

## New Books.

### MORE ABOUT SIR WALTER.\*

It may be said, speaking soberly and in no intentional paradox, that there can hardly be too many books on Scott. There are writers of equal or even greater greatness on whom there might be—there is at least one on whom there certainly are—far too many. When nothing (except facts for the most part perfectly irrelevant to vital cognisance) is known about a man's personality; when his work, if not small, is manageably large; when he is inexhaustible by any single book, and when his greatest value consists in his effect on the individual mind—perhaps it were better to leave him and that mind to the chance of contact without officious and probably vain interference. When a writer is not definitely of the first class in value and volume alike, writing about him at book-length tempts to verbiage and hair-splitting. But with Scott the case is different. In the first place, his career and personality are things extraordinarily interesting, and things about which we have a very great deal of the most trustworthy and various information—this information in its turn lending itself to manipulation and interpretation, by skilled hands, in a very large number of different ways. In the second place his work is extraordinarily voluminous, by no means uniform in kind, showing both merits and defects scattered or blended everywhere in a manner slightly bewildering to the untrained intelligence. Moreover, this work is in parts really difficult of access—much of the miscellaneous prose being still uncollected, and the actual collections (of twenty-eight and thirty volumes respectively) being not co-extensive. Much more, though accessible to everyone, is, as a matter of fact, very little known. Even the delightful introductions to the *Opus magnum*, in parts the very cream of Scott's prose work, are, marvellous as it may be, *terra incognita* to not a few intelligent and educated readers of the text of the novels; while of the aforesaid prose Miscellanies, it is safe to say that, putting the "Tales of a Grandfather" aside, very few people have read them. The same appears to be the case with the notes of the Poems and Novels. The present writer has known another (*not* himself) rebuked for that highest crime in the eyes of the uneasy sciolist, "undue allusiveness," because he made a reference, in writing of Scott himself, to a matter fully set forth in Scott's own pages. Nay, this sluggishness has extended even to Lockhart's biography, one of the most delightful as well as one of the best of books though it be. Therefore, once more, there can hardly be too many books about Scott; and though everybody should apologise for writing one on general principles of politeness and modesty, nobody need do so on any others. There is room for the best book about him; the worst may justify itself by sending somebody to himself.

The two new adventures before us take this general justification; but they exemplify and apply it in different ways. Mr. Lang's, indeed, did not need it at all; for the "special license," which he pleads in his preface, is known to almost every probable reader. It is permissible, according to a famous saying, for Dorians to speak Doric; it is at least equally permissible for Dorians to speak of Dorians. We other Englishmen may think that we know Scott, and love him, and honour him, pretty well. But to take words from one of the greatest and earliest passages of the serious kind of fiction that he ever wrote, we acknowledge the justice of the sentence, "You cannot be to them Vich Ian Vohr." Nobody but a Scotsman of letters can know what Scott is to Scotsmen of letters; nobody but a Borderer can know what Scott is to Borderers. And if this seem too high-flown to a pretty low-flown generation, there is the very methodical and matter-of-fact consideration that Mr. Lang has had access to all the Abbotsford archives, and has worked through the whole body of the "Magnum Opus" *pièces en main*. Of these various advantages it would require some singular dexterity in inexterity not to make good use; and it may be left to those who feel inclined to do so to charge Mr. Lang with want of dexterity in matters literary. The

\* "Sir Walter Scott." By Andrew Lang. 3s. 6d. (Hodder and Stoughton.)

"Sir Walter Scott." By G. Le Grys Norgate. 7s. 6d. net. (Methuen.)

only grumble that suggests itself is that, perhaps for reasons very easily comprehensible, he has not fully remembered his own words in his preface, and has written rather too little "as one who comes from Sir Walter's own countryside." Heaven forbid that the present writer should encourage "gush." But there are gushes and gushes. I am myself sometimes disposed to take Dr. Folliott's view of the Captain's abstinence from classical quotation in regard to this volume. I wish that Mr. Lang had gushed a little more. The facts we can get from many bodies, if not from anybody, even if we (for some inscrutable reason) refrain from going to the fountain-head. "But not the praise"—at least the praise which is worth the giving and the having. We have some of it here; but the *Lobgesang* of Scott can never be given excessively by worthy persons.

We have, however, other things well worth the having. It would not be easy to put better or more briefly the justification, not only of Scott's attitude in literature, politics, and almost everything, but the far vaster and more important attitude of one class of mind generally, than in the phrase, "rooted in and turning towards the Past, as the only explanation of the Present." The approximation of Julia Man-nering and Charlotte Carpenter (p. 30) is an interesting thing; and, curiously enough, it had never occurred to at least one life-long student of Scott and special devotee of "Guy Mannering." Undoubtedly there are some things, besides the personal descriptions, which, as one thinks over them, do tally. The Shepherd, on the celebrated occasion when Mrs. Scott was "Charlotte" to him, must have been to her very much in fact what the Dominie was to Julia in fiction; and if Julia had been a little more unsophisticated she might very well, in equally celebrated circumstances, have paralleled Mrs. Scott's observation to Jeffrey about the *Marmion* review, though, being what she was, it probably would have been less unconventional and more stinging. But I do not think Scott can have been more than very dimly conscious of the likeness; or, being what he was, he would not have accompanied the picture with the warning retrospect of Julia's mother. Dickens might do these things with Dora and Flora and fail to save himself; Thackeray might do them triumphantly with Beatrix Esmond and Beatrix de Bernstein. Scott would not have dared the dubious adventure. "Of love," says Mr. Lang himself most truly, "as of human life, he knew too much to speak"—at least of "the pity" of both.

Perhaps Mr. Lang is rather severe on Scott's "free-booting" with Mr. Coleridge's metre. After all, the thing was no invention of S. T. C.'s. It was there for anybody to find; and the ghost of Spenser might just as well have gone into the sulks as the living author of a poem which, from sheer laziness, he would not publish for seventeen years after it was written and flitting on the lips of men. Also, some of us would not "give up 'Marmion,' 'The Lady of the Lake,' 'Rokeby,' and the 'Lord of the Isles' for" any number of "Waverley novels," which would probably not have been written. It was the comparative idleness (how comparative, of course, one knows and grants) of those nine years that gave us the "Waverley Novels" which we have; and the Poems are thus sheer profit. You cannot, after all, expect to get more than a hundred volumes of Scott's quality, even out of Scott. *Dis aliter visum*, says Mr. Lang, as we are all so apt to say. Yet perhaps in that painful conflict of vision it is the gods who usually see the straighter and the farther.

Mr. Norgate's book may have had its special characteristics thrown up more sharply by its juxtaposition with Mr. Lang's; but they would be noticeable anyhow, and they are of very considerable interest. No offence is meant when it is said to be a remarkably, a curiously *unliterary* book about a great man of letters. This is not because Mr. Norgate (as Scott would not have at all disliked him to do) pays more attention to Scott in his non-literary than in his literary capacities. He has, indeed, a final chapter (not written by himself) on the interesting and almost virgin subject of "Scott as a Lawyer," where the opportunity may be regretfully said not to be taken. But otherwise and elsewhere it is to Scott the Novelist that he pays almost sole attention. He

says little and thinks little of the Poems—in fact, he seems to know nothing but the verse romances, and never mentions “Proud Maisie,” or (though he actually cites its context) the “Ballad of the Harlaw.” The miscellaneous Prose Works (the writer on Scott who shall do full justice to them has yet to write) he says still less of, though he has a proper appreciation of the “Tales of a Grandfather.” But on the novels he is extremely copious—sometimes (not a little to one’s surprise) giving full arguments of their contents as if he were introducing some unheard-of Russ or Scandinavian. He has his likes and dislikes among them, as he most certainly has a right to have. But though many people have said many things against “The Monastery,” and especially against the supernatural part in it, one catches a strange new-old note in the statement that the White Lady’s “tricks with sham graves and table shifting seem mere nonsense to a reader of to-day.” So, too, that “‘Ivanhoe’ is a rollicking good story, but it is little more,” whether it speaks Ivanhoe or not, certainly speaks Mr. Norgate.

But of criticism proper—of literary comparison and evaluation of the parts of the writer’s genius against the whole, of the whole and the parts against the work of others, and so forth—there is hardly anything at all. The most ambitious thing of the kind is, perhaps, a remark that Scott ought to have finished “Rob Roy” with Diana bending from her saddle, instead of, like Thackeray in “Esmond,” letting a happy ending do something to spoil a fine story. Ah, how careful we all ought to be lest offences come! The happy ending used to be the image hung up to the mast and incensed; now it is the image kicked overboard! Not to mention that the edition of “Esmond,” in which there is a happy ending with *Beatrice*, has not come under the present reviewer’s notice.

In saying this, no depreciation of Mr. Norgate is even insinuated. He means to do something; it is not a bad something, and he does it; would the same could be said of all of us!

He does not seem to think that his readers will go to Lockhart, as, probably, they will not; and he provides them not with a whet, but with a substitute. He has himself mastered a good deal of information outside of Lockhart, and arranges it not ill. He assumes, in these readers, the very minimum of that vague miscellaneous literary knowledge which used to be taken for granted. He tells them that Thomas the Rhymer was “the great soothsayer of Scottish tradition”; that the Ladies of Llangollen were “two Irish women of noble birth”; that they themselves (the readers) “probably know nothing of the Shetlands, except that they produce a breed of small horses.” Probably he is quite right; but it is difficult for people who were brought up under another dispensation to realise the existence of this. Realising it, one is not prepared to say that books like Mr. Norgate’s, which are excellent in tone and temper, profitable for instruction, and not unprofitable for delight, have no business to exist. At any rate, whether Mr. Norgate’s pieces of information are superfluous or not, they are, on the whole, very fairly trustworthy. But where did he get the odd idea that “Portobello” is “Fairport,” and “Musselburgh” “Musselcraig”? To begin with, we had thought the identification of the locality of the Halket-Head adventure with the cliffs between Arbroath and Lunan Bay, and of “Musselcraig” with Auchmithie, to be one of the least contentious or disputed things in Scott topography. And, secondly, where does Mr. Norgate get a Halket-Head in

the neighbourhood of Musselburgh? And, thirdly, how do you get to that place by *crossing* the Queen’s Ferry from Edinburgh?

Nevertheless, let us go back to our starting point and say, “Let these things—let everything about Scott that is written reverently and with fair knowledge—come in.” From knowledge of him and delight in him can come nothing but good. We ought, perhaps, to add that in Mr. Lang’s book there is an usually complete series of portraits, and in Mr. Norgate’s many vignettes of places and buildings, not to mention (what the modern critic loves as much as he hates allusions) a very full and explicit index.

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

### LAURU DONATUS.\*

We gather from this volume, which it would be irreverent to treat as anything but autobiographic, that our Poet Laureate’s life has not been so smooth and placid as most of his countrymen have supposed. We do not say it has been Byronic, but it has in a mild way, suited to one who ever kept the memory of an “umbrageous vicarage” (see Sec. xii., Stanza iv.) as his guiding star, striven for Byronism, and it has achieved just such a measure of doubt,



From a Painting by T. Faed.

Scott and his Friends.

(Reproduced from “Sir Walter Scott,” Literary Lives Series.)

turbulence, passion, and melancholy as may afterwards qualify a poet to be the envy of vicars and the admiration of mothers in their meeting-places.

It appears that Mr. Austin was born in the late Spring. The Power

“That bade the land appear, and bring  
From herb and leaf, both fruit and flower,  
Cattle that graze, and birds that sing,  
Ordained the sunshine and the shower;

That, by whatever is decreed,  
His Will and Word shall be obeyed  
From loftiest star to lowliest seed;—  
The worm and me He also made.

And when for nuptials of the Spring  
With Summer on the vestal thorn  
The bridal veil hung flowering,  
A cry was heard and I was born.”

So sings Mr. Austin. What afterwards happened to the worm is not stated. Mr. Austin’s humble contemporary disappears altogether from the story, not having been born, like Mr. Austin,

“To be by blood and long descent  
A member of a mighty State.”

For all we know it may still be writhing in the umbrageous Vicarage Garden, making casts while Mr. Austin makes

\* “The Door of Humility.” By Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate. 4s. 6d. net. (Macmillan and Co.)