

## SCOTT'S FAMILIAR LETTERS.

WHEN the Life of Sir Walter Scott was written by his son-in-law, John Gibson Lockhart, not quite two generations ago, he inserted a number of Scott's own letters and a few from his correspondents. A great mass of letters on both sides, however, was withheld from publication, and, as now appears, with good judgment. As time passed on, a sensible curiosity was more and more directed to the manuscript stores at Abbotsford, still in the possession of a granddaughter of Lockhart and Sophia Scott. This lady has kindly afforded access to her treasures, which have been consulted with great profit by the students of our ballad literature. From them the present editor published a few years ago the whole of Sir Walter Scott's journal, from which Lockhart had given copious extracts; and now we have two handsome volumes of letters,<sup>1</sup> which may be supposed to complete, for the present at least, our knowledge of Scott's private life.

These pages give us a very valuable and a very charming addition to our information about Scott and his times. The latter were so stirring, and Scott's acquaintance with great people was so extensive, that he could hardly write the most familiar letter without unconsciously writing history at the same time; and his own nature was so full of life and love that the simplest domestic details are full of universal interest.

It is, however, quite apparent why most of them could not be published in 1837. Besides the fact that many of Scott's correspondents and other persons alluded to were still alive, there is an obvious freedom about much of the writing that in those days kept itself close in the sanctity of private correspondence, and would have shrunk from any species

<sup>1</sup> *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott*. Edited by DAVID DOUGLAS. In two volumes.

of publicity. In fact, the race and spirit of these letters, equal to the very liveliest of those in Lockhart's work, is really remarkable, bringing us into even closer contact with its subject than that very intimate and familiar book. This is in marked contrast to many supplementary correspondences, which, called out of their retirement by the success of some striking biography, are disappointing, because they show the subject in his duller, not his livelier moments. It is far otherwise with these. It might be hard to select any one passage more vivid and racy than some in Lockhart; but the staple strikes a constant reader of the biography as bringing Scott nearer to our hearts.

A good instance of what it would hardly have answered to give out in the lifetime of John and Charles Kemble is contained in this extract from a letter to Joanna Baillie:—

"I hear a rumor that Mrs. Siddons means to be solicited out on the stage again. Surely she is not such an absolute jackass: she might return with as much credit if she had been a year and a half in her winding-sheet. I should like, if it were possible, to anatomize Mrs. Siddons's intellect, that we might discover in what her unrivaled art consisted: she has not much sense, and still less sound taste, no reading but in her profession and with a view to the boards; and, on the whole, has always seemed to me a vain, foolish woman, spoiled (and no wonder) by unbounded adulation to a degree that deserved praise tasted faint on her palate. And yet, take her altogether, and where shall we see, I do not say her match, but anything within a hundred degrees of what she was in her zenith?" (Vol. ii. p. 42.)

Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1894.

Plain speaking enough, in contrast to the fashionable cult of the theatre, which holds that a "great actor" must be intelligent and well informed even when his performance defies all common sense.

Hesitation to publish letters to and from living correspondents is particularly marked in the case of Francis Jeffrey. It was not wholly respect for the living that made Lockhart so sparing in his notices of this well-known man. The bitterness of party was still very strong in Edinburgh, and the sarcastic Tory did not dare to say all he would like to of the equally sarcastic Whig. But these letters show us, what Macaulay's correspondence had already done, that in spite of politics, in spite even of the review of Marmion, Scott truly loved Jeffrey, and was loved by him in turn, and that the editor of the Edinburgh was eager to renew the old coöperation years after Scott had indignantly parted with the "blue and yellow." He writes:—

"If you would allow me to inscribe you on the list of our contributors, I should place you at once in the rank of the original founders of the work, who are settled with on a different footing, and invested with a certain control, where they think it necessary, over the proceedings of the editor. I know nobody whom I should like so well to have viceroy over me as you, and I am sure there is no one to whose advice I should be so happy to resort in any case of perplexity." (Vol. ii. p. 32.) The entire letter is well worth quoting.

Another passage relating to Jeffrey is of peculiar though not very flattering interest to Americans. It describes an interview with President Madison in 1814, when it seems strange that a subject of George III. — although on an expedition for wooing an American bride — should have been welcome to Washington. The passage is too long to extract, but one may quote from Scott's report of Jeffrey's description that President Madison was "an exceedingly mean looking little

man, who met him with three little ducking bows, and then extended a yellow withered hand to him like a duck's foot." Surely, of all the Europeans presented to Mr. Madison in his days of state at Washington, with the single exception of Thomas Moore, Francis Jeffrey was the last to venture on criticising him for being small in stature.

It may be remarked that Scott's Toryism, fierce as it seems in many of Lockhart's pages, assumes a milder air in the course of these volumes, especially by contrast with some of his correspondents. His friend Mr. Morritt, of Rokeby, for instance, was far from being an active politician; his whole taste ran in the direction of classical investigation, where in he almost made himself the forerunner of Schliemann in exploring the Troad. Yet he could bring himself to write thus of the gallant Lord Cochrane, afterwards Earl of Dundonald, whose conviction on a charge of conspiracy is now admitted to have been brought about by an unparalleled combination of private meanness and party bigotry:—

"We are pretty absurd in Westminster, for you will see that Lord Cochrane is again to be a senator, notwithstanding conviction, expulsion, and pillory. At least so the electors resolved on the day of nomination, and nobody appeared to oppose him, while Sir Francis Burdett proclaimed his wrongs and virtues to a mob. This worthy synod unanimously acquitted the noble lord of all sins, present, past, and future. Your Scotch aristocrats managed his forefather better at the bridge of Lauder, who I believe did not deserve a *tow* half as well." (Vol. i. p. 326.) This of what was beyond a doubt the most enlightened electorate in England, the constituency of Fox and Romilly.

Another copious correspondent of Sir Walter's, of whom we often crave to hear more in the Life, is Lockhart himself. To his son-in-law, the husband of his favorite daughter, Scott's relations were most interesting. He admired him

for his genius and his principles ; he respected him, perhaps beyond what he deserved, for his superior education, and never seems to be conscious, as he well might have been, that his own character was the more elevated of the two. But he could not help being conscious that his own temper was far more generous and sweeter ; that his knowledge of men and his appreciation of the varied excellences were a precious and useful possession, far beyond the pungent and repellent criticism of his somewhat moody and reserved son-in-law, who gauged everything by academic and literary standards. It is truly touching to see how he tried, by gentle and firm advice, to guide and control a spirit which he loved in spite of every fault, to restrain Lockhart from indulgence in that love of contests and triumphs of wit which were sure to leave a sting, and rarely brought away either honey or wax. That Lockhart responded to this kindly direction, and lost the sunshine from his life when his wife and her father died, these pages clearly reveal. One most painful story is recalled by them of a fatal duel arising out of a review incorrectly ascribed to Lockhart, which fairly makes us shudder to think that only seventy years ago a man of Sir Walter's benevolence could contemplate a duel, especially one arising from such a cause, as anything but an infamous crime. The incident referred to, which may be found in vol. ii. pp. 120, 121, occurred in 1821. Only seven years later, the Duke of Wellington, then Prime Minister, thought it right to "go out" with Lord Winchelsea, the most foolish of all his colleagues in the House of Peers, — a bold word ; shortly before, Scott himself was looking calmly forward to a duel with Gourgaud ; and in 1838 Macaulay found himself in precisely the same situation with Wallace.

We have no great increase of Sir Walter's correspondence with other members of his own family, unless it be his

eldest son. Of the second Sir Walter we know little more than we knew before, and probably there was little more to know. Handsome and athletic, a keen rider and sportsman, a good son, brother, and husband, attached to his profession and respected in it, one never hears of his attaining any species of distinction beyond what might have been looked for in a descendant of Wat of Harden or William of Deloraine. He was his mother's true child, as none of her other children seem to have been ; without one spark of romance, poetry, or literature in his nature. Yet to both of them Sir Walter's heart went out with a devoted and unchanged affection, instinct as he was with that undying homeliness which forms so essential an element in the singular checkerwork called the Scottish character, a character unappreciable, perhaps, by any other people — except the New Englanders.

There are some allusions in these letters to Scott's first love ; but it seems very strange that the mystery about her name and lineage should be kept up. It is pretty plain that she was Williamina, daughter of Sir John Stuart of Fettercairn, and his wife, Lady Jane Leslie ; she married Sir William Forbes, one of Sir Walter's most devoted and generous friends at the crash of his fortunes in 1825. It is sad to feel, as one must from the records of the journal, where Scott dwells on his interviews with Lady Jane Stuart, that pride of birth alone separated two persons who seem to have been made for each other.

The influence of this idea — the fact that Walter Scott's own family, though "sprung of Scotia's gentler blood," was still counted below the haughty ranks of her higher aristocracy, "high dames and mighty earls" — is not doubtfully shown in his most interesting correspondence with Lady Louisa Stuart and the Marchioness of Abercorn. Intimate, nay familiar, as many parts of these letters are, Scott seems to have been a little

afraid of these high-born ladies; and the feeling comes out still more plainly in his letters to his "chieftainess," Harriet, Duchess of Buccleuch, whom he indeed looked up to as personally, and not by pedigree or position, a superior being, to be adored rather than admired. It is perhaps not easy for us exactly to understand Sir Walter's regard for rank, which the Edinburgh lawyer and son of a lawyer felt and showed. It is easy to fall into such phrases as "snobbery" and "toadyism," and thereby to miss the entire temper of the age. A lieutenant is not snobbish for deferring to his colonel, nor is a captain a toady because he shows peculiar respect to an admiral; and the feeling in respectable and cultivated society in Edinburgh in Scott's youth and manhood set feudal in the same category as military or naval rank. We should not forget that it was about the time of Sir Walter Scott's birth that Harvard College ceased to enroll its members in a list according to the social rank of their parents. The Marquis of Abercorn, a peer in three kingdoms, was a great personage in 1818, as his descendant, the Duke of Abercorn, is now.\* But the good manners of the former time exacted in such a case a certain deference from persons in legal and literary life which the present etiquette would equally condemn as servile from one gentleman to another. Certain it is that in writing to Lady Abercorn, although the correspondence grows easier, Scott never passes one point of reserve; namely, he evades the great secret of his authorship of the *Waverley* novels, at a time when he was talking freely of it to a dozen others. He even gravely discusses the improbability of their being the work of A, B, and C; and to do this he has to sail rather near the wind, and, without absolutely denying that he wrote the novels, uses language almost incompatible with the fact of the authorship of them.

One would imagine that there was no

more doubt of Sir Walter Scott's being the author of *Old Mortality* and the rest than of *The Lady of the Lake*. Yet in reading these letters there are passages which would almost make one think that there was some basis for the old rumor, started at the time, that his brother Thomas, in Canada, had at least an important share in their creation. It would seem as if Scott had encouraged this idea for the purpose of putting people off the scent. He must have had a natural love for mystification, or he never would have taken the elaborate pains he did to set up some alien authorship or other, he cared little whose, for the *Bridal of Triermain* and *Harold the Dauntless*; and it may be that even in his private correspondence with those who were in the secret he deliberately chose to keep up the delusion for the purpose of keeping his hand in.

The letters to Lady Louisa Stuart are especially interesting, as this venerable lady, who lived to be ninety-four, dying in 1851, was one of the most distinguished links between our own time, that of Scott himself, and a very different age. She was the daughter of John, Earl of Bute, the notorious minister of George III., and granddaughter of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. She had been brought from her very childhood into the most intimate association with the nobility at a time when the cultivation of literature was considered at once their duty and their privilege. No letters can show a pleasanter combination of wit, refinement, and sympathetic good nature than hers. A long passage from one of them (vol. ii. pp. 18-22) had already appeared in *Lockhart's Life* (vol. iv. p. 176 of the original edition), almost the only instance wherein Mr. Douglas has reprinted matter already before the world.

There opens before us, as we read page after page of these volumes, abundant scope for quotation or comment, but we must forbear. It is enough that, fifty years after the death of a great and

good man, we are given new and absolutely authentic memorials of his inmost life, his ways of writing and living, his hopes, fears, passions, doubts, successes, failures. We are brought again face to face with the friend of our childhood, our youth, our manhood; that admired and cherished master who led us through every pictured path of chivalric and domestic emotion and sentiment with the same fascination that endeared him to Washington Irving and Edward Everett, to George Canning and Lord Byron; loved for his writings, loved for himself.

He lives again for us, as he does in every page of his own works, simple and penetrating as the sun or the rain, free from the fantasticalities of later poets and novelists, all sufficiently described by the attributes of his own mediæval hero, Douglas, "tendir and trew." And let an ample share of the same sweet encomium be given to the namesake of that stern champion, David Douglas, of Edinburgh, who has edited these volumes with an affection and fidelity to the subject worthy of his ancient name, his honored calling, and his glorious city.

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### THE HISTORICAL SPIRIT.

IN a recent acute but somewhat unscientific and unphilosophical work,<sup>1</sup> Rhode Island is picturesquely characterized as "the dumping-ground for the surplus intellectual activity of New England. The born agitator, the controversialist, the generally 'otherwise-minded,' — every type of thinker, whether crude and half crazy like Samuel Gorton, or only advanced like Roger Williams, — there found refuge. Thus, what was a good and most necessary element in the economy of nature and the process of human development was in excess in Rhode Island; and the natural result followed, — a disordered community." This view of the community may be taken as having reference to the seventeenth century exclusively, and even to the former half of that century. If the historical critic chose to pursue an inquiry into the characteristics of the community as it proceeded to develop its resources after it had escaped from the conditions of its first settlement, a good

contention could be maintained that this otherwise-mindedness tended toward a sturdy independence of thought and action; an assertion of individualism in social relations; a disposition not only to insist upon personal freedom, but to grant the same rights to others. A score of years ago, a Rhode Islander of large attainments in history said to the writer that no one could come into the State to live, from Massachusetts for instance, where he had been living for a time, without noticing how very little social compulsion there was; there was not even any diminution of respect for a man who did not go to church. It was supposed that he knew his own mind, and his neighbor indulged in no criticism of him for such lapse of good form.

It is partly because of this quality in Rhode Island life that a special interest attaches to the study which Miss Caroline Hazard has made of one Rhode Island family,<sup>2</sup> and especially of a single

<sup>1</sup> *Massachusetts, its Historians and its History. An Object Lesson.* By CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1893.

<sup>2</sup> *Thomas Hazard, Son of Robt, call'd Col-*

*lege Tom. A Study of Life in Narragansett in the XVIII<sup>th</sup> Century.* By his Grandson's Granddaughter, CAROLINE HAZARD. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. 1893.