

six he attended a "dame" school; and from six till nine (when his father died and left the family destitute) he was in his father's school, learning the classics, reading an enormous quantity of English books, avoiding novels, and delighting in cumbrous theological and metaphysical treatises. At ten he was sent to the Charity School of Christ's Hospital, London, where he met Charles Lamb, who records his impression of the place and of Coleridge in one of his famous essays.<sup>1</sup> Coleridge seems to have remained in this school for seven or eight years without visiting his home,—a poor, neglected boy, whose comforts and entertainments were all within himself. Just as, when a little child, he used to wander over the fields with a stick in his hand, slashing the tops from weeds and thistles,



SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

and thinking himself to be the mighty champion of Christendom against the infidels, so now he would lie on the roof of the school, forgetting the play of his fellows and the roar of the London streets, watching the white clouds drifting over and following them in spirit into all sorts of romantic adventures. At nineteen this hopeless dreamer, who had read more books than an old professor, entered Cambridge as a charity student. He remained for nearly three years, then ran away because of a trifling debt and enlisted in the Dragoons, where he served several months before he was discovered and brought back to the university. He left in 1794 without taking his degree; and presently we find him with the youthful Southey,—a kindred spirit, who had been fired to wild enthusiasm by the French Revolution,—founding his famous Pantisocracy for the regeneration of human society. "The Fall of Robespierre," a poem composed by the two enthusiasts, is full of the new revolutionary spirit. The Pantisocracy, on the banks of the Susquehanna, was to be an ideal community, in which the citizens combined farming and literature; and work was to be limited to two hours each day. Moreover, each member of the community was to marry a good woman, and take her with him. The two poets obeyed the latter injunction first, marrying two sisters, and then found

<sup>1</sup> See "Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago," in *Essays of Elia*.

that they had no money to pay even their traveling expenses to the new Utopia.

During all the rest of his career a tragic weakness of will takes possession of Coleridge, making it impossible for him, with all his genius and learning, to hold himself steadily to any one work or purpose. He studied in Germany; worked as a private secretary, till the drudgery wore upon his free spirit; then he went to Rome and remained for two years, lost in study. Later he started *The Friend*, a paper devoted to truth and liberty; lectured on poetry and the fine arts to enraptured audiences in London, until his frequent failures to meet his engagements scattered his hearers; was offered an excellent position and a half interest (amounting to some £2000) in the *Morning Post* and *The Courier*, but declined it, saying "that I would not give up the country and the lazy reading of old folios for two thousand times two thousand pounds,—in short, that beyond £350 a year I considered money a real evil." His family, meanwhile, was almost entirely neglected; he lived apart, following his own way, and the wife and children were left in charge of his friend Southey. Needing money, he was on the point of becoming a Unitarian minister, when a small pension from two friends enabled him to live for a few years without regular employment.

A terrible shadow in Coleridge's life was the apparent cause of most of his dejection. In early life he suffered from neuralgia, and to ease the pain began to use opiates. The result on such a temperament was almost inevitable. He became a slave to the drug habit; his naturally weak will lost all its directing and sustaining force, until, after fifteen years of pain and struggle and despair, he gave up and put himself in charge of a physician, one Mr. Gillman, of Highgate. Carlyle, who visited him at this time, calls him "a king of men," but records that "he gave you the idea of a life that had been full of sufferings, a life heavy-laden, half-vanquished, still swimming painfully in seas of manifold physical and other bewilderment."

The shadow is dark indeed; but there are gleams of sunshine that occasionally break through the clouds. One of these is his association with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, in the Quantock hills, out of which came the famous *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. Another was his loyal devotion to poetry for its own sake. With the exception of his tragedy *Remorse*, which through Byron's influence was accepted at Drury Lane Theater, and for which he was paid



£400, he received almost nothing for his poetry. Indeed, he seems not to have desired it; for he says: "Poetry has been to me its own exceeding great reward; it has soothed my afflictions; it has multiplied and refined my enjoyments; it has endeared solitude, and it has given me the habit of wishing to discover the good and the beautiful in all that meets and surrounds me." One can better understand his exquisite verse after such a declaration. A third ray of sunlight came from the admiration of his contemporaries; for though he wrote comparatively little, he was by his talents and learning a leader among literary men, and his conversations were as eagerly listened to as were those of Dr. Johnson. Wordsworth says of him that, though other men of the age had done some wonderful things, Coleridge was the only wonderful man he had ever known. Of his lectures on literature a contemporary says: "His words seem to flow as from a person repeating with grace and energy some delightful poem." And of his conversation it is recorded: "Throughout a long-drawn summer's day would this man talk to you in low, equable but clear and musical tones, concerning things human and divine; marshalling all history, harmonizing all experiment, probing the depths of your consciousness, and revealing visions of glory and terror to the imagination."

The last bright ray of sunlight comes from Coleridge's own soul, from the gentle, kindly nature which made men love and respect him in spite of his weaknesses, and which caused Lamb to speak of him humorously as "an archangel a little damaged." The universal law of suffering seems to be that it refines and softens humanity; and Coleridge was no exception to the law. In his poetry we find a note of human sympathy, more tender and profound than can be found in Wordsworth or, indeed, in any other of the great English poets. Even in his later poems, when he has lost his first inspiration and something of the splendid imaginative power that makes his work equal to the best of Blake's, we find a soul tender, triumphant, quiet, "in the stillness of a great peace." He died in 1834, and was buried in Highgate Church. The last stanza of the boatman's song, in *Remorse*, serves better to express the world's judgment than any epitaph:

Hark! the cadence dies away  
On the quiet moon-lit sea;  
The boatmen rest their oars and say,  
*Miserere Domini!*

**Works of Coleridge.** The works of Coleridge naturally divide themselves into three classes, — the poetic, the critical, and the philosophical, corresponding to the early, the middle, and the later periods of his career. Of his poetry Stopford Brooke well says: "All that he did excellently might be bound up in twenty pages, but it should be bound in pure gold." His early poems show the influence of Gray and Blake, especially of the latter. When Coleridge begins his "Day Dream" with the line, "My eyes make pictures when they're shut," we recall instantly Blake's haunting *Songs of Innocence*. But there is this difference between the two poets, — in Blake we have only a dreamer; in Coleridge we have the rare combination of the dreamer and the profound scholar. The quality of this early poetry, with its strong suggestion of Blake, may be seen in such poems as "A Day Dream," "The Devil's Thoughts," "The Suicide's Argument," and "The Wanderings of Cain." His later poems, wherein we see his imagination bridled by thought and study, but still running very freely, may best be appreciated in "Kubla Khan," "Christabel," and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." It is difficult to criticise such poems; one can only read them and wonder at their melody, and at the vague suggestions which they conjure up in the mind. "Kubla Khan" is a fragment painting a gorgeous Oriental dream picture, such as one might see in an October sunset. The whole poem came to Coleridge one morning when he had fallen asleep over Purchas, and upon awakening he began to write hastily,

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.

He was interrupted after fifty-four lines were written, and he never finished the poem.

"Christabel" is also a fragment, which seems to have been planned as the story of a pure young girl who fell under the



spell of a sorcerer, in the shape of the woman Geraldine. It is full of a strange melody, and contains many passages of exquisite poetry; but it trembles with a strange, unknown horror, and so suggests the supernatural terrors of the popular hysterical novels, to which we have referred. On this account it is not wholesome reading; though one flies in the face of Swinburne and of other critics by venturing to suggest such a thing.

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is Coleridge's chief contribution to the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798, and is one of the world's masterpieces. Though it introduces the reader to a supernatural realm, with a phantom ship, a crew of dead men, the overhanging curse of the albatross, the polar spirit, and the magic breeze, it nevertheless manages to create a sense of absolute reality concerning these manifest absurdities. All the mechanisms of the poem, its meter, rime, and melody are perfect; and some of its descriptions of the lonely sea have never been equaled. Perhaps we should say suggestions, rather than descriptions; for Coleridge never describes things, but makes a suggestion, always brief and always exactly right, and our own imagination instantly supplies the details. It is useless to quote fragments; one must read the entire poem, if he reads nothing else of the romantic school of poetry.

Among Coleridge's shorter poems there is a wide variety, and each reader must be left largely to follow his own taste. The beginner will do well to read a few of the early poems, to which we have referred, and then try the "Ode to France," "Youth and Age," "Dejection," "Love Poems," "Fears in Solitude," "Religious Musings," "Work Without Hope," and the glorious "Hymn Before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni." One exquisite little poem from the Latin, "The Virgin's Cradle Hymn," and his version of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, show Coleridge's remarkable power as a translator. The latter is one of the best poetical translations in our literature.

Of Coleridge's prose works, the *Biographia Literaria, or Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817), his collected *Lectures on Shakespeare* (1849), and *Aids to Prose Works Reflection* (1825) are the most interesting from a literary view point. The first is an explanation and criticism of Wordsworth's theory of poetry, and contains more sound sense and illuminating ideas on the general subject of poetry than any other book in our language. The *Lectures*, as refreshing as a west wind in midsummer, are remarkable for their attempt to sweep away the arbitrary rules which for two centuries had stood in the way of literary criticism of Shakespeare, in order to study the works themselves. No finer analysis and appreciation of the master's genius has ever been written. In his philosophical work Coleridge introduced the idealistic philosophy of Germany into England. He set himself in line with Berkeley, and squarely against Bentham, Malthus, Mill, and all the materialistic tendencies which were and still are the bane of English philosophy. The *Aids to Reflection* is Coleridge's most profound work, but is more interesting to the student of religion and philosophy than to the readers of literature.

#### ROBERT SOUTHEY (1774-1843)

Closely associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge is Robert Southey; and the three, on account of their residence in the northern lake district, were referred to contemptuously as the "Lakers" by the Scottish magazine reviewers. Southey holds his place in this group more by personal association than by his literary gifts. He was born at Bristol, in 1774; studied at Westminster School, and at Oxford, where he found himself in perpetual conflict with the authorities on account of his independent views. He finally left the university and joined Coleridge in his scheme of a Pantisocracy. For more than fifty years he labored steadily at literature, refusing to



consider any other occupation. He considered himself seriously as one of the greatest writers of the day, and a reading of his ballads—which connected him at once with the romantic school—leads us to think that, had he written less, he might possibly have justified his own opinion of himself. Unfortunately he could not wait for inspiration, being obliged to support not only his own family but also, in large measure, that of his friend Coleridge.

Southey gradually surrounded himself with one of the most extensive libraries in England, and set himself to the task of writing something every working day. The results of his industry were one hundred and nine volumes, besides some hundred and fifty articles for the magazines, most of which are now utterly forgotten. His most ambitious



ROBERT SOUTHEY

poems are *Thalaba*, a tale of Arabian enchantment; *The Curse of Kehama*, a medley of Hindoo mythology; *Madoc*, a legend of a Welsh prince who discovered the western world; and *Roderick*, a tale of the last of the Goths. All these, and many more, although containing some excellent passages, are on the whole exaggerated and unreal, both in manner and in matter. Southey wrote far better prose than poetry, and his admirable *Life of Nelson* is still often read. Besides these are his *Lives of British Admirals*, his lives of Cowper and Wesley, and his histories of Brazil and of the Peninsular War.

Southey was made Poet Laureate in 1813, and was the first to raise that office from the low estate into which it had

fallen since the death of Dryden. The opening lines of *Thalaba*, beginning,

How beautiful is night!  
A dewy freshness fills the silent air,

are still sometimes quoted; and a few of his best known short poems, like "The Scholar," "Auld Cloots," "The Well of St. Keyne," "The Inchcape Rock," and "Lodore," will repay the curious reader. The beauty of Southey's character, his patience and helpfulness, make him a worthy associate of the two greater poets with whom he is generally named.

## WALTER SCOTT (1771-1832)

We have already called attention to two significant movements of the eighteenth century, which we must for a moment recall if we are to appreciate Scott, not simply as a delightful teller of tales, but as a tremendous force in modern literature. The first is the triumph of romantic poetry in Wordsworth and Coleridge; the second is the success of our first English novelists, and the popularization of literature by taking it from the control of a few patrons and critics and putting it into the hands of the people as one of the forces which mold our modern life. Scott is an epitome of both these movements. The poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge was read by a select few, but Scott's *Marmion* and his *Lady of the Lake* aroused a whole nation to enthusiasm, and for the first time romantic poetry became really popular. So also the novel had been content to paint men and women of the present, until the wonderful series of Waverley novels appeared, when suddenly, by the magic of this "Wizard of the North," all history seemed changed. The past, which had hitherto appeared as a dreary region of dead heroes, became alive again, and filled with a multitude of men and women who had the surprising charm of reality. It is of small consequence that Scott's poetry and prose are both faulty; that his poems are read



chiefly for the story, rather than for their poetic excellence; and that much of the evident crudity and barbarism of the Middle Ages is ignored or forgotten in Scott's writings. By their vigor, their freshness, their rapid action, and their breezy, out-of-door atmosphere, Scott's novels attracted thousands of readers who else had known nothing of the delights of literature. He is, therefore, the greatest known factor in establishing and in popularizing that romantic element in prose and poetry which has been for a hundred years the chief characteristic of our literature.

**Life.** Scott was born in Edinburgh, on August 15, 1771. On both his mother's and father's side he was descended from old Border families, distinguished more for their feuds and fighting than for their intellectual attainments. His father was a barrister, a just man, who often lost clients by advising them to be, first of all, honest in their lawsuits. His mother was a woman of character and education, strongly imaginative, a teller of tales which stirred young Walter's enthusiasm by revealing the past as a world of living heroes.

As a child, Scott was lame and delicate, and was therefore sent away from the city to be with his grandmother in the open country at Sandy Knowe, in Roxburghshire, near the Tweed. This grandmother was a perfect treasure-house of legends concerning the old Border feuds. From her wonderful tales Scott developed that intense love of Scottish history and tradition which characterizes all his work.

By the time he was eight years old, when he returned to Edinburgh, Scott's tastes were fixed for life. At the high school he was a fair scholar, but without enthusiasm, being more interested in Border stories than in the text-books. He remained at school only six or seven years, and then entered his father's office to study law, at the same time attending lectures at the university. He kept this up for some six years without developing any interest in his profession, not even when he passed his examinations and was admitted to the Bar, in 1792. After nineteen years of desultory work, in which he showed far more zeal in gathering Highland legends than in gaining clients, he had won two small legal offices which gave him enough income to support him comfortably. His home, meanwhile, was at Ashiestiel on the Tweed, where all his best poetry was written.

Scott's literary work began with the translation from the German of Bürger's romantic ballad of *Lenore* (1796) and of Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen* (1799); but there was romance enough in his own loved Highlands, and in 1802-1803 appeared three volumes of his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, which he had been collecting for many years. In 1805, when Scott was 34 years old, appeared his first original work, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. Its success was immediate, and when *Marmion* (1808) and *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) aroused Scotland and England to intense enthusiasm, and brought unexpected fame to the author, — without in the least spoiling his honest and lovable nature, — Scott gladly resolved to abandon the law, in which he had won scant success, and give himself wholly to literature. Unfortunately, however, in order to increase his earnings, he entered secretly into partnership with the firms of Constable and the brothers Ballantyne, as printer-publishers, — a sad mistake, indeed, and the cause of that tragedy which closed the life of Scotland's greatest writer.



WALTER SCOTT

The year 1811 is remarkable for two things in Scott's life. In this year he seems to have realized that, notwithstanding the success of his poems, he had not yet "found himself"; that he was not a poetic genius, like Burns; that in his first three poems he had practically exhausted his material, though he still continued to write verse; and that, if he was to keep his popularity, he must find some other work. The fact that, only a year later, Byron suddenly became the popular favorite, shows how correctly Scott had judged himself and the reading public, which was even more fickle than usual in this emotional age. In that same year, 1811, Scott bought the estate of Abbotsford, on the Tweed, with which place his name is forever associated. Here he began to spend large sums, and to dispense



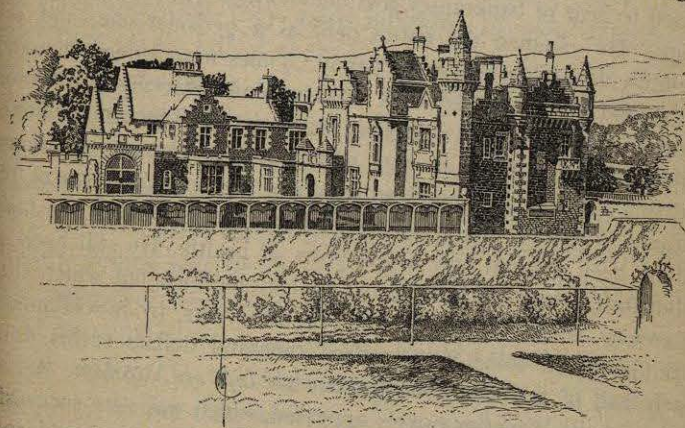
the generous hospitality of a Scotch laird, of which he had been dreaming for years. In 1820 he was made a baronet; and his new title of Sir Walter came nearer to turning his honest head than had all his literary success. His business partnership was kept secret, and during all the years when the Waverley novels were the most popular books in the world, their authorship remained unknown; for Scott deemed it beneath the dignity of his title to earn money by business or literature, and sought to give the impression that the enormous sums spent at Abbotsford in improving the estate and in entertaining lavishly were part of the dignity of the position and came from ancestral sources.

It was the success of Byron's *Childe Harold*, and the comparative failure of Scott's later poems, *Rokeby*, *The Bridal of Triermain*, and *The Lord of the Isles*, which led our author into the new field, where he was to be without a rival. Rummaging through a cabinet one day in search of some fishing tackle, Scott found the manuscript of a story which he had begun and laid aside nine years before. He read this old story eagerly, as if it had been another's work; finished it within three weeks, and published it without signing his name. The success of this first novel, *Waverley* (1814), was immediate and unexpected. Its great sales and the general chorus of praise for its unknown author were without precedent; and when *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Black Dwarf*, *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, and *The Heart of Midlothian* appeared within the next four years, England's delight and wonder knew no bounds. Not only at home, but also on the Continent, large numbers of these fresh and fascinating stories were sold as fast as they could be printed.

During the seventeen years which followed the appearance of *Waverley*, Scott wrote on an average nearly two novels per year, creating an unusual number of characters and illustrating many periods of Scotch, English, and French history, from the time of the Crusades to the fall of the Stuarts. In addition to these historical novels, he wrote *Tales of a Grandfather*, *Demonology and Witchcraft*, biographies of Dryden and of Swift, the *Life of Napoleon*, in nine volumes, and a large number of articles for the reviews and magazines. It was an extraordinary amount of literary work, but it was not quite so rapid and spontaneous as it seemed. He had been very diligent in looking up old records, and we must remember that, in nearly all his poems and novels, Scott was drawing upon a fund of legend, tradition, history, and poetry, which he had been

gathering for forty years, and which his memory enabled him to produce at will with almost the accuracy of an encyclopedia.

For the first six years Scott held himself to Scottish history, giving us in nine remarkable novels the whole of Scotland, its heroism, its superb faith and enthusiasm, and especially its clannish loyalty to its hereditary chiefs; giving us also all parties and characters, from Covenanters to Royalists, and from kings to beggars. After reading these nine volumes we know Scotland and Scotchmen as we can know them in no other way. In 1819 he turned abruptly from Scotland, and in *Ivanhoe*, the most popular of his works, showed what a mine of neglected wealth lay just beneath the surface of English



ABBOTSFORD

history. It is hard to realize now, as we read its rapid, melodramatic action, its vivid portrayal of Saxon and Norman character, and all its picturesque details, that it was written rapidly, at a time when the author was suffering from disease and could hardly repress an occasional groan from finding its way into the rapid dictation. It stands to-day as the best example of the author's own theory that the will of a man is enough to hold him steadily, against all obstacles, to the task of "doing what he has a mind to do." *Kenilworth*, *Nigel Peveril*, and *Woodstock*, all written in the next few years, show his grasp of the romantic side of English annals; *Count Robert* and *The Talisman* show his enthusiasm for the heroic side of the Crusaders' nature; and *Quentin Durward* and *Anne of Geierstein* suggest another mine of romance which he discovered in French history.



For twenty years Scott labored steadily at literature, with the double object of giving what was in him, and of earning large sums to support the lavish display which he deemed essential to a laird of Scotland. In 1826, while he was blithely at work on *Woodstock*, the crash came. Not even the vast earnings of all these popular novels could longer keep the wretched business of Ballantyne on its feet, and the firm failed, after years of mismanagement. Though a silent partner, Scott assumed full responsibility, and at fifty-five years of age, sick, suffering, and with all his best work behind him, he found himself facing a debt of over half a million dollars. The firm could easily have compromised with its creditors; but Scott refused to hear of bankruptcy laws under which he could have taken refuge. He assumed the entire debt as a personal one, and set resolutely to work to pay every penny. Times were indeed changed in England when, instead of a literary genius starving until some wealthy patron gave him a pension, this man, aided by his pen alone, could confidently begin to earn that enormous amount of money. And this is one of the unnoticed results of the popularization of literature. Without a doubt Scott would have accomplished the task, had he been granted only a few years of health. He still lived at Abbotsford, which he had offered to his creditors, but which they generously refused to accept; and in two years, by miscellaneous work, had paid some two hundred thousand dollars of his debt, nearly half of this sum coming from his *Life of Napoleon*. A new edition of the Waverley novels appeared, which was very successful financially, and Scott had every reason to hope that he would soon face the world owing no man a penny, when he suddenly broke under the strain. In 1830 occurred a stroke of paralysis from which he never fully recovered; though after a little time he was again at work, dictating with splendid patience and resolution. He writes in his diary at this time: "The blow is a stunning one, I suppose, for I scarcely feel it. It is singular, but it comes with as little surprise as if I had a remedy ready, yet God knows I am at sea in the dark, and the vessel leaky."

It is good to remember that governments are not always ungrateful, and to record that, when it became known that a voyage to Italy might improve Scott's health, the British government promptly placed a naval vessel at the disposal of a man who had led no armies to the slaughter, but had only given pleasure to multitudes of peaceable men and women by his stories. He visited Malta, Naples,

and Rome; but in his heart he longed for Scotland, and turned homeward after a few months of exile. The river Tweed, the Scotch hills, the trees of Abbotsford, the joyous clamor of his dogs, brought forth the first exclamation of delight which had passed Scott's lips since he sailed away. He died in September of the same year, 1832, and was buried with his ancestors in the old Dryburgh Abbey.

**Works of Scott.** Scott's work is of a kind which the critic gladly passes over, leaving each reader to his own joyous and uninstructed opinion. From a literary view point the works are faulty enough, if one is looking for faults; but it is well to remember that they were intended to give delight, and that they rarely fail of their object. When one has read the stirring *Marmion* or the more enduring *Lady of the Lake*, felt the heroism of the Crusaders in *The Talisman*, the picturesqueness of chivalry in *Ivanhoe*, the nobleness of soul of a Scotch peasant girl in *The Heart of Midlothian*, and the quality of Scotch faith in *Old Mortality*, then his own opinion of Scott's genius will be of more value than all the criticisms that have ever been written.

At the outset we must confess frankly that Scott's poetry is not artistic, in the highest sense, and that it lacks the deeply imaginative and suggestive qualities which make a poem the noblest and most enduring work of humanity. We read it now, not for its poetic excellence, but for its absorbing story interest. Even so, it serves an admirable purpose. *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*, which are often the first long poems read by the beginner in literature, almost invariably lead to a deeper interest in the subject; and many readers owe to these poems an introduction to the delights of poetry. They are an excellent beginning, therefore, for young readers, since they are almost certain to hold the attention, and to lead indirectly to an interest in other and better poems. Aside from this, Scott's poetry is marked by vigor and youthful abandon; its interest lies in its vivid pictures, its heroic characters, and especially in its

Scott's  
Poetry



rapid action and succession of adventures, which hold and delight us still, as they held and delighted the first wondering readers. And one finds here and there terse descriptions, or snatches of song and ballad, like the "Boat Song" and "Lochinvar," which are among the best known in our literature.

In his novels Scott plainly wrote too rapidly and too much. While a genius of the first magnitude, the definition of genius as "the infinite capacity for taking pains" hardly belongs to him. For details of life and history, for finely drawn characters, and for tracing the logical consequences of human action, he has usually no inclination. He sketches a character roughly, plunges him into the midst of stirring incidents, and the action of the story carries us on breathlessly to the end. So his stories are largely adventure stories, at the best; and it is this element of adventure and glorious action, rather than the study of character, which makes Scott a perennial favorite of the young. The same element of excitement is what causes mature readers to turn from Scott to better novelists, who have more power to delineate human character, and to create, or discover, a romantic interest in the incidents of everyday life rather than in stirring adventure.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding these limitations, it is well — especially in these days, when we hear that Scott is outgrown — to emphasize four noteworthy things that he accomplished.

**Scott's Work for Literature** (1) He created the historical novel<sup>2</sup>; and all novelists of the last century who draw upon history for their characters and events are followers of Scott and acknowledge his mastery.

(2) His novels are on a vast scale, covering a very wide range of action, and are concerned with public rather than

<sup>1</sup> See Scott's criticism of his own work, in comparison with Jane Austen's, p. 439.

<sup>2</sup> Scott's novels were not the first to have an historical basis. For thirty years preceding the appearance of *Waverley*, historical romances were popular; but it was due to Scott's genius that the historical novel became a permanent type of literature. See Cross, *The Development of the English Novel*.

with private interests. So, with the exception of *The Bride of Lammermoor*, the love story in his novels is generally pale and feeble; but the strife and passions of big parties are magnificently portrayed. A glance over even the titles of his novels shows how the heroic side of history for over six hundred years finds expression in his pages; and all the parties of these six centuries — Crusaders, Covenanters, Cavaliers, Roundheads, Papists, Jews, Gypsies, Rebels — start into life again, and fight or give a reason for the faith that is in them. No other novelist in England, and only Balzac in France, approaches Scott in the scope of his narratives.

(3) Scott was the first novelist in any language to make the scene an essential element in the action. He knew Scotland, and loved it; and there is hardly an event in any of his Scottish novels in which we do not breathe the very atmosphere of the place, and feel the presence of its moors and mountains. The place, moreover, is usually so well chosen and described that the action seems almost to be the result of natural environment. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this harmony between scene and incident is found in *Old Mortality*, where Morton approaches the cave of the old Covenanter, and where the spiritual terror inspired by the fanatic's struggle with imaginary fiends is paralleled by the physical terror of a gulf and a roaring flood spanned by a slippery tree trunk. A second illustration of the same harmony of scene and incident is found in the meeting of the arms and ideals of the East and West, when the two champions fight in the burning desert, and then eat bread together in the cool shade of the oasis, as described in the opening chapter of *The Talisman*. A third illustration is found in that fascinating love scene, where Ivanhoe lies wounded, raging at his helplessness, while the gentle Rebecca alternately hides and reveals her love as she describes the terrific assault on the castle, which goes on beneath her window. His thoughts are all on the fight; hers on the man she loves; and both are natural, and



both are exactly what we expect under the circumstances. These are but striking examples of the fact that, in all his work, Scott tries to preserve perfect harmony between the scene and the action.

(4) Scott's chief claim to greatness lies in the fact that he was the first novelist to recreate the past; that he changed our whole conception of history by making it to be, not a record of dry facts, but a stage on which living men and women played their parts. Carlyle's criticism is here most pertinent: "These historical novels have taught this truth . . . unknown to writers of history: that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state papers, controversies, and abstractions of men." Not only the pages of history, but all the hills and vales of his beloved Scotland are filled with living characters, — lords and ladies, soldiers, pirates, gypsies, preachers, schoolmasters, clansmen, bailiffs, dependents, — all Scotland is here before our eyes, in the reality of life itself. It is astonishing, with his large numbers of characters, that Scott never repeats himself. Naturally he is most at home in Scotland, and with humble people. Scott's own romantic interest in feudalism caused him to make his lords altogether too lordly; his aristocratic maidens are usually bloodless, conventional, exasperating creatures, who talk like books and pose like figures in an old tapestry. But when he describes characters like Jeanie Deans, in *The Heart of Midlothian*, and the old clansman, Evan Dhu, in *Waverley*, we know the very soul of Scotch womanhood and manhood.

Perhaps one thing more should be said, or rather repeated, of Scott's enduring work. He is always sane, wholesome, manly, inspiring. We know the essential nobility of human life better, and we are better men and women ourselves, because of what he has written.

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON (1788–1824)

There are two distinct sides to Byron and his poetry, one good, the other bad; and those who write about him generally describe one side or the other in superlatives. Thus one critic speaks of his "splendid and imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength"; another of his "gaudy charlatanry, blare of brass, and big bow-wowishness." As both critics are fundamentally right, we shall not here attempt to reconcile their differences, which arise from viewing one side of the man's nature and poetry to the exclusion of the other. Before his exile from England, in 1816, the general impression made by Byron is that of a man who leads an irregular life, poses as a romantic hero, makes himself out much worse than he really is, and takes delight in shocking not only the conventions but the ideals of English society. His poetry of this first period is generally, though not always, shallow and insincere in thought, and declamatory or bombastic in expression. After his exile, and his meeting with Shelley in Italy, we note a gradual improvement, due partly to Shelley's influence and partly to his own mature thought and experience. We have the impression now of a disillusioned man who recognizes his true character, and who, though cynical and pessimistic, is at least honest in his unhappy outlook on society. His poetry of this period is generally less shallow and rhetorical, and though he still parades his feelings in public, he often surprises us by being manly and sincere. Thus in the third canto of *Childe Harold*, written just after his exile, he says:

In my youth's summer I did sing of one,  
The wandering outlaw of his own dark mind;

and as we read on to the end of the splendid fourth canto — with its poetic feeling for nature, and its stirring rhythm that grips and holds the reader like martial music — we lay down the book with profound regret that this gifted man should