

A VISIT TO THE HOME OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

BY MRS. P. L. COLLINS.

PROBABLY many of the young readers of ST. NICHOLAS, who are also readers of Sir Walter Scott's famous romances, would like to hear of a visit which I made a few years ago to the home of that great writer. As some of you may know, it is a fine and lordly mansion, surrounded by a beautiful country, and situated on a bank of the river Tweed, near Melrose Abbey, some thirty miles south-east of Edinburgh, Scotland.

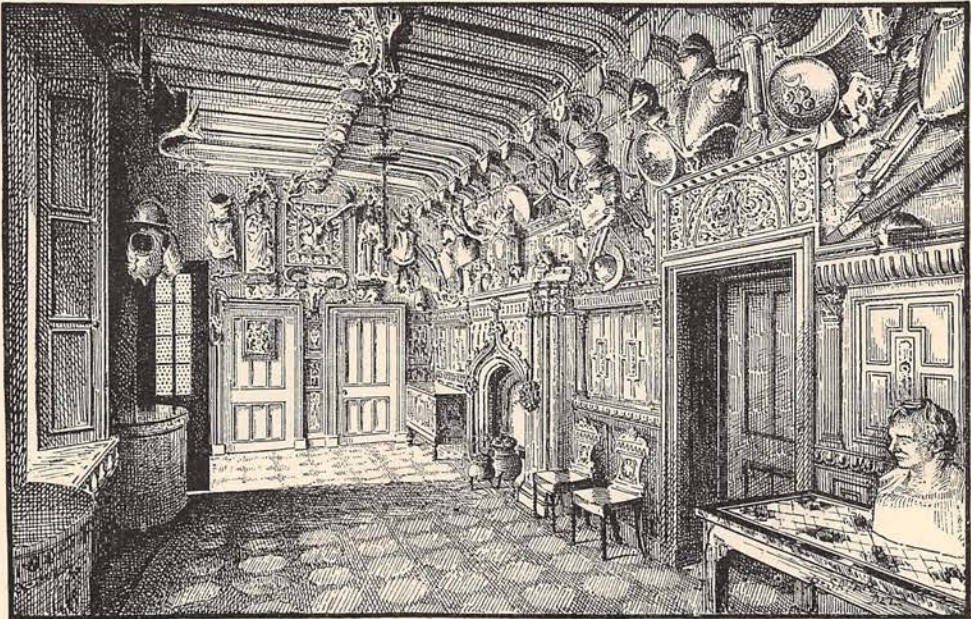
Leaving the cars at Melrose, from which it is three miles distant, I drove the remainder of the way in an open carriage. Hedges of hawthorn skirted the fields that sloped away as far as the eye could reach; flocks of sheep dotted them occasionally; then a bit of grove; and everywhere was the glory of a beautiful day, meet for a pilgrimage to such a place.

I entered by the east-front between a hedge-row and the ivy-covered wall. This view of the mansion is one of the prettiest. The many towers, fantastic gables and airy turrets are seen to excellent advantage. The entire estate was formerly a part of the property of the Abbots of Melrose, and the name was taken from the nearest ford on the Tweed. Sir Walter once said that he would make



ONE OF THE GATES OF ABBOTSFORD.

Abbotsford "a poem in stone and mortar," and right well did he succeed. It is as beautiful as a fairy palace and as grand as an old feudal castle,

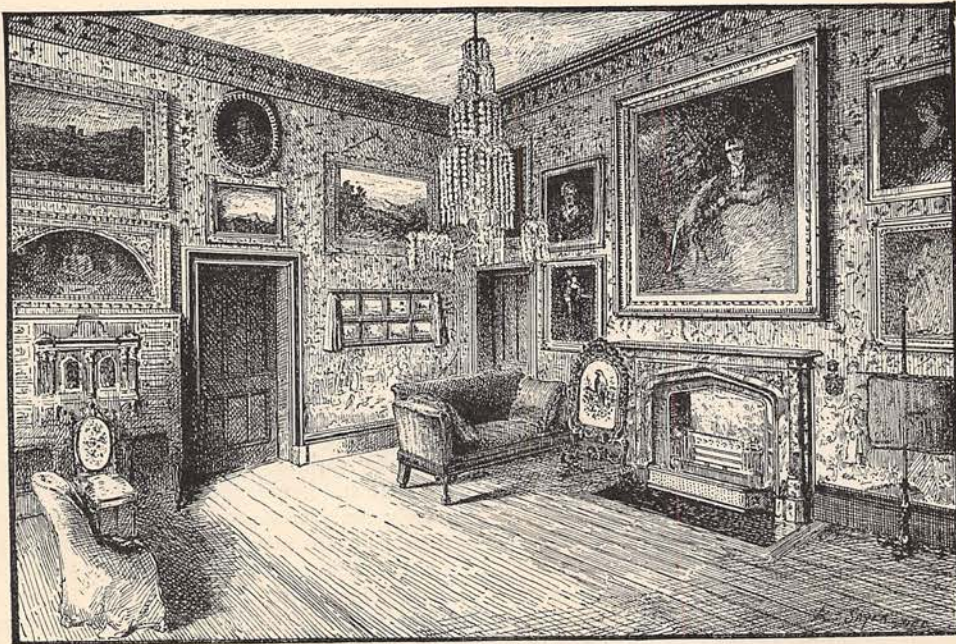


THE ENTRANCE-HALL.—"ALONG THE WALL ARE MANY SUITS OF OLD ARMOR."

and history and romance are literally woven into its walls; for they contain sculptured stones from the famous Tolbooth prison, the burgh of Selkirk, Linlithgow Castle and many other places, each embodying a story of its own.

I was compelled to wait some time for admittance as the place is now open to visitors only two days in the week, and on those days there is always a throng. I recorded my name in the visitors' book and waited patiently for the rare pleasure in store. But when my turn came, it was a great trial to be hurried by the guide through the different apart-

Seringapatam, when that Hindoo city was besieged and captured by the English in 1799. On one side, in a niche formed by a window, is a glass case containing the last suit of clothes worn by Sir Walter. Hanging on the wall at the extreme end near the left door are the keys of the old Tolbooth prison. There are also relics in this entrance-hall of James VI., and Claverhouse, the "Bonny Dundee" of Scottish prose and poetry. Only two windows light the hall and they are so obscured by coats of arms that the interior has been spoken of as being "as dark as the twelfth century." I leave my



THE DRAWING-ROOM AT ABBOTSFORD.

ments as he ran over at railroad speed the history of each.

The entrance hall is forty feet in length. Its lofty ceiling of oak, fashioned into a series of arches, is exquisitely carved; the walls which are also of oak, from Dunfermline Abbey, are richly decorated in the same manner. The floor is made of black and white marble from the Hebrides. Along the walls are many suits of old armor, the most noticeable being an English suit of the time of Henry V., and an Italian one of more recent date; above them are the coats of arms of the ancient border clans, conspicuous among these being the arms of Douglas and the Royal Lion of Scotland. There are also helmets, rapiers and claymores in great variety, as well as Polish lances, and a suit of chain mail taken from the corpse of one of the royal body-guard of Tippoo Sahib, ruler of

young friends who study history to decide how dark that is. Standing in one of the corners, but not visible in the picture, is an American ax that was much prized by Sir Walter as the gift of Washington Irving. Many of you have doubtless read Irving's description of his stay at Abbotsford. It is a fine tribute to the host who entertained him so royally. The farewell at the gate was "I will not say good-bye, but come again." Irving tells us that he was so impressed while there with the fact that Sir Walter, notwithstanding the miracles of work he did, quite concealed his work from his friends and always seemed to have an abundance of leisure. He contrived to appear ever at the command of his guests, ready to participate in every excursion and continually devising new plans for their enjoyment.

The drawing-room contains an admirable collection of portraits. Above the mantel is that of Sir Walter himself with one of his ever faithful



SIR WALTER SCOTT—COPY OF A SKETCH FROM LIFE.

dogs near him. On one side of this hangs the portrait of his mother, and on the other, that of Lady Scott, and near it, that of his warm friend the Duchess of Buccleugh. The oval frame above the door contains the portrait of Lady Hope-Scott, the great-granddaughter and only surviving descendant of Sir Walter, and the present owner of Abbotsford. Among the other portraits are those of the beautiful Lucy Walters, mother of the Duke of Monmouth, and the old ancestor, the stubborn great-grandfather of Sir Walter Scott, who would never let his beard be cut after the execution of Charles I. Beside these, there is a collection of views in water-colors, eight in number, by the celebrated English painter, Turner, presented by the artist himself. And not least in importance, a souvenir of that most unfortunate woman, Mary, Queen of Scots,—a head painted the day after her execution by one Amias Cawood; ghastly, repul-

sive, robbed of all its grace and loveliness. It is said to have been sent to Sir Walter by a Prussian nobleman in whose family it had been for more than two hundred years.

The floor of the room is bare, but is waxed and polished until it is almost as slippery as ice. Not even a rug dots the cold expanse, so that despite the artistic display upon the walls with their silken hangings, rare china and cabinets, and the rich furniture, there seems to American eyes to be something lacking; perhaps a home-like warmth which might be diffused could the great and kindly owner live again.

The study is a small room adjoining the library. A gallery reached by a hanging stair, and filled with books, runs around it. In the center stands Sir Walter's chair and desk just as he last left them. At this desk he wrote most of the Waverley Novels, and after his death were found in it, neatly arranged, a number of small articles which had belonged to his mother when he was a sick child and shared her room, and which he had been accustomed to seeing upon her table. They were placed so that his eyes could rest upon them while he worked, as if he would borrow inspiration from the holiest recollections of his childhood.

In the earlier part of the century, Scott's poetry was very popular, but he suddenly found himself eclipsed by a new favorite—Lord Byron. It was then that he began to write his novels, which so entirely captivated the English reading world, that fame and fortune followed. The public could scarcely await the sheets as they were hurried from his hands to the printer's press. His company was eagerly sought by the highest in the land, and even crowned heads were glad to do him honor. Yet amidst all this he retained a simplicity of nature that no adulation or flattery could spoil. It is related that, upon one of his numerous excursions into a remote part of the country in the search for old folk-lore, a humble farmer with whom he stopped, knowing his fame, expected to be dazzled by his grand air. But after seeing and talking with him, the peasant exclaimed delightedly: "He's a chiel like oursels!"

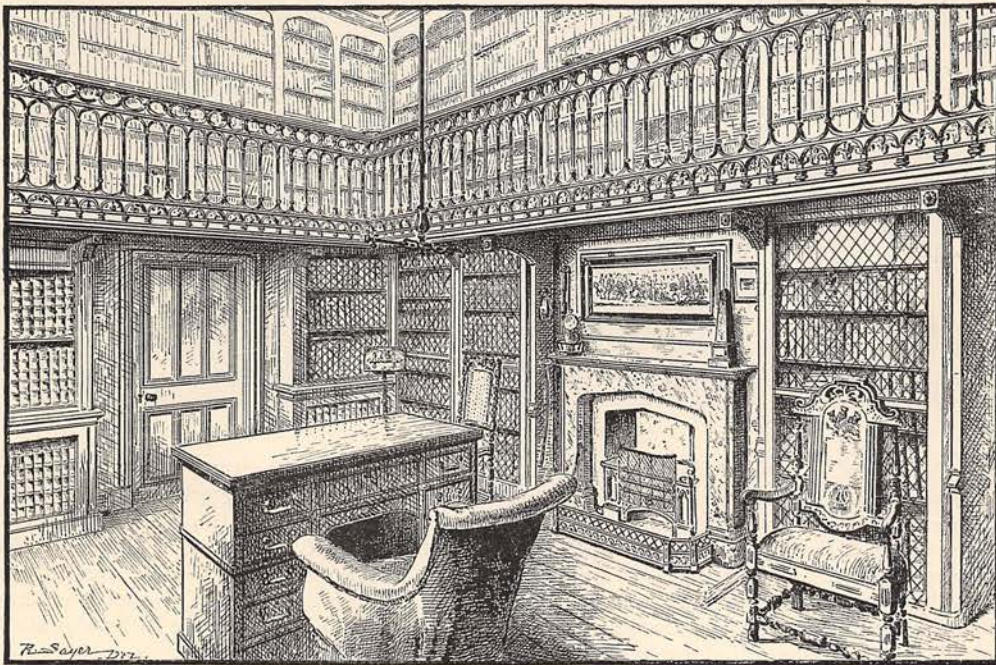
While making these rural tours, instead of taking notes for future use, Sir Walter would simply cut notches upon sticks as reminders, and he often filled not only his own pockets but those of his traveling companions with these notched bits of wood, so that it was once laughingly declared that on their return to Abbotsford "enough timber was discharged from our various integuments to build a ship." The genuineness, the sweetness, the healthy tone of Sir Walter's character, which never changed, I can not help thinking was attributable in a great measure to his extreme

fondness for out-door life. He was wont to say that he only taught his boys two things,—to ride and to shoot, leaving the rest to the mother and their tutors.

He invariably rose early, and often accomplished before breakfast an almost incredible amount of work. While he sat at his desk, one or more of his dogs always lay at his feet, and were apparently as glad as he was, when the morning task was over and they could accompany him on his ride or stroll. His horse never waited to be led out, but as soon as he was saddled and the stable-door opened, trotted around to be mounted. Once upon the death of a favorite dog, Sir Walter asked to be excused from an engagement to dine, as he had "lost a dear friend." In after years, when his fortunes suffered such cruel disasters, he declared that "Nimrod," one of his pets, was "too good for a poor man to keep."

The library is considered the handsomest of all the apartments. It is fifty feet in length by thirty in breadth, and has an immense bay-window that affords a charming glimpse of the Tweed. The

on the wall, is the portrait of Sir Walter's eldest son, who was colonel of the Fifteenth Hussars. He went out to Madras in 1839, and was a very popular and efficient officer; but he soon fell a victim to the fatal climate of India and died on the return voyage to England, whither he had been ordered on account of his health. Here, too, is the bust of Sir Walter at the age of forty-nine, by Chantrey. There are chairs exquisitely wrought, from the Borghese Palace at Rome, the gift of the Pope; a silver urn upon a stand of porphyry, from Lord Byron; and an ebony cabinet and set of chairs presented by King George IV. In a glass case, shielded from the touch of profane fingers are the purse of Rob Roy; the brooch of his wife; a notebook in green and gold, once the property of Napoleon I.; and a gold snuff-box, also given by King George IV. When this royal friend was Regent, he invited Scott to dine with him in London, addressing him familiarly as "Walter," and showering upon him evidences of his esteem; when he succeeded to the throne, one of the first acts of the kingly prerogative was to create him a baronet.



THE STUDY AT ABBOTSFORD, SHOWING SIR WALTER SCOTT'S DESK AND CHAIR.

ceiling is carved after designs from Melrose Abbey. There are twenty thousand volumes here and in the study. The book-cases were made under Sir Walter's direction by his own workmen. Some of them contain rare and curious old books and MSS. that are carefully guarded under lock and key. Here,

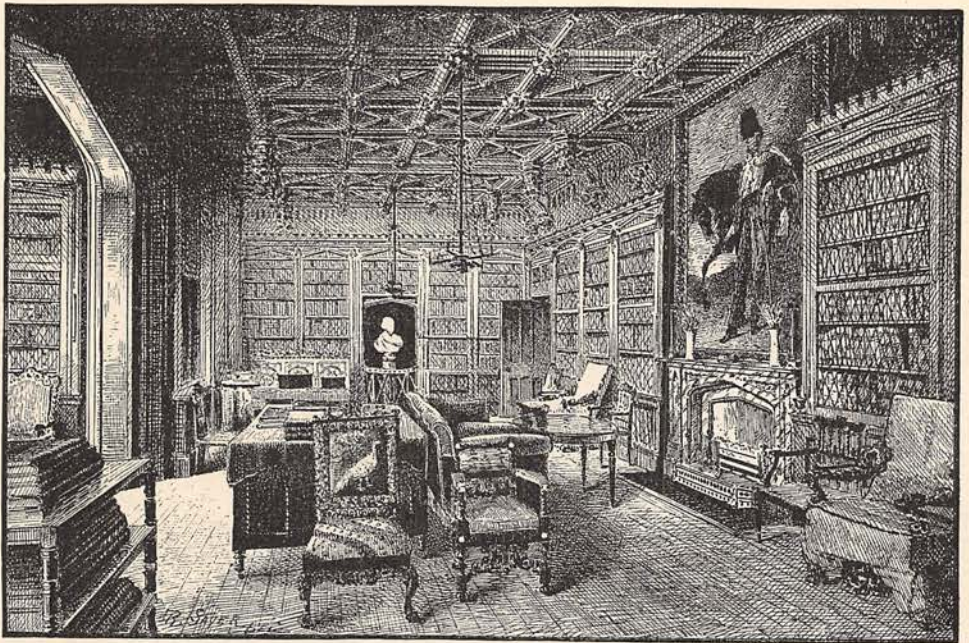
The fascinating history of the adventures of Rob Roy would tell us conclusively, even if Sir Walter himself had not frankly avowed it, that he had a rather trifling regard for his heroes proper, and "an unfortunate propensity for the dubious characters of borderers, buccanners, Highland robbers, and all

others of a Robin Hood description." I confess, for my own part, that I looked long and curiously upon the brooch that belonged to Rob Roy's wife. But as I leaned over the case, I was thinking more of the wife than of the dauntless outlaw; of the woman who reproached her husband upon his deathbed for exhibiting some signs of contrition for past misdeeds, exhorting him to die as he had lived, "like a man." Rob Roy's portrait hangs in the study. And yet another trace of him is found in the armory; his gun with the initials R. M. C. (Robert Macgregor Campbell) cut around the lock.

The armory contains a wonderful array of the weapons of various nations and ages, and disposed

his agony. This is the last of the "show-rooms"; visitors are not allowed elsewhere in the mansion.

As I went out, an almost oppressive silence brooded over the house and grounds, and I pondered upon the story of Sir Walter's struggle for this lordly, ideal home, and the painful buffetings of fortune which he endured afterward. I thought of the joy and beauty of his earlier years, of his triumph and his fame, and then of the sad day when he came back to Abbotsford from a foreign tour, which he had undertaken in the vain hope that it would restore his health. When, on that day, he caught sight first of the Eildon Hills, and soon after of the towers of Abbotsford, his emotion was pro-

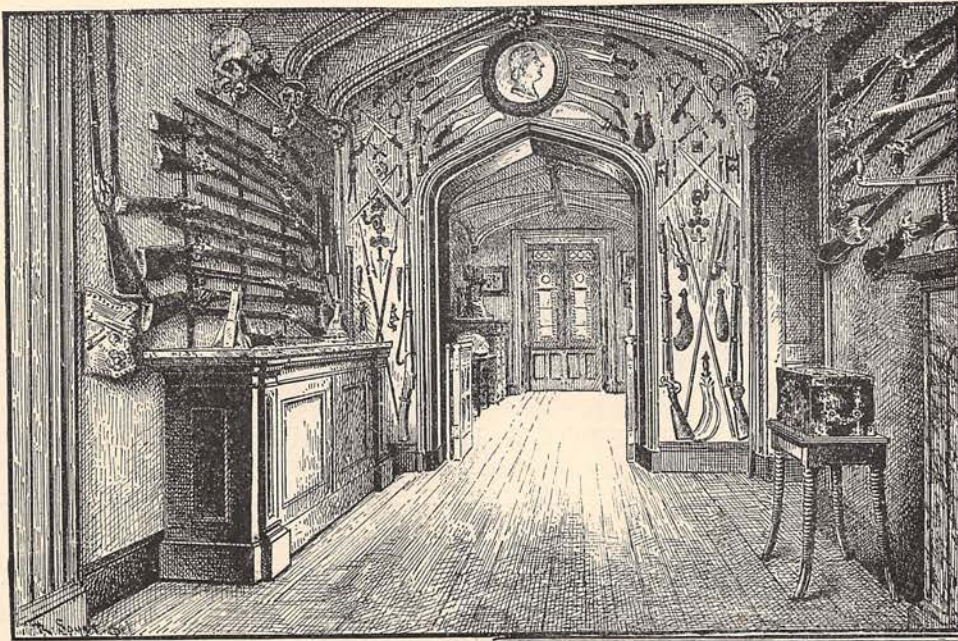


THE LIBRARY AT ABBOTSFORD.

among the spears, battle-axes, darts, arrows, etc., are many relics not of a warlike character, such as Oliver Cromwell's spurs and the hunting-bottle of "bonnie King James;" and the cross which you can see on the wall once belonged to the Queen of Scots. Bonaparte's pistols, said to have been found in his carriage at Waterloo, and a sword superbly mounted, bestowed upon Montrose by Charles I., also belong to this unique collection. I wish I might say no more here, except to mention the bulls' and stags' horns over the doorway, but there is a secret as dark as Blue Beard's. In a corner, almost, but not quite, hidden from view are some of the old Scottish instruments of torture called "thumbkins," and an iron crown which was so adjusted that the victim could not even cry out in

found. It was his last view of them from the outer world. How touching the greeting to his humble and cherished friend: "Ho, Willie Laidlaw! O man, how often I have thought of you!" And those other devoted followers,—the never forgotten dogs, gave their full share of the welcome home, "fawning upon him and licking his hands while he smiled or sobbed over them."

Not long afterward, and just before his death, he said to his son-in-law, "Lockhart, be a good man, my dear,—for when you come to lie here, nothing else will be of any avail." Surely, in those last hours, if the panorama of his own years passed in review before him, it included no scenes for which he need feel repentance. The record of a singularly pure child-life was continued



THE ARMORY AT ABBOTSFORD.

without a blemish. One of his early teachers tells us that it happened only once, while he had charge of him, that he thought it necessary to punish him, and even then the intention was quickly put to flight by the sobbing boy's clasping him about the neck and kissing him.

His literary taste and precocity were very remarkable. When only six years of age, a friend of the family, entering unceremoniously, found him reading the story of a shipwreck, in verse, to his mother. He was quivering with excitement, and his voice rose and fell in sympathy with the sentiment, till his hearers looked in wonder and almost in awe upon their little interpreter of the storm. Having finished, he tossed the book aside carelessly, and said quietly, "That is too melancholy; I had better read something more amusing." On another occasion, while still an occupant of the nursery, he heard a servant-girl begin the recital of a rather blood-curdling ghost-story to one of her companions, and he was very eager to listen to it. Knowing, however, that if he did so he would become frightened and sleepless, he tucked the bed-clothes about his ears, and heroically refused to hear the fascinating narrative.

But I do not wish you to think that, as a boy, Sir Walter was altogether perfect. He was probably much indulged, owing to his lameness and his delicate health; certainly, we never hear that his mother objected to his Shetland pony following him



DRYBURGH ABBEY—THE BURIAL-PLACE OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

into the house! And we have his own word that, when a starling that he had partly tamed was

killed by the old laird of Raeburn, he "flew at his throat like a wild cat, and could only be torn from him with difficulty."

Dryburgh Abbey, where Sir Walter's body is entombed, is four miles from Abbotsford. It was founded in the eleventh century, but was destroyed in the fourteenth by Edward II. It was restored by Robert I., and in the changes of centuries again

destroyed. St. Mary's Aisle, with its arched roof and clustering columns, is the most beautiful fragment now remaining. Within its shadow lie Sir Walter Scott, his wife, eldest son, and Lockhart, whom he loved so much, and who made such an admirable and complete chronicle of his life, and which should be read by every lover of the great Prince of Romancers.

A BALLOON STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

