

James Leatham, writing on Sir Walter Scott in 1915
A Word about Sir Walter

Last year was the centenary of the publication of 'Waverley'; 1915 is the centenary of 'Guy Mannering', and next year will see the hundredth anniversary of 'The Antiquary.' As at the end of a century of fame one still meets many good people who say they 'can't read Scott,' a word may not be out of place as to this great man and great writer by one who owes so much to him as I do. I had begun to read the Waverley novels before entering my teens, and I have been reading and re-reading them ever since, with increasing appreciations.

One offset to the disadvantages of being a Scot is that you stand an extra chance of being grounded in the Waverley novels. In severe Scottish households of a former generation prose fiction was contraband: but an exception was always made as regards Sir Walter on the plea that his tales were 'founded on facts' – as if the writings of other novelists were not, or as if it made any difference, as a rule, whether they were or not. The average modern story is of course largely autobiographical; it is inconceivable that it should be otherwise, inconceivable that novelists should evolve narrative incident, and characterisation out of their inner consciousness. As an intensely fecund and rapid inventor, Scott's incidents and characters were probably, in most cases, formed to a much less extent on actual occurrences and personages than those of less fertile improvisators. What the plea in favour of Sir Walter most probably meant was that he never chose themes that were not in the highest degree epic and worthy; that his must utter nothing small.

To know Scott's work in its length and breadth is to have secured the respectable beginnings of a working knowledge of the history of the world. I know of no books that might more fittingly be turned to account for school lessons than just precisely the novels of Sir Walter. They represent history teaching by examples. To have read 'Ivanhoe' is to have a knowledge of life, of dress, fare, habits, and housing in early Norman England such as no serious history could possibly convey. It is inconceivable that any young person should read through the novels of Scott without becoming a student of history for life. He ransacked the life of the world, from the middle ages to the nineteenth century, for stirring themes with which to engage his romantic pen.

Scott and History.

The Crusades are discussed at close quarters in 'The Talisman,' the Santon of the desert and the Saracenic warrior coming in for treatment as well as the crusaders themselves.

In 'Count Robert of Paris,' the last and poorest of all Scott's novels, and written when his mind was breaking up, the court of Constantinople in pre-Mahometan days is discussed, with special reference to the Saxons of the Varangian guard, men who, rather than accept the Norman dominations in England, had accepted service under the Emperors of the East.

In 'Castle Dangerous' the vexed and turbulent life of the Border is presented.

Switzerland and the strange International secret society known as the Vehmgericht are handled in 'Anne of Geirstein, or the Maiden of the Mist.'

The savage strife and lawlessness of Scotland under the early Stewarts is graphically presented in 'The Fair Maid of Perth.'

The spacious days of Queen Elizabeth form the theme of 'Kenilworth' in which the Virgin Queen herself and Raleigh and Leicester move across the scene.

The break-up of the monastic system and the Reformation in Scotland are inwound with the sad fortunes of Queen Mary and the amusing affectations of the Euphuists in 'The Monastery,' and its sequel 'The Abbot.'

It is at the court of the first Stewart king of England that we follow 'The Fortunes of Nigel,' a young Scottish lord who followed the British Solomon to his new capital.

The 'Legend of Montrose' is laid in the time of the revolutionary government of Charles the First's reign as that movement went forward in Scotland; and as a work of art this tale is notable as containing the character of David Dalgetty, the quaint soldier of fortune who loves to refer to Marischal College, Aberdeen, as his alma mater.

'Woodstock' is a tale of the Cromwellian period, in which Sir Walter, despite his strong aristocratic sympathies, is as fair to the great Protector as he is severe to the roystering cavalier types.

'Peveril of the Peak' relates to the reign of Charles the Second, and introduces the celebrated dwarf Geoffrey Hudson.

'Old Mortality' is a splendid handling of the Covenanting period, the tale itself of great interest, and the portrayal of the Covenanters wonderfully fair, especially when we consider that Sir Walter was a high Churchman who deprecated anything approaching to zeal in religion.

'Rob Roy' is laid in the period, if it has little to do with the incidents of the rebellion of 1715. 'Waverley' follows the fortunes of Charles Edward Stewart in the '45. 'Redgauntlet' revives echoes of this uprising, is full of incident, and has quaint characters such as the Quakers of Mount Sharon with their net fisheries, Wandering Willie and his tale, and the pathetic Peter Peebles, prototype of poor Miss Flyte, the ruined and crazy litigant in 'Bleak House.'

'The Heart of Midlothian,' besides containing such splendid characters as Jeanie Deans, the Laird of Dumbledykes and douce Davie, embodies the notable episode of the Porteous riots, so typical of the turbulent Edinburgh mob of a bygone day.

This, it must be admitted, represents a wonderful series of historic novels, tapping the story of the nations at some of the most stirring stages in the life of the world.

All the history is comparatively good and safe so far as it goes. When Scott notably deviates from historical accuracy the fact is usually stated.

Historical Portraits.

Let us take, first, 'Quentin Durward,' as illustration how the Great Magician could make himself at home abroad. Its lifelike portraits of 'the sagacious, perfidious, superstitious, jocular, political tyrant, Louis XI and of Charles the Bold, and the vivid colour and movement of this first great romance of the lowlands of Europe, secured for it a rapturous welcome in France, which, of course had seen nothing of the kind before. On its first appearance in Edinburgh 'Quentin Durward' had been, as Scott said, frostbitten; but the French enthusiasm reacted upon Britain, and the novel had at last the reception it deserved in the country of its birth. Germany had long before been fully awake to the merits of Sir Walter, and was, indeed, unfailing and steady in its appreciation.

'Quentin Durward' contains, so far as we shall ever know, as faithful portraits of Louis XI and Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, as we are ever likely to have. Scott simply went to Philip des Comines as Shakespeare went to Plutarch, and breathed the breath of life into characters to whom the historian had given everything except colour, speech, and movement. Louis here appears to us in his habit as he lived, his worn clothes and shabby hat stuck round with leaden images, to which, taking off his hat, he would offer a prayer. We see him suspicious yet trustful, sceptical yet superstitiously credulous, hanging upon the horoscopes of his astrologer, yet ready to turn upon him at the least sign of a miscarriage in the fulfilment of these forecasts. We realise him as shunning war, yet capable of taking command, and showing both cool courage and sagacious generalship when war could no longer be avoided; witty and superficially kind, yet ready to be promptly and mercilessly cruel; by turns lavish and penurious with his money; driving away the nobility of France from his own court by his lack of taste for the parade and adventure of kingcraft and by his disinclination to foster any kind of power in the realm save his own; making favourites of his barber and executioner, yet promptly checking any disposition on their part to forget their real position. Such and so varied are the features of this complex personality, helping us to realise once again how very mixed and mingled good and bad may be in human nature as a whole – a fact which we constantly tend to forget.

The dangers of wilfulness in the head of State are graphically brought out in the picture of Charles of Burgundy. The character of this stormy and headlong ruler is shown, not so much by the descriptive analysis as in the blustering speeches and violent commands he issues. It is self-revelation in the true method and spirit of drama.

Scott's Dramatic Faculty.

Scott was an aristocrat in sentiment and opinion. He preferred to write of kings and nobles, of tournaments and sieges and pitched battles and hand to hand encounters. He loved the high parley of court and camp rather than the 'clink of teaspoons and the accents of the curate.' He spoke of his own manner as 'the bow-wow style,' and of giving his characters 'a cane and a cocked hat.' But he was full of universal human sympathy as well.' As with Chaucer, no character was too humble for his art, and, unlike Shakespeare, he did not introduce such characters to make game of them. They are not dolts and butts in his page, but men and women with whom we can sympathise. In 'Ivanhoe' we have the faithful if surly Gurth the swineherd as well as his master Cedric; we have Wamba the jester as well as Athlestane, descendent of kings; Friar Tuck is sketched with rather more fullness of sympathetic detail than is expended on his boon companion of a night, Coeur de Lion, the crusading King of England.

Scott's men and women in humble life are the real flesh and blood folk of fiction. Nothing is more signally characteristic of him than his dramatic faculty of going out of himself, of putting himself in the place of the widely diverse characters by whose mouth he speaks. Whether they be old wives such as Meg Merrilees, Mause Headrigg, or Meg Dodds, or old men like Trapbois, ready to do anything 'for a consideration'; Hubert the Archer whose 'grandsire drew a good bow at the Battle of Hastings'; Edie Ochiltree, the king's bedesman; or Jonathan Oldbuck, the antiquary whom Edie loved to banter over his 'finds,' they are all thoroughly human, with character lineaments that live on the mental retina. Andrew Fairservice, the

pragmatical gardener-theologian; Cuddie Hedrigg, the placable and plausible ploughman; Caleb Balderstone, most faithful of servants, and intensely concerned about covering the nakedness of the land; Richie Moniplies with his 'sifflictation,' a true Scottish Sancho Panza of the seventeenth century – these are the best characters in the realm of Scott folk.

His heroes and heroines are for the most part mere lay figures without individualising traits. In the tale before us, Quentin Durward, the fair-haired young Scottish adventurer in France, is indeed rather a full-blooded fellow. We can form some idea of his tall athletic figure, his readiness for hard knocks and prompt words, his naïve frankness and shrewd watchfulness. But of his fiancée, Isabella Countess of Croye, how little we know! Wilfred of Ivanhoe engages our sympathies by his misfortunes if nothing else; but at best he is a shadowy character; and as for the fair Rowena, we have to take the author's word for her all the time. Neither of them does or says anything by which we could remember them. If by possibility we could meet either, how should we know them?

As shown in 'Quentin Durward.'

In 'Quentin Durward' also it is the minor characters of whom we have the most vivid recollection. Hayraddin, Maugrabin, the gipsy of the elf-locks, the knavish tricks, and the indomitable spirit; Ludovic of the Scar; the whimsical assistant executioner Petit-Andre, who uttered jocosities as he fixed the hempen cravat about the victim's neck – these are more realisable than the counts and court dames who make speeches at Louis and Duke Charles.

Scott's great dramatic impartiality is very well indicated in 'Quentin Durward.' Aristocrat as he avowed himself to be, and despising tradesmen and merchants as he causes his kings and cavaliers to do, he is nevertheless willing to concede 'points' to the burghers of Liège. The portrait of Pavillon, the tanner Syndic of that great free city, is not ill-natured in effect, whatever Scott's intention may have been in his satirical account of the fat tanner's difficulties with his armour and his repugnance to fighting. From quite as good an authority as Sir Walter, from John Froissart himself, we know that the burghers of Ghent at least gave a very good account of themselves again and again even when they took the field against the chivalry of the time handicapped by famine and inferior numbers. Scott makes the Liègeois party to the murder of the Bishop of Liège. Indeed he makes a butcher of Liège the Bishop's executioner. In point of fact the Bishop was murdered by William de la Marck's own hand, and the citizens of Liège, though they had joined in the conspiracy against the Bishop, were as much horrified at his murder as was the rest of Christendom at the time. But while Sir Walter is unfair to the Liègeois in the mass, his dramatic conscience will not allow him to be downright unfriendly to these rich and free burghers as individuals. Pavillon the tanner, his lieutenant Peterkin, his daughter Gertrude and Hans Glover, Gertrude's bachelor, all appear in a kindly light as performing friendly offices, at some risk to themselves, to Quentin and his young Countess. Scott also has the fairness to admit that these burghers showed a degree of taste in their household appointments not to be matched even in the royal castles of France.

But the most signal proof the novel affords of Scott's dramatic fairness is his treatment of the wild and reckless gipsy Maugrabin. When the gipsy is sentenced to death for masquerading as a herald in order to deliver an insolent message from the Boar of Ardennes, Quentin Durward tries to impress upon him the need of receiving

a priest that he may make his peace with god. The wild man refuses this counsel. 'What canst thou expect,' says Quentin, 'dying in such opinions and impenitent?'

'To be resolved into the elements,' said the gipsy Pantheist, pressing his fettered arms against his bosom: 'my hope, trust, and expectation is that the mysterious frame of humanity shall melt into the general mass of nature, to be recomposed in the other forms with which she daily supplies those which daily disappear, and return under different forms – the watery particles to streams and showers, the earthly parts to enrich their mother earth, the airy portions to wanton in the breeze, and those of fire to supply the blaze of Aldeboran and his brethren. In this faith have I lived, and I will die in it! Hence! Begone! Disturb me no further! I have spoken the last word that mortal ears shall listen to!'

These opinions would doubtless be as far as possible from representing the views of Scott himself.

The Time of 'Quentin Durward.'

The period of the tale is the vastly interesting third quarter of the fifteenth century, just after the invention of the art of printing (1444), the fall of Constantinople (1453), and the dissemination of Arabian learning over Europe. Hardly an echo of these great events, or other great events which were even then preparing, finds its way into the novel. There is a bare reference by one of the characters to the winged art of printing; it was almost impossible that Scott, an author and partner in a printing business, could have avoided that. But when we see the abundant and picturesque use made by Charles Reade, in 'the Cloister and the Hearth,' of the general social stir of that teeming time, and, in particular, the marvels of the printing press as successor to the labours of the monkish scribe and illuminator, we realise the strides which the novel has made, in the best hands, since Sir Walter's day.

Fighting, ambuscades, an escape from hanging, an escape from drowning, the safe conveying of distressed ladies, the discussions of Louis, Charles and their courtiers with a pitched battle to crown all – such are the elements of 'Quentin Durward.' The characterisation and still more the dialogue, have Sir Walter's usual spirit and wit, and if we realise that the great modern romancists – Hugo, Dumas and Reade in the great fiction already referred to – had yet to come, we are, nevertheless, not surprised to learn that 'Quentin Durward' was received with as much enthusiasm in Paris as 'Waverley' had been, earlier in the day, in Edinburgh. There was, in truth, nothing in French literature even remotely approaching in character or quality to this novel of French life. The publisher, Constable, had indulged in gloomy forecasts as to its reception – for no reason to be discovered from the tale itself. But the fervour of the welcome extended to it in France reacted on the popular estimation of it in this country. It was quickly translated into German and Italian, and everywhere on the Continent was received with great favour, not less as a true historical study than as a tale of living human interest.

On His Own Ground.

I propose now to give some little examination to the third novel, 'The Antiquary,' as representing Sir Walter on Scottish ground, where he was undoubtedly at his best. 'The Antiquary' was Scott's own favourite novel, and the reason of this preference should not be difficult to understand. He wrote it when his mind was still fresh and full. 'Waverley' and 'Guy Mannering' had gone before, and the fervour with which

they had been received would deepen Scott's conviction that he had struck a new vein of romantic writing as noble in its kind and even more distinctive than the plays of Shakespeare compared with other writings of the Elizabethan dramatists. Jonson, Massinger and Marlowe were all inferior to Shakespeare: but the genre was similar. Whereas Scott had neither precursors nor contemporaries in romantic prose fiction. There was Galt – who never came into his own – coeval with Scott, and a master in his own very different field – and soon there were plenty of followers of much merit.

But if we would appreciate how completely original Scott was we have only to think of the novelists who came before him. Richardson, Fielding, Smollet, Goldsmith – how different they all are from Sir Walter! There was 'The Castle of Otranto,' the wooden romance of lively Horace Walpole, who was utterly an Englishman of the eighteenth century, and incapable of sincere constructive imagination. All of them were living and some of them were writing about the time of the Rebellion of 1745, when the wild 'petticoat men' penetrated as far south as Derby; yet there is no echo in their novels of that most startling incursion. We cannot conceive Scott living in and writing of such a period without turning to account its most outstanding public event.

Since Sir Walter set the example of illustrating history in the historic romance there is scarcely a period, incident, or great personage that has not been made to do duty by writers of prose fiction; though it must be said that the Scots and the French have done and are doing much more in this field than English writers, who, with the genius of their nation, have a history but are nowise interested in it, nor seek to interest their fellow-countrymen. Dickens wrote of the period of the Gordon riots, and Thackeray of the reign of Queen Anne; but they, in common with most of their fellow-countrymen, preferred to deal with the life of their own times.

That the glamour of the past and the golden radiance of the future should be discarded for the greyest realities of the everyday present is not easy to understand. The stories of George Gissing and Mr Pett Ridge, for instance – how determinedly drab they are! The struggles of poverty, the hundred and one manifestations of snobbery, the perpetual dragging in of commonplace details about food and eating, as if the authors had never become accustomed to having enough to stay their stomachs – how can anything of a public be found for that philosophy of the starveling, which is only the more contemptible when the people are represented as bearing their disgraceful, preventable poverty with base contentment. How could a fine writer like Gissing, how can a clever writer like Mr Pett Ridge, sit down day after day to work on elements such as these when the whole world of space and time was and is open to their choice? To say that their work is true to life is nothing to the point. The Multiplication Table is true; but it is not an exhilarating study. A brick wall is a solid fact: but as an object of contemplation or analysis it is not capable of much human or any other kind of interest.

Gissing greatly admired Dickens, but does not seem to have noted that his hero was in all he wrote the politician, the social reformer, the healthy cheerful man who portrayed the poor not without hope that their poverty was remediable, and that with the conviction that it was the business of the man of letters to help to remedy it, preparing the way for the politician by moulding public opinion. Charles Reade was imbued with a similar purpose. Sir Walter himself dealt with the historical struggles for freedom – the Reformation, the Civil War, the Covenanters; and, Tory as he was, his scrupulous fairness compelled him to show the merits of the men he portrayed, with a leaning (if anything), not to his own side, but to the other. From a perusal of 'Woodstock' we rise with a just sense that the Cavalier type as represented in

roystering Roger Wildrack was by much the inferior of the psalm singing Puritan whom he mocked. Similarly in 'Old Mortality' we find the Covenanters depicted as men of more character and prowess than the men who harried them. Thus Balfour of Burleigh, insultingly challenged to a fall by the trooper Bothwell, throws the challenger, a bigger man, with such violence that he lies for a moment as if dead. It is in the same splendid tale that we witness the heroic constancy under torture of the young preacher MacBriar, who swoons under the agony of 'the boot,' but protests against the secular usurpation with his last breath. These are scenes of which the stuff of public spirit and civic genius is made.

Who would not, on a deliberate view, rather pore upon the noble canvas of 'The Cloister and the Hearth' or 'Old Mortality' than 'The Wickhamses' or 'The House of Cobwebs'? The one is as true as the other, while in incident, background, atmosphere, and noble characterisation the historical novels leave the drab cockney realism in the mud. This is what Ruskin had in view when he spoke of the characters of a distinguished English novelist as 'the sweepings of a Pentonville omnibus.' Who writes of snobbery must himself be a snob. Scott kept aristocratic company, had the Duke of Buccleuch for kinsman; hob-nobbed with George the Fourth and his brother the Duke of York; but when he occasionally introduces a Duke or an earl into his story, they appear as natural human beings, not like the rococo noblemen of Disraeli, who have always to be surrounded with the paraphernalia of their rank, from the peacock on the terrace to the coronet on the chair-back. Even then, it was on humble characters that he expended his most detailed and sympathetic art – the old beggarman Edie Ochiltree, the old gipsy wife Meg Merrilies; Mause Headrigg, the old scolding Covenanter wife and her son the pawky ploughman, Cuddie.

His art was in accordance with his life in this respect. The bustling alewife at Fushie Bridge said of Sir Walter: 'Oh, but he's company for kings, an' yet he'll mak himself company for me, he's so aiffable an' pleasant to a' ranks.' One of his favourite anecdotes was of an elderly woman who warmed his heart by calling herself 'a poor old struggler,' When in Ireland he gave a shilling to a man for some sixpenny service, he said 'Remember, Pat, you owe me sixpence.' And Pat delighted him by replying, 'May your honour live till I pay ye!' Lockhart recounts how Scott, tired with a long walk, leaned upon the shoulder of Tom Purdie, his gamekeeper and forester, how he scolded Tom for neglecting to carry out his instructions as to the thinning of a hedgerow, and thereafter transferred his hand to the shoulder of Constable the bookseller. Tom disconsolately dropped behind; but, the party coming to a gate, he ran forward to open it. Scott, seeing the ex-poacher's chagrin, asked him for a pinch of snuff, and put his hand on the shoulder once more. The forgiven and gratified henchman was then pleased to say to Sir Walter that he 'would take his advice' about the thinning. It was Scott himself, who, with great enjoyment, told the last part of the story.

To our Tale.

'The Antiquary' is to some extent autobiographical. In a preface to the edition of 1830 Scott speaks of the chief character, Jonathan Oldbuck, as reflecting the characteristics of a worthy old friend of his boyhood's days, and this was understood to mean George Constable of Wallace-Craigie. But Scott himself had some of the features of his Antiquary. Jonathan Oldbuck was both book-collector and antiquary, and so was Scott. The one lives at Monkbarns, and the other at Abbotsford. The author was a sheriff, the character was a justice of the peace. Both were landed

proprietors. Oldbuck was descended from a famous printer, the founder of the house. Scott was a partner in the great printing concern of Ballantyne & Co. Both had been disappointed in love. The Antiquary amused himself by chiding and chaffing his nephew Captain Hector McIntryre, and Scott's letters to his son Walter, also an officer, have banter and reproof as their constant notes.

But George Constable certainly was an antiquary, a landed proprietor, and may have had other features of Jonathan Oldbuck. It was he who helped to form Scott's tastes as a collector when the author of 'The Antiquary' was a young man haunting the beach and the cliffs about Prestonpans, where the scene of the novel is laid. Scott's tastes had so much in common with those of the laird of Monkbarns that he was moved in his later years to begin a descriptive catalogue (never finished) of the contents of the Gabions of the late Jonathan Oldbuck, Esq.' That the zeal shown by the Antiquary of the novel in adding to his collection was excelled by Scott himself is shown by many a letter to Daniel Terry, the actor, in London, who besides dramatizing a number of the novels (terryifying, Scott called it), bought much antique furniture and armour for him. Thus in the fortieth chapter of Lockhart's 'Life' the following passage occurs in the very first letter we light upon: -

I was now anxious to complete Abbotsford... I am quite feverish about the armoury. I have two pretty complete suits of armour – one Indian one and a cuirassiers, with boots, casque, etc; many helmets corslets, and steel caps, swords and poinards without end, and about a dozen of guns, ancient and modern. I have beside two or three battleaxes and maces, pikes and targets, a Highlander's accoutrement complete, a great variety of branches of horns, pikes, bows and arrows, and the clubs and creases of Indian tribes.

These details are interesting as showing that Scott knew something of the weapons and the clothes of the armed men, who figure so numerous in his pages; though they were hardly collected as mere 'properties' to the writer. Scott lived in the old world. His reading and thoughts were remote from the time of his life, so much so, that when in his later years he took to pamphleteering against the Reform Bill his friends had to tell him that the arguments had already been put forward by other Tories and had been completely and decisively answered from the other side. A man cannot write from 6am till breakfast time, and neglect the periodical press as Scott did, without being hopelessly behind the time, as millions of voters still are, without having Scott's good excuse.

'The Antiquary' abounds in great scenes and descriptive passages. The treasure-hunting in the old Priory of St Ruth and the rescue of Sir Arthur and Miss Wardour from the Halkethhead Crags will appeal to a large class; but such incidents have been much handled by other novelists; though one does not recall any writer who had introduced them before Scott. The most characteristic scene is that in which Oldbuck delivers to Lovel his enthusiastic disquisition on the Kaim of Kinprunes, that account into which the old bedesman Edie Ochiltree breaks with his deadly untimeous 'Praetroian here, Praetorian there, I mind the biggin' o't.' The stone bearing a sacrificing vessel, and marked 'A.D.L.L.' was to the fervid Antiquary nothing less than a Roman monument whose inscription might 'without much violence' stand for Agricola Dicavit Libens Lubens. Old Edie's cruel explanation that the vessel was, as the initials indicated Aiken Drum's Lang Ladle, appears to have amused Dickens so much that he paraphrases the incident in a chapter of 'Pickwick' in which an inscription on a stone discovered by the members of the Club is ultimately found to mean nothing more historically momentous than 'Bill Stamps his Mark.'

Of the descriptive passages two stand out beyond the others. The one is the account of the Antiquary's study, with its little black Elzevirs, its calthrops, spurs and buckles, its mutilated copy of 'The Complaynt of Scotland,' its old ballads and broadsides 'not one of them later than 1700 and some of them an hundred years older,' and, as the genius loci of the apartment, a big black cat. The other is the account of the achievements of the Antiquary's redoubtable ancestor, the printer, who won the hand of his former master's daughter, under the terms of her father's will, by being the only one among her many suitors who could set the types and pull a proof of his work, which he did, as clean 'as a triple revise' (that is a third corrected impression.)

Jonathan Oldbuck.

Here again, as so often in his novels, Scott seems actually to go out of his way to write up the opposite views to those which he himself held. The Antiquary is a Whig, proud of his descent from the early German printer Oldenbuck, and rather scornful about the 'old nobility' generally, and the ancestors of his Tory neighbour Sir Arthur Wardour, in particular. When that pompous knight obliquely reflects upon the Antiquary's descent from a Westphalian printer, old Jonathan makes the spirited reply; 'I conceive that my descent from that painful and industrious typographer Aldobrand Oldbuck, who, in the month of December, 1493, under the patronage, as the colophon tells us, of Sebaldus Scheyter and Sebastian Kammermaister, accomplished the printing of the great Chronicle of Nuremberg - I conceive, I say, that my descent from that great restorer of learning is more creditable to me as a mean of letters than if I had number in my genealogy all the brawling, bulleto headed, iron-fisted, old Goth barons since the days of Crenthemnachcrime - not one of whom, I suppose, could write his own name.'

'If you mean the observation as a sneer at my ancestry,' said the knight with an assumption of dignified superiority and composure, 'I have the pleasure to inform you that the name of my ancestor, Gamelyn de Guardover, Miles, is written fairly with his own hand in the earliest Ragman Roll.'

'Which,' says the ready Antiquary, 'only serves to show that he was one of the earliest who set the mean example of submitting to Edward I.'

As against the pompous futility of Sir Arthur and the tragic gloom and remoteness of the Earl of Glenallan, the Antiquary shows as a man of admirable shrewdness and spirit, whose liability to be deceived over Roman camps and his professed dislike of 'womenkind' are engaging fallibilities from which the dull and ordinary are exempt.

Edie Ochiltree.

The dramatic power which enabled Scott to place himself at the start point of the old Whig Antiquary serves him equally well with the splendid sustained character of Edie Ochiltree, the old beggar who refuses to be provided for on the ground that he does not need it, and that any change in his state must needs be for the worse.

'I am,' says Edie, 'the idlest auld carle that ever lived. I downa be bound down to hours o' eating and sleeping; and, to speak the honest truth, I wad be a very bad example in ony weel-regulated family... I could never abide staying still in ae place, and just seeing the same joists and couples aboon my head night after night... and then what wad the country about do for want o' auld Edie Ochiltree, that brings news

and country cracks frae ae farm steading to anither, and gingerbread to the lunes and helps the lads to mend their fiddles and the gudewives to clout their pans, and plaits rushes and grenadier caps for the weans, and busks the hinds flees, and has skill o' cow-ills and horse-ills, and kens mair auld sangs and tales than a' the barony besides, and gars ilka body laugh wherever the comes? - troth, my leddy, I canna lay down my vocation; it would be a public loss.'

When Miss Wardour tries to tempt him with the prospect of being independent, the old man says: -

'I am mair independent as I am. I want nae mair at ony single house than a meal o' meat, or maybe but a mouthfu' o't - if it's refused at ae place I get it at anither - sae I canne be said to depend on ony body in particular, but just on the country at large.'

He has just helped to save Miss Wardour's life and that of her father, and she presses him to accept a sum of money at least.

'That I might be robbed and murdered some night between town and town! Or what's as bad, that I might live in constant apprehensions o't! Im no - (lowering his voice to a whisper, and looking keenly about him) I'm no that clean unprovided for neither; and though I should die at the back o' a kike, they'll find as muckle quilted in this auld blue gown as will bury me like a Christian, and gie the lads and lasses a blythe lykewake too; sae there's the gaberlunzie's burial provided for, and I need nae mair - were the like o' me ever to change a note, wha the deil d'ye think wad be sic fules as to gie me charity afiter that? It would flee through the country like wildfire that auld Edie suld had done siccan a like thing, and then, I'se warrant, I might grane my heart out or ony body wad gie me either a bane or a bodle.'

It is it the grand apologia for all the gangrel fraternity, of which there are still many representatives in the land of Edie.

Scott's attitude towards the old-fashioned beggar of Edie's type is amusingly brought out in the memorandum contributed by Allan Cunningham to Lockhart's 'Life' Recounting a conversation they had, Cunningham tells how he said to Scott:

'I knew a man, the last of a race of district tale-tellers, who used to boast of the golden days of his youth, and say that the world, with all its knowledge, was grown sixpence a day worse for him.'

Scott: How was that? How did he make his living? By telling tales and singing ballads?

Cunningham: By both; he had a devout tale for the old and a merry song for the young; he was a sort of beggar.

Scott: Out upon thee Allan! Dost thou call that begging! Why, man, we make our bread by story-telling, and honest bread it it.

There are suggestions that for the character in the lyric and epic revelry of Burn's 'Jolly Beggars'; but Edie lives to us as a more flesh-and-blood beggarman than any that we have met even in real life. *

*For that matter there are suggestions for the character of the Antiquary in the seven poems addressed to Captain Francis Grose, the real antiquary of whom Burns writes:

*He has a fouth o' auld nick- nackets:
Rusty airn caps and jinglin' jackets,
Wad haud the Lothians three in tackets
A townmont gude:*

And parritch pats, and ault saut-buckets,

Before the Flood.

The hero, Lovel, is not very lifelike. He shares the usual characteristics of Scott's heroes, who are apt to be the sport of middle-aged caprice, or tutelage. Isabella Wardour, too, is a somewhat colourless heroine, such a young gentlewoman, in fact, as we might expect to be sketched by a sensible middle-aged man who had been married seventeen years before, at the age of twenty-six. Sex-love is not a very large element in a manly life; and it is only another recommendation that the 'love interest' is kept comparatively subordinate in the Waverley novels. It is something that Lovel contrives to be a young man of spirit, address, and capacity, combined with modesty. If he has few recognisable lineaments, there is plenty of 'character' in the tale without.

As a bustling picture of Scottish life in the first decade of the nineteenth century, when coastwise folk lived in daily and nightly expectation of a landing by the French 'The Antiquary' has a special topical interest for us at present. Besides the chapters devoted to the alarm of invasion, a German charlatan and rogue serves as the villain of the tale. The many variations played on the surname Dousterswivel illustrates Scott's genius for coining amusing and suggestive names of every kind. These he seemed to have on tap, and he introduced them in his speech and letters as if the supply were inexhaustible. Thus, in a letter to Terry, he refers to the actor's infant son as Master Mumblecrust, though the happy cognomen would probably be invented for no other reason than that he had momentarily forgotten the child's Christian name.

Conclusion.

We are apt to think of our own day as being exclusively the period of literary 'booms' and big things; but it is interesting to learn from Lockhart that the first 6,000 copies of 'The Antiquary' were taken up in six days. Miss Corelli and Mr Hall Caine can easily beat that with the much larger population and advertising methods of today. But it was a great event for the year 1816.

With the intoxicating demand there was for the writings of this great man of letters it is not surprising that Scott, his printer partners, his publishers, and all associated with him should have lost their heads. Sir Walter had put £6,000 into Ballantyne's business, which had been transferred from Kelso to Edinburgh at his instance. This was pure goodwill to the Ballantynes because they were good printers and men of literary taste. When we read animadversions on Scott's anxiety for money and his often careless writing, it is well to remember that he shared his prosperity freely with others, and that when the crash came through no fault of his, he gallantly shouldered and bore the burden of writing off a debt of £117,000, such a kind of liability as no man ever tried to lift by such means, the power of a single rapidly-moving pen. That he so greatly succeeded is a splendid tribute to both his genius and his character.

The criticisms of his hasty style – of what Stevenson calls 'his brave neglect' are misplaced to the extent that probably he could work in no other way. There was nothing niggling or stippling in his genius. The mark of his style is a certain splendid naturalness and sober animation. He had no particular mannerisms; yet what reader of discernment could fail to tell a prose passage of his at once? He wrote from an overflowing mind, which all his life and experience contributed to fill. If he wrote

much he read much, and his intense acuteness, his marvelous memory, his enormous circle of friends, and his essential happy-heartedness, wit, humour, and kindly feeling represented such an equipment for his work as no writer of fiction had before or has shown since. He and Robert Burns have been Scotland's greatest asset; for the soul of a country is the most material thing about it. When all the generals, judges, statesmen, captains of industry, and even great physicians and surgeons Scotland has produced are forgotten, the world created by these two will be freshly remembered and still potent to cheer, inform, and fortify all who directly or indirectly owe the best part of their thoughts to the printed word, as who does not?



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