea!"

The two lines were enough to give Scott a new ambition. He could write such poetry himself! The impulse was strengthened by his reading Lewis's *Monk* and the ballads in the German manner interspersed through the work. He hastened to procure a copy of Bürger, at once executed translations of several of his ballads, published *The Chase*, and *William and Helen*, in a thin quarto in 1796 (his ambition being perhaps quickened by the unfortunate issue of a love affair), and was much encouraged by the applause of his friends. Soon after he met Lewis personally, and his ambition was confirmed. "Finding Lewis," he says, "in possession of so much reputation, and conceiving that if I fell behind him in poetical powers, I considerably exceeded him in general information, I suddenly took it into my head to attempt the style of poetry by which he had raised himself to fame." Accordingly, he composed *Glenfinlas*, *The Eve of St John*, and the *Gray Brother*, which were published in Lewis's collection of *Tales of Wonder* (2 vols., 1801). But he soon became convinced that "the practice of ballad-writing was out of fashion, and that any attempt to revive it or to found a poetical character on it would certainly fail of success." His study of Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*, of

which he published a translation in 1799, gave him wider ideas. Why should he not do for ancient Border manners what Goethe had done for the ancient feudalism of the Rhine? He had been busy since his boyhood collecting Scottish Border ballads and studying the minutest details of Border history. He began to cast about for a form which should have the advantage of novelty, and a subject which should secure unity of composition. He was engaged at the time preparing a collection of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. The first instalment was published in two volumes in 1802; it was followed by a third next year, and by an edition and continuation of the old romance of Sir Tristram; and Scott was still hesitating about subject and form for a large original work. Chance at last threw in his way both a suitable subject and a suitable metrical vehicle. He had engaged all his friends in the hunt for Border ballads and legends. Among others, the countess of Dalkeith, wife of the heir-apparent to the dukedom of Buccleuch, interested herself in the work. Happening to hear the legend of a tricksy hobgoblin named Gilpin Horner, she asked Scott to write a ballad about it. He agreed with delight, and, out of compliment to the lady who had given this command to the bard, resolved to connect it with the house of Buccleuch. The subject grew in his fertile imagination, till incidents enough had gathered round the goblin to furnish a framework for his long-designed picture of Border manners. Chance also furnished him with a hint for a novel scheme of verse. Coleridge's fragment of *Christabel*, though begun in 1797 — when he and Wordsworth were discussing on the Quantock Hills the principles of such ballads as Scott at the same time was reciting to himself in his gallops on Musselburgh sands — was not published till 1816. But a friend of Scott's, Sir John Stoddart, had met Coleridge in Malta, and had carried home in his memory enough of the unfinished poem to convey to Scott that its metre was the very metre of which he had been in search.

Scott introduced still greater variety into the four-beat couplet; but it was to *Christabel* that he owed the suggestion, as one line borrowed whole and many imitated rhythms testify. The *Lay of the Last Minstrel* appeared in January 1805, and at once became widely popular. It sold more rapidly than poem had ever sold before. Scott was astonished at his own success, although he expected that "the attempt to return to a more simple and natural style of poetry was likely to be welcomed." Many things contributed to the extraordinary demand for the *Lay*. First and foremost, no doubt, we must reckon its simplicity. After the abstract themes and abstruse, elaborately allusive style of the 18th century, the public were glad of verse that could be read with ease and even with exhilaration, verse in which a simple interesting story was told with brilliant energy, and simple feelings were treated not as isolated themes but as incidents in the lives of individual men and women. The thought was not so profound, the lines were not so polished, as in *The Pleasures of Memory* or *The Pleasures of Hope*, but the "light-horseman sort of stanza" carried the reader briskly over a much more diversified country, through boldly outlined and strongly coloured scenes. No stanza required a second reading; you had not to keep attention on the stretch or pause and construe laboriously before you could grasp the writer's meaning or enter into his artfully condensed sentiment. To remember the pedigrees of all the Scotts, or the names of all the famous chiefs and hardy retainers "whose gathering word was Bellenden," might have required some effort, but only the conscientious reader need care to make it. The only puzzle in the *Lay* was the goblin page, and the general reader was absolved from all trouble about him by the unanimous declaration of the critics, led by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*, that he was a grotesque excrescence, in no way essential to the story. It is commonly taken for granted that Scott acquiesced in this judgment, his politely

ironic letter to Miss Seward being quoted as conclusive. This is hardly fair to the poor goblin, seeing that his story was the germ of the poem and determines its whole structure; but it is a tribute to the lively simplicity of the *Lay* that few people should be willing to take the very moderate amount of pains necessary to see the goblin's true position in the action. The supernatural element was Scott's most risky innovation. For the rest, he was a cautious and conservative reformer, careful not to offend established traditions. He was far from raising the standard of rebellion, as Wordsworth had done, against the great artistic canon of the classical school —

"True art is nature to advantage dressed."

To "engraft modern refinement on ancient simplicity," to preserve the energy of the old ballad without its rudeness and bareness of poetic ornament, was Scott's avowed aim. He adhered to the poetic diction against which Wordsworth protested. His rough Borderers are "dressed to advantage" in the costume of romantic chivalry. The baronial magnificence of Branksome, Deloraine's "shield and jack and acton," the elaborate ceremony of the combat between the pseudo-Deloraine and Musgrave, are concessions to the taste of the 18th century. Further, he disarmed criticism by putting his poem into the mouth of an ancient minstrel, thus pictorially emphasizing the fact that it was an imitation of antiquity, and providing a scapegoat on whose back might be laid any remaining sins of rudeness or excessive simplicity. And, while imitating the antique romance, he was careful not to imitate its faults of rambling, discursive, disconnected structure. He was scrupulously attentive to the classical unities of time, place and action. The scene never changes from Branksome and its neighbourhood; the time occupied by the action (as he pointed out in his preface) is three nights and three days; and, in spite of all that critics have said about the

superfluity of the goblin page, it is not difficult to trace unity of intention and regular progressive development in the incidents.

The success of the *Lay* decided finally, if it was not decided already, that literature was to be the main business of Scott's life, and he proceeded to arrange his affairs accordingly. It would have been well for his comfort, if not for his fame, had he adhered to his first plan, which was to buy a small mountain-farm near Bowhill, with the proceeds of some property left to him by an uncle, and divide his year between this and Edinburgh, where he had good hopes, soon afterwards realized, of a salaried appointment in the Court of Session. This would have given him ample leisure and seclusion for literature, while his private means and official emoluments secured him against dependence on his pen. He would have been laird as well as sheriff of the cairn and the scaur, and as a man of letters his own master. Since his marriage in 1797 with Charlotte Charpentier, daughter of a French refugee, his chief residence had been at Lasswade, about six miles from Edinburgh. But on a hint from the lord-lieutenant that the sheriff must live at least four months in the year within his county, and that he was attending more closely to his duties as quartermaster of a mounted company of volunteers than was consistent with the proper discharge of his duties as sheriff, he had moved his household in 1804 to Ashestiel. When his uncle's bequest fell in, he determined to buy a small property on the banks of the Tweed within the limits of his sheriffdom. There, within sight of Newark Castle and Bowhill, he proposed to live like his ancient minstrel, as became the bard of the clan, under the shadow of the great ducal head of the Scotts. But this plan was deranged by an accident. It so happened that an old schoolfellow, James Ballantyne (1772-1833), a printer in Kelso, whom he had already befriended, transplanted to Edinburgh, and

furnished with both work and money, applied to him for a further loan. Scott declined to lend, but offered to join him as sleeping partner. Thus the intended purchase money of Broadmeadows became the capital of a printing concern, of which by degrees the man of letters became the overwrought slave, milch-cow and victim.

When the *Lay* was off his hands, Scott's next literary enterprise was a prose romance — a confirmation of the argument that he did not take to prose after Byron had "*bet* him," as he put it, in verse, but that romance writing was a long-cherished purpose. He began *Waverley*, but a friend to whom he showed the first chapters — which do not take Waverley out of England, and describe an education in romantic literature very much like Scott's own — not unnaturally decided that the work was deficient in interest and unworthy of the author of the *Lay*. Scott accordingly laid *Waverley* aside. We may fairly conjecture that he would not have been so easily diverted had he not been occupied at the time with other heavy publishing enterprises calculated to bring grist to the printing establishment. His active brain was full of projects for big editions, which he undertook to carry through on condition that the printing was done by Ballantyne & Co., the "Co." being kept a profound secret, because it might have injured the lawyer and poet professionally and socially to be known as partner in a commercial concern.

In 1806 he collected from different publications his *Ballads and Lyrical Pieces*. Between 1806 and 1812, mainly to serve the interests of the firm, though of course the work was not in itself unattractive to him, Scott produced his elaborate editions of Dryden (18 vols., 1808), Swift (19 vols., 1818), the Somers Tracts (13 vols., 1809-1815), and the *State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler* (2 vols., 1809). Incidentally these laborious tasks contributed to his

preparation for the main work of his life by extending his knowledge of English and Scottish history.

Marmion, begun in November 1806 and published in February 1808, was written as a relief to “graver cares,” though in this also he aimed at combining with a romantic story a solid picture of an historical period. It was even more popular than the *Lay*. Scott's resuscitation of the four-beat measure of the old “gestours” afforded a signal proof of the justness of their instinct in choosing this vehicle for their recitations. The four-beat lines of *Marmion* took possession of the public like a kind of madness: they not only clung to the memory but they would not keep off the tongue: people could not help spouting them in solitary places and muttering them as they walked about the streets. The critics, except Jeffrey, who may have been offended by the pronounced politics of the poet, were on the whole better pleased than with the *Lay*. Their chief complaint was with the “introductions” to the various cantos, which were objected to as vexatiously breaking the current of the story.

The triumphant success of *Marmion*, establishing him as *facile princeps* among living poets, gave Scott such a *heeze*, to use his own words, “as almost lifted him off his feet.” He touched then the highest point of prosperity and happiness. Presently after, he was irritated and tempted by a combination of little circumstances into the great blunder of his life, the establishment of the publishing house of John Ballantyne & Co. A coolness arose between him and Jeffrey, chiefly on political but partly also on personal grounds. They were old friends, and Scott had written many articles for the *Review*, but its political attitude at this time was intensely unsatisfactory to Scott. To complete the breach, Jeffrey reviewed *Marmion* in a hostile spirit. A quarrel occurred also between Scott's printing firm and Constable,

the publisher, who had been the principal feeder of its press. Then the tempter appeared in the shape of Murray, the London publisher, anxious to secure the services of the most popular *littérateur* of the day. The result of negotiations was that Scott set up, in opposition to Constable, “the crafty,” “the grand Napoleon of the realms of print,” the publishing house of John Ballantyne & Co., to be managed by John Ballantyne (d. 1821), James's younger brother, whom Scott nicknamed “Rigdumfunnidos,” for his talents as a mimic and low comedian. Scott interested himself warmly in starting the *Quarterly Review*, and in return Murray constituted Ballantyne & Co. his Edinburgh agents. Scott's trust in Rigdumfunnidos and his brother, “Aldiborontiphoscophornio,” and in his own power to supply all their deficiencies, is as strange a piece of infatuation as any that ever formed a theme for romance or tragedy. Their devoted attachment to the architect of their fortunes and proud confidence in his powers helped forward to the catastrophe, for whatever Scott recommended they agreed to, and he was too immersed in multifarious literary work and professional and social engagements to have time for cool examination of the numerous rash speculative ventures into which he launched the firm.

The *Lady of the Lake* (May 1810) was the first great publication by the new house, and next year the *Vision of Don Roderick* followed. *The Lady of the Lake* was received with enthusiasm, even Jeffrey joining in the chorus of applause. It made the Perthshire Highlands fashionable for tourists, and raised the post-horse duty in Scotland. But it did not make up to Ballantyne & Co. for their heavy investments in unsound ventures. The *Edinburgh Annual Register*, meant as a rival to the *Edinburgh Review*, though Scott engaged Southey to write for it and wrote for it largely himself, proved a failure. In a very short time the warehouses of the firm were filled with unsaleable stock.

By the end of three years Scott began to write to his partners about the propriety of “reefing sails.” But apparently he was too much occupied to look into the accounts of the firm, and, so far from understanding the real state of their affairs, he considered himself rich enough to make his first purchase of land at Abbotsford. But he had hardly settled there in the spring of 1812, and begun his schemes for building and planting and converting a bare moor into a richly wooded *pleasaunce*, than his business troubles began, and he found himself harassed by fears of bankruptcy. Rigdumfunnidos concealed the situation as long as he could, but as bill after bill came due he was obliged to make urgent application to Scott, and the truth was thus forced from him item by item. He had by no means revealed all when Scott, who behaved with admirable good-nature, was provoked into remonstrating, “For heaven's sake, treat me as a man and not as a milch-cow.” The proceeds of *Rokeby* (January 1813) and of other labours of Scott's pen were swallowed up, and bankruptcy was inevitable, when Constable, still eager at any price to secure Scott's services, came to the rescue. With his help three crises were tided over in 1813.

It was in the midst of these embarrassments that Scott opened up the rich new vein of the Waverley novels. He chanced upon the manuscript of the opening chapters of *Waverley* which he had written in 1805, and resolved to complete the story. Four weeks in the summer of 1814 sufficed for the work, and *Waverley* was published by Constable without the author's name in July. The notes and introductions first appeared in the edition of 1829. Many plausible reasons might be given and have been given for Scott's resolution to publish anonymously. The reason given by Lockhart is that he considered the writing of novels beneath the dignity of a grave clerk of the Court of Session. Why he kept up the mystification, though the secret, which

was formally divulged in 1827, was an open one to all his Edinburgh acquaintances, is easily understood. He enjoyed it, and his formally initiated coadjutors enjoyed it; it relieved him from the annoyances of foolish compliment; and it was not unprofitable — curiosity about “the Great Unknown” keeping alive the interest in his works. The secret was so well kept by all to whom it was definitely entrusted, and so many devices were used to throw conjecture off the scent, that even Scott's friends, who were certain of the authorship from internal evidence, were occasionally puzzled. He kept on producing in his own name as much work as seemed humanly possible for an official who was to be seen every day at his post and as often in society as the most fashionable of his professional brethren. His treatises on chivalry, romance and the drama, besides an elaborate work in two volumes on Border antiquities, appeared in the same year with *Waverley*, and his edition of Swift in nineteen volumes in the same week. In 1813 he published the romantic tale of *The Bridal of Triermain* in three cantos, enlarged from an earlier poem, printed in the *Edinburgh Annual Register* of 1809. The *Lord of the Isles* was published in January 1815; *Guy Mannering*, written in “six weeks about Christmas,” in February; and *The Field of Waterloo* in the same year. *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk* and *The Antiquary* appeared in 1816; the first series of the *Tales of My Landlord*, edited by “Jedediah Cleishbotham” — *The Black Dwarf* and *Old Mortality* — in the same year; *Harold the Dauntless* in 1817; the two volumes of *The Border Antiquities of England and Scotland* in 1814 and 1817. No wonder that the most positive interpreters of internal evidence were mystified. It was not as if he had buried himself in the country for the summer half of the year. On the contrary, he kept open house at Abbotsford in the fine old feudal fashion and was seldom without visitors. His own friends and many strangers from a distance, with or without introductions,

sought him there, and found a hearty hospitable country laird, entirely occupied to all outward appearance with local and domestic business and sport, building and planting, adding wing to wing, acre to acre, plantation to plantation, with just leisure enough for the free-hearted entertainment of his guests and the cultivation of friendly relations with his humble neighbours. How could such a man find time to write two or three novels a year, besides what was published in his own name? Even the few intimates who knew how early he got up to prepare his packet for the printer, and had some idea of the extraordinary power that he had acquired of commanding his faculties for the utilization of odd moments, must have wondered at times whether he had not inherited the arts of his ancestral relation Michael Scot, and kept a goblin in some retired attic or vault.

Scott's fertility is not absolutely unparalleled; Anthony Trollope claimed to have surpassed him in rate as well as total amount of production, having also business duties to attend to. But in speed of production combined with variety and depth of interest and weight and accuracy of historical substance Scott is unrivalled. On his claims as a serious historian, which Carlyle ignored in his curiously narrow and splenetic criticism, he was always, with all his magnanimity, peculiarly sensitive. A certain feeling that his antiquarian studies were undervalued seems to have haunted him from his youth. It was probably this that gave the sting to Jeffrey's criticism of *Marmion*, and that tempted him to the somewhat questionable proceeding of reviewing his own novels in the *Quarterly* upon the appearance of *Old Mortality*. He was nettled besides at the accusation of having treated the Covenanters unfairly, and wanted to justify himself by the production of historical documents. In this criticism of himself Scott replied lightly to some of the familiar objections to his work, such as the

feebleness of his heroes, Waverley, Bertram, Lovel, and the melodramatic character of some of his scenes and characters. But he argued more seriously against the idea that historical romances are the enemies of history, and he rebutted by anticipation Carlyle's objection that he wrote only to amuse idle persons who like to lie on their backs and read novels. His *apologia* is worth quoting. Historical romances, he admits, have always been failures, but the failure has been due to the imperfect knowledge of the writers and not to the species of composition. If, he says, anachronisms in manners can be avoided, and “the features of an age gone by can be recalled in a spirit of delineation at once faithful and striking, . . . the composition itself is in every point of view dignified and improved; and the author, leaving the light and frivolous associates with whom a careless observer would be disposed to ally him, takes his seat on the bench of the historians of his time and country. In this proud assembly, and in no mean place of it, we are disposed to rank the author of these works. At once a master of the great events and minute incidents of history, and of the manners of the times he celebrates, as distinguished from those which now prevail, the intimate thus of the living and of the dead, his judgment enables him to separate those traits which are characteristic from those that are generic; and his imagination, not less accurate and discriminating than vigorous and vivid, presents to the mind of the reader the manners of the times, and introduces to his familiar acquaintance the individuals of the drama as they thought and spoke and acted.” This defence of himself shows us the ideal at which Scott aimed, and which he realized. He was not in the least unconscious of his own excellence. He did not hesitate in this review to compare himself with Shakespeare in respect of truth to nature. “The volume which this author has studied is the great book of nature. He has gone abroad into the world in quest of what the world will certainly and abundantly

supply, but what a man of great discrimination alone will find, and a man of the very highest genius will alone depict after he has discovered it. The characters of Shakespeare are not more exclusively human, not more perfectly men and women as they live and move, than those of this mysterious author."

The immense strain of Scott's double or quadruple life as sheriff and clerk, hospitable laird, poet, novelist, and miscellaneous man of letters, publisher and printer, though the prosperous excitement sustained him for a time, soon told upon his health. Early in 1817 began a series of attacks of agonizing cramp of the stomach, which recurred at short intervals during more than two years. But his appetite and capacity for work remained unbroken. He made his first attempt at play-writing as he was recovering from the first attack; before the year was out he had completed *Rob Roy*, and within six months it was followed by *The Heart of Midlothian*, which filled the four volumes of the second series of *Tales of My Landlord*, and has remained one of the most popular among his novels. *The Bride of Lammermoor*, *The Legend of Montrose*, forming the third series by "Jedediah Cleishbotham," and *Ivanhoe* (1820) were dictated to amanuenses, through fits of suffering so acute that he could not suppress cries of agony. Still he would not give up. When Laidlaw begged him to stop dictating he only answered, "Nay, Willie, only see that the doors are fast. I would fain keep all the cry as well as the wool to ourselves; but as to giving over work, that can only be when I am in woollen."

Throughout those two years of intermittent ill-health, which was at one time so serious that his life was despaired of and he took formal leave of his family, Scott's semi-public life at Abbotsford continued as usual — swarms of visitors coming and going, and the rate of production, on the

whole, suffering no outward and visible check, all the world wondering at the novelist's prodigious fertility. The first of the series concerning which there were murmurs of dissatisfaction was *The Monastery* (1820), which was the first completed after the re-establishment of the author's bodily vigour. The failure, such as it was, was possibly due to the introduction of the supernatural in the person of the White Lady of Avenel; and its sequel, *The Abbot* (1820), in which Mary, Queen of Scots, is introduced, was generally hailed as fully sustaining the reputation of “the Great Unknown.” *Kenilworth* (1821), *The Pirate* (1822), *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), *Peveril of the Peak* (1822), *Quentin Durward* (1823), *St Ronan's Well* (1824), *Redgauntlet* (1824) followed in quick succession in the course of three years, and it was not till the last two were reached that the cry that the author was writing too fast began to gather volume. *St Ronan's Well* was very severely criticized and condemned. And yet Leslie Stephen tells a story of a dozen modern connoisseurs in the Waverley novels who agreed that each should write down separately the name of his favourite novel, when it appeared that each had without concert named *St Ronan's Well*. There is this certainly to be said for *St Ronan's*, that, in spite of the heaviness of some of the scenes at the “bottle” and the artificial melodramatic character of some of the personages, none of Scott's stories is of more absorbing or more brilliantly diversified interest. Contradictions between contemporary popular opinion and mature critical judgment, as well as diversities of view among critics themselves, rather shake confidence in individual judgment on the vexed but not particularly wise question which is the best of Scott's novels. There must, of course, always be inequalities in a series so prolonged. The author cannot always be equally happy in his choice of subject, situation and character. Naturally also he dealt first with the subjects of which his mind was fullest. But any theory of

falling off or exhaustion based upon plausible general considerations has to be qualified so much when brought into contact with the facts that very little confidence can be reposed in its accuracy. *The Fortunes of Nigel* comes comparatively late in the series and has often been blamed for its looseness of construction. Scott himself always spoke slightingly of his plots, and humorously said that he proceeded on Bayes's maxim, “What the deuce is a plot good for but to bring in good things?” Yet some competent critics prefer *The Fortunes of Nigel* to any other of Scott's novels. An attempt might be made to value the novels according to the sources of their materials, according as they are based on personal observation, documentary history or previous imaginative literature. On this principle *Ivanhoe* and *The Tales of the Crusaders* (1825, containing *The Betrothed* and *The Talisman*) might be adjudged inferior as being based necessarily on previous romance. But as a matter of fact Scott's romantic characters are vitalized, clothed with a verisimilitude of life, out of the author's deep, wide and discriminating knowledge of realities, and his observation of actual life was coloured by ideals derived from romance. He wrote all his novels out of a mind richly stored with learning of all kinds, and in the heat of composition seems to have drawn from whatever his tenacious memory supplied to feed the fire of imagination, without pausing to reflect upon the source. He did not exhaust his accumulations from one source first and then turn to another, but from first to last drew from all as the needs of the occasion happened to suggest.

During the years 1821-1825 he edited Richard Franck's *Northern Memoirs* (1821), *Chronological Notes of Scottish Affairs from the Diary of Lord Fountainhall* (1822), *Military Memoirs of the Great Civil War* (1822), and *The Novelists' Library* (10 vols., London, 1821-1824), the prefatory memoirs to which were separately published in 1828.

Towards the close of 1825, after eleven years of brilliant and prosperous labour, encouraged by constant tributes of admiration, homage and affection such as no other literary potentate has ever enjoyed, realizing his dreams of baronial splendour and hospitality on a scale suited to his large literary revenues, Scott suddenly discovered that the foundations of his fortune were unsubstantial. He had imagined himself clear of all embarrassments in 1818, when all the unsaleable stock of John Ballantyne & Co. was bargained off by Rigdum to Constable for Waverley copyrights, and the publishing concern was wound up. Apparently he never informed himself accurately of the new relations of mutual accommodation on which the printing firm then entered with the great but rashly speculative publisher, and drew liberally for his own expenditure against the undeniable profits of his novels without asking any questions, trusting blindly in the solvency of his commercial henchmen. Unfortunately, “lifted off their feet” by the wonderful triumphs of their chief, they thought themselves exempted like himself from the troublesome duty of inspecting ledgers and balancing accounts, till the crash came. From a diary which Scott began a few days before the first rumours of financial difficulty reached him we know how he bore from day to day the rapidly unfolded prospect of unsuspected liabilities. “Thank God,” was his first reflection, “I have enough to pay more than 20s. in the pound, taking matters at the worst.” But a few weeks revealed the unpleasant truth that, owing to the way in which Ballantyne & Co. were mixed up with Constable & Co., and Constable with Hurst & Robinson, the failure of the London house threw upon him personal responsibility for £130,000.

How Scott's pride rebelled against the dishonour of bankruptcy, how he toiled for the rest of his life to clear off

this enormous debt, declining all offers of assistance and asking no consideration from his creditors except time, and how nearly he succeeded, is one of the most familiar chapters in literary history, and would be one of the saddest were it not for the heroism of the enterprise. His wife died soon after the struggle began, and he suffered other painful bereavements; but, though sick at heart, he toiled on indomitably, and, writing for honour, exceeded even his happiest days in industrious speed. If he could have maintained the rate of the first three years, during which he completed *Woodstock* (1826); *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827), which included three tales — “The Highland Widow,” “The Two Drovers” and “The Surgeon's Daughter”; *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828, in the second series of *Chronicles of the Canongate*); *Anne of Geierstein* (1829); the *Life of Napoleon* (9 vols., 1827); part of his *History of Scotland* (2 vols., 1829-1830, for *Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia*); the Scottish series of *Tales of a Grandfather* (four series, 1828-1829-1830-1831; inscribed to “Hugh Littlejohn,” *i.e.* John Hugh Lockhart), besides several magazine articles, some of them among the most brilliant of his miscellaneous writings, and prefaces and notes to a collected edition of his novels — if he could have continued at this rate he might soon have freed himself from all his encumbrances. The result of his exertions from January 1826 to January 1828 was nearly £40,000 for his creditors. But the terrific labour proved too much even for his endurance. Ugly symptoms began to alarm his family in 1829, and in February of 1830 he had his first stroke of paralysis. Still he was undaunted, and not all the persuasions of friends and physicians could induce him to take rest. “During 1830,” Lockhart says, “he covered almost as many sheets with his MS. as in 1829,” the new introductions to a collected edition of his poetry and the *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* being amongst the labours of the year. He had a slight touch of apoplexy in

November and a distinct stroke of paralysis in the following April; but, in spite of these warnings and of other bodily ailments, he had two more novels, *Count Robert of Paris* and *Castle Dangerous* (constituting the fourth series of *Tales of My Landlord*), ready for the press by the autumn of 1831. He would not yield to the solicitations of his friends and consent to try rest and a change of scene, till fortunately, as his mental powers failed, he became possessed of the idea that all his debts were at last paid and that he was once more a free man. In this belief he happily remained till his death. When it was known that his physicians recommended a sea voyage for his health, a government vessel was put at his disposal, and he cruised about in the Mediterranean and visited places of interest for the greater part of a year before his death. But, when he felt that the end was near, he insisted on being carried across Europe that he might die on his beloved Tweedside at Abbotsford, where he expired on the 21st of September 1832. He was buried at Dryburgh Abbey.

Scott's wife had died in 1826. His eldest son, Walter, succeeded to the baronetcy which had been conferred on his father in 1820, and the title became extinct on his death in 1847; the second son, Charles, died at Teheran in 1841, and the second daughter, Anne, died unmarried in 1833. Scott's elder daughter Charlotte Sophia (d. 1837) was the wife of his biographer, J. G. Lockhart (*q.v.*); and their daughter Charlotte (d. 1858) married J. R. Hope-Scott (q.v.), and was the mother of Mary Monica, wife of the Hon. J. C. Maxwell, who in 1874 took the additional name of Scott on his marriage with the heiress of Abbotsford. Mrs Maxwell Scott inherited some of the family literary talent, and among other books wrote two volumes about Abbotsford (1893 and 1897).

Two busts of Scott were executed by Sir Francis Chantrey: one in 1820, which was presented to Scott by the sculptor in 1828; a second in 1828, which was sent by Chantrey to Sir Robert Peel about 1837, and is now in the National Portrait Gallery, London. The 1820 bust was duplicated by Chantrey for the duke of Wellington in 1827, and there is a copy in Westminster Abbey, erected in 1897. Henry Raeburn painted Scott's portrait for Archibald Constable in 1808; Scott sat to the same artist in 1809 for the portrait now at Abbotsford, and two or three times subsequently. Other notable portraits were executed by Sir Thomas Lawrence in 1820 for George IV.; by John Graham Gilbert in 1829 for the Royal Society of Edinburgh; by Francis Grant for Lady Ruthven in 1831; and a posthumous portrait of Scott with his dogs in the Rhymer's Glen by Sir Edwin Landseer. The Scott monument in Princes Street, Edinburgh, erected in 1846, was designed by George Kemp, the statue being the work of John Steell.

Kenilworth

Introduction

A certain degree of success, real or supposed, in the delineation of Queen Mary, naturally induced the author to attempt something similar respecting "her sister and her foe," the celebrated Elizabeth. He will not, however, pretend to have approached the task with the same feelings; for the candid Robertson himself confesses having felt the prejudices with which a Scottishman is tempted to regard the subject; and what so liberal a historian avows, a