

If these are the qualities demanded from a Mussulman, what tenor from the Opéra is worthy to be a convert to Islam?

But the audience, too, must exhibit perfect demeanor. They must be calm and collected. They must content themselves with murmuring '*Mach Allah!*' (Glory to God!) or '*Cheker!*' (It is sugar!) and they may also pass their hands delightedly across their stomachs as if digesting delicious dainties. The famous woman singer Azzé demanded strict silence from her audience, and if anyone talked or stirred he was immediately punished by a whack over the head with a stick. Our own French public might well take heed of these excellent examples.

As one reads the history of Mussulman art, one comes to see that the musical circles of the eighteenth century in Arabia were not very different from our own. The great composer Hakem, after having achieved distinction with *thakil*, which are slow and serious melodies, began to compose *hazadj*, light and frivolous little refrains. To his son who reproached him for making such use of his talent he replied: 'I have spent thirty years on *thakil*, and have barely got enough to live on. I have been singing *hazadj* for less than three years, and I have got more money than you have seen in your life.'

You can see that there is really nothing new under the sun.

## WALTER SCOTT: AN ITALIAN ESTIMATE

BY BENEDETTO CROCE

*[Signor Croce's book on Shakespeare, which appeared last year, aroused comment wherever English is spoken. In the present study, the distinguished Italian philosopher and writer on aesthetics transfers his attention to a lesser luminary of our literature.]*

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No writer of the first half of the nineteenth century, surveying the recent history of literature, could possibly have failed to place Walter Scott, the great Scottish poet and novelist, among the stars of first magnitude. His works spread triumphantly to all the countries of the world, giving birth to countless imitations everywhere. Few writers had so many disciples, and such significant ones, as did Walter Scott.

The eulogies and the enthusiasm did

not rise from the middle stratum of the reading public only: we may recall Goethe, who thought Scott 'a great genius without equal, who rightly produces such an extraordinary impression upon the readers of the world.' In his native country, it was customary to compare the great novelist with Shakespeare.

At present all this glory is a thing of the past. Critical judgment, especially since the appearance of Taine's notable pages, has showed itself fierce

and depreciative. In truth, it is difficult not to lose patience with those novels by the time you have read them. They are too long; and, besides the fatigue, our contemporary reader feels the artificiality of this art, the mechanical quality of its proceedings. As a result, the reader entertains a revengeful desire to speak about these novels in a flippant manner. If they were only two or three, how much more indulgence they might have met! One would have looked eagerly for their positive aspects, and the little gems of literary art that are found here and there among the endless pages would have been picked out religiously. However, we must arm ourselves with serenity; and in the first place we must consider the purpose that Scott and his art served in his own day. This office was nothing else than that of an industrial producer whose duty it was to supply the market amply with a commodity for which the demand was even greater than the necessity.

Do such necessities really exist — necessities of either stimulating or restraining the imaginative faculty of the mind? Is it not a sane craving of the imagination to demand images of virtue, prowess, generous sentiment? Is it not natural to be unwilling to waste one's time on a mere satisfaction of this craving and to demand simultaneously some instruction in historical events and customs? Walter Scott possessed a genius for industrial enterprise. He began by composing a few poems that were the first ones to satisfy the existing demand. In a few years, however, he discovered that these goods were going out of fashion; besides, a dangerous rival appeared in the field of poetry — Lord Byron. Thus he passed from poetry to prose. He surrounded his name with mystery, calling himself 'author of the Waverley

Novels,' and met with extraordinary success, which accompanied him to his last days.

When reading Scott's biographies, one feels as if he were reading those of some captain of industry. One admires and praises the penetrativeness of his inventive mind as well as his assiduity, which enabled him to produce two or three novels a year, not to mention the marvelous castle which he was able to build for himself with the enormous sums he gained, and his princely hospitality.

Almost nothing is said of his intimate life, of his experiences in love or religion, of his ideas; still less of his spiritual struggles and disappointments. The dramatic cumulative point of Scott's biographers is the failure of his fellow publisher and the enormous monetary loss he sustained. At this point Scott surmounts his misfortune, refuses to be disheartened, takes hold of his pen once more and assumes the obligation of paying all his creditors by his writings. He ruins his health to meet these obligations, but he does meet them in the end. It is not a biography belonging to the history of literature; it is a book in the spirit of *Self-Help* and the other works of Smiles and his followers.

In the second place, we must consider that the European demand for works of the kind Walter Scott could supply came as an outgrowth of the revived historic-moral-political sentiment which had come as a reaction against the rationalism of the eighteenth century and the Jacobinism of the French Revolution. Scott was not the author of this intellectual movement; but he most certainly was its discoverer and its ingenious exploiter.

We must not undervalue the importance and the spiritual effectiveness of this work of discovery. The easy 'Scottian' novel reached such strata

as were inaccessible to philosophers, historians, or even poets. Walter Scott's Scotland created many other Scotlands — that is to say, it generated innumerable evocations of the past and representations of national customs in all parts of Europe. Its influence was experienced by the professional historians themselves — fortunately enough — causing them to abandon their monotonous and colorless manner, but unfortunately also giving them an incentive to conceive history as a historical novel — as a brilliant frame devoid of its own importance.

But this last exaggeration has passed and the beneficial effects have stayed. It would be impossible to-day to characterize adequately the historical writings of the nineteenth century without taking into account the part that Walter Scott played in their evolution.

We can hardly speak of art, but rather of Sir Walter Scott's ability to contrive plots, which is more important for our purposes. This capacity should not be judged by the standards of our day, for such a comparison would make it appear poor and inexperienced, at best not much of a talent. Anyone who attempted Scott's methods of construction to-day would be laughed at; but we must compare them with the manner of his contemporary writers and judge them by the disposition of his contemporary readers, to do them full justice.

After all Goethe, who himself was poorly gifted in novel-writing, admired in Walter Scott chiefly his ability to compose his historical narratives. 'This entirely new art, discovered by him, gives enough food for thought; it is an art possessing laws all its own,' Goethe said of Scott. The long novels invariably had a good 'antiquarian' and 'tourist' background. They began with descriptions of landscapes and customs. The reader's interest was

then held in suspension by mysterious characters. Ethics agreeably gave place to comedy for a change. Persons possessed by a single idea or a single desire were depicted with a condescending smile; but invariably the other ones — the noble and valorous — were put in the first line and exposed for admiration.

Scott's art has to be finally considered — but not before the other things already mentioned; it could not be the chief criterion for judging his works, because first of all Scott himself did not give it principal consideration. Most certainly one feels a strong desire to repudiate Scott at a single stroke when reading such critics as, for instance, Gosse: 'England could defy all the literatures of the world to find among their ranks a genius of greater purity, a writer who has more brilliantly combined history and novel, and set marvelous narratives in a frame of everyday life.' But such criticism should not cause us to abandon our cool historical method. It is plainly manifest that Gosse himself feels uncertain in his affirmations. He finishes by saying that, if Europe has nothing more to do with Scott, his English fatherland will keep him all to itself and will always be exalted by his works, where the most perfect style of the national literature is to be found; that he has never written a single morbid, improper, or vulgar word — he is the perfect type of English gentleman.

Yes, of gentleman — but not of poet! Walter Scott's limited poetic genius promptly diffuses itself in his prosaic temperament. His most celebrated lines show the quality of his composition: —

The way was long, the wind was cold,  
The minstrel was infirm and old:  
His withered cheek and tresses gray  
Seemed to have known a better day;  
The harp, his sole remaining joy,  
Was carried by an orphan boy. . . .

Again, there is his description of Melrose Abbey: —

If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,  
Go visit it by the pale moonlight;  
For the gay beams of lightsome day  
Gild, but to flout, the ruins gray.  
Where the broken arches are blank in night,  
And each shafted oriel glimmers white;  
When the cold light's uncertain power  
Streams on the ruined central tower.  
Then go — but go alone the while —  
Then view St. David's ruined pile;  
And home returning, soothly swear,  
Was never scene so sad and fair! . . .

The art of his novels is an equally superficial one, as in *Ivanhoe*, which begins with a journey across a plain and continues to present to our eyes so-called interesting episodes and characters, but which, at the close of the book, leaves us with the feeling of a vacancy and perplexity. There is no epic sentiment in this novel, nor is there love, or religion, or any other feeling. The personages live by themselves, presenting an entertaining spectacle to our eyes, that is, to our imagination. There is no true development, and only a succession of attractive episodes is held out to us instead of an artistic idea.

At times it seems as if a live pulse were beginning to beat, as in the celebrated episode of the knight's passion for Rebecca, the Jewess. But this episode, as all the rest, is treated in a conventional manner; the conversation between the knight and the Jewish maiden is often absurd. We get the external surroundings of an inner drama — but the soul of the drama is missing. Best of all are those passages where we are given to feel the generous impulse in the knight's heart, and the episode of his death — not from an enemy's weapon, but from the overwhelming tension of his own passions.

The image of Rebecca also has something elevated and delicate, es-

pecially in the final scene of her visit to Lady Rowena. Rebecca is a Jewess who stays such out of loyalty to her race.

These glimpses of genuine drama are more abundant in other novels, as, for instance, in *Old Mortality*, where the rustic and licentious Sergeant Bothwell makes himself ridiculous by talking all the time about his descent from the Stuarts. When he dies in battle, Morton finds on his person a drawing of the Stuart genealogical tree, two letters written in a beautiful feminine handwriting and dated some twenty years before, a lock of hair, and some verses composed by Bothwell himself. Morton then reflects upon the destiny of that strange and unfortunate man who, amid all his misery and disgrace, kept thinking of the high summits whither his noble lineage ought to lead him; and who never forgot, even in his abjectness, his youthful years and his noble love.

There is poetry in Walter Scott's descriptions of travel and of unexpected encounters like those in the first chapters of *Rob Roy*. But all this is soon completely submerged in the outward intrigue.

Walter Scott's good-natured smile — as when he draws the portrait of the priest in St. Ronan's Well — is really the most frankly poetic trait the novelist possesses. Sometimes it illumines even his comic figures. I think that *The Heart of Midlothian* is his best novel just because it is impregnated with such good nature, not only in particular episodes but throughout the whole plot. It does not lack the usual complications; it presents, of course, a gang of bandits who in reality are not bandits but noblemen of refined sentiments, as well as other attractions. But you cannot help being conquered by the story of gentle Effie incarcerated on a false charge

of having murdered her own son; by the immaculate integrity and the valor of her sister Jeanie, who refuses to utter a lie in order to save her sister's life and later saves her by braving all danger and by obtaining her pardon. You could not help liking the rough and avaricious but sentimental and timidly enamored Laird Dumbiedikes, and admiring the perverse and generous Madge, suspicious and astute in her madness — a character described in a most realistic manner and yet encircled in a halo of piety.

The author shows us the pedantry and vain complacency of David Deans,

the father of the two sisters, even in his moments of acute sorrow; and yet the man appears noble and arouses sympathy.

Let us look for these outbursts of good will, humanity, and smiling simplicity among the voluminous works of Walter Scott. All the rest is either labor or erudition; but from these spots shines his modest poesy, which makes it possible for us to take leave in a sympathetic mood of a writer who delighted our grandparents and parents, and who, for this reason alone, would deserve a courteous reception on the part of the younger generations.

## THE GYPSY-TOWN OF SOFIA

BY FRANCESCO SAPORI

From *La Tribuna*, February 13  
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I HAVE seen Gypsies wander all over the wide world with the look of a beaten dog, with an avid, egoistic expression peculiar to those who do not know whether they will have anything to eat to-morrow. I have seen them always the same under different skies: filthy, ragged, like shepherds without a flock. They might count the stars as their own money; they always seemed related to, or part of the road, the dust, the rain, the mud and the ditches, but without a country, and with no limit to their wanderings. They were lords and servants at the same time. I have seen them, with painted faces, perform in an itinerant circus, beat their tambourines and swallow burning rope; or do tinkering about villages; repairing umbrellas in the suburbs; juggling and

begging in the streets of important cities; or grinding a hand organ and singing at the top of their voices songs which no one could understand, and which seemed the very voice of homeless poverty invoking death and oblivion. The Gypsy is on the road forever. He has no origin and no home; he is but a passing sorrow, a leaf off a tree, driven about by the wind, deprived of any importance. He does not count in our common life, this devotee of poverty and humility. One is almost tempted to think a Gypsy is not human.

But he is also a thief, a liar, an untrustworthy rascal. At times he looks like one who has escaped from the galleys and still sees handcuffs and armed guards with his wild, fright-