

A MORNING VISIT TO SIR WALTER SCOTT.

BY MISS COSTELLO.

IN May, 1828, I was introduced by letter to Sir Walter Scott, through the means of a very old mutual friend, General Sir Alexander D—. As of course I was extremely anxious to avail myself of so good an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the Author of Waverley, I was careful not to leave home at the hours I thought it likely that he might call or send. However, as usually happens, the only time I did venture out proved the wrong moment, and on my return I found, to my inexpressible vexation, that, during my absence, the event had taken place for which I had so eagerly watched and waited. Sir Walter Scott called, "and I must be away!" How mortifying! I could scarcely retain my anger at my own folly, though I could not avoid going out, and my absence had been so short. "It is all over," exclaimed I, throwing myself into a seat,—“I am fated never to see him!”—My landlady, who was a character, and had been enjoying my impatience, at length informed me that he had left a note and a request to see me, at twelve o'clock the next morning, in Sussex Place, Regent's Park. Overjoyed I snatched the note: "are you quite sure?" asked I. "Oh yes, for he said it to me himself. I was determined to have a good look at him, so I opened the door myself and went to the carriage to take the note. He is a fine-looking man, and very good-humoured and friendly, and he gave me such a nice bow when he drove off." I saw that this visit, after all, had not been thrown away, but had made an epoch in the life of my hostess.

My brother and I looked upon the intervening hours as null and void; we felt inclined to wish that time and space might be annihilated, till the important twelve o'clock of the next day should place us at the summit of our happiness.

The day was brilliant, and our walk along the Regent's Park delightful; to both of us, who were strangers in our native land, and saw all the new world of this quarter for the first time, the scene was peculiarly attractive, and as we thought of *the goal*, we "seem'd a dauncing as we walked." We reached Mr. Lockhart's house, where our treasure was contained, and with much delighted trepidation were ushered into a parlour on the

ground floor: after a few minutes of breathless suspense the door opened; and the Author of Waverley entered the room. His frank and friendly greeting set us as much at our ease as circumstances would allow, and he began at once to converse familiarly and kindly: his voice was rather low, and his accent much stronger than I was prepared to hear. His lameness was perceptible to a painful degree, and his appearance expressed languor, and I thought indisposition.

As a miniature picture on an historical subject had been the means of our acquaintance, the conversation turned on painting in general: he disclaimed all knowledge of the art, though he confessed a great admiration for its productions, and took occasion to say several kind things on the manner in which I had executed the picture in question, and on some lines which I had written in explanation of its subject. I expressed a hope that he was about to produce some new work, to which he replied that one in a very different style from his ordinary writings would shortly appear. "It requires some explanation," said he, "for the work I allude to is a volume of sermons. They are in fact written by a friend of mine, a young clergyman of great merit, in whom I am much interested. He had been fagging himself to death to make some sermons, and when they were done he was terribly discontented with his performance, and came to me quite in despair to beg I would assist him. It was rather out of my way—though you must know," he added, looking archly at my brother, "in Scotland they teach us a little of everything—but as he was very earnest with me and I knew the necessity of the case, I promised to try what I could do. I was the more induced to this when he told me my doing so would ensure the sale of his MS. I accordingly read the sermons over with care, made additions, &c., &c. And the result is that he gets two hundred pounds for the work, and more if it reaches a second edition. My end is therefore quite answered, and I am rejoiced to have served one for whom I have so much esteem: this is the plain history of my sermons."

He related this anecdote in a playful man-

ner, through which benevolence and kind feeling shone conspicuously, and the occasional animation of his eyes gave great effect to all he uttered. I observed that as he spoke he bent his head rather down, and looked up now and then with an intelligence of expression which contradicted the heaviness of his somewhat massive features. His eyebrows, though light, were overhanging; his mouth, though not handsome, peculiarly pleasing; and his smile all gentleness. The extreme height of his forehead reminded me forcibly of a colossal bust of Goethe which I had seen in the studies of M. David at Paris*, and which was considered a very correct likeness. His hair was thin, straight, and grey; his figure was large, and he would have appeared even taller than he did but for his lameness, which prevented his standing quite erect; his limbs seemed strongly knit, and his hands large, of which latter circumstance he appeared aware when he held my hand in his, as he looked down and smiled good-humouredly to observe the contrast.

I regretted that he proposed leaving town so soon: he sighed deeply, and said "my visit to town has been on a melancholy occasion, the illness of a very dear little grand-child. It is a source of great anxiety to us all; for though very young, he is a most engaging and intelligent creature†.

He spoke to my brother with much animation of the West Indies and America, and listened with interest to his description of the beautiful caves of Bermuda; expressing the pleasure he felt in hearing of scenes connected with the poet Moore's early poems, many of which were written during his temporary stay in those islands. I spoke of Mr. Moore's personal kindness, and he joined in his praise with great warmth; "I do not know," said he, "a more kind-hearted and friendly being than Moore, and he is never so well pleased as when he can do a service to

another." He then adverted to the promised Life of Lord Byron, and pronounced his name in so strong a Scotch accent that we both thought he spoke of Burns—"poor Byrn!" he said with a sigh.

Of Mr. Bowles, the poet, of whom I had occasion to speak, he said, "I regret much not having seen more of him, for I hear from every one that he is a most amiable man; my short stay, I fear, will now prevent our meeting, but it would give me pleasure at all times."

As he kindly inquired my present pursuit, I named to him a work on the Poets of France, for which I was collecting materials, and with great earnestness he listened to what I said on the subject, recommending me various authors to consult. He appeared pleased with the design; and when I told him that my intention was to give translated specimens of all the French poets from the time of the Troubadours to the age of Louis XIV. he paid me some compliments, which were the more agreeable as they were so simply uttered, and seemed sincere. He talked of the beauty of the poems of Alain Chartier, the Duke of Orleans, and others too little known in England, and kindly wished success to the work.

When we rose to take leave he insisted on accompanying us to the hall door, which was close, but his lameness was so apparent that I was pained to see him exert himself so much. He laughed at my remonstrances, and said, "Oh, I assure you, I am still a tolerable walker; the time has been when I could walk to the top of Halidon Hill, without fatigue; but I can't do so now—I am not so strong as I used to be." He said the last words in rather a melancholy tone, and they were the last he addressed to us, except his cordial "good-bye," as he shook hands with us both in the most friendly manner.

We left the house impressed with feelings of reverence and regard, for all about him breathed the very spirit of goodness, simplicity, and warmth of heart. From that time our interview with the Author of Waverley has been an event in our lives to which we look back with mingled pleasure and regret.

* This young artist was, at the time I saw him, about to visit Edinburgh for the express purpose of obtaining the bust of Sir Walter Scott. I do not know if he succeeded.

† This child was the son of Mr. Lockhart, for whom he wrote his Tales of a Grandfather, and whose death deeply affected him.