The Examiner.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL OF POLITICS, LITERATURE AND NEWS.

"This is true Liberty, when Freeborn Men, having to advise the Public, may speak free.'---Euripides

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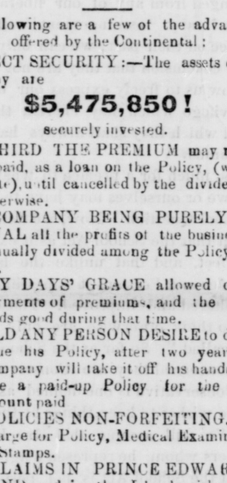

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Miscellany.

The Story of Scott's Life.

WALTER SCOTT was born at Edinburgh, on the 15th of August, 1771. His father was a lawyer. His paternal descent was derived from a Border family known as the Scotts of Harden—a branch of the house of Buccleuch. His mother Anne Rutherford, was the daughter of Dr. John Rutherford, a Professor of Medicine in the University of Edinburgh. His parents were married in 1758, and they had a numerous family—twelve children—of which Walter was one of the young members. His birthplace was a house in College Wynd near the gate of the University of Edinburgh. It has since been demolished. Scott's infant years were passed partly in this house and partly in Smallholm Grange, the farm-house of his paternal grandfather, at a place called Sandy Knowe, in the vale of the lower Tweed. A brief portion of his infancy was spent at Bath, in England, and at Prestonpans. In his eighth year he was taken home to his father's house, at No. 25 George-square Edinburgh, and entered as a pupil at the High School, where he is said to have displayed greater proficiency in story-telling than in pursuit of the regular course of his studies. The boys, indeed, called him Dum Scotus, on account of his back letter scholarship. In November, 1783, he was transferred to the University of Edinburgh, where he accomplished a considerable amount of desultory study and reading but where—in consequence of a serious illness—he did not long remain. In May, 1785 he was apprenticed to his father—one of those attorneys that are called in Scotland, writers to the signet—and began the study of law This he prosecuted with commendable assiduity, considering that he found it distasteful, till, in 1792 he passed the requisite examination and was called to the bar.

His success as a lawyer was indifferent. From childhood he had been trifling with the Muse, waking and riding about the Border Country, in quest of historic tradition and character portrait, and storing his capacious and unerring memory with poetic legend. The result was natural—and it was fortunate. As his nature ripened into manhood the fascinations of literature won an easy victory, in his mind and heart over the fascinations of the law He did not relinquish his legal avocations. To the end of his life, indeed, he held a legal office. But he gave himself, more and more as the days passed to those pursuits of poetry and romance to which he was both impelled and fitted by the latent power and interior consciousness of genius. His first publication appeared in 1796, and was a translation of Burger's 'Lenore.' This he made in the course of one night, in fulfilment of a promise to Miss Cranstoun—afterward Countess of Purgstall—an accomplished and discerning lady, who thereupon prophesied that he would turn out a poet; something of a cross between Burns and Gray.' Prescott, in a thoughtful and gentle essay on Sir Walter Scott, has noticed—with a delicate touch of taste—that Scott's 'first production, by a singular chance, came into the world in the very year (Burns dying in 1796) in which the Ayrshire Minstrel was withdrawn from it; as if Nature had intended that the chain of poetic inspiration should not be broken.' In 1799 Scott contributed to 'Monk' Lewis's 'Tales of Wonder'—a fantastic and short-lived compilation—three ballads entitled 'Glenfinlas' 'The Eve of St John,' and 'The Grey Brother.' These ballads afterwards reappeared, with others of kindred character and merit, in his "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border" In December 1797, Scott was married His wife was Miss Charlotte Margaret Carpenter, the daughter of French parents, but educated in England under the care of Lord Downshire. His first residence after marriage were in Edinburg in George Stree and in South Castle Street; but in 1798 he took up his abode in a lovely rural cottage at Lasswade. Scott's married life was very happy. He had suffered, in 1795-6, a grievous disappointment in love, but his manly heart had thoroughly conquered his sorrow, and he never displayed the least morbid sensibility on the subject.

"The Minstrels of the Scottish Border," to which reference has been made, appeared in 1802 It comprised the result of investigations commenced before he was ten years old; it was printed in beautiful style by his school-fellow, James Ballantyne, and it was welcomed with avidity and read with delight. This was his first emphatic success in literature. Three incidents of note should be mentioned that occurred prior to the publication of this book. On the 16th of December, 1799, Scott was appointed Sheriff of Selkirk, in the same year he published a translation of Goethe's tragedy of 'Goetz von Berlichingen.' Also he visited London, in company with his wife and inspected the antiquities at Westminster Abbey the Tower, and the British Museum. He had first seen these memorable places when less than four years old, yet he remembered them well. "I was astonished," he says, in his fragment of Autobiography, "to find how accurate my recollections of these celebrated places of visitation proved to be, and I have ever since trusted more implicitly to my juvenile reminiscences." In 1804 he published his annotated edition of the old poem of "Sir Tristram," composed in the thirteenth century by Thomas of Ercildonnee, called the Rhymer. This enhanced his reputation, but it was not till the next year, 1805, that he made the great success—by publishing 'The Lady of the Last Minstrel,'—which led to his complete devotion to literature, and which introduced an entirely new school of British poetry. This work has been correctly described as 'a complete expansion of the ancient ballad into an epic form' Its triumph exalted the author in the esteem of his co-temporaries, and led, among other results, to one piece of professional good fortune. Scott was appointed a Clerk of the Court of Sessions, with a salary of £800, which was afterwards increased to £1,300.

Meanwhile, in 1 04, he had removed from Lasswade to Ashastiel. He now relinquished legal practice and fully entered upon the splendid career as a poet and novelist, with which the whole world is familiar. It lasted twenty-six years, and in the course of that time he made additions to British Literature, more voluminous, and—considering the immense audience addressed—more important than any it had received since the days of Shakespeare. In 1812 Scott removed to his newly acquired property of Abbotsford, which he straightway began to expand and embellish and which he continued to beautify till about the year 1825, he had completely finished and furnished the noble Gothic pile that still remains—as doubtless it will remain forever—the chief and most hallowed literary shrine of Scotland Here, in 1814, he finished 'Waverly,' which appeared in that year, and laid the solid foundation of even greater triumphs than he had already achieved. In 1812 he received a baronetcy, from George the Fourth, and became Sir Walter

For a long time, as will be seen, his bark had sailed smoothly "both with wind and stream." Favoring breezes continued to fan it forward, till, at length, in 1826, a sudden and terrible storm of misfortune and affliction burst all at once upon him. Messrs. Constable & Co., of Edinburgh, his publishers, failed in January of that year, and Sir Walter Scott was found to be liable to their creditors for £72,000. Messrs. Ballantyne & Co., his printers, also failed, and, being liable as a silent partner in that house, his indebtedness was increased to upward of £120 000. And his wife died in the same doleful year. The consternation and grief of such a time might well have broken his spirit, and doubtless it would have done so, had he not been a man of true heroic mold. "If we lose everything else" he said, "we will at least keep our honor unblemished."

——'I would rather sell any thing or every thing than be less than a true man to the world." ——"Duty to God and to my children must teach me patience." His conduct matched his words. He gave up his town house in Edinburgh, to be sold at auction and most of his personal property, to be held in trust for his creditors He took modest lodgings in St. David Street, in the Scottish capital, and he went to work with his herculean energy, upon the last great labor of his noble life. The fortitude and perseverence which he displayed in this cruel crises and the sudden success with which his manly labor was rewarded, have often been told. History does not record a more illustrious example of devotion to duty than was thus afforded by Sir Walter Scott. To keep his honor unblemished and to leave the estate for which he had toiled so long and so hard, the grand old man laid down his life Within the next four years he had paid more than £100,000, and paved the way for payment of the residue

Towards the close of 18 0 his health began to fail. Paralysis—hereditary in his family and accelerated by these tremendous exertions—overtook him in the next year. Foreign travel was advised, with rest from all mental effort. The Admiralty of Great Britain furnished a ship, the Barham, for his trasportation to Italy. In that country he met with the most delicate attention and the most signal honours But he never more found the vanished angel of health Fatigue and heat brought on another stroke of disease, and the giant was reduced to the verge of imbecility His one hope and his one word was—Abbotsford. The rapid journey homeward from Naples to London and thence to Abbotsford, has been described by Lockhart in some of the most simple and tender words in his admirable biography. Scott reached his home on the 11th of July, 1831 When at the distance of a mile he caught sight of his own towers, he sprang up in the carriage with a cry of delight. When lifted into his dining room, 'his dogs assembled about his chair and began to fawn upon him and lick his hand, and he alternately sobbed and smiled over them until sleep oppressed him' It is a pitiful story of decline. He had some intervals of consciousness and reason but for the most part remained in stupor. The last scene, however, was happily brief. God's mercy relieved him by death, on the 21st of September, 183 . "It was a beautiful day,' says Lockhart, 'so warm that every window was wide open—and so perfectly still that the sound of all others most delicious to his ear,—the gentle ripple of the Tweed over its pebbles,—was distinctly audible, as we knelt around the bed, and his eldest son kissed and closed his eyes No sculpor never modelled a more majestic image of repose.' His funeral took place on the 26th of September and his remains—followed by a great procession of mourners of all classes—were laid beneath an aisle in Dryburgh Abbey. A flat stone, of polished red granite, marks the spot, inscribed with his name and the date of his death.

SCOTT'S WORKS.—THE STORY OF HIS LABOR.

The early works of Scott should be viewed by themselves in a group. They were produced in what may be called the experimental period of his career—that period which was full of flirtation with Thespis field-sports, research into the legendary lore of his beloved Scotland, and rambles among the pesantry; that period in which, as one of his companions said, in later years 'He was makin' himsel a' the time; but he didna ken, maybe, what he was about, till years had passed. At first he thought o' little, I dare say, but the queerness and the fun.' Under the title of early works we comprehend the following, which were the fruits of the first eight years of Scott's literery life:—

The Burger Ballads	1796.
Translation of Goeth's Goetz von Berlichingen	1799
Tragedy of the House of Aspen .	1799.
Ballads in Monk Lewis's Tales of Wonder	1799.
Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border—1802-3.	
Annotated Edition of Sir Tristram .	1804.

SCOTT'S POEMS.

'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' like Cowper's 'Task,' owed its origin to the wish of a lady, the Countess of Dalkeith, who enjoined upon Scott that he should compose a Border Ballad on the grotesque legend of Gilpin Horner 'Had she asked me to write a ballad on a broomstick,' he subsequently said, 'I must have attempted it.' The first result of the attempt was a few verses called 'The Goblin Page.' These were little esteemed, and were laid aside; but some time afterwards, in 1802, when confined at home in consequence of the kick of a horse, Scott resumed working upon them, and shortly produced the poem as it now stands. It was written at the rate of about one canto a week, and when published—in 1805—it met with prodigious success. This result, as we have seen, embarked him fully and finally in literature.

One of the best modern critics of literature, Professor Craik, of Queen's College Belfast, makes upon Scott's poetry, the subjoined compendious and judicious remarks: 'His poems are all lays and romances of chivalry, but infinitely finer than any that have ever before been written. With all their irregularity and carelessness,—qualities which in some sort are characteristic of of an essential to this kind of poetry.—that element of life in all writing, which comes of the excited feeling and earnest belief of the writer, is never wanting; this animation, fervour, enthusiasm—call it by what names you will—exists in greater strength in no poetry than in that of Scott, redeeming a thousand defects and triumphing over all reclamations of criticism. It was this, no doubt, more than anything else, which at once took the public admiration by storm. All cultivated and perfect enjoyment of poetry, or of any other of the finer arts, is partly emotional, partly critical: the enjoyment and appreciation are only perfect when these two qualities are blended; but most of the poetry that had been produced among us in modern times, had aimed at affording chiefly, if not exclusively, a critical gratification. The Lay of the Last Minstrel surprised readers of all degrees with a long and elaborate poem, which carried them on with an excitement of heart as well as of head which many of them had never experienced before in the perusal of poetry. The narrative form of the poem, no doubt, did much to produce this effect, giving to it, even without the poetry, the interest and excitement of a novel; but all readers, even the least tinctured with a literary taste, felt also, in a greater or less degree, the charm of the verse, and the poetic glow with which the work was all alive. 'Marmion' (1808), carried the same feelings to a much higher pitch. It is undoubtedly Scott's greatest poem, or one, at any rate in which the noblest passages are found; though the most domestic attractions of 'The Lady of the Lake' (1810) made it the most popular at its first appearance. Meanwhile his success, the example he had set, and the tastes which he had awakened in the public mind, had affected our literature to an extent, in various directions, which has scarcely been sufficiently appreciated. Notwithstanding the previous appearance of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and some other writers, it was Scott who first in his day made poetry the rage.——But what is still more worthy of note is that Scott's poetry impressed its own character upon all the poetry that was produced among us for many years after; it put an end to long works in verse of a didatic or merely reflective character and directed the current of all writing of that kind into the form of narrative. Even Wordsworth's 'Excursion' [1814] is, for the most part, a collection of tales. If Scott's own genius, were to be described by any single epithet it would be called a narrative genius. Hence, when he left off writing verse, he betook himself to the production of fiction in prose, which were really substantially the same thing with his poems, and, in that freer form of composition, succeeded in achieving a second reputation, still more brilliant than the first.

To this especially clear, just and useful piece of criticism—which is also history, for our present purpose—we append a complete list of Scott's publications in Poetry:—

The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Ballads of Lyrical Pieces, Marmion, The Lady of the Lake The Vision of Don Roderick Rokeby, The Bridal of Triermain, The Lord of the Isles The Field of Waterloo, Harold the Dauntless.

Writing to James Ballantyne, in 1812, Scott referred to the chief of his poems as follows: 'I would say, if it is fair for me to say anything, that the force in the 'Lay' is thrown on style; in 'Marmion,' on description; and in 'The Lady of the Lake,' on incident.

WAVERLEY.

'Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty years Since,' was—as all the world knows—the first of the great series that has taken permanent rank in literature as the Waverley Novels. The composition of it was commenced in the summer of 1805. Scott's serious business, at this time was the labor of editing the Works of Dryden; and it was to lighten the monotony of that occupation that he tried his hand at the Historical Novel. 'Waverley' seems, however, to have been begun in an indolent spirit and prosecuted in a desultory manner. 'When I had proceeded as far, I think, as the seventh chapter'—Scott afterward wrote—'I showed my work to a critical friend, whose opinion was unfavorable; and, having then some poetical reputation, I was unwilling to risk the loss of it by attempting a new style of composition. I, therefore, then threw aside the work I had commenced, without either reluctance or remonstrance.' Nine years afterward, in 1814—having, in the meantime, supplemented 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' with 'Marmion,' 'The Lady of the Lake,' 'Rokeby,' 'The Vision of Don Roderick,' and 'The Bridal of Triermain,' and having seen the lustre of his splendid poetic reputation begin to wane in the radiance of the newly-risen star of Byron—he turned again to his neglected manuscript resumed his work upon it, and, in the brief space of three weeks completed the first of the Waverley Novels. Ballantyne, the publisher, had told him that the sale of his poetry was declining. But Scott's genius was the sublimity of common sense, and no caprice of the popular taste could dampen its ardour or fetter its industry. 'Since one line has failed, he said, 'we must strike out something else.' The something else was the series of twenty-six novels—not to speak of the six smaller tales—which alone would have sufficed to make his name illustrious, and which have conferred upon the human race an incalculable amount of innocent and healthful pleasure.

An idea of the fertility of Scott's mind, and of the prodigious and unremitting industry with which he labored, is strikingly suggested by a glance at the Waverley Novels in a group. Their titles are here appended.

Waverley, Guy Mannering, the Antiquary, Old Mortality, the Black Dwarf, Rob Roy, the Heart of Mid-Lothian, a Legend of Montrose, the Bride of Lammermoor, Ivanhoe, the Monastery, the Abbot, Kenilworth, the Pirate, the Fortunes of Nigel, Peveril of the Peak, Quentin Durward, St. Ronan's Well, Red Gauntlet, the Betrothed, the Talisman, Woodstock, the Chronicles of the Canongate, the Fair Maid of Perth, Anne of Geierstein, Count Robert of Paris, Castle Dangerous.

SCOTT'S CHILDREN.

The children of Sir Walter Scott were four in number—Sophia, Anne, Walter and Charles. All of them have followed their parents into 'the silent land' Sophia became the wife of John Gibson Lockhart and their daughter inherited Abbotsford She was married to Mr. Robert Hope, but by act of Parliament, she and her husband were authorized to assume the name of Scott.

'They have kind hearts,' Scott once said in allusion to his children, 'and that is the main point.' 'As to Walter,' he told Irving, referring to his eldest son, 'I taught him, while a boy, to ride and shoot, and speak the truth. Every reader knows that during their earlier years, dreading the effects of over-stimulated fancy, he took care that they should not see any of his writings. For them, as for himself, and for everbody, he was solicitous first of all of the score of moral rectitude and substantial individuality of character.

SCOTT AT HOME.

'His domestic animals,' says Irving giving the testimony of a personal observer, 'were his friends. Everything about him seemed to rejoice in the light of his countenance. The face of the humblest dependent brightened at his approach, as if he anticipated a cordial and cheering word. 'No one's concerns, no one's tastes and pleasures, seemed beneath him.'

His study was always open to his children no less than to his greyhound. He never considered their tattle as any disturbance; they went and came as pleased their fancy; he was always ready to answer their questions; and when they, unconscious how he was engaged, entreated him to lay down his pen and tell them a story, he would take them on his knee, repeat a ballad or legent, kiss them and set them down again to their marbles or ninepins, and resume his labour as if refreshed by the interruption.

SIR WALTER

Scott's Baronetcy was conferred on him, we are told, not in consequence of any ministerial suggestion, but by the King (George the Fourth,) personally and of his own unsolicited motion; and when the poet kissed his hand he said to him: 'I shall always reflect with pleasure on Sir Walter Scott's having been the first creation of my reign.' The Baronetcy was given to Scott in April 1820. The admiration which George the Fourth felt for the poet seems to have been genuine: and that he was capable of feeling it is a fact that does him credit. One of the literary treasures of Abbotsford, by the way, was a copy of Montfaucon's Antiquities, in fifteen volumes, richly bound in scarlet velvet, presented to Scott by the friendly monarch.

SCOTT'S PERSONAL APPEARANCE.

Scott, at twenty, is thus described in Lockhart's Life:—"Young Walter Scott was a comely creature. He had outgrown the sallowness of early ill-health, and had a fresh, brilliant complexion. His eyes were clear, open, and well set, with a changeful radience, to which teeth, of the most perfect regularity and whiteness, lent their assistance, while the noble expansion and elevation of the brow gave to the whole aspect a dignity far above the charm of mere features. His smile was always delightful, and I can easily fancy the peculiar intermixture of tenderness and gravity with playful, innocent hilarity and humor in the expression, as being well calculated to fix a fair lady's eyes. His figure, excepting the blemish in one limb, must, in those days, have been eminently handsome. Tall, much above the usual standard, it was cast in the very model of a young Hercules, the head set on with a singular grace, the throat and chest after the truest model of the antique, the hands delicately finished, the whole outline that of extraordinary vigor, without as yet a touch of cumulsiness."

A glimpse of the personal appearance of Sir Walter Scott is afforded in the following lines, from the rapid and vigorous sketch of the author in the American Cyclopædia: He "was tall and of vigorous frame, and in walking betrayed his lameness only by a slight sinking of the right limb. His head was long and cylindrical in shape, his complexion fair, and his eyes—surmounted by large bushy eyebrows—were small and grey. The expression of his countenance was somewhat heavy, but in conversation, or in moments of relaxation, it brightened up with great animation."

Prescott, the historian, in an essay on Scott, [1838], noted the opinion that, worldly sagacity or shrewdness was a prominent trait of expression in the face of Sir Walter Scott. "Indeed, his countenance," says this writer, "would seem to exhibit, ordinarily, much more of Dandie Dinmont's benevolent shrewdness than of the eye glancing from earth to heaven, which in fancy we assign to the poet, and which, in some moods, must have been his"

Irving's description should not be omitted, familiar though it be—for it is exceedingly fresh and animated:—"In a little while the lord of the castle himself made his appearance. I knew him at once, by the descriptions I had heard and read, and the likenesses that had been published of him. He was tall, and of a large and powerful frame. His dress was simple and almost rustic. An old green shooting coat, with a dog-whistle at the button-hole, brown linen pantaloons, stout shoes that tied at the ankle, and a white hat that had evidently seen service. He came limping up the gravel walk, aiding himself by a stout walking staff, but moving rapidly and with vigor. By his side jogged along a large iron grey stag-hound, of a most grave demeanor, who took no part in the clamor of the canine rabble, but seemed to consider himself