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POETRY & LIFE

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

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SCOTT & HIS POETRY

BY

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GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.

LONDON

BOMBAY

SYDNEY

First published May 1912
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & COMPANY
89-91 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W.C. 2

Reprinted: July 1915
August 1919
October 1922
August 1929

Printed in Great Britain at THE BALLANTYNE PRESS by
SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE & CO. LTD
Colchester, London & Eton

GENERAL PREFACE

A GLANCE through the pages of this little book will suffice to disclose the general plan of the series of which it forms a part. Only a few words of explanation, therefore, will be necessary.

The point of departure is the undeniable fact that with the vast majority of young students of literature a living interest in the work of any poet can best be aroused, and an intelligent appreciation of it secured, when it is immediately associated with the character and career of the poet himself. The cases are indeed few and far between in which much fresh light will not be thrown upon a poem by some knowledge of the personality of the writer, while it will often be found that the most direct—perhaps even the only—way to the heart of its meaning lies through a consideration of the circumstances in which it had its birth. The purely æsthetic critic may possibly object that a poem should be regarded simply as a self-contained and detached piece of art, having no personal affiliations or bearings. Of the validity of this as an abstract principle nothing need now be said. The fact remains that, in the earlier stages of study at any rate, poetry is most valued and loved when it is made to seem most human and vital; and the human and vital interest of poetry can be most surely brought home to the reader by the biographical method of interpretation.

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This is to some extent recognized by writers of histories and text-books of literature, and by editors of selections from the works of our poets ; for place is always given by them to a certain amount of biographical material. But in the histories and text-books the biography of a given writer stands by itself, and his work has to be sought elsewhere, the student being left to make the connexion for himself ; while even in our current editions of selections there is little systematic attempt to link biography, step by step, with production.

This brings us at once to the chief purpose of the present series. In this, biography and production will be considered together and in intimate association. In other words, an endeavour will be made to interest the reader in the lives and personalities of the poets dealt with, and at the same time to use biography as an introduction and key to their writings.

Each volume will therefore contain the life-story of the poet who forms its subject. In this, attention will be specially directed to his personality as it expressed itself in his poetry, and to the influences and conditions which counted most as formative factors in the growth of his genius. This biographical study will be used as a setting for a selection, as large as space will permit, of his representative poems. Such poems, where possible, will be reproduced in full, and care will be taken to bring out their connexion with his character, his circumstances, and the movement of his mind. Then, in

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addition, so much more general literary criticism will be incorporated as may seem to be needed to supplement the biographical material, and to exhibit both the essential qualities and the historical importance of his work.

It is believed that the plan thus pursued is substantially in the nature of a new departure, and that the volumes of this series, constituting as they will an introduction to the study of some of our greatest poets, will be found useful to teachers and students of literature, and no less to the general lover of English poetry.

WILLIAM HENRY HUDSON

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SCOTT AND HIS POETRY

WALTER SCOTT was born on August 15, 1771, at his father's house in an old quarter of Edinburgh. His father, a Writer to the Signet, was a staid Calvinist, the first of his hardy race to adopt the sedentary life of a profession. He and his wife, the daughter of Dr. John Rutherford, Professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh, had a very large family, but only five reached a mature age. These were Robert, a naval officer, John, an officer in the army, Anne, Walter, and Thomas.

In his second year Walter Scott had a serious illness which resulted in a lameness that lasted as long as his life. Every remedy was tried, and as part of the treatment he was sent to live in the country at his grandfather's house, Sandy-Knowe, near the ruined tower of Smailholm. Here the child learnt the delights of country life, and, at this early age, developed a love of external nature which influenced him and all his work to an incalculable degree. "It is here at Sandy-Knowe," Scott writes in his Autobiography, "in the residence of my paternal grandfather, already mentioned, that I have the first consciousness of existence."¹

¹ Lockhart's "Life of Sir Walter Scott," p. 14. The edition referred to throughout is the author's own abridgment republished in "Everyman's Library." I have chosen this particular edition because it is easily obtainable. It would be better if every student of Scott were to study the complete Life, but as that is exceedingly long, whilst the abridgment is very good, I recommend the latter for first study.

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In the summer weather he would be carried by the old shepherd to the sheep pastures on the knolls, and there would lie watching the browsing sheep or roll luxuriously on the grass in the midst of the flock. Thus he gained an intimate knowledge of the aspects of nature just at the age when infancy was developing into childhood. At this same age, when all the faculties are springing into existence and when the imagination can be stunted or quickened, the boy was influenced by the tragic tales of Jacobite struggles and Border raids told by a neighbouring farmer and by his own grandmother. So, too, his aunt amused and inspired him, reading by the hour from works of history and imagination. If there be anything in the theory of early impressions, one cannot fail to trace to these early stimuli that love of adventure and chivalry and that sympathy with external nature which are the two chief characteristics of all Scott's literary work.

The strongest confirmation of this is Scott's own account of the impression which his dawning fancy received from the surroundings of Sandy-Knowe and Smailholm.

Thus, while I ape the measure wild
Of tales that charm'd me yet a child,
Rude though they be, still with the chime
Return the thoughts of early time ;
And feelings, roused in life's first day,
Glow in the line, and prompt the lay.

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Then rise those crags, that mountain tower,¹
Which charm'd my fancy's wakening hour.
Though no broad river swept along,
To claim, perchance, heroic song ;
Though sigh'd no groves in summer gale,
To prompt of love a softer tale ;
Though scarce a puny streamlet's speed
Claim'd homage from a shepherd's reed ;
Yet was poetic impulse given,
By the green hill and clear blue heaven.
It was a barren scene, and wild,
Where naked cliffs were rudely piled ;
But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green ;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wall-flower grew,
And honeysuckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.
I deem'd such nooks the sweetest shade
The sun in all its round survey'd ;
And still I thought that shatter'd tower
The mightiest work of human power ;
And marvell'd as the aged hind
With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,
Of forayers, who, with headlong force,
Down from that strength had spurr'd their horse,
Their southern rapine to renew,
Far in the distant Cheviots blue,
And, home returning, fill'd the hall
With revel, wassel-rout, and brawl.
Methought that still, with trump and clang,
The gateway's broken arches rang ;
Methought grim features, seam'd with scars,
Glared through the window's rusty bars,

¹ The ruined tower of Smailholm.

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And ever, by the winter hearth,
Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,
Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms ;
Of patriot battles, won of old
By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold ;
Of later fields of feud and fight,
When, pouring from their Highland height,
The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,
Had swept the scarlet ranks away.
While stretch'd at length upon the floor,
Again I fought each combat o'er,
Pebbles and shells, in order laid,
The mimic ranks of war display'd ;
And onward still the Scottish Lion bore,
And still the scatter'd Southron fled before.

Still, with vain fondness, could I trace,
Anew, each kind familiar face,
That brighten'd at our evening fire !
From the thatch'd mansion's grey-hair'd Sire,¹
Wise without learning, plain and good,
And sprung of Scotland's gentler blood ;
Whose eye, in age, quick, clear, and keen,
Show'd what in youth its glance had been ;
Whose doom discording neighbours sought,
Content with equity unbought ;
To him the venerable Priest,²
Our frequent and familiar guest,
Whose life and manners well could paint
Alike the student and the saint ;
Alas ! whose speech too oft I broke
With gambol rude and timeless joke :
For I was wayward, bold, and wild,

¹ Robert Scott of Sandy-Knowe, Scott's grandfather.

² Dr Duncan, the minister.

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A self-will'd imp, a grandame's child ;
But half a plague, and half a jest,
Was still endured, beloved, caress'd.

“Marmion.” *Introd.*, canto iii.

In his fourth year the child was taken to England, and after spending a year at Bath for the sake of the waters he returned to his home in Edinburgh, and afterwards for a season to Sandy-Knowe. At Bath he had learnt to read, and he now began to appreciate books unaided. Many spare hours were spent in reading aloud to his mother, particularly from Pope's translation of Homer. In 1778 the boy was sent to the High School of Edinburgh, but there, he tells us, he was distinguished rather amongst his fellows for story-telling than amongst his instructors for more orthodox learning. Nevertheless he made progress, which was marked by fitful flashes of brilliance, and by the time his studies were complete, Scott had acquired a sound knowledge of Latin, though his Greek was almost negligible. But Latin did not oust English, and Scott's reading was gradually widening. He had been taken from the High School and sent to Kelso, where opportunities for reading were nowise diminished. As yet, however, he had been devouring books with the aimlessness and voluptuous acquisitiveness of a child, when at the age of thirteen he first fell in with Percy's "Reliques of Ancient Poetry." "As I had been from infancy devoted to legendary lore of

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this nature," he writes, "and only reluctantly withdrew my attention, from the scarcity of materials and the rudeness of those which I possessed, it may be imagined, but cannot be described, with what delight I saw pieces of the same kind which had amused my childhood, and still continued in secret the Delilahs of my imagination, considered as the subject of sober research, grave commentary, and apt illustration, by an editor who showed his poetical genius was capable of emulating the best qualities of what his pious labour preserved. I remember well the spot where I read these volumes for the first time. It was beneath a huge platanus-tree, in the ruins of what had been intended for an old-fashioned arbour in the *garden* I have mentioned. The summer day sped onward so fast that, notwithstanding the sharp appetite of thirteen, I forgot the hour of dinner, was sought for with anxiety, and was still found entranced in my intellectual banquet. To read and to remember was in this instance the same thing, and henceforth I overwhelmed my school-fellows, and all who would hearken to me, with tragical recitations from the ballads of Bishop Percy."¹

Vaguely longing after the chivalrous and the adventurous in literature, the boy now finds a fresh spring whence he can draw at leisure what had delighted his infant taste. From infancy he had heard ballads and tales of Border adventure, but his appreciation had so far

¹ Lockhart, "Life," pp. 29, 30.

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been unconscious. Now with the advent of a conscious love of this type of literature, there came of necessity a new purpose in all that he read, and instead of roaming aimlessly in the fields of literature he began to exercise choice, knowing well what would please this newly discovered taste.

At the same time the love of external nature became a conscious love, just as his taste in the creations of art was becoming conscious. "To this period also," he writes, "I can trace distinctly the awaking of that delightful feeling for the beauties of natural objects which has never since deserted me. . . . The romantic feelings which I have described as predominating in my mind, naturally rested upon and associated themselves with these grand features of the landscape around me ; and the historical incidents, or traditional legends connected with many of them, gave to my admiration a sort of intense impression of reverence, which at times made my heart feel too big for its bosom. From this time the love of natural beauty, more especially when combined with ancient ruins, or remains of our fathers' piety or splendour, became with me an insatiable passion, which, if circumstances had permitted, I would willingly have gratified by travelling over half the globe."¹

From Kelso Scott returned to enter the University of Edinburgh and to prepare for his father's profession. Here, as at school, he showed a tendency to stray from the path of orthodox

¹ Lockhart, "Life," pp. 30, 31.

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learning into unfrequented but pleasant by-paths of romantic and antiquarian lore. It was in no spirit of idleness that he chose his own way, dallying in by-paths for their shade and ease. These paths were as thorny as those where his comrades walked, but because they led in the direction of his object they were pleasanter. In piling up masses of learning of abstruse and unusual sort he expended more labour than an ordinary undergraduate gives to the recognised curriculum. Hence it was that Scott had no lack of that discipline which is a necessary basis of education, and without which he would never have become the man of resolution and industry that he was in after-life.

He had not, however, been totally neglecting more regular studies. When he was fifteen years of age he was articled to his father, but in 1789 he decided to study for the Bar. This he did for three years, and in 1792 he was called. An advocate Scott became then at the age of twenty-one, and because he was so great a figure in literature, we must not forget that until very near the end of his life he remained an active lawyer. Indeed, had it not been for his greatness as a writer, it is certain that he would have attained the highest rank in his profession.

About this time Scott made the first of many visits to the unfrequented Liddesdale, which he had heard was a mine of Border ballads, and thus began to study at first hand the poetry and people that were to become so eminently his,

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and to lay up a store which was easily held by his marvellous memory till the time when it should be needed for purposes of creative work. In these Liddesdale "raids," as he called them, he seems to have been influenced by nothing further than mere curiosity and a love of the thing, but he was in truth "makin' himsell a' the time," as his companion Robert Shortreed put it. He was also pushing forward his studies of English and of foreign literature. Gray, who with his Scandinavian and Welsh poems had introduced into English poetry a new spirit of liberty and romance,¹ was interesting him; likewise the "Morte d'Arthur," with its tales of an ideal chivalry and romance. French, German, and Italian were also becoming accessible to him, and he was able to read enough Spanish to gain some first-hand knowledge of many Spanish authors, above all Cervantes. Old French chronicles were studied with the interest of an antiquary and a lawyer; Tasso and Ariosto likewise were a pleasure to him. But in chief it was to the new romantic German writers that he owed so much of his own tendency. Already he had studied and admired the bold dramatists of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, and it is not surprising that he should have been swept along by their new admirers in Germany who, bursting the bonds of regularity and individual repression, had returned to the type of the earlier English school of drama.

¹ See Mr. Hudson's "Gray and his Poetry" in this series, pp. 98-107.

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The Elizabethans had been daring in the free play that they had given to the imagination, but the new German writers, desirous of utter emancipation, far outran their masters in a deliberate attempt to encompass the marvellous and the terrible. Schiller and Goethe he was now able to read in the original, to say nothing of other German writers who, with less genius, had less restraint. In this new school Scott found abundance of the spirit that he sought in poetry. Poetry had become cramped and finally dead through excess of regularity and restraint. In the seventeenth century the case had been exactly the reverse : poetry had decayed through excess of liberty, through utter licence of the individual to express himself without restriction. The consequence was a most healthy return to a new type of art in which the individual is sunk, and in place of liberty, individualism, and a consequent irregularity, we find restraint, uniformity, and a resultant regularity. But that had been carried too far, and toward the end of the eighteenth century English poetry became formal and finally effete. Amongst the earliest men to hark back to an earlier age of liberty were Gray, Horace Walpole, Chatterton, James Macpherson, and above all, as far as effects went, Bishop Percy. The same spirit rose spontaneously in Burns and Blake, without antiquarian research and inspiration from a bygone age. Scott, as we have seen, had been feeding his mind on the romantic and ballad literature which during the days of classicism was un-

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known, or, if known, regarded as the barbarous relic of barbarous ages. Should we then wonder if he abandoned himself unrestrainedly in admiration of the school of German dramatists which had revived the spirit of romance and was willing to give unchecked licence to individualism in poetic art? Indeed, however we may accuse this new school of extravagance, and even of vulgar excess, we cannot deny that it is a relief after the sterility and banality which it replaced.

His first serious production was, in fact, a translation of the "Lenore" of Bürger, entitled "William and Helen." This ballad was translated in 1795, and in 1796 it was published together with his second translation, also from Bürger, called "The Chase." These two poems did not receive a very warm welcome outside his immediate circle, partly, no doubt, because the "Lenore" had found a number of translators at the same time. Nor can we now give them high praise. Merits they have, and as first productions they are interesting. They showed an undeniable boldness and freedom of handling, and they both display that marvellous speed which later was to become one of Scott's chief poetic qualities. But, like most of the new literature of the supernatural and terrifying kind, they do not any longer raise the hair; the spectres smack of stage trickery and the climax is unconvincing.

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II

FOR nearly six years before this time Scott had been in love with a certain young lady to whom chance had introduced him. She was Margaret, the daughter of Sir John Stuart Belches, of Invernay. But despite his faithful, silent devotion to her for so long, she never would admit his addresses, and in 1796 an end was put to this long dream by her marriage with William Forbes. The story of this early passion is obscure, and though Scott referred to it in a private journal in 1827, there is great doubt as to what exactly was the extent of their relations and what caused the final breach. Suffice it for us that in 1797 Scott, under the influence of this disappointment, wrote what is justly regarded as one of his purest lyrics, and from this poem it is obvious that, whether with justice or not, he was certainly filled with bitterness.

THE VIOLET

The violet in her green-wood bower,
Where birchen boughs with hazels mingle,
May boast itself the fairest flower
In glen, or copse, or forest dingle.

Though fair her gems of azure hue,
Beneath the dewdrop's weight reclining ;
I've seen an eye of lovelier blue,
More sweet through wat'ry lustre shining.

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The summer sun that dew shall dry,
Ere yet the day be past its morrow ;
Nor longer in my false love's eye
Remain'd the tear of parting sorrow.

It has been said that Scott's was essentially a martial spirit. In poetry he loved the blaring notes of the trumpet; pomp and pageantry and military display were his delight. So in actual life he took pleasure in the exercise of arms. About this time the fear of invasion had stimulated public spirit to zeal for military training, and Edinburgh had raised a band of volunteers. Scott's lameness debarred him from joining these, so, in his anxiety not to be defeated, he persuaded several influential men to aid in the enrolment of a band of mounted volunteers, for, though he was crippled on foot, Scott was all his life a horseman of the first order.

During the summer of 1797 Scott and his brother went on a tour to the English Lakes. It was on his way thither, at a ball at Carlisle, that Scott was first introduced to Charlotte Margaret Carpenter, the daughter of Jean Charpentier of Lyons, who had fled to England at the time of the Revolution. Her father was now dead, but her mother, partly under the protection of the Marquis of Downshire, was still living in England. To Miss Carpenter (as she was called in England) Scott was married on Christmas Eve of the same year. He and his wife settled in a house in Edinburgh, and in the following summer they

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hired a cottage at Lasswade, a village six miles out of Edinburgh. Here they spent several happy summers, making an ever-widening circle of friends, whilst Scott was laying the foundation of his literary reputation. Amongst the most important of these new acquaintances, Matthew Gregory Lewis was, from a literary point of view and in so far as he influenced Scott, the chief. "Monk" Lewis, who was the leader in England of the school of "terror and wonder," was then preparing the collection of ballads, mostly his own, that were published in 1799 as "Tales of Terror," and in 1801, with additions, as "Tales of Wonder." He immediately found in Scott a kindred spirit who, like himself, admired the new German school of horror and weirdness. The immediate result of this acquaintance seems to have been that Lewis negotiated with a bookseller the publication of Scott's prose translation of Goethe's "Goetz von Berlichingen"—the first of Scott's works to bear his name. The result was that Scott contributed five ballads to "Tales of Wonder." Of these ballads—"Glenfinlas," "The Eve of St. John," "The Fire-King," "Frederick and Alice," and "The Wild Huntsman"¹—the last two are from the German, and the rest are original. "Glenfinlas" and "The Eve of St. John" are noteworthy as being Scott's first ballads with Scottish subjects. The most remarkable, per-

¹ This poem had already been published with the title of "The Chase." See p. 23. Later it was called "The Wild Huntsman."

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haps, is "The Eve of St. John," which, besides having most poetic merit, is interesting in that the scene is laid at Smailholm Tower, the ruin near Sandy-Knowe which Scott had known so well from earliest childhood.

THE EVE OF ST. JOHN

The Baron of Smaylho'me rose with day,
He spurr'd his courser on,
Without stop or stay, down the rocky way,
That leads to Brotherstone.

He went not with the bold Buccleuch,
His banner broad to rear ;
He went not 'gainst the English yew,
To lift the Scottish spear.

Yet his plate-jack was braced, and his helmet
was laced,
And his vaunt-brace of proof he wore ;
At his saddle-gerthe was a good steel sperthe,
Full ten pound weight and more.

The Baron return'd in three days' space,
And his looks were sad and sour ;
And weary was his courser's pace,
As he reach'd his rocky tower.

He came not from where Ancram Moor
Ran red with English blood ;
Where the Douglas true, and the bold Buccleuch,
'Gainst keen Lord Evers stood.

Yet was his helmet hack'd and hew'd,
His acton pierced and tore,
His axe and his dagger with blood imbrued,—
But it was not English gore.

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He lighted at the Chapellage,
He held him close and still ;
And he whistled thrice for his little foot-page,
His name was English Will.

“ Come thou hither, my little foot-page,
Come hither to my knee ;
Though thou art young, and tender of age,
I think thou art true to me.

“ Come, tell me all that thou hast seen,
And look thou tell me true !
Since I from Smaylho'me tower have been,
What did thy lady do ? ”—

“ My lady, each night, sought the lonely light,
That burns on the wild Watchfold ;
For, from height to height, the beacons bright
Of the English foemen told.

“ The bittern clamour'd from the moss,
The wind blew loud and shrill ;
Yet the craggy pathway she did cross
To the eiry Beacon Hill.

“ I watched her steps, and silent came
Where she sat her on a stone ;—
No watchman stood by the dreary flame,
It burnèd all alone.

“ The second night I kept her in sight,
Till to the fire she came,
And, by Mary's might ! an Armèd Knight
Stood by the lonely flame.

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“ And many a word that warlike lord
Did speak to my lady there ;
But the rain fell fast, and loud blew the blast,
And I heard not what they were.

“ The third night there the sky was fair,
And the mountain-blast was still,
As again I watched the secret pair,
On the lonesome Beacon Hill.

“ And I heard her name the midnight hour,
And name this holy eve ;
And say, ‘ Come this night to thy lady’s bower ;
~~Ask no bold~~ **Baron’s leave.**

“ ‘ He lifts his spear with the bold Buccleuch ;
His lady is all alone ;
The door she’ll undo, to her knight so true,
On the eve of good St. John.’—

“ ‘ I cannot come ; I must not come ;
I dare not come to thee ;
On the eve of St. John I must wander alone :
In thy bower I may not be.’—

“ ‘ Now, out on thee, fainthearted knight !
Thou should’st not say me nay ;
For the eve is sweet, and when lovers meet,
Is worth the whole summer’s day.

“ ‘ And I’ll chain the blood-hound, and the warder
shall not sound,
And rushes shall be strewed on the stair ;
So, by the black rood-stone, and by holy St. John,
I conjure thee, my love, to be there ! ’—

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“ ‘ Though the blood-hound be mute, and the rush
 beneath my foot,
 And the warder his bugle should not blow,
Yet there sleepeth a priest in a chamber to the east,
 And my footstep he would know.’—

“ ‘ O fear not the priest, who sleepeth to the east,
 For to Dryburgh the way he has ta’en ;
And there to say mass, till three days do pass,
 For the soul of a knight that is slayne.’—

“ He turn’d him around, and grimly he frown’d ;
 Then he laugh’d right scornfully—
‘ He who says the mass-rite for the soul of that
 knight,
 May as well say mass for me :

“ ‘ At the lone midnight hour, when bad spirits
 have power,
 In thy chamber will I be.’
With that he was gone, and my lady left alone,
 And no more did I see.”

Then changed, I trow, was that bold Baron’s brow,
 From the dark to the blood-red high ;

“ Now, tell me the mien of the knight thou hast seen,
 For, by Mary, he shall die ! ”—

“ His arms shone full bright, in the beacon’s red
 light ;
 His plume it was scarlet and blue ;
On his shield was a hound, in a silver leash bound,
 And his crest was a branch of the yew.”—

“ Thou liest, thou liest, thou little foot-page,
 Loud dost thou lie to me !
For that knight is cold, and low laid in the mould,
 All under the Eildon Tree.”—

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

“ Yet hear but my word, my noble lord !
For I heard her name his name ;
And that lady bright, she called the knight
Sir Richard of Coldinghame.”—

The bold Baron’s brow then changed, I trow,
From high blood-red to pale—
“ The grave is deep and dark—and the corpse is
stiff and stark—
So I may not trust thy tale.

“ Where fair Tweed flows round holy Melrose,
And Eildon slopes to the plain,
Full three nights ago, by some secret foe,
That gay gallant was slain.

“ The varying light deceived thy sight,
And the wild winds drown’d the name ;
For the Dryburgh bells ring, and the white monks
do sing,
For Sir Richard of Coldinghame ! ”

He pass’d the court-gate, and he oped the tower-gate,
And he mounted the narrow stair,
To the bartizan-seat, where, with maids that on
her wait,
He found his lady fair.

That lady sat in mournful mood ;
Look’d over hill and vale ;
Over Tweed’s fair flood, and Mertoun’s wood,
And all down Teviotdale.

“ Now hail, now hail, thou lady bright ! ”—
“ Now hail, thou Baron true !
What news, what news, from Ancram fight ?
What news from the bold Buccleuch ? ”—

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

~~"The Ancren-weir is red with gore,~~
For many a Southron fell ;
And Buccleuch has charged us, evermore,
To watch our beacons well."—

The lady blush'd red, but nothing she said ;
Nor added the Baron a word :
Then she stepp'd down the stair to her chamber fair,
And so did her moody lord.

In sleep the lady mourn'd, and the Baron toss'd
and turn'd,
And oft to himself he said,—
~~"The worms around him creep, and his bloody~~
grave is deep . . .
It cannot give up the dead !"—

It was near the ringing of matin-bell,
The night was well-nigh done,
When a heavy sleep on that Baron fell,
On the eve of good St. John.

The lady look'd through the chamber fair,
By the light of a dying flame ;
And she was aware of a knight stood there—
Sir Richard of Coldinghame !

"Alas ! away, away !" she cried,
"For the holy Virgin's sake !"—
"Lady, I know who sleeps by thy side ;
But, lady, he will not awake.

"By Eildon Tree, for long nights three,
In bloody grave have I lain ;
The mass and the death-prayer are said for me
But, lady, they are said in vain.

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“ ~~By~~ the Baron's brand, near Tweed's fair strand,
Most foully ~~slain~~, I fell ;
And my restless sprite on the ~~baron's~~ height,
For a space is doom'd to dwell.

“ At our trysting-place, for a certain space,
I must wander to and fro ;
But I had not had power to come to thy bower
Had'st thou not conjured me so.”—

Love master'd fear—her brow she cross'd ;
“ How, Richard, hast thou sped ?
And art thou saved, or art thou lost ? ”—
The vision shook his head !

“ Who spilleth life, shall forfeit life ;
So bid thy lord believe :
That lawless love is guilt above,
This awful sign receive.”

He laid his left palm on an oaken beam ;
His right upon her hand ;
The lady shrunk, and fainting sunk,
For it scorch'd like a fiery brand.

The sable score, of fingers four,
Remains on that board impress'd ;
And for evermore that lady wore
A covering on her wrist.

There is a nun in Dryburgh bower,
Ne'er looks upon the sun ;
There is a monk in Melrose tower
He speaketh word to none.

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That nun, who ne'er beholds the day,
That monk, who speaks to none—
That nun was Smaylho'me's Lady gay,
That monk the bold Baron.

About the same time Scott had written another play, "The House of Aspen," partly translated from the German and partly original. Like "Goetz," it is a prose drama, but it contains two or three lyrics which show the spirit and metrical quality of some of his later songs. The one here given is written in a metre similar to that of the "Boat Song" of Clan-Alpine in "The Lady of the Lake."

SONG

Joy to the victors ! the sons of old Aspen !
Joy to the race of the battle and scar !
Glory's proud garland triumphantly grasping ;
Generous in peace, and victorious in war.
Honour acquiring,
Valour inspiring,
Bursting, resistless, through foemen they go ;
War-axes wielding,
Broken ranks yielding,
Till from the battle proud Roderic retiring,
Yields in wild rout the fair palm to his foe.

Joy to each warrior, true follower of Aspen !
Joy to the heroes that gain'd the bold day !
Health to our wounded, in agony gasping ;
Peace to our brethren that fell in the fray !
Boldly this morning,
Roderic's power scorning,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Well for their chieftain their blades did they wield :

Joy blest them dying,

As Maltingen flying,

Low laid his banners, our conquest adorning,

Their death-clouded eyeballs descried on the field !

Now to our home, the proud mansion of Aspen,

Bend we, gay victors, triumphant away ;

There each fond damsel, her gallant youth clasping,

Shall wipe from his forehead the stains of the fray.

Listening the prancing

Of horses advancing ;

E'en now on the turrets our maidens appear.

Love our hearts warming,

Songs the night charming,

Round goes the grape in the goblet gay dancing ;

Love, wine, and song, our blithe evening shall cheer !

In December 1799 Scott was appointed to the Sheriffship of Selkirkshire, a small but permanent position which brought him £300 a year. But all his professional duties did not hinder Scott from pursuing his literary bent, although it is a most noteworthy fact that never did he look upon literature as his real profession, and though he completed such a vast quantity of work in both poetry and prose, it was always done in what to others appeared to be odd moments. Scott never wasted a single instant : he rose early and devoted the time till breakfast to literary work ; if he had legal business, that took up what time it must ; guests and general society engaged a large proportion of his day, for he was ever the most hospitable of men ; yet

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still there seemed time to devote to more writing. Unlike most writers, he scarcely ever needed to await the right mood for composition : he had that sternness and determination which enabled him to make use of every vacant hour. But withal he was a man of infinite capability of application and hard work ; otherwise he would never have accomplished the enormous amount of writing that he did—for he was more prolific than almost any other writer, even those who were nothing more than mere professional literary men.

His next work was to collect, annotate, and supplement with original poems a mass of Border poetry, which was published in 1802 and 1803. The most important feature of this collection, so far as Scott was concerned, consisted of the notes, which gave him scope for displaying all his store of antiquarian and historical knowledge ; though he also exhibited his poetical powers in his own contributions in the manner of the old ballads. Of these the most important is "Cadyow Castle," a ballad which has for theme the murder of the Regent Murray.¹

In the summer of 1802, whilst on duty at Musselburgh with the cavalry volunteers, Scott had been forced to keep his room for three days, owing to a kick from a horse. He spent the time in writing, and before he was about again he had completed the first canto of the "Lay of the Last Minstrel." The poem progressed,

¹ For an excellent and comprehensive appreciation of the Border minstrelsy, see Lockhart, "Life," pp. 113-115.

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but was laid aside for some time, and did not appear in print until 1805. This, the first of his longer poems or poetical romances, originated in a request of the Countess of Dalkeith (afterwards Duchess of Buccleuch) to compose a ballad on the subject of Border superstition. "He assents to Lady Dalkeith's request and casts about for some new variety of diction and rhyme. . . . Sir John Stoddart's casual recitation, a year or two before, of Coleridge's unpublished 'Christabel,' had fixed the music of that noble fragment in his memory. . . . A single scene of feudal festivity in the hall of Branksome, disturbed by some pranks of a nondescript goblin, was probably all that he contemplated ; but his accidental confinement in the midst of a volunteer camp gave him leisure to meditate his theme to the sound of the bugle—and suddenly there flashes on him the idea of extending his simple outline, so as to embrace a vivid panorama of that old Border life of war and tumult, and all earnest passions, with which his researches on the 'Minstrelsy' had by degrees fed his imagination. . . . Erskine or Cranstoun suggests that he would do well to divide the poem into cantos, and prefix to each of them a motto explanatory of the action, after the fashion of Spenser in the 'Faerie Queene.' He pauses for a moment—and the happiest conception of the framework of a picturesque narrative that ever occurred to any poet—one that Homer might have envied—the creation of the ancient harper, starts to life. By such

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steps did the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' grow out of the 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.'"¹

The success of the poem was immediate and immense. The public, critics, brother poets, statesmen, young and old, joined in praise. Fourteen editions followed one another in quick succession, and by 1830 forty-four thousand copies had been sold. Nor is it surprising. As Scott says himself in his Introduction to the 1830 edition: "The attempt to return to a more simple and natural poetry was likely to be welcomed, at a time when the public had become tired of heroic hexameters, with all the buckram and binding that belong to them in modern days." It is just this simplicity of narrative that lends charm to the best parts of the "Lay." But besides simplicity it had a spirit and energy which were to become the most striking characteristics of Scott's narrative poetry. There is that brave show of arms, that bold description of hot speed, that enthralling portrayal of the splendour of a past age of chivalry, tempered by the imagination of a lover of all that is tender and beautiful in human and external nature. And if we feel that all this and more is to be found still better expressed in some of the later romances, we must remember that it was a new-found marvel for the age to which it was first presented. What wonder, then, that the glamour of this splendid imagination enchanted the public of the day?

Unfortunately, space precludes any connected

¹ Lockhart, "Life," pp 129, 130.

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selections from this poem, but the following extract will give some idea of the various qualities which are characteristic of this new work. The Lady of Branksome, who is acquainted with magic lore, is desirous of learning still more, and her immediate wish is to obtain a wondrous book of potent spells which lies buried with Michael Scott, the old magician, in the vaults of Melrose Abbey. For this purpose she summons William of Deloraine, "a stark moss-trooping Scott," to carry out her errand.

XXII

"Sir William of Deloraine, good at need,
Mount thee on the wightest steed ;
Spare not to spur, nor stint to ride,
Until thou come to fair Tweedside ;
And in Melrose's holy pile
Seek thou the Monk of St. Mary's aisle.
Greet the Father well from me ;
Say that the fated hour is come,
And to-night he shall watch with thee,
To win the treasure of the tomb :
For this will be St. Michael's night,
And, though stars be dim, the moon is bright ;
And the Cross, of bloody red,
Will point to the grave of the mighty dead.

XXIII

"What he gives thee, see thou keep ;
Stay not thou for food or sleep :
Be it scroll, or be it book,
Into it, Knight, thou must not look ;
If thou readest, thou art lorn !
Better hadst thou ne'er been born !"—

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XXIV

" O swiftly can speed my dapple-grey steed,
Which drinks of the Teviot clear ;
Ere break of day," the warrior 'gan say,
" Again will I be here :
And safer by none may thy errand be done,
Than, noble dame, by me ;
Letter nor line know I never a one,
Wer't my neck-verse at Hairibee."

XXV

Soon in his saddle sate he fast,
And soon the steep descent he past,
Soon cross'd the sounding barbican,
And soon the Teviot side he won.
Eastward the wooded path he rode,
Green hazels o'er his basnet nod ;
He pass'd the Peel of Goldiland,
And cross'd old Borthwick's roaring strand ;
Dimly he view'd the Moat-hill's mound,
Where Druid shades still flitted round ;
In Hawick twinkled many a light ;
Behind him soon they set in night ;
And soon he spurr'd his courser keen
Beneath the tower of Hazeldean.

XXVI

The clattering hoofs the watchmen mark ;—
" Stand, ho ! thou courier of the dark."—
" For Branksome, ho ! " the knight rejoin'd,
And left the friendly tower behind.
He turn'd him now from Teviotside,
And, guided by the tinkling rill,
Northward the dark ascent did ride,
And gain'd the moor at Horsliehill ;

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Broad on the left before him lay,
For many a mile, the Roman way.

XXVII

A moment now he slack'd his speed,
A moment breathed his panting steed ;
Drew saddle-girth and corslet-band,
And loosen'd in the sheath his brand.
On Minto-crag the moonbeams glint,
Where Barnhill hew'd his bed of flint ;
Who flung his outlaw'd limbs to rest,
Where falcons hang their giddy nest,
Mid cliffs, from whence his eagle eye
For many a league his prey could spy ;
Cliffs, doubling, on their echoes borne,
The terrors of the robber's horn ;
Cliffs, which, for many a later year,
The warbling Doric reed shall hear,
When some sad swain shall teach the grove,
Ambition is no cure for love !

XXVIII

Unchallenged, thence pass'd Deloraine,
To ancient Riddel's fair domain,
Where Aill, from mountains freed,
Down from the lakes did raving come ;
Each wave was crested with tawny foam,
Like the mane of a chestnut steed.
In vain ! no torrent, deep or broad,
Might bar the bold moss-trooper's road.

XXIX

At the first plunge the horse sunk low,
And the water broke o'er the saddlebow ;
Above the foaming tide, I ween,
Scarce half the charger's neck was seen ;

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

For he was barded from counter to tail,
And the rider was arm'd complete in mail ;
Never heavier man and horse
Stemm'd a midnight torrent's force.
The warrior's very plume, I say,
Was daggl'd by the dashing spray ;
Yet, through good heart, and Our Ladye's grace,
At length he gain'd the landing-place.

XXX

Now Bowden Moor the march-man won,
And sternly shook his plumèd head,
As glanced his eye o'er Halidon ;
For on his soul the slaughter red
Of that unhallow'd morn arose,
When first the Scott and Carr were foes ;
When royal James beheld the fray,
Prize to the victor of the day ;
When Home and Douglas, in the van,
Bore down Buccleuch's retiring clan,
Till gallant Cessford's heart-blood dear
Reek'd on dark Elliot's Border spear.

XXXI

In bitter mood he spurrèd fast,
And soon the hated heath was past ;
And far beneath, in lustre wan,
Old Melros' rose, and fair Tweed ran :
Like some tall rock with lichens grey,
Seem'd dimly huge, the dark Abbaye.
When Hawick he pass'd, had curfew rung,
Now midnight lauds were in Melrose sung.
The sound, upon the fitful gale,
In solemn wise did rise and fail,
Like that wild harp, whose magic tone
Is waken'd by the winds alone.

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But when Melrose he reach'd, 'twas silence all ;
He meetly stabled his steed in stall,
And sought the convent's lonely wall.

* * * * *

III

Bold Deloraine his errand said ;
The porter bent his humble head ;
With torch in hand, and feet unshod,
And noiseless step, the path he trod ;
The archèd cloister, far and wide,
Rang to the warrior's clanking stride,
Till, stooping low his lofty crest,
He enter'd the cell of the ancient priest,
And lifted his barrèd aventayle,
To hail the Monk of St. Mary's aisle.

IV

“ The Ladye of Branksome greets thee by me ;
Says, that the fated 'hour is come,
And that to-night I shall watch with thee,
To win the treasure of the tomb.”
From sackcloth couch the Monk arose,
With toil his stiffen'd limbs he rear'd ;
A hundred years had flung their snows
On his thin locks and floating beard.

V

And strangely on the Knight look'd he,
And his blue eyes gleam'd wild and wide ;
“ And darest thou, Warrior ! seek to see
What heaven and hell alike would hide ?
My breast, in belt of iron pent,
With shirt of hair and scourge of thorn ;
For threescore years, in penance spent,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

My knees those flinty stones have worn ;
Yet all too little to atone
For knowing what should ne'er be known.
Would'st thou thy every future year
In ceaseless prayer and penance dree,
Yet wait thy latter end with fear—
Then, daring Warrior, follow me ! ”—

VI

“ Penance, father, will I none ;
Prayer know I hardly one ;
For mass or prayer can I rarely tarry,
Save to patter an Ave Mary,
When I ride on a Border foray.
Other prayer can I none ;
So speed me my errand, and let me be gone.”—

VII

Again on the Knight look'd the Churchman old,
And again he sighed heavily ;
For he had himself been a warrior bold,
And fought in Spain and Italy.
And he thought on the days that were long since by,
When his limbs were strong, and his courage was
high :—
Now, slow and faint, he led the way,
Where, cloister'd round, the garden lay ;
The pillar'd arches were over their head,
And beneath their feet were the bones of the dead.

VIII

Spreading herbs, and flowerets bright,
Glisten'd with the dew of night ;
Nor herb, nor floweret, glisten'd there,
But was carved in the cloister-arches as fair.
The Monk gazed long on the lovely moon,
Then into the night he looked forth ;

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

And red and bright the streamers light
Were dancing in the glowing north.
So had he seen, in fair Castile,
The youth in glittering squadrons start ;
Sudden the flying jennet wheel,
And hurl the unexpected dart.
He knew, by the streamers that shot so bright,
That spirits were riding the northern light.

IX

By a steel-clenched postern door,
They enter'd now the chancel tall ;
The darken'd roof rose high aloof
On pillars lofty and light and small :
The key-stone, that lock'd each ribbèd aisle,
Was a fleur-de-lys, or a quatre-feuille ;
The corbells were carved grotesque and grim ;
And the pillars, with cluster'd shafts so trim,
With base and with capital flourish'd around,
Seem'd bundles of lances which garlands had bound.

X

Full many a scutcheon and banner riven,
Shook to the cold night-wind of heaven,
Around the screenèd altar's pale ;
And there the dying lamps did burn,
Before thy low and lonely urn,
O gallant Chief of Otterburne !
And thine, dark Knight of Liddesdale !
O fading honours of the dead !
O high ambition, lowly laid !

XI

The moon on the east oriel shone
Through slender shafts of shapely stone,
By foliated tracery combined ;
Thou would'st have thought some fairy's hand

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'Twixt poplars straight the ozier wand,
In many a freakish knot, had twined ;
Then framed a spell, when the work was done,
And changed the willow wreaths to stone.
The silver light, so pale and faint,
Show'd many a prophet, and many a saint,
Whose image on the glass was dyed ;
Full in the midst, his Cross of Red
Triumphant Michael brandishèd,
And trampled the Apostate's pride.
The moonbeam kiss'd the holy pane,
And threw on the pavement a bloody stain.

XII

They sate them down on a marble stone
(A Scottish monarch slept below) ;
Thus spoke the Monk, in solemn tone :—
“ I was not always a man of woe ;
For Paynim countries I have trod,
And fought beneath the Cross of God :
Now, strange to my eyes thine arms appear,
And their iron clang sounds strange to my ear.

XIII

“ In these far climes it was my lot
To meet the wondrous Michael Scott ;
A wizard, of such dreaded fame,
That when, in Salamanca's cave,
Him listed his magic wand to wave,
The bells would ring in Notre Dame !
Some of his skill he taught to me ;
And, Warrior, I could say to thee
The words that cleft Eildon hills in three,
And bridled the Tweed with a curb of stone :
But to speak them were a deadly sin ;

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And for having but thought them my heart
within,
A treble penance must be done.

XIV

“ When Michael lay on his dying bed,
His conscience was awakened,
He bethought him of his sinful deed,
And he gave me a sign to come with speed.
I was in Spain when the morning rose,
But I stood by his bed ere evening close.
The words may not again be said,
That he spoke to me, on death-bed laid ;
They would rend this Abbaye’s massy nave,
And pile it in heaps above his grave.

XV

“ I swore to bury his Mighty Book,
That never mortal might therein look ;
And never to tell where it was hid,
Save at his Chief of Branksome’s need :
And when that need was past and o’er,
Again the volume to restore.
I buried him on St. Michael’s night,
When the bell toll’d one, and the moon was
bright,
And I dug his chamber among the dead,
When the floor of the chancel was stained red,
That his patron’s cross might over him wave,
And scare the fiends from the Wizard’s grave.

XVI

“ It was a night of woe and dread,
When Michael in the tomb I laid !
Strange sounds along the chancel pass’d,
The banners waved without a blast ”—
—Still spoke the Monk, when the bell toll’d one !—

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

I tell you, that a braver man
Than William of Deloraine, good at need,
Against a foe ne'er spurr'd a steed ;
Yet somewhat was he chill'd with dread,
And his hair did bristle upon his head.

XVII

“ Lo, Warrior ! now the Cross of Red
Points to the grave of the mighty dead ;
Within it burns a wondrous light,
To chase the spirits that love the night.
That lamp shall burn unquenchably,
Until the eternal doom shall be.”—
Slow moved the Monk to the broad flagstone,
Which the bloody Cross was traced upon :
He pointed to a secret nook ;
An iron bar the Warrior took ;
And the Monk made a sign with his wither'd
hand,
The grave's huge portal to expand.

XVIII

With beating heart to the task he went ;
His sinewy frame o'er the grave-stone bent ;
With bar of iron heaved amain,
Till the toil-drops fell from his brows, like rain.
It was by dint of passing strength,
That he moved the massy stone at length.
I would you had been there, to see
How the light broke forth so gloriously,
Stream'd upward to the chancel roof,
And through the galleries far aloof !
No earthly flame blazed e'er so bright :
It shone like heaven's own blessèd light,
And, issuing from the tomb,
Show'd the Monk's cowl, and visage pale,

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Danced on the dark-brow'd Warrior's mail,
And kiss'd his waving plume.

XIX

Before their eyes the Wizard lay,
As if he had not been dead a day.
His hoary beard in silver roll'd,
He seem'd some seventy winters old ;
A palmer's amice wrapp'd him round,
With a wrought Spanish baldric bound,
Like a pilgrim from beyond the sea :
His left hand held his Book of Might ;
A silver cross was in his right ;
The lamp was placed beside his knee ;
High and majestic was his look,
At which the fellest fiend had shook,
And all unruffled was his face :
They trusted his soul had gotten grace.

XX

Often had William of Deloraine
Rode through the battle's bloody plain,
And trampled down the warriors slain,
And neither known remorse nor awe ;
Yet now remorse and awe he own'd ;
His breath came thick, his head swam round,
When this strange scene of death he saw,
Bewilder'd and unnerved he stood,
And the priest pray'd fervently and loud :
With eyes averted prayèd he ;
He might not endure the sight to see,
Of the man he had loved so brotherly.

XXI

And when the priest his death-prayer had pray'd,
Thus unto Deloraine he said :—

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“ Now, speed thee what thou hast to do,
Or, Warrior, we may dearly rue ;
For those, thou may’st not look upon,
Are gathering fast round the yawning stone ! ”—
Then Deloraine, in terror, took
From the cold hand the Mighty Book,
With iron clasp’d, and with iron bound :
He thought, as he took it, the dead man frown’d ;
But the glare of the sepulchral light,
Perchance, had dazzled the warrior’s sight.

XXII

When the huge stone sunk o’er the tomb,
The night return’d in double gloom ;
For the moon had gone down, and the stars were
few ;
And, as the Knight and Priest withdrew,
With wavering steps and dizzy brain,
They hardly might the postern gain.
’Tis said, as through the aisles they pass’d,
They heard strange noises on the blast ;
And through the cloister-galleries small,
Which at mid-height thread the chancel wall,
Loud sobs, and laughter louder, ran,
And voices unlike the voice of man ;
As if the fiends kept holiday,
Because these spells were brought to day.
I cannot tell how the truth may be ;
I say the tale as ’twas said to me.

“ Lay of the Last Minstrel,” cantos i. and ii.

“ The Lay of the Last Minstrel ” is more interesting from a subjective point of view than most of Scott’s poetry. Lockhart thinks it quite certain that “ he had dressed out his Margaret of Branksome in the form and features of his

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own first love." "This poem," he proceeds, "may be considered as the 'bright consummate flower' in which all the dearest dreams of his youthful tancy had at length found expansion for their strength, spirit, tenderness, and beauty."¹

At this time Scott was living in the rented house of Ashestiel, near the Buccleuch seat at Bowhill. An estate just near the ruins of Newark, on the banks of the Yarrow, was about to come into the market, and to buy this was his keen desire. Lockhart points out that it was with this idea in mind that Scott wrote the final lines of the poem, in which the old harper retires and lives on the bounty of the ancestress of the Buccleuchs, beneath the walls of Newark's tower.

Hush'd is the harp—the Minstrel gone.
And did he wander forth alone ?
Alone, in indigence and age,
To linger out his pilgrimage ?
No !—close beneath proud Newark's tower,
Arose the Minstrel's lowly bower ;
A simple hut ; but there was seen
The little garden hedged with green,
The cheerful hearth, and lattice clean.
There shelter'd wanderers, by the blaze,
Oft heard the tale of other days ;
For much he loved to ope his door,
And give the aid he begg'd before.
So pass'd the winter's day ; but still,
When summer smiled on sweet Bowhill,
And July's eve, with balmy breath,
Waved the blue-bells on Newark heath ;
When throstles sung in Harehead-shaw,

¹ Lockhart, "Life," p. 131.

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And corn was green on Carterhaugh,
And flourish'd, broad, Blackandro's oak,
The aged Harper's soul awoke !
Then would he sing achievements high,
And circumstance of chivalry,
Till the rapt traveller would stay,
Forgetful of the closing day ;
And noble youths, the strain to hear,
Forsook the hunting of the deer ;
And Yarrow, as he roll'd along,
Bore burden to the Minstrel's song.

" Lay of the Last Minstrel," epilogue to canto vi.

Not the least important result of the success of " The Lay " was that James Ballantyne, an old Kelso friend of Scott's, who had printed the book, was strained beyond his powers in the attempt to cope with the great demand. As his own capital was too small, he was obliged to ask Scott on more than one occasion for advances of money. The upshot was that Scott advanced all his available capital and became a third-sharer in the business—a business that in the end was to become a millstone hung about his neck.

III

IN the autumn of 1805 Scott and his wife went to the English Lake Country. They paid a visit to Wordsworth, who was then living in hill-encircled Grasmere. The result of an ascent of the neighbouring mountain, Helvellyn, which the two poets made, was Scott's poem on the subject of the young man

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who had lost his life on the mountain in the preceding spring, and whose remains had for three months been watched and guarded from depredation by his faithful terrier.

HELVELLYN

I climb'd the dark brow of the mighty Helvellyn,
Lakes and mountains beneath me gleam'd misty
and wide ;
All was still, save by fits, when the eagle was yelling,
And starting around me the echoes replied.
On the right, Striden-edge round the Red-tarn was
bending,
And Catchedicam its left verge was defending,
One huge nameless rock in the front was ascending,
When I marked the sad spot where the wanderer
had died.

Dark green was that spot 'mid the brown mountain-
heather,
Where the Pilgrim of Nature lay stretch'd in decay,
Like the corpse of an outcast abandon'd to weather,
Till the mountain-winds wasted the tenantless clay.
Nor yet quite deserted, though lonely extended,
For, faithful in death, his mute favourite attended,
The much-loved remains of her master defended,
And chased the hill-fox and the raven away.

How long didst thou think that his silence was slumber ?
When the wind waved his garment, how oft didst
thou start ?
How many long days and long weeks didst thou
number,
Ere he faded before thee, the friend of thy heart ?
And, oh ! was it meet, that—no requiem read o'er
him—

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No mother to weep, and no friend to deplore him,
And thou, little guardian, alone stretch'd before
him—

Unhonour'd the Pilgrim from life should depart ?

When a Prince to the fate of the Peasant has yielded,
The tapestry waves dark round the dim-lighted hall ;
With scutcheons of silver the coffin is shielded,
And pages stand mute by the canopied pall :
Through the courts, at deep midnight, the torches are
gleaming ;
In the proudly-arch'd chapel the banners are beaming ;
Far adown the long aisle sacred music is streaming,
Lamenting a Chief of the people should fall.

But meeter for thee, gentle lover of nature,
To lay down thy nead like the meek mountain
lamb,
When, wilder'd, he drops from some cliff huge in
stature,
And draws his last sob by the side of his dam.
And more stately thy couch by this desert lake lying,
Thy obsequies sung by the grey plover flying,
With one faithful friend but to witness thy dying,
In the arms of Helvellyn and Catchedicam.

After leaving Grasmere Scott took his wife to Gilsland, on the borders of Cumberland and Northumberland. Here he received the news of an expected landing of a French force in Scotland. The alarm had spread and a gathering of the volunteers took place at Dalkeith, near Edinburgh. Scott was eager at the thought of war, and, leaving his wife to return alone, he hastened to join the colours. In

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twenty-four hours he covered the distance of a hundred miles on horseback, only to find that the alarm was over. It was on this wild ride that he composed "The Bard's Incantation," a poem of which "the verses," says Lockhart, "bear the full stamp of the feelings of the moment."

THE BARD'S INCANTATION

The forest of Glenmore is drear,
It is all of black pine and the dark oak-tree ;
And the midnight wind, to the mountain deer,
Is whistling the forest lullaby :
The moon looks through the drifting storm,
But the troubled lake reflects not her form
For the waves roll whitening to the land,
And dash against the shelvy strand.
There is a voice among the trees,
That mingles with the groaning oak—
That mingles with the stormy breeze,
And the lake-waves dashing against the rock ;—
There is a voice within the wood,
The voice of the bard in fitful mood ;
His song was louder than the blast,
As the bard of Glenmore through the forest past.

"Wake ye from your sleep of death,
Minstrels and bards of other days !
For the midnight wind is on the heath,
And the midnight meteors dimly blaze :
The Spectre with his Bloody Hand,
Is wandering through the wild woodland ;
The owl and the raven are mute for dread,
And the time is meet to awak the dead !

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“Souls of the mighty, wake and say,
To what high strain your harps were strung,
When Lochlin plow'd her billowy way,
And on your shores her Norsemen flung ?
Her Norsemen train'd to spoil and blood,
Skill'd to prepare the raven's food,
All, by your harpings, doom'd to die
On bloody Largs and Loncarty.

“Mute are ye all ? No murmurs strange
Upon the midnight breeze sail by ;
Nor through the pines, with whistling change
Mimic the harp's wild harmony !
Mute are ye now ?—Ye ne'er were mute,
When Murder with his bloody foot,
And Rapine with his iron hand,
Were hovering near yon mountain strand.

“O yet awake the strain to tell,
By every deed in song enroll'd,
By every chief who fought or fell,
For Albion's weal in battle bold :—
From Coilgach, first who roll'd his car
Through the deep ranks of Roman war,
To him, of veteran memory dear,
Who victor died on Aboukir.

“By all their swords, by all their scars
By all their names, a mighty spell !
By all their wounds, by all their wars,
Arise, the mighty strain to tell !
For fiercer than fierce Hengist's strain,
More impious than the heathen Dane,
More grasping than all-grasping Rome,
Gaul's ravening legions hither come ! ”—

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The wind is hush'd, and still the lake—
Strange murmurs fill my tingling ears,
Bristles my hair, my sinews quake,
At the dread voice of other years—
“ When targets clash'd, and bugles rung,
And blades round warriors' heads were flung,
The foremost of the band were we,
And hymn'd the joys of Liberty ! ”

In 1806 Scott obtained the position of Deputy-Clerk of Session—a post in the Edinburgh courts of law. At first this meant only a large amount of work, for he held the post during five years without drawing any pay, all of which went to the invalid clerk whose duties he was fulfilling.

In the same year Scott wrote several of those short ballads in which action and passion are compressed into the smallest space, and, against a background vividly sketched with a few bold strokes, produce a marvellous effect. One may best describe them with Browning as “ dramatic lyrics.” The example given first, so lurid with its high contrasts, is perhaps the most successful of his poems of this sort.

THE PALMER ¹

“ O open the door, some pity to show,
Keen blows the northern wind !
The glen is white with the drifted snow,
And the path is hard to find.

¹ This poem and the next two given were written for Haydn's *Collection of Scottish Airs*, 1806.

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“ No outlaw seeks your castle gate,
From chasing the King's deer,
Though even an outlaw's wretched state
Might claim compassion here.

“ A weary Palmer, worn and weak,
I wander for my sin ;
O open, for Our Lady's sake !
A pilgrim's blessing win !

“ I'll give you pardons from the Pope,
And reliques from o'er the sea ;—
Or if for these you will not ope,
Yet open for charity.

“ The hare is crouching in her form,
The hart beside the hind ;
An aged man, amid the storm,
No shelter can I find.

“ You hear the Ettrick's sullen roar,
Dark, deep, and strong is he,
And I must ford the Ettrick o'er,
Unless you pity me.

“ The iron gate is bolted hard,
At which I knock in vain ;
The owner's heart is closer barr'd,
Who hears me thus complain.

“ Farewell, farewell ! and Mary grant
When old and frail you be,
You never may the shelter want,
That's now denied to me.”

The Ranger on his couch lay warm,
And heard him plead in vain ;

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But oft amid December's storm,
He'll hear that voice again :

For lo, when through the vapours dank
Morn shone on Ettrick fair,
A corpse amid the alders rank,
The Palmer welter'd there.

Another of these 1806 poems is also full of this compressed dramatic quality. It is based on a Tweeddale tradition that a certain love-lorn maid was awaiting the return of her lover, but so changed was she with long pining during his absence that he failed to recognise her and passed by regardless. Unable to support the shock, the maid, who was far gone in a wasting disease, fell back and died.

THE MAID OF NEIDPATH

O, lovers' eyes are sharp to see,
And lovers' ears in hearing :
And love, in life's extremity,
Can lend an hour of cheering.
Disease had been in Mary's bower,
And slow decay from mourning,
Though now she sits on Neidpath's tower,
To watch her love's returning.

All sunk and dim her eyes so bright,
Her form decay'd by pining,
Till through her wasted hand, at night,
You saw the taper shining ;
By fits, a sultry hectic hue
Across her cheek was flying ;
By fits, so ashy pale she grew,
Her maidens thought her dying.

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Yet keenest powers to see and hear,
Seem'd in her frame residing ;
Before the watch-dog prick'd his ear,
She heard her lover's riding ;
Ere scarce a distant form was kenn'd,
She knew, and waved to greet him ;
And o'er the battlement did bend,
As on the wing to meet him.

He came—he pass'd—a heedless gaze,
As o'er some stranger glancing ;
Her welcome, spoke in faltering phrase,
Lost in his courser's prancing—
The castle arch, whose hollow tone
Returns each whisper spoken,
Could scarcely catch the feeble moan,
Which told her heart was broken.

The third of these poems does not exhibit the same dramatic element nor the same quality of execution, but there is a quiet thankfulness and joyous rest after past trials, which, with its simplicity of execution and apt expression of feeling, go to make it a lyric of high quality.

WANDERING WILLIE

All joy was bereft me the day that you left me,
And climb'd the tall vessel to sail yon wide sea ;
O weary betide it ! I wander'd beside it,
And bann'd it for parting my Willie and me.

Far o'er the wave hast thou follow'd thy fortune,
Oft fought the squadrons of France and of Spain ;

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Ae kiss of welcome's worth twenty at parting,
Now I hae gotten my Willie again.

When the sky it was mirk, and the winds they were
wailing,

I sat on the beach wi' the tear in my ee,
And thought o' the bark where my Willie was sailing,
And wish'd that the tempest could a' blaw on me.

Now that thy gallant ship rides at her mooring,
Now that my wanderer's in safety at hame,
Music to me were the wildest winds' roaring,
That e'er o'er Inch-Keith drove the dark ocean
faem.

When the lights they did blaze, and the guns they did
rattle,
And blithe was each heart for the great victory,
In secret I wept for the dangers of battle,
And thy glory itself was scarce comfort to me.

But now shalt thou tell, while I eagerly listen,
Of each bold adventure, and every brave scar ;
And trust me, I'll smile, though my een they may
glisten ;
For sweet after danger's the tale of the war.

And oh, how we doubt when there's distance 'tween
lovers,
When there's naething to speak to the heart thro'
the ee ;
How often the kindest and warmest prove rovers,
And the love of the faithfulest ebbs like the sea.

Till, at times—could I help it ?—I pined and I ponder'd,
If love could change notes like the bird on the tree—

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Now I'll ne'er ask if thine eyes may hae wander'd,
Enough, thy leal heart has been constant to me.

Welcome from sweeping o'er sea and through
channel,
Hardships and danger despising for fame,
Furnishing story for glory's bright annal,
Welcome, my wanderer, to Jeanie and hame !

Enough, now thy story in annals of glory
Has humbled the pride of France, Holland, and
Spain ;
No more shalt thou grieve me, no more shalt thou
leave me,
I never will part with my Willie again.

A visit to London in this year showed how popular Scott had become. But although he was introduced into some of the best drawing-rooms of the day, and even to that of Princess Caroline, he was in no way elated. In fact, although from this time onward he was "beleaguered," as Lockhart says, "by the importunities of fashionable admirers," he never lost his head, and without affecting to disdain such attentions, he always maintained a dignified indifference to the caresses of the great. "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" had won him fame, but not such fame as was to be his after the publication of his next poem. "Marmion" was begun in 1806, and composed for the most part in and around his home of Ashestiel. "Mr. Skene, however, informs me that many of the more energetic descriptions, and particularly

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that of the battle of Flodden, were struck out while he was in quarters again with his cavalry, in the autumn of 1807. 'In the intervals of drilling,' he says, 'Scott used to delight in walking his powerful black steed up and down by himself upon the Portobello sands, within the beating of the surge; and now and then you would see him plunge in his spurs and go off as if at the charge, with the spray dashing about him. As we rode back to Musselburgh he often came and placed himself beside me, to repeat the verses that he had been composing during these pauses of our exercise.' " 1

Early in 1808 "Marmion" was published, but, such was his reputation, Scott had long before this received for the unfinished poem a sum of a thousand guineas from the Edinburgh publisher Constable. It was on this poem that Scott expended most time and trouble: contrary to his usual practice of dashing off his work in hot haste and without careful revision, he seems to have taken pains to improve and correct "Marmion." Certainly "Marmion" is the best or second best of Scott's poems; it would yield place only to "The Lady of the Lake." Lockhart may be taken as representing the general opinion when he says, "'The Lay' . . . is, I should say, generally considered as the most natural and original, 'Marmion' as the most powerful and splendid, 'The Lady of the Lake' as the most interesting, romantic,

1 Lockhart, "Life," pp. 161, 162.

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picturesque, and graceful of his great poems.”¹ A great part of the strength of “Marmion” lies in its psychology. As a rule Scott the poet is not a psychologist; he is essentially the descriptive painter or the vivid narrator. The painter and the narrator are evident to the full in “Marmion”; but in addition there is the student of human nature, the dissector and describer of passions and emotions, showing the subtle correlation of motive and action and the interplay of character upon character. Though this type of art may not always have the simple charm nor give the quiet pleasure of a beautiful description, nor may it enthrall and captivate as would a thrilling narrative, yet it is certainly of a higher kind. For the type of art which for subject considers that “the proper study of mankind is man” will always give most pleasure to men in the highest stages of civilisation.

In “The Lay of the Last Minstrel” there is little characterisation in the main story. The figures move somewhat mechanically, puppets in a magnificent setting, such as only Scott’s antiquarian imagination—if one may so term it—could supply with all the furniture of a half-fantastic, chivalric age. It is perhaps misleading to call them mechanical puppets, for in action they are splendid; they are full of animal vitality and move with consequent vivacity and spontaneity. But they are puppets, and with sawdust souls, for aught that we know

¹ Lockhart, “Life,” p. 211.

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of their real selves. What is there to interest us in the characters of the lovers? Lord Cranstoun and even Margaret of Branksome are purely conventional. If he inspire interest it is as a fine fighter; if she inspire interest it is for her winsome person and obviously pitiful circumstances. What carries us through the poem is the headlong galloping of William of Deloraine and our desire to witness the unravelling of the tangle caused by the loves of the rival houses. When we come to "Marmion," however, we see a serious attempt at characterisation, although there is at the same time plenty of martial display and luxuriant description of scenes of chivalry and mediæval splendour. A strain of the supernatural is, of course, there: that Scott never omits.

Like all Scott's poetical romances, "Marmion" has a too complicated plot, or, rather, the plot is unfolded with an awkwardness that leaves one in confusion and doubt throughout the greater part of the story. This is a great blemish, caused doubtless by the speed at which Scott worked. He could describe an isolated scene with marvellous accuracy and with telling strokes, but for artistic composition he lacked the time or inclination for the labour that must necessarily be given to this important part of any work of art. His execution is good, but his construction is weak. But this needs modification, for even in execution he frequently betrays too little care, and in his finest passages one too often finds lines of poor composition,

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harsh rhythm, odious¹ rime, or painful flatness and prosaic verbiage. Let it not be imagined that Scott was lazy. He was, on the contrary, endued with abilities for superhuman feats of labour; but his powers of work led to quantity rather than quality. One word might be said as to his frequent weak rimes. To begin with, Scott laboured under the difficulty, as a writer of pure English, of being Scotch. It is a known fact that at the beginning of his poetical career he could not trust his own ear in such matters, and was largely dependent on friendly critics. In the second place, Scott as a poet was brought up on ballads, and in ballad literature rime is not a strong feature. Often and often in the older ballads one meets rimes which are weak beyond measure or even no rimes at all, merely assonances.

The main story of "Marmion" we cannot attempt to give, even in skeleton. Fortunately Scott is strongest, as we have seen, in isolated passages, so we shall be able to extract certain pieces which are of interest and beauty even out of their setting. The first passage is descriptive of a scene enacted in the sea-girt convent of St. Cuthbert on Holy Island. Thither has gone the Abbess of St. Hilda's from Whitby to attend a conclave in judgment on an erring nun, Constance de Beverley, who had forsaken her

¹ This may seem too strong a word to be used without justification. For an instance compare the last line of the extract on p. 84. What a disappointment—a disappointment accompanied by resentment—is it to have such a splendid passage spoiled by an accent and rime like that of "Marmion"!

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vows for the love of Lord Marmion, and on a monk, her accomplice. Marmion, envying the rich lands of the heiress Clare, the lover and beloved of De Wilton, had betrayed Constance ; and the scene here given describes the judgment and punishment meted out by the Church to her and the monk.

THE CONVENT VAULT

XVII

While round the fire such legends go,
Far different was the scene of woe,
Where, in a secret aisle beneath,
Council was held of life and death.
It was more dark and lone that vault,
Than the worst dungeon cell :
Old Colwulf built it, for his fault,
In penitence to dwell,
When he, for cowl and beads, laid down
The Saxon battle-axe and crown.
This den, which, chilling every sense
Of feeling, hearing, sight,
Was call'd the Vault of Penitence,
Excluding air and light,
Was, by the prelate Sexhelm, made
A place of burial for such dead,
As, having died in mortal sin,
Might not be laid the church within.
'Twas now a place of punishment ;
Whence if so loud a shriek were sent,
As reach'd the upper air,
The hearers bless'd themselves, and said
The spirits of the sinful dead
Bemoan'd their torments there.

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XVIII

But though, in the monastic pile,
Did of this penitential aisle
Some vague tradition go,
Few only, save the Abbot, knew
Where the place lay ; and still more few
Were those who had from him the clew
To that dread vault to go.
Victim and executioner
Were blindfold when transported there.
In low dark rounds the arches hung,
From the rude rock the side-walls sprung ;
The grave-stones, rudely sculptured o'er,
Half sunk in earth, by time half wore,
Were all the pavement of the floor ;
The mildew-drops fell one by one,
With tinkling splash, upon the stone.
A cresset, in an iron chain,
Which served to light this drear domain,
With damp and darkness seem'd to strive,
As if it scarce might keep alive ;
And yet it dimly served to show
The awful conclave met below.

XIX

There, met to doom in secrecy,
Were placed the heads of convents three :
All servants of St. Benedict,
The statutes of whose order strict
On iron table lay ;
In long black dress, on seats of stone,
Behind were these three judges shown
By the pale cresset's ray :
The Abbess of Saint Hilda's, there,
Sat for a space with visage bare,

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Until, to hide her bosom's swell,
And tear-drops that for pity fell,
 She closely drew her veil :
Yon shrouded figure, as I guess,
By her proud mien and flowing dress,
Is Tynemouth's haughty Prioress,
 And she with awe looks pale :
And he, that Ancient Man, whose sight
Has long been quench'd by age's night,
Upon whose wrinkled brow alone,
Nor ruth, nor mercy's trace is shown,
 Whose look is hard and stern,—
Saint Cuthbert's Abbot is his style ;
For sanctity call'd, through the isle,
 The Saint of Lindisfarne.

XX

Before them stood a guilty pair ;
But, though an equal fate they share,
Yet one alone deserves our care.
Her sex a page's dress belied ;
The cloak and doublet, loosely tied,
Obscured her charms, but could not hide.
 Her cap down o'er her face she drew ;
 And, on her doublet breast,
 She tried to hide the badge of blue,
 Lord Marmion's falcon crest.
But, at the Prioress' command,
A Monk undid the silken band,
 That tied her tresses fair,
And raised the bonnet from her head,
And down her slender form they spread,
 In ringlets rich and rare.
Constance de Beverley they know,
Sister profess'd of Fontevraud,

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Whom the Church number'd with the dead,
For broken vows, and convent fled.

XXI

When thus her face was given to view
(Although so pallid was her hue,
It did a ghastly contrast bear
To those bright ringlets glistening fair,)
Her look composed, and steady eye,
Bespoke a matchless constancy ;
And there she stood so calm and pale,
That, but her breathing did not fail,
And motion slight of eye and head,
And of her bosom, warranted
That neither sense nor pulse she lacks,
You might have thought a form of wax,
Wrought to the very life, was there ;
So still she was, so pale, so fair.

XXII

Her comrade was a sordid soul,
Such as does murder for a meed ;
Who, but of fear, knows no control,
Because his conscience, sear'd and foul,
Feels not the import of his deed ;
One, whose brute-feeling ne'er aspire
Beyond his own more brute desires.
Such tools the Tempter ever needs,
To do the savagest of deeds ;
For them no vision'd terrors daunt,
Their nights no fancied spectres haunt,
One fear with them, of all most base,
The fear of death,—alone finds place.
This wretch was clad in frock and cowl,
And shamed not loud to moan and howl,

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His body on the floor to dash,
And crouch, like hound beneath the lash ;
While his mute partner, standing near,
Waited her doom without a tear.

XXIII

Yet well the luckless wretch might shriek,
Well might her paleness terror speak !
For there were seen in that dark wall,
Two niches, narrow, deep, and tall ;—
Who enters at such grisly door,
Shall ne'er, I ween, find exit more.
In each a slender meal was laid,
Of roots, of water, and of bread :
By each, in Benedictine dress,
Two haggard monks stood motionless ;
Who, holding high a blazing torch,
Show'd the grim entrance of the porch :
Reflecting back the smoky beam,
The dark-red walls and arches gleam.
Hewn stones and cement were display'd,
And building tools in order laid.

XXIV

These executioners were chose,
As men who were with mankind foes,
And with despite and envy fired,
Into the cloister had retired ;
Or who, in desperate doubt of grace,
Strove, by deep penance, to efface
Of some foul crime the stain ;
For, as the vassals of her will,
Such men the Church selected still,
As either joy'd in doing ill,
Or thought more grace to gain,

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If, in her cause, they wrestled down
Feelings their nature strove to own.
By strange device were they brought there,
They knew not how, nor knew not where.

XXV

And now that blind old Abbot rose,
To speak the Chapter's doom
On those the wall was to enclose,
Alive, within the tomb ;
But stopp'd, because that woful Maid,
Gathering her powers, to speak essay'd.
Twice she essay'd, and twice in vain ;
Her accents might no utterance gain ;
Nought but imperfect murmurs slip
From her convulsed and quivering lip ;
'Twixt each attempt all was so still,
You seemed to hear a distant rill—
'Twas ocean's swells and falls ;
For though this vault of sin and fear
Was to the sounding surge so near,
A tempest there you scarce could hear,
So massive were the walls.

XXVI

At length, an effort sent apart
The blood that curdled to her heart,
And light came to her eye,
And colour dawn'd upon her cheek,
A hectic and a flutter'd streak,
Like that left on the Cheviot peak,
By Autumn's stormy sky ;
And when her silence broke at length,
Still as she spoke she gather'd strength,

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And arm'd herself to bear.
It was a fearful sight to see
Such high resolve and constancy,
In form so soft and fair.

* * * *

XXXII

Fix'd was her look, and stern her air :
Back from her shoulders streamed her hair ;
The locks, that wont her brow to shade,
Stared up erectly from her head ;
Her figure seem'd to rise more high ;
Her voice, despair's wild energy
Had given a tone of prophecy.
Appall'd the astonish'd conclave sate ;
With stupid eyes, the men of fate
Gazed on the light inspirèd form,
And listen'd for the avenging storm ;
The judges felt the victim's dread ;
No hand was moved, no word was said,
Till thus the Abbot's doom was given,
Raising his sightless balls to heaven :—
“ Sister, let thy sorrows cease ;
Sinful brother, part in peace ! ”

From that dire dungeon, place of doom,
Of execution too, and tomb,

Paced forth the judges three ;
Sorrow it were, and shame, to tell
The butcher-work that there befell,
When they had glided from the ccell
Of sin and misery.

XXXIII

An hundred winding steps convey
That conclave to the upper day ;

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But, ere they breathed the fresher air,
They heard the shriekings of despair,
And many a stifled groan :
With speed their upward way they take
(Such speed as age and fear can make),
And cross'd themselves for terror's sake,
As hurrying, tottering on :
Even in the vesper's heavenly tone,
They seem'd to hear a dying groan,
And bade the passing knell to toll
For welfare of a parting soul.
Slow o'er the midnight wave it swung,
Northumbrian rocks in answer rung ;
To Warkworth cell the echoes roll'd,
His beads the wakeful hermit told,
The Bamborough peasant raised his head,
But slept ere half a prayer he said ;
So far was heard the mighty knell,
The stag sprung up on Cheviot fell,
Spread his broad nostril to the wind,
Listed before, aside, behind,
Then couch'd him down beside the hind,
And quaked among the mountain fern,
To hear that sound so dull and stern.

"Marmion," canto ii.

Into all his romances, poetical and prose, Scott introduces ballads and songs. Although they are not always quite apposite, they are, many of them, exceedingly beautiful *per se*, and from a constructive point of view may be looked upon as a relief in the main story. A long poem, unless diversified, is bound to become monotonous. Many are the devices that a clever metrist can employ to vary the versifica-

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tion, even without apparently changing the kind of metre. So the artist will keep alive the interest by well-chosen digressions and ornaments such as these songs and ballads. The song given here, so beautiful as mere music, is far from being inapposite, as the subject of it bears directly on Marmion's base conduct towards Constance and is prophetic of his end on Flodden Field.

FITZ-EUSTACE'S SONG

Where shall the lover rest,
Whom the fates sever
From his true maiden's breast,
Parted for ever ?
Where, through groves deep and high,
Sounds the far billow,
Where early violets die,
Under the willow.

CHORUS

Eleu loro, &c. Soft shall be his pillow.

There, through the summer day,
Cool streams are laving ;
There, while the tempests sway,
Scarce are boughs waving ;
There, thy rest shalt thou take,
Parted for ever,
Never again to wake,
Never, O never !

CHORUS

Eleu loro, &c. Never, O never !

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Where shall the traitor rest,
He, the deceiver,
Who could win maiden's breast,
Ruin, and leave her ?
In the lost battle,
Borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war's rattle
With groans of the dying.

CHORUS

Eleu loro, &c. There shall he be lying.

Her wing shall the eagle flap
O'er the false-hearted ;
His warm blood the wolf shall lap,
Ere life be parted.
Shame and dishonour sit
By his grave ever,
Blessing shall hallow it,—
Never, O never !

CHORUS

Eleu loro, &c. Never, O never !

"Marmion," canto iii.

Of all the scenes in "Marmion," perhaps the finest is the Battle of Flodden Field. In this Scott has the opportunity that he best knew how to utilise. Ever excelling in descriptions of martial display, he has made of this grand event a scene of splendour which is in keeping with one of the greatest events of Border history and forms a magnificent climax to the tragedy of "Marmion."

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THE BATTLE

XXV

Blount and Fitz-Eustace rested still
With Lady Clare upon the hill !
On which (for far the day was spent)
The western sunbeams now were bent.
The cry they heard, its meaning knew,
Could plain their distant comrades view :
Sadly to Blount did Eustace say,
“ Unworthy office here to stay !
No hope of gilded spurs to-day. —
But see ! look up ! — on Flodden bent
The Scottish foe has fired his tent.”

And sudden, as he spoke,
From the sharp ridges of the hill,
All downward to the banks of Till,
Was wreathed in sable smoke.
Volumed and fast, and rolling far,
The cloud enveloped Scotland's war,
As down the hill they broke ;
Nor martial shout, nor minstrel tone,
Announced their march ; their tread alone
At times one warning trumpet blown,
At times a stifled hum,
Told England, from his mountain-throne
King James did rushing come. —
Scarce could they hear or see their foes,
Until at weapon-point they close. —
They close, in clouds of smoke and dust,
With sword-sway, and with lance's thrust ;
And such a yell was there,
Of sudden and portentous birth,
As if men fought upon the earth,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

And fiends in upper air ;
Oh ! life and death were in the shout,
Recoil and rally, charge and rout,
And triumph and despair.
Long look'd the anxious squires ; their eye
Could in the darkness nought descry.

XXVI

At length the freshening western blast
Aside the shroud of battle cast ;
And, first, the ridge of mingled spears
Above the brightening cloud appears ;
And in the smoke the pennons flew,
As in the storm the white sea-mew.
Then mark'd they, dashing broad and far,
The broken billows of the war,
And plumèd crests of chieftains brave,
Floating like foam upon the wave ;
But nought distinct they see :
Wide ragèd the battle on the plain ;
Spears shook, and falchions flash'd amain ;
Fell England's arrow-flight like rain ;
Crests rose, and stoop'd, and rose again,
Wild and disorderly.
Amid the scene of tumult, high
They saw Lord Marmion's falcon fly :
And stainless Tunstall's banner white,
And Edmund Howard's lion bright,
Still bear them bravely in the fight ;
Although against them come,
Of gallant Gordons many a one,
And many a stubborn Badenoch-man,
And many a rugged Border clan,
With Huntly, and with Home.

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XXVII

Far on the left, unseen the while,
Stanley broke Lennox and Argyle :
Though there the western mountaineer
Rush'd with bare bosom on the spear,
And flung the feeble targe aside,
And with both hands the broadsword plied.
'Twas vain :—But Fortune, on the right,
With fickle smile, cheer'd Scotland's fight.
Then fell that spotless banner white,
 The Howard's lion fell ;
Yet still Lord Marmion's falcon flew
With wavering flight, while fiercer grew
 Around the battle-yell.
The Border slogan rent the sky !
A Home ! a Gordon ! was the cry :
 Loud were the clanging blows ;
Advanced,—forced back,—now low, now high,
 The pennon sunk and rose ;
As bends the bark's mast in the gale,
When rent are rigging, shrouds, and sail,
 It waver'd 'mid the foes.
No longer Blount the view could bear :
" By Heaven and all its saints ! I swear
 I will not see it lost !
Fitz-Eustace, you with Lady Clare
May bid your beads, and patter prayer,—
 I gallop to the host."
And to the fray he rode amain,
Follow'd by all the archer train.
The fiery youth, with desperate charge,
Made, for a space, an opening large,—
The rescued banner rose,—
But darkly closed the war around
Like pine-tree, rooted from the ground,

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It sunk among the foes.
Then Eustace mounted too :—yet staid
As loath to leave the helpless maid,
When, fast as shaft can fly,
Blood-shot his eyes, his nostrils spread,
The loose rein dangling from his head,
Housing and saddle bloody red,
Lord Marmion's steed rush'd by ;
And Eustace, maddening at the sight,
A look and sign to Clara cast,
To mark he would return in haste,
Then plunged into the fight.

XXVIII

Ask me not what the maiden feels,
Left in that dreadful hour alone :
Perchance her reason stoops, or reels ;
Perchance a courage, not her own,
Braces her mind to desperate tone.—
The scatter'd van of England wheels ;—
She only said, as loud in air
The tumult roar'd, “ Is Wilton there ? ”—
They fly, or, madden'd by despair,
Fight but to die,—“ Is Wilton there ? ”
With that, straight up the hill there rode
Two horsemen drench'd with gore,
And in their arms, a helpless load,
A wounded knight they bore.
His hand still strain'd the broken brand ;
His arms were smear'd with blood and sand.
Dragg'd from among the horse's feet,
With dinted shield, and helmet beat,
The falcon-crest and plumage gone,
Can that be haughty Marmion ? . . .
Young Blount his armour did unlace,

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And, gazing on his ghastly face,
Said—"By Saint George, he's gone !
That spear-wound has our master sped,
And see the deep cut on his head !
Good night to Marmion."—
"Unnurtured Blount ! thy brawling cease :
He opes his eyes," said Eustace ; "peace !"

XXIX

When, doff'd his casque, he felt free air,
Around 'gan Marmion wildly stare :—
"Where's Harry Blount ? Fitz-Eustace where ?
Linger ye here, ye hearts of hare !
Redeem my pennon,—charge again !
Cry—'Marmion to the rescue !'—Vain !
Last of my race, on battle-plain
That shout shall ne'er be heard again !—
Yet my last thought is England's—fly,
To Dacre bear my signet-ring :
Tell him his squadrons up to bring.—
Fitz-Eustace, to Lord Surrey hie ;
Tunstall lies dead upon the field,
His life-blood stains the spotless shield :
Edmund is down :—my life is reft ;
The Admiral alone is left.
Let Stanley charge with spur of fire,—
With Chester charge, and Lancashire,
Full upon Scotland's central host,
Or victory and England's lost.—
Must I bid twice ?—hence, varlets ! fly !
Leave Marmion here alone—to die."
They parted, and alone he lay ;
Clare drew her from the sight away,
Till pain wrung forth a lowly moan,
And half he murmur'd,—“Is there none,

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Of all my halls have nurst,
Page, squire, or groom, one cup to bring
Of blessèd water from the spring,
To slake my dying thirst ! ”

XXX

O, woman ! in our hours of ease,
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please,
And variable as the shade
By the light quivering aspen made ;
When pain and anguish wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou !—
Scarce were the piteous accents said,
When, with the Baron's casque, the maid
To the nigh streamlet ran :
Forgot were hatred, wrongs, and fears ;
The plaintive voice alone she hears,
Sees but the dying man.
She stoop'd her by the runnel's side,
But in abhorrence backward drew ;
For, oozing from the mountain's side,
Where raged the war, a dark-red tide
Was curdling in the streamlet blue.
Where shall she turn ?—behold her mark
A little fountain cell,
Where water, clear as diamond-spark,
In a stone basin fell.
Above, some half-worn letters say,
Drink . weary . pilgrim . drink . and . pray .
For . the . kind . soul . of . Sybil . Gray .
Who . built . this . cross . and . well .
She fill'd the helm, and back she hied,
And with surprise and joy espied
A monk supporting Marmion's head :
A pious man, whom duty brought

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To dubious verge of battle fought,
To shrieve the dying, bless the dead.

XXXI

Deep drank Lord Marmion of the wave,
And, as she stoop'd his brow to lave—
“ Is it the hand of Clare,” he said,
“ Or injured Constance, bathes my head ? ”
Then, as remembrance rose,—
“ Speak not to me of shrift or prayer !
I must redress her woes.
Short space, few words, are mine to spare ;
Forgive and listen, gentle Clare ! ”
“ Alas ! ” she said, “ the while,—
O think of your immortal weal !
In vain for Constance is your zeal ;
She—died at Holy Isle.”—
Lord Marmion started from the ground,
As light as if he felt no wound ;
Though in the action burst the tide,
In torrents, from his wounded side.
“ Then it was truth ”—he said—“ I knew
That the dark presage must be true.—
I would the Fiend, to whom belongs
The vengeance due to all her wrongs,
Would spare me but a day !
For wasting fire, and dying groan,
And priests slain on the altar-stone,
Might bribe him for delay.
It may not be !—this dizzy trance—
Curse on yon base marauder's lance,
And doubly cursed my failing brand !
A sinful heart makes feeble hand.”
Then, fainting, down on earth he sunk,
Supported by the trembling Monk.

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XXXII

With fruitless labour, Clara bound,
And strove to stanch the gushing wound :
The Monk, with unavailing cares,
Exhausted all the Church's prayers.
Ever, he said, that, close and near,
A lady's voice was in his ear,
And that the priest he could not hear,

For that she ever sung,
*"In the lost battle, borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war's rattle with groans of the
dying!"*

So the notes rung ;—
"Avoid thee, Fiend !—with cruel hand,
Shake not the dying sinner's sand !—
O, look, my son, upon yon sign
Of the Redeemer's grace divine ;
O, think on faith and bliss !—
By many a death-bed I have been,
And many a sinner's parting seen,
But never aught like this."—

The war, that for a space did fail,
Now trebly thundering swell'd the gale,

And—STANLEY ! was the cry ;—
A light on Marmion's visage spread,
And fired his glazing eye :

With dying hand, above his head,
He shook the fragment of his blade,

And shouted "Victory !—
Charge, Chester, charge ! On, Stanley, on !"
Were the last words of Marmion.

"Marmion," canto vi.

"Marmion" was greeted with enthusiasm
by every section of the public, except perhaps

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a certain class of Edinburgh Whigs, who considered that there was a "manifest neglect of *Scottish* feelings." But as Lockhart comments, it was possible that "the boldness and energy of *British* patriotism which breathes in so many passages, may have had more share than that alleged omission in pointing the pen that criticised 'Marmion.'"¹ For it must be remembered that Scott, unlike most of his *confrères* at the Scotch Bar, was a very staunch Tory in home and foreign politics. In the burning question of the French war, which was so vehemently deprecated by most Whigs, Scott was enthusiastically patriotic and antigallican. 'This spirit inspires the Introduction to the first canto of "Marmion," where Pitt and Nelson are lauded as their country's saviours. But despite any carping of such critics, the poem had a phenomenal sale.

Before leaving the year 1808 we must quote a very spirited little song that was published in the "Edinburgh Annual Register" for that year.

HUNTING SONG

Waken, lords and ladies gay,
On the mountain dawns the day,
All the jolly chase is here,
With hawk, and horse, and hunting-spear !
Hounds are in their couples yelling,
Hawks are whistling, horns are knelling,
Merrily, merrily, mingle they,
"Waken, lords and ladies gay."

¹ Lockhart, "Life," p. 172

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Waken, lords and ladies gay,
The mist has left the mountain grey,
Springlets in the dawn are steaming,
Diamonds on the brake are gleaming :
And foresters have busy been,
To track the buck in thicket green ;
Now we come to chant our lay,
“ Waken, lords and ladies gay.”

Waken, lords and ladies gay,
To the green-wood haste away ;
We can show you where he lies,
Fleet of foot, and tall of size ;
We can show the marks he made,
When 'gainst the oak his antlers fray'd ;
You shall see him brought to bay,
“ Waken, lords and ladies gay.”

Louder, louder chant the lay,
Waken, lords and ladies gay !
Tell them youth, and mirth, and glee,
Run a course as well as we ;
Time, stern huntsman ! who can baulk,
Stanch as hound, and fleet as hawk :
Think of this, and rise with day,
Gentle lords and ladies gay.

IV

IN 1809 Scott paid a visit to London, where his circle of literary and fashionable acquaintances was increasing with his fame. On his way back he spent a few days with his friend Morritt at Rokeby Park, on the northern boundary of Yorkshire. “ He was so delighted

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by the scenery of the rivers Tees and Greta, which have their confluence within the demesne, and so interested with his host's traditionary anecdotes of the Cavaliers of the Rokeby lineage, that he resolved on connecting a poem with these fair landscapes."¹ This he afterwards did in "Rokeby," but in the meantime he had in preparation another poem, "The Lady of the Lake."

"The Lady of the Lake" appeared in 1810. Like its predecessors it won great favour, and sold no less readily than "Marmion." Scott nominally received two thousand guineas for the copyright, but as the firm of Ballantyne, in which, as we saw, he was a large investor, reserved three-quarters of the rights for itself, Scott continued to have a big financial interest in the work. No better criticism can be made than that of Lockhart already quoted—that of Scott's great poems "The Lady of the Lake" is "the most interesting, romantic, picturesque, and graceful." Interesting it is because of the quality of the plot; romantic because of the noble knight-errantry of the king and the happy peacefulness of the *dénouement*; picturesque by reason of its wonderful setting of Highland scenery; graceful in its simple story and the beauty of the characters depicted. And fifthly, we might add, it is the poem which displays happy facility more than any other of Scott's. The gentle sentiments of a father's love for his only daughter and of a servant's fidelity

¹ Lockhart, "Life," p. 202.

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to his fallen master are thrown into relief by the fierce passion of the wild Highland chief. Here Scott had materials eminently suitable to his own gentle spirit, even without the environment of a country that was calculated to produce the felicity of familiarity and happy association.

The poem opens with an account of the chase in which a Lowland knight following the stag loses himself in the wilds of the Trossachs.

THE CHASE

I

The stag at eve had drunk his fill,
Where danced the moon on Monan's rill,
And deep his midnight lair had made
In lone Glenartney's hazel shade ;
But, when the sun his beacon red
Had kindled on Benvoirlich's head,
The deep-mouth'd bloodhound's heavy bay
Resounded up the rocky way,
And faint, from farther distance borne,
Were heard the clanging hoof and horn.

II

As Chief, who hears his warder call,
" To arms ! the foemen storm the wall,"
The antler'd monarch of the waste
Sprung from his heathery couch in haste.
But, ere his fleet career he took,
The dew-drops from his flanks he shook ;
Like crested leader proud and high,
Toss'd his beam'd frontlet to the sky ;
A moment gazed adown the dale,
A moment snuff'd the tainted gale,

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A moment listen'd to the cry,
That thicken'd as the chase drew nigh ;
Then, as the headmost foes appear'd,
With one brave bound the copse he clear'd,
And, stretching forward free and far,
Sought the wild heaths of Uam-Var.

III

Yell'd on the view the opening pack ;
Rock, glen, and cavern, paid them back ;
To many a mingled sound at once
The awaken'd mountain gave response.
A hundred dogs bay'd deep and strong,
Clatter'd a hundred steeds along,
Their peal the merry horns rung out,
A hundred voices joined the shout ;
With hark and whoop and wild halloo,
No rest Benvoirlich's echoes knew.
Far from the tumult fled the roe,
Close in her covert cower'd the doe,
The falcon, from her cairn on high,
Cast on the rout a wondering eye,
Till far beyond her piercing ken
The hurricane had swept the glen.
Faint and more faint, its failing din
Return'd from cavern, cliff, and linn,
And silence settled, wide and still,
On the lone wood and mighty hill.

IV

Less loud the sounds of sylvan war
Disturb'd the heights of Uam-Var,
And roused the cavern, where, 'tis told,
A giant made his den of old ;
For ere that steep ascent was won,
High in his pathway hung the sun,

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And many a gallant, stay'd perforce,
Was fain to breathe his faltering horse,
And of the trackers of the deer,
Scarce half the lessening pack was near ;
So shrewdly on the mountain side
Had the bold burst their mettle tried.

V

The noble stag was pausing now,
Upon the mountain's southern brow,
Where broad extended, far beneath,
The varied realms of fair Menteith.
With anxious eye he wandered o'er
Mountain and meadow, moss and moor,
And ponder'd refuge from his toil,
By far Lochard or Aberfoyle.
But nearer was the copsewood grey,
That waved and wept on Loch-Achray,
And mingled with the pine-trees blue
On the bold cliffs of Benvenue.
Fresh vigour with the hope return'd,
With flying foot the heath he spurn'd,
Held westward with unwearied race,
And left behind the panting chase.

VI

'Twere long to tell what steeds gave o'er,
As swept the hunt through Cambus-more ;
What reins were tighten'd in despair,
When rose Benledi's ridge in air ;
Who flagg'd upon Bochastle's heath,
Who shunn'd to stem the flooded Teith,—
For twice that day, from shore to shore,
The gallant stag swam stoutly o'er.

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Few were the stragglers, following far,
That reach'd the lake of Vennachar ;
And when the Brigg of Turk was won,
The headmost horseman rode alone.

VII

Alone, but with unbated zeal,
That horseman plied the scourge and steel ;
For jaded now, and spent with toil,
Emboss'd with foam, and dark with soil,
While every gasp with sobs he drew,
The labouring stag strained full in view.
Two dogs of black Saint Hubert's breed,
Unmatch'd for courage, breath, and speed,
Fast on his flying traces came,
And all but won that desperate game ;
For, scarce a spear's length from his haunch,
Vindictive toiled the bloodhounds staunch ;
Nor nearer might the dogs attain,
Nor farther might the quarry strain.
Thus up the margin of the lake,
Between the precipice and brake,
O'er stock and rock their race they take.

VIII

The hunter mark'd that mountain high,
The lone lake's western boundary,
And deem'd the stag must turn to bay,
Where that huge rampart barr'd the way ;
Already glorying in the prize,
Measured his antlers with his eyes ;
For the death-wound and death-halloo,
Muster'd his breath, his whin-yard drew ;—
But thundering as he came prepared,
With ready arm and weapon bared,

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The wily quarry shunn'd the shock,
And turn'd him from the opposing rock ;
Then, dashing down a darksome glen,
Soon lost to hound and hunter's ken,
In the deep Trosach's wildest nook
His solitary refuge took.
There, while close couch'd, the thicket shed
Cold dewes and wild-flowers on his head,
He heard the baffled dogs in vain
Rave through the hollow pass amain,
Chiding the rocks that yell'd again.

IX

Close on the hounds the hunter came,
To cheer them on the vanish'd game ;
But, stumbling in the rugged dell,
The gallant horse exhausted fell.
The impatient rider strove in vain
To rouse him with the spur and rein,
For the good steed, his labours o'er,
Stretch'd his stiff limbs, to rise no more ;
Then, touch'd with pity and remorse,
He sorrow'd o'er the expiring horse.
" I little thought, when first thy rein
I slack'd upon the banks of Seine,
That Highland eagle e'er should feed
On thy fleet limbs, my matchless steed !
Woe worth the chase, woe worth the day,
That costs thy life, my gallant grey ! "

" The Lady of the Lake," canto i.

As before, we cannot attempt to follow the thread of the plot, but must merely give excerpts that are of characteristic and marked beauty. The next stanza is a gem of description, which can be transported from its connection.

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MORNING

The summer dawn's reflected hue
To purple changed Loch Katrine blue ;
Mildly and soft the western breeze
Just kiss'd the lake, just stirr'd the trees,
And the pleased lake, like maiden coy,
Trembled but dimpled not for joy ;
The mountain-shadows on her breast
Were neither broken nor at rest ;
In bright uncertainty they lie,
Like future joys to Fancy's eye.
The water-lily to the light
Her chalice rear'd of silver bright ;
The doe awoke, and to the lawn,
Begemm'd with dew-drops, led her fawn ;
The grey mist left the mountain-side,
The torrent show'd its glistening pride ;
Invisible in fleckèd sky,
The lark sent down her revelry ;
The blackbird and the speckled thrush
Good-morrow gave from brake and bush ;
In answer coo'd the cushat dove
Her notes of peace, and rest, and love.

"The Lady of the Lake," canto iii.

To understand the next passage one must know a little of the circumstances. The knight who had wandered far after the stag finds himself near Loch Katrine. On an isle in the lake lives a Highland chief, Roderick Dhu, head of the Clan-Alpine. The King of Scotland's forces are prepared for a raid on the Highlanders, who are mustering to defend themselves and their

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mountain homeland. In the following song, a boat song peculiar to the Clan-Alpine, Scott exhibits to great effect his power as a versifier.

The question of Scott's metrical forms is important. In his poetical romances the staple measure is the iambic octosyllabic couplet. But, as has been pointed out above, every poem of length must have variety of versification. To begin with, Scott's most frequent method of breaking the monotony is to introduce trochaic verses in places where a quicker measure is suitable or necessary. Another and most effective device, which hastens the verse still more, is the use of trisyllabic feet. Some of Scott's most telling effects are produced by this metrical form. Even to enumerate his many forms of versification would be impossible, still more to exemplify them. The next example, however, like the song given on page 34, is a splendid instance of the spirited effect that he can produce with the use of dactyls, which carry one on with a quick rush of syllables, and fire the mind by means of a purely metrical device. Not that the whole effect is merely metrical ; for though versification may contribute largely in influencing the imagination, it can never act singly : there must be present many other factors which go to make up the full effect of pleasing and inspiring verse. But to discuss the essence of true poetry is beyond our present scope.

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BOAT SONG

Hail to the Chief who in triumph advances !
Honour'd and bless'd be the ever-green Pine ! ¹
Long may the tree, in his banner that glances,
Flourish, the shelter and grace of our line !
Heaven send it happy dew,
Earth lend it sap anew,
Gaily to bourgeon, and broadly to grow,
While every Highland glen
Sends our shout back agen,
“ Roderigh Vich Alpine dhu, ho ! ieroe ! ”

Ours is no sapling, chance-sown by the fountain,
Blooming at Beltane, in winter to fade ;
When the whirlwind has stripp'd every leaf on the
mountain,
The more shall Clan-Alpine exult in her shade.
Moor'd in the rifted rock,
Proof to the tempest's shock,
Firmer he roots him the ruder it blow ;
Menteith and Breadalbane, then,
Echo his praise agen,
“ Roderigh Vich Alpine dhu, ho ! ieroe ! ”

Proudly our pibroch has thrill'd in Glen Fruin,
And Bannochar's groans to our slogan replied ;
Glen Luss and Ross-dhu, they are smoking in ruin,
And the best of Loch Lomond lie dead on her side.
Widow and Saxon maid
Long shall lament our raid,
Think of Clan-Alpine with fear and with woe ;
Lennox and Leven-glen
Shake when they hear agen,
“ Roderigh Vich Alpine dhu, ho ! ieroe ! ”

¹ The emblem of the Clan-Alpine.

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Row, vassals, row, for the pride of the Highlands !
Stretch to your oars, for the ever-green Pine !
O that the rosebud that graces yon islands
Were wreathed in a garland around him to twine !
O that some seedling gem,
Worthy such noble stem,
Honour'd and bless'd in their shadow might grow !
Loud should Clan-Alpine then
Ring from the deepest glen,
" Roderigh Vich Alpine dhu, ho ! ieroe ! "

"The Lady of the Lake," canto ii.

The next extract describes a curious and interesting custom which was common in former days amongst the Highland clans. Scott explains it thus in his note on this passage :

When a chieftain designed to summon his clan, upon any sudden or important emergency, he slew a goat, and making a cross of any light wood, seared its extremities in the fire, and extinguished them in the blood of the animal. This was called the "Fiery Cross," also "Crean Tarigh," or the "Cross of Shame," because disobedience to what the symbol implied inferred infamy. It was delivered to a swift and trusty messenger, who ran full speed with it to the next hamlet, where he presented it to the principal person, with a single word, implying the place of rendezvous. He who received the symbol was bound to send it forward, with equal despatch, to the next village ; and thus it passed with incredible celerity through all the district which owed allegiance to the chief, and also among his allies and neighbours, if the danger was common to them. At sight of the Fiery Cross, every man, from sixteen years old to sixty, capable of bearing arms, was obliged instantly to repair, in his best arms

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and accoutrements, to the place of rendezvous. He who failed to appear, suffered the extremities of fire and sword, which were emblematically denounced to the disobedient by the bloody and burnt marks upon this warlike signal. During the civil war of 1745-46, the Fiery Cross often made its circuit ; and upon one occasion it passed through the whole district of Breadalbane, a tract of thirty-two miles, in three hours.

THE FIERY CROSS

XII

Then Roderick, with impatient look,
From Brian's hand the symbol took :
" Speed, Malise, speed ! " he said, and gave
The crosslet to his henchman brave.
" The muster-place be Lanrick mead —
Instant the time—speed, Malise, speed ! "
Like heath-bird, when the hawks pursue,
A barge across Loch Katrine flew ;
High stood the henchman on the prow ;
So rapidly the barge-men row,
The bubbles, where they launch'd the boat,
Were all unbroken and afloat,
Dancing in foam and ripple still,
When it had neared the mainland hill ;
And from the silver beach's side
Still was the prow three fathoms wide,
When lightly bounded to the land
The messenger of blood and brand.

XIII

Speed, Malise, speed ! the dun deer's hide
On fleeter foot was never tied.
Speed, Malise, speed ! such cause of haste
Thine active sinews never braced.

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Bend 'gainst the steepy hill thy breast,
Burst down like torrent from its crest ;
With short and springing footstep pass
The trembling bog and false morass ;
Across the brook like roebuck bound,
And thread the brake like questing hound ;
The crag is high, the scaur is deep,
Yet shrink not from the desperate leap :
Parch'd are thy burning lips and brow,
Yet by the fountain pause not now ;
Herald of battle, fate, and fear,
Stretch onward in thy fleet career !
The wounded hind thou track'st not now,
Pursuest not maid through greenwood bough,
Nor pliest thou now thy flying pace,
With rivals in the mountain race ;
But danger, death, and warrior deed,
Are in thy course—speed, Malise, speed !

XIV

Fast as the fatal symbol flies,
In arms the huts and hamlets rise ;
From winding glen, from upland brown,
They pour'd each hardy tenant down.
Nor slack'd the messenger his pace ;
He show'd the sign, he named the place,
And, pressing forward like the wind,
Left clamour and surprise behind.
The fisherman forsook the strand,
The swarthy smith took dirk and brand ;
With changèd cheer, the mower blithe
Left in the half-cut swathe the scythe ;
The herds without a keeper stray'd,
The plough was in mid-furrow staid,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

The falc'ner toss'd his hawk away,
The hunter left the stag at bay ;
Prompt at the signal of alarms,
Each son of Alpine rush'd to arms ;
So swept the tumult and affray
Along the margin of Achray.
Alas ! thou lovely lake ! that e'er
Thy banks should echo sounds of fear !
The rocks, the bosky thickets, sleep
So stilly on thy bosom deep,
The lark's blithe carol, from the cloud,
Seems for the scene too gaily loud.

XV

Speed, Malise, speed !—The lake is past,
Duncraggan's huts appear at last,
And peep, like moss-grown rocks, half seen,
Half hidden in the copse so green ;
There mayst thou rest, thy labour done,
Their Lord shall speed the signal on.—
As stops the hawk upon his prey,
The henchman shot him down the way.
—What woeful accents load the gale ?
The funeral yell, the female wail !
A gallant hunter's sport is o'er,
A valiant warrior fights no more.
Who, in the battle or the chase,
At Roderick's side shall fill his place !—
Within the hall, where torches' ray
Supplies the excluded beams of day,
Lies Duncan on his lowly bier,
And o'er him streams his widow's tear.
His stripling son stands mournful by,
His youngest weeps, but knows not why :

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

The village maids and matrons round
The dismal coronach¹ resound.

XVI

CORONACH

He is gone on the mountain,
He is lost to the forest,
Like a summer-dried fountain,
When our need was the sorest.
The font, reappearing,
From the rain-drops shall borrow,
But to us comes no cheering,
To Duncan no morrow !

The hand of the reaper
Takes the ears that are hoary,
But the voice of the weeper
Wails manhood in glory.
The autumn winds rushing
Waft the leaves that are searest,
But our flower was in flushing,
When blighting was nearest.

Fleet foot on the correi,²
Sage counsel in cumber,
Red hand in the foray,
How sound is thy slumber !
Like the dew on the mountain,
Like the foam on the river,
Like the bubble on the fountain,
Thou art gone, and for ever !

XVII

See Stumah,³ who, the bier beside,
His master's corpse with wonder eyed,

¹ A song of lamentation for the dead.

² Or *corri*, the hollow side of the hill, where game usually lies.

³ Faithful, the name of a dog.

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Poor Stumah ! whom his least halloo
Could send like lightning o'er the dew,
Bristles his crest, and points his ears,
As if some stranger step he hears.
'Tis not a mourner's muffled tread,
Who comes to sorrow o'er the dead,
But headlong haste, or deadly fear,
Urge the precipitate career.
All stand aghast :—unheeding all,
The henchman bursts into the hall ;
Before the dead man's bier he stood ;
Held forth the Cross besmear'd with blood ;
" The muster-place is Lanrick mead ;
Speed forth the signal ! clansmen, speed ! "

XVIII

Angus, the heir of Duncan's line,
Sprung forth and seized the fatal sign.
In haste the stripling to his side
His father's dirk and broadsword tied ;
But when he saw his mother's eye
Watch him in speechless agony,
Back to her open'd arms he flew,
Press'd on her lips a fond adieu—
" Alas ! " she sobb'd,—“ and yet, be gone,
And speed thee forth, like Duncan's son ! ”
One look he cast upon the bier,
Dash'd from his eye the gathering tear,
Breathed deep to clear his labouring breast,
And toss'd aloft his bonnet crest,
Then, like the high-bred colt, when, freed,
First he essays his fire and speed,
He vanish'd, and o'er moor and moss
Sped forward with the Fiery Cross.

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Suspended was the widow's tear,
While yet his footsteps she could hear ;
And when she mark'd the henchman's eye
Wet with unwonted sympathy,
" Kinsman," she said, " his race is run,
That should have sped thy errand on ;
The oak has fall'n,—the sapling bough
Is all Duncraggan's shelter now.
Yet trust I well, his duty done,
The orphan's God will guard my son.—
And you, in many a danger true,
At Duncan's hest your blades that drew,
To arms, and guard that orphan's head !
Let babes and women wail the dead."'
Then weapon-clang, and martial call,
Resounded through the funeral hall,
While from the walls the attendant band
Snatch'd sword and targe, with hurried hand .
And short and flitting energy
Glanced from the mourner's sunken eye,
As if the sounds to warrior dear,
Might rouse her Duncan from his bier.
But faded soon that borrowed force ;
Grief claim'd his right, and tears their course.

XIX

Benledi saw the Cross of Fire,
It glanced like lightning up Strath-Ire.
O'er dale and hill the summons flew,
Nor rest nor pause young Angus knew ;
The tear that gather'd in his eye
He left the mountain breeze to dry ;
Until, where Teith's young waters roll,
Betwixt him and a wooded knoll,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

That graced the sable strath with green,
The chapel of Saint Bride was seen.
Swoln was the stream, remote the bridge,
But Angus paused not on the edge ;
Though the dark waves danced dizzily,
Though reel'd his sympathetic eye,
He dash'd amid the torrent's roar :
His right hand high the crosslet bore,
His left the pole-axe grasp'd, to guide
And stay his footing in the tide.
He stumbled twice—the foam splash'd high,
With hoarser swell the stream raced by ;
And had he fall'n,—for ever there,
Farewell Duncraggan's orphan heir !
But still, as if in parting life,
Firmer he grasp'd the Cross of strife,
Until the opposing bank he gain'd,
And up the chapel pathway strain'd.

XX

A blithesome rout, that morning tide,
Had sought the chapel of Saint Bride.
Her troth Tombea's Mary gave
To Norman, heir of Armandave.
And, issuing from the Gothic arch,
The bridal now resumed their march.
In rude, but glad procession, came
Bonneted sire and coif-clad dame ;
And plaided youth, with jest and jeer,
Which snooded maiden would not hear ;
And children, that, unwitting why,
Lent the gay shout their shrilly cry ;
And minstrels, that in measures vied
Before the young and bonny bride,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Whose downcast eye and cheek disclose
The tear and blush of morning rose.
With virgin step, and bashful hand,
She held the 'kerchief's snowy band ;
The gallant bridegroom by her side,
Beheld his prize with victor's pride,
And the glad mother in her ear
Was closely whispering word of cheer.

XXI

Who meets them at the churchyard gate ?
The messenger of fear and fate !
Haste in his hurried accent lies,
And grief is swimming in his eyes.
All dripping from the recent flood,
Panting and travel-soil'd he stood,
The fatal sign of fire and sword
Held forth, and spoke the appointed word :
“ The muster-place is Lanrick mead ;
Speed forth the signal ! Norman, speed ! ”
And must he change so soon the hand,
Just link'd to his by holy band,
For the fell Cross of blood and brand ?
And must the day, so blithe that rose,
And promised rapture in the close,
Before its setting hour, divide
The bridegroom from the plighted bride ?
O fatal doom !—it must ! it must !
Clan-Alpine's cause, her Chieftain's trust,
Her summons dread, brook no delay ;
Stretch to the race—away ! away !

XXII

Yet slow he laid his plaid aside,
And, lingering, eyed his lovely bride,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Until he saw the starting tear
Speak woe he might not stop to cheer ;
Then, trusting not a second look,
In haste he sped him up the brook,
Nor backward glanced, till on the heath
Where Lubnaig's lake supplies the Teith.
—What in the racer's bosom stirr'd ?
The sickening pang of hope deferr'd,
And memory, with a torturing train
Of all his morning visions vain.
Mingled with love's impatience, came
The manly thirst for martial fame ;
The stormy joy of mountaineers,
Ere yet they rush upon the spears ,
And zeal for Clan and Chieftain burning,
And hope, from well-fought field returning,
With war's red honours on his crest,
To clasp his Mary to his breast.
Stung by such thoughts, o'er bank and brae,
Like fire from flint he glanced away,
While high resolve, and feeling strong,
Burst into voluntary song.

XXIII

SONG

The heath this night must be my bed,
The bracken curtain for my head,
My lullaby the warder's tread,
Far, far, from love and thee, Mary ;
To-morrow eve, more stilly laid,
My couch may be my bloody plaid,
My vesper song, thy wail, sweet maid !
It will not waken me, Mary !

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I may not, dare not, fancy now
The grief that clouds thy lovely brow,
I dare not think upon thy vow,
 And all it promised me, Mary.
No fond regret must Norman know ;
When bursts Clan-Alpine on the foe,
His heart must be like bended bow,
 His foot like arrow free, Mary.

A time will come with feeling fraught,
For, if I fall in battle fought,
Thy hapless lover's dying thought
 Shall be a thought on thee, Mary.
And if returned from conquer'd foes,
How blithely will the evening close,
How sweet the linnet sing repose,
 To my young bride and me, Mary !

XXIV

Not faster o'er thy heathery braes,
Balquhiddy, speeds the midnight blaze,
Rushing, in conflagration strong,
Thy deep ravines and dells along,
Wrapping thy cliffs in purple glow,
And reddening the dark lakes below ;
Nor faster speeds it, nor so far,
As o'er thy heaths the voice of war.
The signal roused to martial coil
The sullen margin of Loch Voil,
Waked still Loch Doine, and to the source
Alarm'd, Balvaig, thy swampy course ;
Thence southward turn'd its rapid road
Adown Strath-Gartney's valley broad,
Till rose in arms each man might claim
A portion in Clan-Alpine's name,

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From the grey sire, whose trembling hand
Could hardly buckle on his brand,
To the raw boy, whose shaft and bow
Were yet scarce terror to the crow.
Each valley, each sequester'd glen,
Muster'd its little horde of men,
That met as torrents from the height
In Highland dales their streams unite,
Still gathering, as they pour along,
A voice more loud, a tide more strong,
Till at the rendezvous they stood
By hundreds prompt for blows and blood ;
Each train'd to arms since life began,
Owning no tie but to his clan,
No oath, but by his chieftain's hand,
No law, but Roderick Dhu's command.

"The Lady of the Lake," canto iii.

V

SCOTT'S next publication was "The Vision of Don Roderick," which appeared in 1811. In style it is interesting as it is written in Spenserian stanza, a form which Scott at times employed with great success. "The Vision" was written for purposes of charity, to add by the proceeds of its sale to the fund which was being raised for the relief of the Portuguese who were suffering from the devastating war in the Peninsula. The poem is not a success. To begin with, the subject is Spanish, and consequently not as suitable to Scott's genius as a Scotch subject would have been. Moreover, the poem is allegorical, whereas Scott excels in straight-

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forward description. But it is only fair to quote what Scott tells us in the preface, that whilst he was "hastily executing a work, written for a temporary purpose, and on passing events, the task was most cruelly interrupted by the successive deaths of Lord President Blair, and Lord Viscount Melville"—men who were numbered amongst his real friends. "Under such interruptions," he adds, "the following verses, which my best and happiest efforts must have left far unworthy of their theme, have, I am myself sensible, an appearance of negligence and incoherence, which, in other circumstances, I might have been able to remove."

It was in this year also that Scott's long-cherished plan of becoming a Lowland *laird* took definite shape. After five years of work as Clerk of Session without any remuneration, it now seemed probable that an arrangement would be made by which Scott, although still nominally only a deputy, should receive a fixed emolument. This prospect and the coincidence of the expiry of his lease of Ashestiel and the vacancy of a particularly desirable estate on the Tweed were enough for him. Prospects were always sufficient for Scott. So he raised £4,000 by an arrangement with the Ballantynes and bought the estate. When he bought this estate it did not consist of more than a small house and a few fields; but by gradual accretion of land and the erection of a magnificent mansion, it afterwards became a very fine property. The house, when Scott first entered into possession, was

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small and out of repair, though hardly, as he himself described it, "a gardener's hut," whilst the land suffered from previous neglect. "Clarty Hole," as the place was called from a filthy weed-covered duck-pond which stagnated before the cottage, was immediately rechristened "Abbotsford," a name taken from the neighbouring ford of the Tweed, and Scott set to work to restore the land and improve the house.

In 1812 Scott began to draw his salary of £1,300 a year for his Clerkship. This, with his Sheriff's salary, brought his professional income up to a total of £1,600 a year, and so it remained until a very short time before his death.

During the summer of 1812, busy as he was with his legal duties and his running to and fro between Edinburgh and Abbotsford, where building was being pushed on apace, Scott was at work on two poems simultaneously—"Rokeby" and "The Bridal of Triermain." The first to appear was "Rokeby," which was published in January 1813. In the autumn of 1812 Scott had paid a visit to his friend Morritt at Rokeby Park in order to collect materials for his poem and details of local colour. "I observed him," writes Morritt, "noting down even the peculiar little wild-flowers and herbs on the side of a bold crag near his intended cave of Guy Denzil ; and could not help saying, that as he was not to be upon oath in his work, daisies, violets, and primroses would be as poetical as any of the humble plants he was examining. I laughed, in short, at his scrupulousness ; but I understood

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him when he replied, 'that in nature herself no two scenes were exactly alike, and that whoever copied truly what was before his eyes would possess the same variety in his descriptions, and exhibit apparently an imagination as boundless as the range of nature in the scenes he recorded ; whereas—whoever trusted to imagination, would soon find his own mind circumscribed and contracted to a few favourite images, and the repetition of these would sooner or later produce that very monotony and barrenness which had always haunted descriptive poetry in the hands of any but the patient worshippers of truth.' " ¹ This, apart from its bearing on the composition of " Rokeby," is an exceedingly interesting passage. It shows how completely at one were the views of Scott with those voiced by Wordsworth in his plea for a more intimate study of the detail as well as the larger aspects of nature—views which, put into practice, gave rise to a totally new type of poetry in which true imagery and natural language replaced the conventional descriptions and artificial diction of an earlier school.

" Rokeby " shows a new element in Scott's poetry, or at least a definite attempt to make essential what so far had been but incidental. " I hope," Scott had said to Ballantyne, " the thing will do, chiefly because the world will not expect from *me* a poem of which the interest turns upon *character*." ² We saw that in " Marmion " there was a greater tendency

¹ Lockhart, " Life," p. 233.

² *Ibid.* p. 235.

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toward characterisation than in "The Lay," but in "Rokeby" the tendency is still more marked as a definite effort. Still deeper interest is added by the fact that in Matilda, the heroine, as in Margaret of "The Lay," Scott was describing his early love, and in her rejection of Wilfrid, the frail young poet-dreamer, he is portraying himself and his disappointed hopes. Yet if this tendency to abandon the description of place and incident for characterisation makes the poem of particular interest, it also makes it a poem less suitable for illustration by excerpts. Isolated scenes of characteristic merit were to be found in the first three poetical romances, but in the case of "Rokeby" one must read the whole poem to appreciate its real quality. What passages we select will therefore not be truly characteristic of the whole work. In the case of the first one, however, an attempt has been made to choose a piece which does exhibit this new quality as well as any isolated passage can. In it are displayed to a great extent the outstanding differences between the characters of two types of bad men—Oswald Wycliffe, a cunning and cowardly wretch who is anxious for the death of his noble kinsman, Philip of Mortham, whose wealth and estates he wants for himself, and Bertram Risingham, a callous but recklessly brave ruffian who is willing to procure Wycliffe's desire so long as he shares in the booty. The scene opens with Oswald's restless expectancy of the news of the upshot

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of a plan that, in the imminent battle between the Royalists and Parliamentarians, Bertram should take advantage of the general fight to kill Mortham.

II

* * * * *

Ere sleep stern OSWALD'S senses tied,
Oft had he changed his weary side,
Composed his limbs, and vainly sought
By effort strong to banish thought.
Sleep came at length, but with a train
Of feelings true and fancies vain,
Mingling, in wild disorder cast,
The expected future with the past.
Conscience, anticipating time,
Already rues the enacted crime,
And calls her furies forth, to shake
The sounding scourge and hissing snake ;
While her poor victim's outward throes
Bear witness to his mental woes,
And show what lesson may be read
Beside a sinner's restless bed.

III

Thus Oswald's labouring feelings trace
Strange changes in his sleeping face,
Rapid and ominous as these
With which the moonbeams tinge the Tees.
There might be seen of shame the blush,
There anger's dark and fiercer flush,
While the perturbed sleeper's hand
Seem'd grasping dagger-knife, or brand.
Relax'd that grasp, the heavy sigh,
The tear in the half-opening eye,

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The pallid cheek and brow, confess'd
That grief was busy in his breast ;
Nor paused that mood—a sudden start
Impell'd the life-blood from the heart :
Features convulsed, and mutterings dread,
Show terror reigns in sorrow's stead.
That pang the painful slumber broke,
And Oswald with a start awoke.

IV

He woke, and fear'd again to close
His eyelids in such dire repose ;
He woke,—to watch the lamp, and tell
From hour to hour the castle-bell.
Or listen to the owlet's cry,
Or the sad breeze that whistles by,
Or catch, by fits, the tuneless rhyme
With which the warder cheats the time,
And envying think, how, when the sun
Bids the poor soldier's watch be done,
Couch'd on his straw, and fancy free
He sleeps like careless infancy.

V

Far townward sounds a distant tread,
And Oswald, starting from his bed,
Hath caught it, though no human ear,
Unsharpen'd by revenge and fear,
Could e'er distinguish horse's clank,
Until it reach'd the castle bank.
Now nigh and plain the sound appears,
The warder's challenge now he hears,
Then clanking chains and levers tell,
That o'er the moat the drawbridge fell,

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And, in the castle court below,
Voices are heard, and torches glow,
As marshalling the stranger's way,
Straight for the room where Oswald lay ;
The cry was,—“ Tidings from the host,
Of weight—a messenger comes post.”
Stifling the tumult of his breast,
His answer Oswald thus express'd—
“ Bring food and wine, and trim the
fire ;
Admit the stranger, and retire.”

VI

The stranger came with heavy stride,
The morion's plumes his visage hide.
And the buff-coat, an ample fold,
Mantles his form's gigantic mould.
Full slender answer deignèd he
To Oswald's anxious courtesy,
But mark'd, by a disdainful smile,
He saw and scorn'd the petty wile,
When Oswald chang'd the torch's place,
Anxious that on the soldier's face
Its partial lustre might be thrown,
To show his looks, yet hide his own.
His guest, the while, laid low aside
The ponderous cloak of tough bull's hide,
And to the torch glanced broad and clear
The corslet of a cuirassier ;
Then from his brows the casque he drew,
And from the dank plume dash'd the dew,
From gloves of mail relieved his hands,
And spread them to the kindling brands,
And, turning to the genial board,
Without a health, or pledge, or word

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Of meet and social reverence said,
Deeply he drank, and fiercely fed ;
As free from ceremony's sway,
As famish'd wolf that tears his prey.

VII

With deep impatience, tinged with fear,
His host beheld him gorge his cheer,
And quaff the full carouse, that lent
His brow a fiercer hardiment.
Now Oswald stood a space aside,
Now paced the room with hasty stride,
In feverish agony to learn
Tidings of deep and dread concern,
Cursing each moment that his guest
Protracted o'er his ruffian feast.
Yet, viewing with alarm, at last,
The end of that uncouth repast,
Almost he seemed their haste to rue,
As, at his sign, his train withdrew,
And left him with the stranger, free
To question of his mystery.
Then did his silence long proclaim
A struggle between fear and shame.

VIII

Much in the stranger's mien appears,
To justify suspicious fears.
On his dark face a scorching clime,
And toil, had done the work of time,
Roughen'd the brow, the temples bared,
And sable hairs with silver shared,
Yet left—what age alone could tame—
The lip of pride, the eye of flame ;
The full-drawn lip that upward curl'd,
The eye, that seem'd to scorn the world.

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That lip had terror never blench'd ;
Ne'er in that eye had tear-drop quench'd
The flash severe of swarthy glow,
That mock'd at pain, and knew not woe.
Inured to danger's direst form,
Tornado and earthquake, flood and storm,
Death had he seen by sudden blow,
By wasting plague, by tortures slow,
By mine or breach, by steel or ball,
Knew all his shapes, and scorn'd them all.

IX

But yet, though BERTRAM'S harden'd look,
Unmoved, could blood and danger brook,
Still worse than apathy had place
On his swart brow and callous face ;
For evil passions, cherish'd long,
Had plough'd them with impressions strong,
All that gives gloss to sin, all gay
Light folly, past with youth away,
But rooted stood, in manhood's hour,
The weeds of vice without their flower.
And yet the soil in which they grew,
Had it been tamed when life was new,
Had depth and vigour to bring forth
The hardier fruits of virtuous worth.
Not that, e'en then, his heart had known
The gentler feelings' kindly tone ;
But lavish waste had been refined
To bounty in his chasten'd mind,
And lust of gold, that waste to feed,
Been lost in love of glory's meed,
And, frantic then no more, his pride
Had ta'en fair virtue for its guide.

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X

Even now, by conscience unrestrain'd,
Clogg'd by gross vice, by slaughter stain'd,
Still knew his daring soul to soar,
And mastery o'er the mind he bore ;
For meaner guilt, or heart less hard,
Quail'd beneath Bertram's bold regard.
And this felt Oswald, while in vain
He strove, by many a winding train,
To lure his sullen guest to show,
Unask'd, the news he long'd to know,
While on far other subject hung
His heart, than falter'd from his tongue.
Yet nought for that his guest did deign
To note or spare his secret pain,
But still, in stern and stubborn sort,
Return'd him answer dark and short,
Or started from the theme, to range
In loose digression wild and strange,
And forced the embarrass'd host to buy,
By query close, direct reply.

XI

A while he glozed upon the cause
Of Commons, Covenant, and Laws,
And Church Reform'd—but felt rebuke
Beneath grim Bertram's sneering look,
Then stammer'd—"Has a field been fought ?
Has Bertram news of battle brought ?
For sure a soldier, famed so far
In foreign fields for feats of war,
On eve of fight ne'er left the host,
Until the field were won and lost."
"Here, in your towers by circling Tees,
You, Oswald Wycliffe, rest at ease ;

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Why deem it strange that others come
To share such safe and easy home,
From fields where danger, death, and toil,
Are the reward of civil broil ? ”—
“ Nay, mock not, friend ! since well we know
The near advances of the foe,
To mar our northern army’s work,
Encamp’d before beleaguer’d York ;
Thy horse with valiant Fairfax lay,
And must have fought—how went the
day ? ”—

XII

“ Wouldst hear the tale ?—On Marston heath
Met, front to front, the ranks of death ;
Flourish’d the trumpets fierce, and now
Fired was each eye, and flush’d each brow ;
On either side loud clamours ring,
‘ God and the Cause ! ’—‘ God and the King ! ’
Right English all, they rush’d to blows,
With nought to win, and all to lose.
I could have laugh’d—but lack’d the time
To see, in phrenesy sublime,
How the fierce zealots fought and bled,
For king or state, as humour led ;
Some for a dream of public good,
Some for church-tippet, gown and hood,
Draining their veins, in death to claim
A patriot’s or a martyr’s name.—
Led Bertram Risingham the hearts,
That counter’d there on adverse parts,
No superstitious fool had I
Sought El Dorados in the sky !
Chili had heard me through her states,
And Lima oped her silver gates,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Rich Mexico I had march'd through,
And sack'd the splendours of Peru,
Till sunk Pizarro's daring name,
And, Cortez, thine, in Bertram's fame."—
"Still from the purpose wilt thou stray !
Good gentle friend, how went the day ?"—

XIII

"Good am I deem'd at trumpet sound,
And good where goblets dance the round,
Though gentle ne'er was join'd, till now,
With rugged Bertram's breast and brow.—
But I resume. The battle's rage
Was like the strife which currents wage,
Where Orinoco, in his pride,
Rolls to the main no tribute tide,
But 'gainst broad ocean urges far
A rival sea of roaring war ;
While, in ten thousand eddies driven,
The billows fling their foam to heaven,
And the pale pilot seeks in vain,
Where rolls the river, where the main.
Even thus upon the bloody field,
The eddying tides of conflict wheel'd
Ambiguous, till that heart of flame,
Hot Rupert, on our squadrons came,
Hurling against our spears a line
Of gallants, fiery as their wine ;
Then ours, though stubborn in their zeal,
In zeal's despite began to reel.
What wouldst thou more ?—in tumult tost
Our leaders fell, our ranks were lost.
A thousand men, who drew the sword
For both the Houses and the Word,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Preach'd forth from hamlet, grange, and
down,
To curb the crosier and the crown,
Now, stark and stiff, lie stretch'd in gore,
And ne'er shall rail at mitre more.—
Thus fared it, when I left the fight,
With the good Cause and Commons' right.”—

XIV

“Disastrous news!” dark Wycliffe
said;
Assumed despondence bent his head,
While troubled joy was in his eye,
The well-feign'd sorrow to belie.—
“Disastrous news!—when needed most,
Told ye not that your chiefs were lost?
Complete the woful tale, and say
Who fell upon that fatal day;
What leaders of repute and name
Bought by their death a deathless fame.
If such my direst foeman's doom,
My tears shall dew his honour'd tomb.—
No answer?—Friend, of all our host,
Thou know'st whom I should hate the
most,
Whom thou, too, once wert wont to hate,
Yet leav'st me doubtful of his fate.”
With look unmoved,—“Of friend or foe,
Aught,” answer'd Bertram, “would'st thou
know,
Demand in simple terms and plain,
A soldier's answer shalt thou gain:—
For question dark, or riddle hight,
I have nor judgment nor reply.”

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

XV

The wrath his art and fear suppress'd,
Now blazed at once in Wycliffe's breast ;
And brave, from man so meanly born,
Roused his hereditary scorn.
" Wretch ! hast thou paid thy bloody debt ?
PHILIP OF MORTHAM, lives he yet ?
False to thy patron or thine oath,
Trait'rous or perjured, one or both,
Slave ! hast thou kept thy promise plight,
To slay thy leader in the fight ? "
Then from his seat the soldier sprung,
And Wycliffe's hand he strongly wrung ;
His grasp, as hard as glove of mail,
Forced the red blood-drop from the nail—
" A health ! " he cried ; and, ere he quaff'd,
Flung from him Wycliffe's hand, and laugh'd :
—" Now, Oswald Wycliffe, speaks thy heart !
Now play'st thou well thy genuine part !
Worthy, but for thy craven fear,
Like me to roam a buccanier.
What reck'st thou of the Cause divine,
If Mortham's wealth and lands be thine ?
What carest thou for beleaguer'd York,
If this good hand have done its work ?
Or what though Fairfax and his best
Are reddening Marston's swarthy breast,
If Philip Mortham with them lie,
Lending his life-blood to the dye ?—
Sit, then ! and as 'mid comrades free
Carousing after victory,
When tales are told of blood and fear,
That boys and women shrink to hear,
From point to point I frankly tell
The deed of death as it befell.

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

XVI

“ When purposed vengeance I forego,
Term me a wretch, nor deem me foe ;
And when an insult I forgive,
Then brand me as a slave, and live !—
Philip of Mortham is with those
Whom Bertram Risingham calls foes ;
Or whom more sure revenge attends,
If number’d with ungrateful friends.
As was his wont, ere battle glow’d,
Along the marshall’d ranks he rode,
And wore his vizor up the while.
I saw his melancholy smile,
When, full opposed in front, he knew
Where ROKEBY’S kindred banner flew.
‘ And thus,’ he said, ‘ will friends
divide ! ’—
I heard, and thought how, side by side,
We two had turn’d the battle’s tide,
In many a well-debated field,
Where Bertram’s breast was Philip’s
shield.
I thought on Darien’s deserts pale,
Where death bestrides the evening gale ;
How o’er my friend my cloak I threw,
And fenceless faced the deadly dew ;
I thought on Quariana’s cliff,
Where, rescued from our foundering skiff
Through the white breakers’ wrath I
bore
Exhausted Mortham to the shore ;
And when his side an arrow found,
I suck’d the Indian’s venom’d wound.
These thoughts like torrents rush’d along
To sweep away my purpose strong.

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

XVII

“Hearts are not flint, and flints are
rent ;
Hearts are not steel, and steel is bent.
When Mortham bade me, as of yore,
Be near him in the battle's roar,
I scarcely saw the spears laid low,
I scarcely heard the trumpets blow ;
Lost was the war in inward strife,
Debating Mortham's death or life.
'Twas then I thought, how, lured to come,
As partner of his wealth and home,
Years of piratic wandering o'er,
With him I sought our native shore.
But Mortham's lord grew far estranged
From the bold heart with whom he ranged ;
Doubts, horrors, superstitious fears,
Sadden'd and dimm'd descending years ;
The wily priests their victim sought,
And damn'd each free-born deed and
thought ;
Then must I seek another home,
My license shook his sober dome ;
If gold he gave, in one wild day
I revell'd thrice the sum away.
An idle outcast then I stray'd,
Unfit for tillage or for trade ;
Deem'd, like the steel of rusted lance
Useless and dangerous at once.
The women fear'd my hardy look,
At my approach the peaceful shook ;
The merchant saw my glance of flame,
And lock'd his hoards when Bertram came ;
Each child of coward peace kept far
From the neglected son of war.

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XVIII

“ But civil discord gave the call,
And made my trade the trade of all.
By Mortham urged, I came again
His vassals to the fight to train.
What guerdon waited on my care ?
I could not cant of creed or prayer ;
Sour fanatics each trust obtain'd,
And I, dishonour'd and disdain'd,
Gain'd but the high and happy lot,
In these poor arms to front the shot !—
All this thou know'st, thy gestures tell ;
Yet hear it o'er, and mark it well.
'Tis honour bids me now relate
Each circumstance of Mortham's fate.

XIX

“ Thoughts, from the tongue that slowly
part,
Glance quick as lightning through the heart.
As my spur press'd my courser's side,
Philip of Mortham's cause was tried,
And, ere the charging squadrons mix'd,
His plea was cast, his doom was fix'd.
I watch'd him through the doubtful fray,
That changed as March's moody day,
Till, like a stream that bursts its bank,
Fierce Rupert thunder'd on our flank.
'Twas then, 'midst tumult, smoke, and strife,
Where each man fought for death or life,
'Twas then I fired my petronel,
And Mortham, steed and rider, fell.
One dying look he upward cast,
Of wrath and anguish—'twas his last.
Think not that there I stopp'd, to view

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What of the battle should ensue ;
But ere I clear'd that bloody press,
Our northern horse ran masterless ;
Monckton and Mitton told the news,
How troops of roundheads choked the
Ouse,

And many a bonny Scot, aghast,
Spurring his palfrey northward, past,
Cursing the day when zeal or meed
First lured their Leslie o'er the Tweed.
Yet when I reach'd the banks of Swale,
Had rumour learn'd another tale ;
With his barb'd horse, fresh tidings say,
Stout Cromwell has redeem'd the day :
But whether false the news, or true,
Oswald, I reckon as light as you."

XX

Not then by Wycliffe might be shown,
How his pride startled at the tone
In which his complice, fierce and free,
Asserted guilt's equality.
In smoothest terms his speech he wove,
Of endless friendship, faith, and love ;
Promised and vow'd in courteous sort,
But Bertram broke professions short.
" Wycliffe, be sure not here I stay,
No, scarcely till the rising day ;
Warn'd by the legends of my youth,
I trust not an associate's truth.
Do not my native dales prolong
Of Percy Rede the tragic song,
Train'd forward to his bloody fall
By Girsonfield, that treacherous Hall ?
Oft, by the Pringle's haunted side,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

The shepherd sees his spectre glide.
And near the spot that gave me name,
The moated mound of Risingham,
Where Reed upon her margin sees
Sweet Woodburne's cottages and trees,
Some ancient sculptor's art has shown
An outlaw's image on the stone ;
Unmatch'd in strength, a giant he,
With quiver'd back, and kirtled knee.
Ask how he died, that hunter bold,
The tameless monarch of the wold,
And age and infancy can tell,
By brother's treachery he fell.
Thus warn'd by legends of my youth,
I trust to no associate's truth.

XXI

“ When last we reason'd of this deed,
Nought, I bethink me, was agreed,
Or by what rule, or when, or where,
The wealth of Mortham we should share ;
Then list, while I the portion name,
Our differing laws give each to claim.
Thou, vassal sworn to England's throne,
Her rules of heritage must own ;
They deal thee, as to nearest heir,
Thy kinsman's lands and livings fair,
And these I yield :—do thou revere
The statutes of the Buccanier.
Friend to the sea, and foeman sworn
To all that on her waves are borne,
When falls a mate in battle broil,
His comrade heirs his portion'd spoil ;
When dies in fight a daring foe,
He claims his wealth who struck the blow ;

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And either rule to me assigns
Those spoils of Indian seas and mines,
Hoarded in Mortham's caverns dark ;
Ingot of gold and diamond spark,
Chalice and plate from churches borne,
And gems from shrieking beauty torn,
Each string of pearl, each silver bar,
And all the wealth of western war.
I go to search, where, dark and deep,
Those Trans-atlantic treasures sleep.
Thou must along—for, lacking thee,
The heir will scarce find entrance free ;
And then farewell. I haste to try
Each varied pleasure wealth can buy ;
When cloy'd each wish these wars afford
Fresh work for Bertram's restless sword."

XXII

An undecided answer hung
On Oswald's hesitating tongue.
Despite his craft, he heard with awe
This ruffian stabber fix the law ;
While his own troubled passions veer
Through hatred, joy, regret, and fear :—
Joy'd at the soul that Bertram flies,
He grudged the murderer's mighty prize,
Hated his pride's presumptuous tone,
And fear'd to wend with him alone.
At length, that middle course to steer,
To cowardice and craft so dear,
" His charge," he said, " would ill
allow
His absence from the fortress now ;
WILFRID on Bertram should attend,
His son should journey with his friend."

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XXIII

Contempt kept Bertram's anger down,
And wreathed to savage smile his frown.
"Wilfrid, or thou—'tis one to me,
Whichever bears the golden key.
Yet think not but I mark, and smile
To mark, thy poor and selfish wile !
If injury from me you fear,
What, Oswald Wycliffe, shields thee here ?
I've sprung from walls more high than these,
I've swam through deeper streams than Tees.
Might I not stab thee ere one yell
Could rouse the distant sentinel ?
Start not—it is not my design,
But, if it were, weak fence were thine ;
And, trust me, that, in time of need,
This hand hath done more desperate deed.
Go, haste and rouse thy slumbering son ;
Time calls, and I must needs be gone."

"Rokeby," canto i.

The next passage, which is essentially a piece of striking description, at the same time shows the indomitable spirit and determination of Bertram, and by contrast throws into relief the gentler complexion of Wilfrid's nature. The two are on the errand mentioned in the previous extract, and Bertram imagines that he is haunted by the wraith of the murdered Philip Mortham, though in reality it is the real Mortham, not killed after all, but alive and actually dogging him. Driven to desperation, Bertram decides to pursue this elusive apparition.

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XIV

As bursts the levin in its wrath,
He shot him down the sounding path ;
Rock, wood, and stream, rang wildly out,
To his loud step and savage shout.
Seems that the object of his race
Hath scaled the cliffs ; his frantic chase
Sidelong he turns, and now 'tis bent
Right up the rock's tall battlement ;
Straining each sinew to ascend,
Foot, hand, and knee, their aid must lend.
Wilfrid, all dizzy with dismay,
Views from beneath, his dreadful way :
Now to the oak's warp'd roots he clings,
Now trusts his weight to ivy strings ;
Now, like the wild-goat, must he dare
An unsupported leap in air ;
Hid in the shrubby rain-course now,
You mark him by the crashing bough,
And by his corslet's sullen clank,
And by the stones spurn'd from the
bank,
And by the hawk scared from her nest,
And ravens croaking o'er their guest,
Who deem his forfeit limbs shall pay
The tribute of his bold essay.

XV

See, he emerges !—desperate now
All farther course—Yon beetling brow,
In craggy nakedness sublime,
What heart or foot shall dare to climb ?
It bears no tendril for his clasp,
Presents no angle to his grasp :

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Sole stay his foot may rest upon,
Is yon earth-bedded jetting stone.
Balanced on such precarious prop,
He strains his grasp to reach the top.
Just as the dangerous stretch he makes,
By Heaven, his faithless footstool shakes !
Beneath his tottering bulk it bends,
It sways, . . it loosens, . . it descends !
And downward holds its headlong way,
Crashing o'er rock and copsewood spray.
Loud thunders shake the echoing dell !—
Fell it alone ?—alone it fell.
Just on the very verge of fate,
The hardy Bertram's falling weight
He trusted to his sinewy hands,
And on the top unharm'd he stands !—

XVI

Wilfrid a safer path pursued ;
At intervals where, roughly hew'd,
Rude steps ascending from the dell
Render'd the cliffs accessible.
By circuit slow he thus attain'd
The height that Risingham had gain'd,
And when he issued from the wood,
Before the gate of Mortham stood.
'Twas a fair scene ! the sunbeam lay
On battled tower and portal grey :
And from the grassy slope he sees
The Greta flow to meet the Tees ;
Where, issuing from her darksome bed,
She caught the morning's eastern red,
And through the softening vale below
Roll'd her bright waves, in rosy glow,

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All blushing to her bridal bed,
Like some shy maid in convent bred ;
While linnet, lark, and blackbird gay,
Sing forth her nuptial roundelay.

"Rokeby," canto ii.

Compared with his former triumphs, the welcome given to "Rokeby" was moderate. Scott himself thought that the cause of his waning popularity was partly "the satiety of the public ear, which had had so much of his rhythm, not only from himself, but from dozens of mocking-birds, male and female, all more or less applauded in their day, and now all equally forgotten. This circumstance, too, had probably no slender effect ; the more that, in defiance of all the hints of his friends, he now repeated (with more negligence) the uniform octosyllabic couplets of 'The Lady of the Lake,' instead of recurring to the more varied cadence of 'The Lay' or 'Marmion.'"¹ But Scott also realised what was undoubtedly a most potent factor in the decline of his popularity, namely, the hold that Byron was now obtaining on the public ear and mind. "The deeper and darker passion of 'Childe Harold,' the audacity of its morbid voluptuousness, and the melancholy majesty of the numbers in which it defied the world, had taken the general imagination by storm ; and 'Rokeby,' with many beauties and some sublimities, was pitched, as a whole, on a key which seemed tame in comparison."²

¹ Lockhart, "Life," p. 236.

² *Ibid.*

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Very soon after "Rokeby's" publication "The Bridal of Triermain" appeared. Chiefly for the amusement of quizzing the critics, Scott published the poem anonymously, and had cleverly manipulated a report that it was by his friend Erskine. The original plan had been for the two poems to be published on the same day, but despite the slight juniority of "The Bridal," the ruse was sufficient to deceive the majority. The "Quarterly" said: "The diction undoubtedly reminds us of a rhythm and cadence we have heard before; but the sentiments, descriptions, and characters have qualities that are native and unborrowed." The poem is not exactly of the type of Scott's four other romances: Lockhart's happy appellation is "a romance in little." It is, in fact, a cross between his ballads and romances. As in the case of "The Lay" there is a slight frame in which the main story is set: there is a story within a story, and the inner story is the more important. The setting is supplied by a dialogue between two lovers, as lightly sketched as the old minstrel and the duchess. Like them too they are of later time than the characters of the inner story, and are consequently more tangible and earthly. The main story is fantastic, with an admixture of the supernatural, and is removed from the world of actuality by events which could spring only from an imagination as wild as Scott's.

The year 1813 witnessed a serious trade depression throughout the country, which was

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sapped of its strength by the war that had been going on for so many years, and under this depression the publishing trade had suffered no less than others. How this reflected on Scott must now be shown. In early days Scott had been a great friend of the famous Scotch publisher Constable, and a contributor to his periodical "The Edinburgh Review." But as this became more and more violently Whig in tendency, Scott had broken all connection with it, even that of a subscriber. Furthermore, he had entered into a plan with the London Tory publisher Murray for the foundation of a rival review, "The Quarterly," to which he was to become a contributor. At the same time the breach with Constable was widened by the foundation of a rival Edinburgh publishing firm, under the name of "John Ballantyne & Co." The figurehead of this firm was James Ballantyne's brother, who had not one penny of capital in the business and was quite innocent of experience in the publishing trade. As a matter of fact the bulk of the capital was Scott's, but this fact was kept rigidly secret. The whole affair was exceedingly ill-advised, and in the sequel proved an infinite misfortune to Scott. He now had become a large holder in a printing business and a publishing business which were managed by charming friends but deplorable business men—James and John Ballantyne. Thus it was that when, in 1813, the trade depression swept over all England, Scott found himself on the

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brink of ruin. But, fortunately, the breach with the powerful publisher Constable had been almost healed by this time, and the Ballantynes were as willing to receive, as Constable to give, the help necessary to tide over the danger. Constable himself was not a methodical business man, but he possessed infinite sagacity and power to gauge the popular taste. He was a man too sanguine in temperament, who never gave sufficient consideration to a scheme which pleased his fancy. But in his unswerving faith in Scott's popularity he proved his astuteness, and when he was met with an offer of a fourth share in the copyright of "Rokeby," he willingly agreed to relieve the overburdened printing establishment of a large part of its stock. The Ballantynes were to make every effort to get rid of the remaining stock and to wind up the publishing business as soon as might be. Scott wrote gentle but strongly worded reproofs to both the brothers—virtually his managers—enjoining on James a less frequent addiction to the pleasures of the table and a little more to his affairs, whilst on John he impressed the necessity of more methodical conduct in his business. But Scott himself was not the wisest of men. Ever confident in his own powers, and by nature sanguine, he had no sooner shaken himself free of this embarrassment than he was for buying a neighbouring estate to add to his property of Abbotsford. Building was still going forward with great energy and the house was being stocked with furniture of all descriptions,

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not least nor most cheaply with supplies for his library and armoury.

Shortly after this another urgent appeal for help came from John Ballantyne. The necessary money was sent with a remonstrance, and Scott set out on a visit to the Duke of Buccleuch ; but another and another hasty despatch followed him with similar calls. He cut short his visit and returned home to settle the affair, and then proceeded on a journey into England. But he had got as far as Penrith only when still another letter reached him, and he was forced once again to send money to the embarrassed publisher. Scott returned north and Constable was again called in to help by relieving the firm of still more of its superfluous stock. Even this was not enough to remove all difficulties, but the necessary help was given by the Duke of Buccleuch, who immediately guaranteed to the extent of £4,000, whilst as security Scott insured his life for that amount and deposited the policy with the Duke. Thus passed the second crisis.

While these difficulties were pressing on Scott, an offer was made to him on behalf of the Prince Regent of the office of Poet Laureate, which had just become vacant owing to the death of Henry James Pye. But after considering the matter Scott felt that, as he already enjoyed two offices in the gift of the Crown, he ought not to accept this new offer. He therefore declined the Laureateship, but at the same time used all his influence to obtain it for Southey, to whom it was, in fact, given.

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VI

SCOTT, as we saw in connection with the politics of "Marmion," was always a strong Tory. In 1814 he wrote a poem in memory of William Pitt, which may well be compared with the famous "Introduction" to the first canto of "Marmion."

SONG

For the Anniversary Meeting of the Pitt
Club of Scotland

O, dread was the time, and more dreadful the omen,
When the brave on Marengo lay slaughter'd in vain,
And beholding broad Europe bow'd down by her foe-
men,

PITT closed in his anguish the map of her reign !
Not the fate of broad Europe could bend his brave
spirit

To take for his country the safety of shame ;
O, then in her triumph remember his merit,
And hallow the goblet that flows to his name.

Round the husbandman's head, while he traces the
furrow,

The mists of the winter may mingle with rain,
He may plough it with labour, and sow it in sorrow,
And sigh while he fears he has sow'd it in vain ;
He may die ere his children shall reap in their gladness,
But the blithe harvest home shall remember his
claim ;

And their jubilee-shout shall be soften'd with sadness,
While they hallow the goblet that flows to his name.

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Though anxious and timeless his life was expended,
In toils for our country preserved by his care,
Though he died ere one ray o'er the nations ascended,
To light the long darkness of doubt and despair ;
The storms he endured in our Britain's December,
The perils his wisdom foresaw and o'ercame,
In her glory's rich harvest shall Britain remember,
And hallow the goblet that flows to his name.

Nor forget HIS grey head, who, all dark in affliction,
Is deaf to the tale of our victories won,
And to sounds the most dear to paternal affection,
The shout of his people applauding his Son ;
By his firmness unmoved in success and disaster,
By his long reign of virtue, remember his claim !
With our tribute to PITT join the praise of his Master,
Though a tear stain the goblet that flows to his
name.

Yet again fill the wine cup, and change the sad measure,
The rites of our grief and our gratitude paid,
To our Prince, to our Heroes, devote the bright
treasure,
The wisdom that plann'd, and the zeal that obey'd !
Fill WELLINGTON'S cup till it beam like his glory,
Forget not our own brave DALHOUSIE and GRÆME ;
A thousand years hence hearts shall bound at their
story,
And hallow the goblet that flows to their fame.

As early as 1807 Constable's faith in Scott had been so great that, fearing he would lose him to the London publisher, he had offered him the huge sum of £1,500 for an edition of Swift's works. For six years Scott had been

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working at this task, and now, in July 1814, the edition appeared.

But a more important work was in preparation. In 1805 (apparently) Scott had written the opening chapters of a prose romance, a literary form quite new to him ; but the friends to whom he showed it were depressing in their criticism, and the manuscript was cast aside. All know the story how one day, years afterwards, Scott was rummaging in a long-unused drawer for some fishing tackle, when he turned up this forgotten fragment ; how he rescued it from oblivion, continued where he had ceased and produced "Waverley," the first of his famous novels. The first volume was accomplished in leisure, but the second and third volumes were written in the incredibly short space of the evenings of twenty-seven days, such was the facility and speed with which Scott was always able to write. This first of his prose romances was published in July 1814, within a week or so of the publication of the Swift. As in the case of the subsequent novels, "Waverley" was published anonymously.

Without awaiting the verdict of the public—he was always ready to await this and accept it, whatever it were, without impatience—Scott set out with the Commissioners of the Northern Light Houses on their yearly trip round Scotland. All the men whom he accompanied were near friends, so that he was not tied by any formalities, but could enjoy the scenes through which they passed as he pleased. Scott never

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travelled with closed eyes, and in this case, as the yacht took them amongst the Hebrides and the western islands, he gathered materials which were afterwards employed in "The Lord of the Isles" and "The Pirate."

The success of "Waverley" had been instantaneous and phenomenal. Within five weeks of publication, although in the time of year at which books are never expected to sell, the first impression of one thousand copies was sold out. By the end of August two thousand more were put on the market, and in September Constable was preparing for one thousand more. Although he had paid £1,500 for half the copyright, Constable had covered expenses and made a profit of £612 in four months. For once Constable's sagacity had failed him, for at the opening of negotiations he had refused to give £1,000 for all rights! But it is true that he did not know who the author was.

On January 15, 1815, "The Lord of the Isles" was published, and six weeks later appeared "Guy Mannering," Scott's second novel. Like "Rokeby," "The Lord of the Isles" was a success when regarded by itself, although its sale showed a falling off as compared with the first three poetical romances. One can scarcely describe a poem as a failure with the public when it was sold within a few years to the extent of fifteen thousand copies. "The Lord of the Isles" resembles the earlier poems in the main. Characterisation plays a less important part than scenic effect. Its final description of the

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Battle of Bannockburn is naturally comparable with the description of Flodden in "Marmion."

THE BATTLE

XIX

It was a night of lovely June,
High rode in cloudless blue the moon,
Demayet smiled beneath her ray ;
Old Stirling's towers arose in light,
And, twined in links of silver bright,
Her winding river lay.
Ah, gentle planet ! other sight
Shall greet thee next returning night,
Of broken arms and banners tore,
And marshes dark with human gore,
And piles of slaughter'd men and horse,
And Forth that floats the frequent corse,
And many a wounded wretch to plain
Beneath thy silver light in vain !
But now, from England's host, the cry
Thou hear'st of wassail revelry,
While from the Scottish legions pass
The murmur'd prayer, the early mass !—
Here, numbers had presumption given ;
There, bands o'er-match'd sought aid from
Heaven.

XX

* * * *

Now on the Ochils gleams the sun,
And glistens now Demayet dun ;
Is it the lark that carols shrill ?
Is it the bittern's early hum ?
No !—distant, but increasing still,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

The trumpet's sound swells up the hill,
With the deep murmur of the drum.
Responsive from the Scottish host,
Pipe-clang and bugle-sound were toss'd,
His breast and brow each soldier cross'd,
And started from the ground ;
Arm'd and array'd for instant fight,
Rose archer, spearman, squire and knight,
And in the pomp of battle bright
The dread battalia frown'd.

XXI

Now onward, and in open view,
The countless ranks of England drew,
Dark rolling like the ocean-tide,
When the rough west hath chafed his pride,
And his deep roar sends challenge wide
To all that bars his way !
In front the gallant archers trode,
The men-at-arms behind them rode,
And midmost of the phalanx broad
The Monarch held his sway.
Beside him many a war-horse fumes,
Around him waves a sea of plumes,
Where many a knight in battle known,
And some who spurs had first braced on,
And deem'd that fight should see them won,
King Edward's hests obey.
De Argentine attends his side,
With stout De Valence, Pembroke's pride,
Selected champions from the train,
To wait upon his bridle-rein.
Upon the Scottish foe he gazed—
—At once, before his sight amazed,
Sunk banner, spear, and shield ;

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Each weapon-point is downward sent,
Each warrior to the ground is bent.
“ The rebels, Argentine, repent !
For pardon they have kneel’d.”—
“ Ay !—but they bend to other powers,
And other pardon sue than ours !
See where yon bare-foot Abbot stands,
And blesses them with lifted hands !
Upon the spot where they have kneel’d,
These men will die or win the field.”—
—“ Then prove we if they die or win !
Bid Gloster’s Earl the fight begin.”

XXII

Earl Gilbert waved his truncheon high,
Just as the Northern ranks arose,
Signal for England’s archery
To halt and bend their bows.
Then stepp’d each yeoman forth a pace,
Glanced at the intervening space,
And raised his left hand high ;
To the right ear the cords they bring—
—At once ten thousand bow-strings ring,
Ten thousand arrows fly !
Nor paused on the devoted Scot
The ceaseless fury of their shot ;
As fiercely and as fast,
Forth whistling came the grey-goose wing
As the wild hailstones pelt and ring
Adown December’s blast.
Nor mountain targe of tough bull-hide,
Nor lowland mail, that storm may bide ;
Woe, woe to Scotland’s banner’d pride,
If the fell shower may last !
Upon the right, behind the wood,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Each by his steed dismounted, stood

The Scottish chivalry ;—

With foot in stirrup, hand on mane,

Fierce Edward Bruce can scarce restrain

His own keen heart, his eager train,

Until the archers gain'd the plain ;

Then, " Mount, ye gallants free ! "

He cried ; and, vaulting from the ground,

His saddle every horseman found.

On high their glittering crests they toss,

As springs the wild-fire from the moss ;

The shield hangs down on every breast,

Each ready lance is in the rest,

And loud shouts Edward Bruce—

" Forth, Marshal ! on the peasant foe !

We'll tame the terrors of their bow,

And cut the bow-string loose ! "

XXIII

Then spurs were dashed in chargers' flanks,
They rush'd among the archer ranks.

No spears were there the shock to let,

No stakes to turn the charge were set,

And how shall yeoman's armour slight,

Stand the long lance and mace of might ?

Or what may their short swords avail,

'Gainst barbèd horse and shirt of mail ?

Amid their ranks the chargers sprung,

High o'er their heads the weapons swung,

And shriek and groan and vengeful shout

Give note of triumph and of rout !

Awhile, with stubborn hardihood,

Their English hearts the strife made good

Borne down at length on every side,

Compell'd to flight, they scatter wide.—

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Let stags of Sherwood leap for glee,
And bound the deer of Dallom-Lee !
The broken bows of Bannock's shore
Shall in the greenwood ring no more !
Round Wakefield's merry May-pole now,
The maids may twine the summer bough,
May northward look with longing glance,
For those that wont to lead the dance,
For the blithe archers look in vain !
Broken, dispersed, in flight o'erta'en,
Pierced through, trode down, by thousands slain,
They cumber Bannock's bloody plain.

XXIV

The King with scorn beheld their flight.
" Are these," he said, " our yeomen wight ?
Each braggart churl could boast before,
Twelve Scottish lives his baldric bore !
Fitter to plunder chase or park,
Than make a manly foe their mark.—
Forward, each gentleman and knight !
Let gentle blood show generous might,
And chivalry redeem the fight ! "

To rightward of the wild affray,
The field show'd fair and level way ;
But, in mid-space, the Bruce's care
Had bored the ground with many a pit,
With turf and brushwood hidden yet,
That form'd a ghastly snare.

Rushing, ten thousand horsemen came,
With spears in rest, and hearts on flame,
That panted for the shock !
With blazing crests and banners spread,
And trumpet-clang and clamour dread,
The wide plain thunder'd to their tread,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

As far as Stirling rock.
Down ! down ! in headlong overthrow,
Horsemen and horse, the foremost go,
Wild floundering on the field !
The first are in destruction's gorge,
Their followers wildly o'er them urge ;—
The knightly helm and shield,
The mail, the acton, and the spear,
Strong hand, high heart, are useless here !
Loud from the mass confused the cry
Of dying warriors swells on high,
And steeds that shriek in agony !
They came like mountain-torrent red,
That thunders o'er its rocky bed ;
They broke like that same torrent's wave
When swallow'd by a darksome cave.
Billows on billows burst and boil,
Maintaining still the stern turmoil
And to their wild and tortured groan
Each adds new terrors of his own !

* * * *

XXVIII

Bruce, with the pilot's wary eye,
The slackening of the storm could spy.
" One effort more, and Scotland's free !
Lord of the Isles, my trust in thee
Is firm as Ailsa Rock ;
Rush on with Highland sword and targe,
I, with my Carrick spearmen charge ;
Now, forward to the shock ! "
At once the spears were forward thrown,
Against the sun the broadswords shone ;
The pibroch lent its maddening tone,
And loud King Robert's voice was known—

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

“ Carrick, press on—they fail, they fail !
Press on, brave sons of Innisgail,
The foe is fainting fast !
Each strike for parent, child, and wife,
For Scotland, liberty, and life,—
The battle cannot last ! ”

Just as Clare is a spectator at Flodden Field, so here the heroine Edith is watching the battle from a neighbouring hill. Seeing the English rallying once again, she stirs up the host of camp-followers around her to seize what weapons they can find and go to the Bruce's aid. It is a matter of history that the English took this descending multitude for a fresh contingent, and, breaking rank, fled. Argentine, remembering that for his honour's sake he must go and seek his enemy Bruce, plunges again into the battle to meet his foe or his death.

XXXI

Already scatter'd o'er the plain,
Reproof, command, and counsel vain,
The rearward squadrons fled amain,
Or made but doubtful stay ;—
But when they mark'd the seeming show
Of fresh and fierce and marshall'd foe,
The boldest broke array.
O give their hapless prince his due !
In vain the royal Edward threw
His person 'mid the spears,
Cried, “ Fight ! ” to terror and despair,
Menaced, and wept, and tore his hair,
And cursed their caitiff fears ;

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Till Pembroke turn'd his bridle rein,
And forced him from the fatal plain.
With them rode Argentine, until
They gain'd the summit of the hill,
But quitted there the train :—
“ In yonder field a gage I left,—
I must not live of fame bereft ;
I needs must turn again.
Speed hence, my Liege, for on your trace
The fiery Douglas takes the chase,
I know his banner well.
God send my Sovereign joy and bliss,
And many a happier field than this ! —
Once more, my Liege, farewell.”

XXXII

Again he faced the battle-field,—
Wildly they fly, are slain, or yield.
“ Now then,” he said, and couch'd his spear,
“ My course is run, the goal is near ;
One effort more, one brave career,
Must close this race of mine.”
Then in his stirrups rising high,
He shouted loud his battle-cry,
“ Saint James for Argentine ! ”
And, of the bold pursuers, four
The gallant knight from saddle bore ;
But not unharm'd—a lance's point
Has found his breastplate's loosen'd joint,
An axe has razed his crest ;
Yet still on Colonsay's fierce lord.
Who press'd the chase with gory sword,
He rode with spear in rest,
And through his bloody tartans bored,
And through his gallant breast.

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Nail'd to the earth, the mountaineer
Yet writhed him up against the spear,
And swung his broadsword round !
—Stirrup, steel-boot, and cuish gave way,
Beneath that blow's tremendous sway,
The blood gush'd from the wound ;
And the grim Lord of Colonsay
Hath turn'd him on the ground,
And laugh'd in death-pang, that his blade
The mortal thrust so well repaid.

XXXIII

Now toil'd the Bruce, the battle done,
To use his conquest boldly won ;
And gave command for horse and spear
To press the Southron's scatter'd rear,
Nor let his broken force combine,
—When the war-cry of Argentine
Fell faintly on his ear ;
“ Save, save his life,” he cried, “ O save
The kind, the noble, and the brave ! ”
The squadrons round free passage gave,
The wounded knight drew near ;
He raised his red-cross shield no more,
Helm, cuish, and breastplate stream'd with
gore,
Yet, as he saw the King advance,
He strove even then to couch his lance—
The effort was in vain !
The spur-stroke fail'd to rouse the horse ;
Wounded and weary, in mid course
He stumbled on the plain.
Then foremost was the generous Bruce
To raise his head, his helm to loose ;—
“ Lord Earl, the day is thine !

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

My Sovereign's charge, and adverse fate,
Have made our meeting all too late :
Yet this may Argentine,
As boon from ancient comrade, crave—
A Christian's mass, a soldier's grave."

XXXIV

Bruce press'd his dying hand—its grasp
Kindly replied ; but, in his clasp,
It stiffen'd and grew cold—
" And, O farewell ! " the victor cried,
" Of chivalry the flower and pride,
The arm in battle bold,
The courteous mien, the noble race,
The stainless faith, the manly face !—
Bid Ninian's convent light their shrine,
For late-wake of De Argentine.
O'er better knight on death-bier laid,
Torch never gleam'd nor mass was said ! "

XXXV

Not for De Argentine alone,
Through Ninian's church these torches shone,
And rose the death-prayer's awful tone.
That yellow lustre glimmer'd pale,
On broken plate and bloodied mail,
Rent crest and shatter'd coronet,
Of Baron, Earl, and Banneret ;
And the best names that England knew,
Claim'd in the death-prayer dismal due.
Yet mourn not, Land of Fame !
Though ne'er the Leopards on thy shield
Retreated from so sad a field,
Since Norman William came.
Oft may thine annals justly boast

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

Of battles stern by Scotland lost ;
Grudge not her victory,
When for her freeborn rights she strove ;
Rights dear to all who freedom love,
To none so dear as thee !

"Lord of the Isles," canto vi.

The year 1815 was an interesting one in Scott's life. In March he and his family went to London, where he had not been for six years. On the previous occasion he had been lionised *ad nauseam*, but on this visit he was more sought after than ever. He dined more than once, and on most cordial terms, with the Prince Regent, and was courted by the *élite* of London. But perhaps his most interesting meeting was with his only rival, Byron. All the more gratifying was this meeting since their first relations had been far from happy. In "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" Byron had made an unwarrantable and pointless attack on Scott, but in 1812, at a time when the younger poet was becoming a serious competitor before the public, the two had begun a most friendly correspondence in which it was their first aim to clear up the old trouble. Byron had most honourably withdrawn his words and expressed his regret that they should ever have been used, and Scott had accepted this amends with magnanimity. For many weeks they met frequently, chiefly at the house of their mutual friend Murray ; and thus began a friendship of the pleasantest kind between these two great literary favourites of their day, who from this time

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forward had no thoughts for each other but those of warm regard and esteem.

Later in the year Scott crossed to the Continent, and was received with much honour in Paris, where so many of the great royal and military personages of Europe were gathered round the triumphant Duke of Wellington. Here arose a friendship with Wellington, which, if not intimate, was always cordial, and in Scott's opinion was one of the greatest honours that he ever received.

The poetical outcome of this tour was "The Field of Waterloo," a poem which does not display the usual splendour of his martial descriptions. Although he was fired with enthusiasm for Wellington's marvellous campaign, Scott does not seem to be as much at home in this great English battle as in the Scottish fights of Bannockburn and Flodden Field. Nevertheless the poem achieved great success with the public, though doubtless from reasons other than literary.

During the year 1816 Scott published three more of his novels, which were now the real vein of his genius, but in 1817 he wrote "Harold the Dauntless." This poem, the last of his poetical romances, has a grandeur of barbarism and ferocity which is well maintained in the rugged characters of Harold the heathen and his half christian, quite savage old father Witikind. The rough character of these grim Vikings and the corresponding style of treatment is well exemplified in the passage given

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below—a piece taken from the beginning of the poem :

I

* * * * *

Count Witikind came of a regal strain,
And roved with his Norsemen the land and the main.
Woe to the realms which he coasted ! for there
Was shedding of blood, and rending of hair,
Rape of maiden, and slaughter of priest,
Gathering of ravens and wolves to the feast :
When he hoisted his standard black,
Before him was battle, behind him wrack,
And he burn'd the churches, that heathen Dane,
To light his band to their barks again.

II

On Erin's shores was his outrage known,
The winds of France had his banners blown ;
Little was there to plunder, yet still
His pirates had foray'd on Scottish hill :
But upon merry England's coast
More frequent he sail'd, for he won the most.
So wide and so far his ravage they knew,
If a sail but gleam'd white 'gainst the welkin blue,
Trumpet and bugle to arms did call,
Burghers hasten'd to man the wall,
Peasants fled inland his fury to 'scape,
Beacons were lighted on headland and cape,
Bells were toll'd out, and aye as they rung,
Fearful and faintly the grey brothers sung,
“ Bless us, Saint Mary, from flood and from fire,
From famine and pest, and Count Witikind's ire ! ”

III

He liked the wealth of fair England so well,
That he sought in her bosom as native to dwell,

SCOTT & HIS POETRY

He enter'd the Humber in fearful hour,
And disembark'd with his Danish power.
Three Earls came against him with all their train,—
Two hath he taken, and one hath he slain.
Count Witikind left the Humber's rich strand,
And he wasted and warr'd in Northumberland.
But the Saxon King was a sire in age,
Weak in battle, in council sage ;
Peace of that heathen leader he sought,
Gifts he gave, and quiet he bought ;
And the Count took upon him the peaceable style
Of a vassal and liegeman of Britain's broad isle.

IV

Time will rust the sharpest sword,
Time will consume the strongest cord ;
That which moulders hemp and steel,
Mortal arm and nerve must feel.
Of the Danish band, whom Count Witikind led,
Many wax'd agèd, and many were dead :
Himself found his armour full weighty to bear,
Wrinkled his brows grew, and hoary his hair ;
He lean'd on a staff, when his step went abroad,
And patient his palfrey, when steed he bestrode.
As he grew feebler, his wildness ceased,
He made himself peace with prelate and priest ;
Made his peace, and, stooping his head,
Patiently listed the counsel they said :
Saint Cuthbert's Bishop was holy and grave,
Wise and good was the counsel he gave.

V

“ Thou hast murder'd, robb'd, and spoil'd,
Time it is thy poor soul were assoil'd ;
Priests didst thou slay, and churches burn,
Time it is now to repentance to turn ;

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Fiends hast thou worshipp'd, with fiendish rite,
Leave now the darkness, and wend into light :
O ! while life and space are given,
Turn thee yet, and think of Heaven ! ”
That stern old heathen his head he raised,
And on the good prelate he steadfastly gazed ;
“ Give me broad lands on the Wear and the Tyne,
My faith I will leave, and I'll cleave unto thine.”

VI

Broad lands he gave him on Tyne and Wear,
To be held of the Church by bridle and spear ;
Part of Monkwearmouth, of Tynedale part,
To better his will, and to soften his heart :
Count Witikind was a joyful man,
Less for the faith than the lands that he wan.
The high church of Durham is dress'd for the day,
The clergy are ranked in their solemn array :
There came the Count, in a bear-skin warm,
Leaning on Hilda his concubine's arm.
He kneel'd before Saint Cuthbert's shrine,
With patience unwonted at rites divine ;
He abjured the gods of heathen race,
And he bent his head at the font of grace.
But such was the grisly old proselyte's look,
That the priest who baptized him grew pale and
shook ;
And the old monks mutter'd beneath their hood,
“ Of a stem so stubborn can never spring good ! ”

VII

Up then arose that grim convertite,
Homeward he hied him when ended the rite ;
The Prelate in honour will with him ride,
And feast in his castle on Tyne's fair side.

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Banners and banderols danced in the wind,
Monks rode before them, and spearmen behind ;
Onward they pass'd, till fairly did shine
Pennon and cross on the bosom of Tyne ;
And full in front did that fortress lower,
In darksome strength with its buttress and tower :
At the castle gate was young Harold there,
Count Witikind's only offspring and heir.

VIII

Young Harold was fear'd for his hardihood,
His strength of frame, and his fury of mood.
Rude he was and wild to behold,
Wore neither collar nor bracelet of gold
Cap of vair nor rich array,
Such as should grace that festal day :
His doublet of bull's hide was all unbraced,
Uncover'd his head, and his sandal unlaced :
His shaggy black locks on his brow hung low,
And his eyes glanced through them a swarthy glow ;
A Danish club in his hand he bore,
The spikes were clotted with recent gore ;
At his back a she-wolf, and her wolf-cubs twain,
In the dangerous chase that morning slain.
Rude was the greeting his father he made,
None to the Bishop,—while thus he said :—

IX

“ What priest-led hypocrite art thou,
With thy humbled look and thy monkish brow,
Like a shaveling who studies to cheat his vow ?
Canst thou be Witikind the Waster known,
Royal Eric's fearless son,
Haughty Gunhilda's haughtier lord,
Who won his bride by the axe and sword ;

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From the shrine of St. Peter the chalice who tore,
And melted to bracelets for Freya and Thor ;
With one blow of his gauntlet who burst the skull,
Before Odin's stone, of the Mountain Bull ?
Then ye worshipp'd with rites that to war-gods
 belong,
With the deed of the brave, and the blow of the
 strong ;
And now, in thine age to dotage sunk,
Wilt thou patter thy crimes to a shaven monk,—
Lay down thy mail-shirt for clothing of hair,—
Fasting and scourge, like a slave, wilt thou bear ?
Or, at best, be admitted in slothful bower
To batten with priest and with paramour ?
Oh! out upon thine endless shame !
Each Scald's high harp shall blast thy fame,
And thy son will refuse thee a father's name !”

X

Ireful wax'd old Witikind's look,
His faltering voice with fury shook :—
“ Hear me, Harold of harden'd heart !
Stubborn and wilful ever thou wert,
Thine outrage insane I command thee to cease,
Fear my wrath and remain at peace :—
Just is the debt of repentance I've paid,
Richly the Church has a recompense made,
And the truth of her doctrines I prove with my
 blade,
But reckoning to none of my actions I owe,
And least to my son such accounting will show.
Why speak I to thee of repentance or truth,
Who ne'er from thy childhood knew reason or ruth ?
Hence! to the wolf and the bear in her den ;
These are thy mates, and not rational men.”

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XI

Grimly smiled Harold, and coldly replied,
" We must honour our sires, if we fear when they
chide.

For me, I am yet what thy lessons have made,
I was rock'd in a buckler and fed from a blade ;
An infant, was taught to clasp hands and to shout
From the roofs of the tower when the flame had
broke out ;

In the blood of slain foemen my finger to dip,
And tinge with its purple my cheek and my lip. —
'Tis thou know'st not truth, that hast barter'd in eld,
For a price, the brave faith that thine ancestors held.
When this wolf,"—and the carcase he flung on the
plain,—

" Shall awake and give food to her nurslings again,
The face of his father will Harold review ;
Till then, agèd Heathen, young Christian, adieu ! "

XII

Priest, monk, and prelate, stood aghast,
As through the pageant the heathen pass'd.
A cross-bearer out of his saddle he flung,
Laid his hand on the pommel, and into it sprung,
Loud was the shriek, and deep the groan,
When the holy sign on the earth was thrown !
The fierce old Count unsheathed his brand,
But the calmer Prelate stay'd his hand.
" Let him pass free !—Heaven knows its hour,—
But he must own repentance's power,
Pray and weep, and penance bear,
Ere he hold land by the Tyne and the Wear."'
Thus in scorn and in wrath from his father is gone
Young Harold the Dauntless, Count Witikind's son.

" Harold the Dauntless," canto I.

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VII

WITH the publication of "Harold the Dauntless" we reach the limit of Scott's direct efforts as a poet. For twenty years he had been publishing poetry more or less regularly, and, as we have seen, had obtained a marvellous grip on the public; but from this time onward he abandoned poetry except on certain rare occasions and when he turned to poetry for the purpose of adorning his prose works. The novels, which are undoubtedly Scott's most important contribution to literature, do not come within the scope of this book, so the scantiest mention must constitute all the attention we can give them. Furthermore, Scott's life is of interest to us only in so far as it forms the background of his poetical production, so in like manner we can deal with the story of his later life only in summary. A slight link that we shall still have with Scott the poet will be found, as already hinted, in the verse which is scattered throughout his novels. These poems, consisting in the main of headings for the chapters and songs sung by various characters, are none the less beautiful because they are thus scattered. Though scattered, they are not buried.

The first of the three novels published in 1816 was "The Antiquary," from which comes the following stirring ballad. One can scarcely refrain from seeing in the reckless valour of the hero of this poem a tragic forecast of the

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desperately brave battle which Scott was so soon to make against the sea of troubles that beset him.

ELSPETH'S BALLAD

Now haud your tongue, baith wife and
carle,

And listen great and sma',
And I will sing of Glenallan's Earl
That fought on the red Harlaw.

The cronach's cried on Bennachie,
And down the Don and a',
And hieland and lawland may mournfu' be
For the sair field of Harlaw.—

They saddled a hundred milk-white steeds,
They hae bridled a hundred black,
With a chafron of steel on each horse's head,
And a good knight upon his back.

They hadna ridden a mile, a mile,
A mile, but barely ten,
When Donald came branking down the brae
Wi' twenty thousand men.

Their tartans they were waving wide,
Their glaives were glancing clear,
The pibrochs rung frae side to side,
Would deafen ye to hear.

The great Earl in his stirrups stood,
That Highland host to see :
“ Now here a knight that's stout and good
May prove a jeopardie : •

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“ What would'st thou do, my squire so gay,
That rides beside my reyne,—
Were ye Glenallan's Earl the day,
And I were Roland Cheyne ?

“ To turn the rein were sin and shame,
To fight were wondrous peril,—
What would ye do now, Roland Cheyne,
Were ye Glenallan's Earl ? ”—

“ Were I Glenallan's Earl this tide,
And ye were Roland Cheyne,
The spur should be in my horse's side,
And the bridle upon his mane.

“ If they hae twenty thousand blades,
And we twice ten times ten,
Yet they hae but their tartan plaids,
And we are mail-clad men.

“ My horse shall ride through ranks sae rude,
As through the moorland fern,—
Then ne'er let the gentle Norman blude
Grow cauld for Highland kerne.”

“The Antiquary,” chap. xl.

It was in “ The Antiquary ” that Scott first made use of his “ Old Play ” and “ Old Ballad ” device for supplying the lack of a quotation by a composition. The story, as told by Lockhart, is that as he was correcting the proofs Scott asked John Ballantyne to look up a quotation in Beaumont and Fletcher that he needed as a motto. At length, weary of waiting, he cried, “ Hang it, Johnnie, I believe I can make a

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motto sooner than you will find one." And so accordingly he did.¹

In some of these mottoes, and especially in those of "The Antiquary," one sees a depth of thought and sobriety of philosophy that are found nowhere else in Scott's poetry. Naturally they are affected by the subject of the chapters above which they stand, but they are interesting for their own sakes even when detached.

MOTTOES

Tell me not of it, friend—when the young weep,
Their tears are lukewarm brine ;—from our old eyes
Sorrow falls down like hail-drops of the North,
Chilling the furrows of our wither'd cheeks,
Cold as our hopes, and harden'd as our feeling—
Theirs, as they fall, sink sightless—ours recoil,
Heap the fair plain, and bleaken all before us.

—Old Play.

"The Antiquary," chap. xxxi.

Remorse—she ne'er forsakes us !—
A bloodhound stanch—she tracks our rapid step
Through the wild labyrinth of youthful frenzy,
Unheard, perchance, until old age hath tamed us ;
Then in our lair, when Time hath chill'd our joints,
And maim'd our hope of combat, or of flight,
We hear her deep-mouth'd bay, announcing all
Of wrath and woe and punishment that bides us.

—Old Play.

Ibid. chap. xxxiii.

—Life, with you,
Glows in the brain and dances in the arteries ;

1 Lockhart. "Life," p. 290.

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'Tis like the wine some joyous guest hath quaff'd,
That glads the heart and elevates the fancy :—
Mine is the poor residuum of the cup,
Vapid, and dull, and tasteless, only soiling
With its base dregs the vessel that contains it.

—Old Play.

“ The Antiquary,” chap. xxxv.

Life ebbs from such old age, unmark'd and silent,
As the slow neap-tide leaves yon stranded galley—
Late she rock'd merrily at the least impulse
That wind or wave could give ; but now her keel
Is settling on the sand, her mast has ta'en
An angle with the sky, from which it shifts not.
Each wave receding shakes her less and less,
Till, bedded on the strand, she shall remain
Useless as motionless.

—Old Play.

Ibid. chap. xl.

A somewhat similar philosophy—a cheerful fatalism, one might almost call it—is seen in the following song from another of the 1816 novels, “ Old Mortality ” :

MAJOR BELLENDEN'S SONG

And what though winter will pinch severe
Through locks of grey and a cloak that's old,
Yet keep up thy heart, bold cavalier,
For a cup of sack shall fence the cold.

For time will rust the brightest blade,
And years will break the strongest bow ;
Was never wight so starkly made,
But time and years would overthrow ?

“ Old Mortality,” chap. xix.

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In 1816 Scott composed a few poems for "Albyn's Anthology," a miscellany edited by his friend Alexander Campbell. Perhaps the best is his famous song, "Jock of Hazeldean." The first stanza of the ballad, Scott tells us, is ancient.

JOCK OF HAZELDEAN

I

"Why weep ye by the tide, ladie ?
Why weep ye by the tide ?
I'll wed ye to my youngest son,
And ye sall be his bride :
And ye sall be his bride, ladie,
Sae comely to be seen "—
But aye she loot the tears down fa'
For Jock of Hazeldean.

II

"Now let this wilfu' grief be done,
And dry that cheek so pale ;
Young Frank is chief of Errington,
And lord of Langley-dale ;
His step is first in peaceful ha',
His sword in battle keen "—
But aye she loot the tears down fa'
For Jock of Hazeldean.

III

"A chain of gold ye sall not lack,
Nor braid to bind your hair ;
Nor mettled hound, nor managed hawk,
Nor palfrey fresh and fair ;

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And you, the foremost o' them a',
Shall ride our forest queen "—
But aye she loot the tears down fa'
For Jock of Hazeldean.

IV

The kirk was deck'd at morning-tide,
The tapers glimmer'd fair ;
The priest and bridegroom wait the bride,
And dame and knight are there.
They sought her baith by bower and ha' ;
The ladie was not seen !
She's o'er the Border, and awa'
Wi' Jock of Hazeldean.

The following ballad was also written for
" Albyn's Anthology."

NORA'S VOW

I

Hear what Highland Nora said—
" The Earlie's son I will not wed,
Should all the race of nature die,
And none be left but he and I.
For all the gold, for all the gear,
And all the lands both far and near,
That ever valour lost or won,
I would not wed the Earlie's son."—

II

" A maiden's vows," old Callum spoke,
" Are lightly made and lightly broke ;
The heather on the mountain's height
Begins to bloom in purple light ;
The frost-wind soon shall sweep away
That lustre deep from glen and brae ;

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Yet Nora, ere its bloom be gone,
May blithely wed the Earlie's son."—

III

"The swan," she said, "the lake's clear breast
May barter for the eagle's nest ;
The Awe's fierce stream may backward turn
Ben-Cruaichan fall, and crush Kilchurn ;
Our kilted clans, when blood is high,
Before their foes may turn and fly ;
But I, were all these marvels done,
Would never wed the Earlie's son."

IV

Still in the water-lily's shade
Her wonted nest the wild-swan made ;
Ben-Cruaichan stands as fast as ever,
Still downward foams the Awe's fierce river ;
To shun the clash of foeman's steel,
No Highland brogue has turned the heel ;
But Nora's heart is lost and won,
—She's wedded to the Earlie's son !

The year 1817 was marked by the first serious illness from which Scott had suffered since the infant malady that gave rise to his lameness. In March he was suddenly attacked by severe cramps in the stomach, which became so acute that inflammation ensued and his life was in danger. But the worst was soon over, although the attacks recurred intermittently for some time. It was the physical prostration resulting from this illness that gave rise to the frame of mind displayed in the following poem. This beautiful lyric, which belongs to the same year,

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was written, says Lockhart, on the very spot which it describes, during a fit of languor resulting from ill-health.

THE SUN UPON THE WEIRDLAW HILL

The sun upon the Weirdlaw Hill,
In Ettrick's vale, is sinking sweet ;
The westland wind is hush and still,
The lake lies sleeping at my feet.
Yet not the landscape to mine eye
Bears those bright hues that once it bore ;
Though evening, with her richest dye,
Flames o'er the hills of Ettrick's shore.

With listless look along the plain,
I see Tweed's silver current glide,
And coldly mark the holy fane
Of Melrose rise in ruin'd pride.
The quiet lake, the balmy air,
The hill, the stream, the tower, the tree,—
Are they still such as once they were ?
Or is the dreary change in me ?

Alas, the warp'd and broken board,
How can it bear the painter's dye !
The harp of strain'd and tuneless chord,
How to the minstrel's skill reply !
To aching eyes each landscape lowers,
To feverish pulse each gale blows chill ;
And Araby's or Eden's bowers
Were barren as this moorland hill.

The same year, 1817, saw the composition of "The Doom of Devorgoil," a blank-verse play written for his friend, the actor Terry. But it

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was never staged, and was published only toward the close of Scott's life. "Rob-Roy," the next of the novels, appeared on the last day of the same year, and in 1818 "The Heart of Midlothian" was published.

Scott had confided the secret of the authorship of the Waverley Novels to only a very few of his friends, but to a much larger circle of acquaintances the anonymity was no mystery. The Prince Regent was certainly not ignorant of the name of their writer when he conferred a baronetcy on Scott in 1818. Scott was far from being a vain man, but his two aims in life were to found a house in his branch of the family and to build up an estate that would be a fitting emblem of its entity. Therefore he willingly accepted this proffered honour, though when he was offered a seat in the Privy Council—perhaps a greater honour—he declined it on the ground that it was not to be handed down to his posterity.

In the year 1819 he had further relapses of ill-health. One day on which he was confined to his bed he devoted to the composition of "The Noble Moringer," a poem showing a return to his love and imitation of German ballads. "The Bride of Lammermoor" and "The Legend of Montrose" appeared in the same year, and were followed in the December by "Ivanhoe." "Ivanhoe," like all his novels, was a success, but in England it was an especial success, by reason, doubtless, of the story being essentially English; though for that very reason it is not

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one of his best works. The following poem, in which Scott attempts to imitate the style of the earliest Old English poetry, is from "Ivanhoe." As an antiquarian revival it is hardly successful in style, though it is in spirit; as a spirited and fiery piece of rhythmical composition it is certainly worthy of attention.

SAXON WAR-SONG

I

Whet the bright steel,
Sons of the White Dragon !
Kindle the torch,
Daughter of Hengist !
The steel glimmers not for the carving of the
 banquet,
It is hard, broad, and sharply pointed ;
The torch goeth not to the bridal chamber,
It steams and glitters blue with sulphur.
Whet the steel, the raven croaks !
Light the torch, Zerneck is yelling !
Whet the steel, sons of the Dragon !
Kindle the torch, daughter of Hengist !

II

The black clouds are low over the thane's castle :
The eagle screams—he rides on their bosom.
Scream not, grey rider of the sable cloud,
Thy banquet is prepared !
The maidens of Valhalla look forth,
The race of Hengist will send them guests.
Shake your black tresses, maidens of Valhalla !
And strike your loud timbrels for joy !
Many a haughty step bends to your halls,
Many a helmèd head.

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III

Dark sits the evening upon the thane's castle,
The black clouds gather round ;
Soon shall they be red as the blood of the valiant !
The destroyer of forests shall shake his red crest
against them ;
He, the bright consumer of palaces,
Broad waves he his blazing banner,
Red, wide, and dusky,
Over the strife of the valiant ;
His joy is in the clashing swords and broken bucklers ;
He loves to lick the hissing blood as it bursts warm
from the wound !

IV

All must perish
The sword cleaveth the helmet ;
The strong armour is pierced by the lance :
Fire devoureth the dwelling of princes,
Engines break down the fences of the battle.
All must perish !
The race of Hengist is gone—
The name of Horsa is no more !
Shrink not then from your doom, sons of the sword !
Let your blades drink blood like wine ;
Feast ye in the banquet of slaughter,
By the light of the blazing halls !
Strong be your swords while your blood is warm.
And spare neither for pity nor fear,
For vengeance hath but an hour ;
Strong hate itself shall expire !
I also must perish.

"Ivanhoe," chap. xxxi.

These years were the heyday of Scott's life. Abbotsford, one of the dearest objects of his ambition, was growing up under his direction ;

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the property was gradually extending by the occasional addition of a neighbouring estate as it came into the market ; the library was being stocked ; the house was being furnished and adorned in a manner after his own heart ; he was surrounded with fond, admiring friends ; his books were selling with a success that ensured what seemed complete worldly prosperity. With his pen alone he could earn as much as £15,000 a year. To a casual observer Scott would have seemed to live the life of any other laird who kept open house and loved his dogs, his trees, and the pursuits of the country. But when we think that besides being a laird, and a busy one too, he was an Edinburgh lawyer and at odd times the writer of about three novels a year, one may well be astounded.

The novels continued to appear with regularity. In 1820 "The Monastery," "The Abbot," and "Kenilworth" were published, to be followed the next year by "The Pirate."

The following mottoes taken from "The Abbot," further illustrate the type of poetry that is found scattered through the novels. The first one exhibits that thoughtfulness and mature philosophy which is typical of these snatches.

—In the wild storm,
The seaman hews his mast down, and the merchant
Heaves to the billows wares he once deem'd precious :
So prince and peer, 'mid popular contentions,
Cast off their favourites.

—Old Play.

"The Abbot," chap. v.

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In the next poem there is a joyousness in life, but a joyousness which is tempered by a certain aloofness. One may look upon it as an expression of what we have before called his "cheerful fatalism."

Life hath its May, and all is mirthful then :
The woods are vocal, and the flowers all odour ;
Its very blast has mirth in't,—and the maidens,
The while they don their cloaks to skreen their
 kirtles,
Laugh at the rain that wets them.

—Old Play.

"The Abbot," chap. xi.

A similar spirit of maturity and sobriety is evident in the next.

Youth ! thou wear'st to manhood now,
Darker lip and darker brow,
Statelier step, more pensive mien
In thy face and gait are seen :
Thou must now brook midnight watches,
Take thy food and sport by snatches !
For the gambol and the jest,
Thou wert wont to love the best,
Graver follies must thou follow,
But as senseless, false, and hollow.

—Life : a Poem.

Ibid. chap. xvi.

In the same year Scott wrote two more dramatic pieces. The first was "Halidon Hill," which was intended for a charity collection of verse edited by his friend Miss Joanna Baillie. But it outgrew the original design, so he

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composed the shorter "Macduff's Cross," which served the purpose of the miscellany. Cadell, Constable's partner, heard that "Halidon Hill" was going begging, and although he knew nothing of it more than the mere rumour of its existence, he promptly made an offer of £1,000 for the copyright! The bargain was concluded, and in no way disappointed the publisher's hopes.

"The Fortunes of Nigel" appeared in 1822, and "Peveril of the Peak," "Quentin Durward," and "St. Ronan's Well" in the following year. "Redgauntlet" followed in 1824, and "The Talisman" and "The Betrothed" in 1825.

In the meantime the clouds were gathering. The firm of Ballantyne was hopelessly involved with that of Constable, and when another trade crisis came and Constable's credit was threatened the very existence of the house of Ballantyne was imperilled. Finally the crash came in January 1826. Constable was unable to meet the calls made on him by his London creditors, and the blow redounded on Ballantyne. Bills and counter-bills could not be met, and the Ballantyne firm was discovered to be insolvent to the extent of some £130,000. It was soon evident that James Ballantyne had no assets, so responsibility for the whole sum fell on Scott. Had Scott been willing he might have sold Abbotsford, handed over all his assets to his creditors, and been legally quit of the business. But he was made of sterner stuff and never did he contemplate such a course, which,

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though legally just, seemed to him incompatible with manly honour. With his creditors' consent all his property was put into trust for their benefit, and he agreed to make every effort to earn by his literary powers the wherewithal to pay them in full. The task he undertook was stupendous, and beyond the powers of any man fifty-five years old. But he never winced under the ordeal except when his pride was touched by the necessary change in circumstances and by the treatment received from some of his former acquaintances.

His calamities did not end here. For some time Lady Scott had been in failing health, and in the early summer she died. Still he struggled with manful heroism, and with a stoical resolve to which the history of literature can show no parallel. "Woodstock," his next novel, was produced in three months, and brought in £8,228 to the creditors. In 1827 the first two editions of his "Life of Buonaparte" added £18,000 more, and by June 1827 he had discharged £28,000 of the debt.

The first series of "Chronicles of the Cannon-gate" were published in the same year, as also the first series of "Tales of a Grandfather." These "Tales" from Scottish history, which were ostensibly written for Scott's little grandson, Johnnie Lockhart, proved a great success. By January 1828, two years after the catastrophe, Scott's literary earnings for the benefit of his creditors amounted to very nearly £40,000. But his efforts were never slackened.

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The next undertakings were "The Fair Maid of Perth" and "Anne of Geierstein," published in 1828 and 1829 respectively. Another series of "Tales of a Grandfather" followed, and then Scott turned to the preparation of collected editions of his novels and poems. The success of the collected edition of the novels was immense. So far was Scott from losing a real hold on the public that the monthly sale reached as much as 35,000. The next publication was a blank-verse drama, "The Ayrshire Tragedy," which was followed by his "Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft" and a series of French "Tales of a Grandfather." But early in 1830, before the composition of the two last-mentioned works, Scott had suffered from an apoplectic seizure, which had left him alarmingly weak, though undaunted. So little daunted, in fact, that he hardly relaxed his literary work. But the symptoms of overstrain were unmistakable. Not only was he physically affected; his creative powers were showing signs of decay. "Count Robert of Paris," his next novel, and "Castle Dangerous" gave ample evidence to those who watched their progress that the master-hand was growing feeble.

Before starting the second of these stories Scott had had another bad seizure. He laboured on, but that the strain could not last was obvious to all around him. And that he himself was not blind to the fact is shown by a motto written at this time for a chapter of "Count Robert of Paris":

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The storm increases—'tis no sunny shower,
Foster'd in the moist breath of March or April,
Or such as parched Summer cools his lips with.
Heaven's windows are flung wide ; the inmost deeps
Call in hoarse greeting upon one another ;
On comes the flood in all its foaming horrors,
And where's the dike shall stop it ?

—The Deluge : a Poem.

“Count Robert of Paris,” chap. v

Equally significant are the following two mottoes from “Castle Dangerous” :

The way is long, my children, long and rough—
The moors are dreary and the woods are dark ;
But he that creeps from cradle on to grave,
Unskilled save in the velvet course of fortune,
Hath missed the discipline of noble hearts.

—Old Play.

“Castle Dangerous,” chap. xiv

His talk was of another world—his bodements
Strange, doubtful, and mysterious ; those who heard
him

Listen'd as to a man in feverish dreams,
Who speaks of other objects than the present,
And mutters like to him who sees a vision.

—Old Play.

Ibid. chap. xviii.

Before the completion of these two tales, Scott had retired from his Clerkship on a pension of £800 a year, but now still more rest was necessary. The Government put a frigate at his disposal, and in September 1831 he went for a trip to the Mediterranean and visited his son

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Charles, who was in the Diplomatic Service at Naples. But the remedy came too late. In the early summer he started to return home overland, but in Germany he had another apoplectic attack, and by the time London was reached he lay unconscious. The crowning calamity of dying in exile was averted, and he reached his beloved Abbotsford to die there peacefully within the sound of his "silver streams of Tweed" on September 21, 1832.

He had failed to earn the vast sum necessary to discharge his debts in full, but before many years elapsed the proceeds of the copyrights of his works paid off all his creditors' claims, and Abbotsford, the darling object of his life and hopes, was left unencumbered for his heirs, and his name was handed down to posterity unsullied.

VIII

IT is not surprising that Scott's poetry has been eclipsed by the marvellous series of novels that occupied the later portion of his life and laid the foundation and constituted the structure of his fame. For one thing, the novel has been a more popular form of literature than poetry during the past century, and, moreover, Scott is undoubtedly at his greatest as a novelist. It is in his novels that he exhibits that wonderful sympathy with his fellow men which was shadowed forth in some of his maturer poetical romances—a sympathy which is at the root of every great writer's nature.

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Admitting, then, that Scott as a poet is not Scott fully expressed, or expressed perfectly, it is now before us to inquire more exactly into the extent and causes of his greater poetical worth. We have seen incidentally many particularities which go to constitute the beauty of the passages quoted, but we have not faced the question in its broadest aspect.

To many Scott is a mere rimer, a versifier of tales, a writer of doggerel with unlimited facility and command of language. To say that and that alone is to accuse Scott justly to a certain extent, but unjustly to a greater. Often, alas ! does he relapse into prosaic versifying, and show very clearly the truth of the doctrine that not all metrical composition is poetry. We can account for such prosaic passages by remembering what a hasty writer and too lax corrector Scott was ; but to explain a fault is not to condone it. That these faults, resulting from a lack of concentration in artistic detail, are present in Scott's works cannot be denied.

Another just accusation that can be made against Scott is that he was too little the artist who worked for his art's sake, setting before him a lofty ideal of the true aim of poetry. He was by no means devoid of a true love of the beautiful, but his real object in life was to attain by means of art a certain material position. His chief aims seem to have been the foundation of his line of the Scott family as a great branch with a worthy seat—Abbotsford. The pursuit of art enabled him to do this, and he therefore

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followed art with assiduity. But let it not be imagined that Scott was callous to the fair side of life. Morally and intellectually he was refined, but he had a strong strain of that rough stock from which he sprang. An animal joy in life, a pleasure in mere living, was a potent element in his composition. He was, in fact, a materialist in the very best sense of the word. A materialist who could at the same time keenly enjoy the pleasures of the mind, who could live a life of spiritual purity, who could pay due attention to every phase of his moral nature, and, above all, who in his relations with his fellow men had no touch of selfishness, but only an unbounded love and sympathy. But a materialist he certainly was as regards his views on his own art.

Now is such an outlook compatible with the creation of the highest type of poetry? Striking exceptions—such, perhaps, as in the case of Shakespeare—would seem to show that it is; but in the vast majority of instances one would be inclined to say that it was not. The fact remains that in Scott's case we do not find a poetry of the noblest and most soul-affecting kind, whether or not it be this attitude toward art that was the cause. His poetry lacks that inspiration, that elevation, that spiritual forcefulness which characterises the best work of Wordsworth or Shelley or Browning. This is indisputable, but the causes are not. The instance of Shakespeare, just cited, would seem to show that there may be something else that is essen-

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tial in the highest type of poetry. Can it be that the sympathy with humankind, the loving interest in man, which are so eminent in such poets as Shakespeare, Burns, Wordsworth, Browning, is the essential? Scott, as we have already seen, did not lack this sympathy: indeed he possessed it to a wonderful degree; but it was in his life and in his novels that he displayed it, not in his poetry. This growing interest in one's fellow men is a usual result of maturity: it was so in Wordsworth's case, we know; it was certainly so in Shakespeare's. With Scott, too, it would appear to be the same.

The great merit, then, of Scott's poetry lies in description, usually the description of scenes of external nature or scenes of human action; not in his portrayal of character, which must result from this interest which as a poet he lacked. The second ground on which he may justly claim praise for his poetry is in powerful narrative. His plots as a whole are often weak, but incidents are narrated with rare power and vividness. These two qualities constitute his main right to praise, but there are others. None can deny him the accessory excellences of facility of diction, of a marvellous flexibility and diversity of metre, of a clarity of composition which is doubly praiseworthy in the light of contemporary poetry, or, rather, of the poetry of the preceding era; of a marvellous power over detail of every sort and degree. In antiquarian lore, in a carefully acquired intimacy with the scenes of his poems, in knowledge of

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the times in which he places his action, he far surpassed anything that had appeared before his day. Naturally his historical knowledge of men and manners is not perfect ; but this is a fair case in which to take into consideration the state of such learning at the time.

The most serious limitations of his poetry and minor accusations, though important ones, such as his frequent carelessness and a tendency to slip into mere rimed prose, have been discussed. As before mentioned, we may account for, but not excuse, these faults by remembering the speed at which he worked.

One of the reasons of this aptness of his verse to become doggerel was his general use of octosyllabic verse. His metre lacks the dignity of a longer line, and when there is any tendency to be prosaic or to fall off in quality of thought and execution, the quick-recurring rime, the fixed cæsura, the inflexibility of the line, all make for tinkle and hollowness, and accentuate the weakness in subject-matter.

In fine, it should be said that this general criticism is chiefly applicable to Scott's longer poems. In his lyrics and some of the snatches of verse that are to be found in his later works there are evidences of all the finest qualities of the poet. Alas ! " The Violet " and " Weirclaw Hill " are beautiful exceptions ! Were they characteristic of his poetry at large, our verdict would not be, as it must be, that it is Scott the novelist and not Scott the poet whom posterity will admire and revere.

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