

The commemoration of Sir Hugh Heron's troopers, who

Have drunk the monks of St. Bothan's ale, &c." is of this description. The long account of Friar John, though not without merit, offends in the same manner; nor would we expect in a serious poem the author to speak of

"The wind that blows,
And warms itself against his nose."

Again there are passages which are lacking in poetic beauty, forming a decided contrast with the more finished portions of the poem. The most striking of these is found in the Abbess's explanation to De Wilton, (Canto V.), commencing with

"De Wilton and Lord Marmion woo'd, &c."

Though Scott imparts an air of freedom and naturalness to his distinguished characters, it is generally conceded that in this poem he was unfortunate in his choice of heroes.

Marmion himself is finely conceived, but the expedient of representing such a character, however wicked, as forging documents, is a fatal blemish to the poem. The following lines from Byron, though somewhat exaggerated, are not without truth:—

"Next view in state, proud prancing on his roan,
The golden-crested haughty Marmion,
Now forging scrolls, now foremost in the fight,
Not quite a felon, yet but half a knight,
The gibbet or the field prepared to grace;
A mighty mixture of the great and base."

The character of Constance is rather improbable not to say impossible. Her guilt is so revolting that it is inconceivable in connection with the weakness and delicacy of her person. It cannot be denied that in his female portraits, Scott lacks that vigor and especially that individuality which distinguishes the delineation of his heroes. His female characters possess either a too uniform and angelic sweetness or, as in the case of Constance, a baseness no less inhuman, and consequently fail to enlist our interest to the same degree as his male creations. The spirit of chivalry with its devotedness to the fair sex, had so penetrated every fibre of Scott's nature, it would seem that he could not conceive of any dame of high degree except in the light of almost absolute perfection.

On the other side his heroes—who are

all of an august pedigree, for upon commoners he never wastes the efforts of his brush—are drawn with such a distinctness of outline and individuality, and an elaborate minuteness of detail, that they impress themselves upon our imagination with an appearance of reality never to be effaced. Thus it came that his knights and warriors have become household types in all tongues, whereas his heroines are little remembered. Some critics have complained of the six introductory epistles as breaking the unity of the story, but the objection is altogether without weight. One might as well object to Byron for deserting Childe Harold to meditate on raptures of solitude. That there exists however a certain lack of unity in the general conception of the plot of Marmion nobody can deny. But it is not so much caused by the frequent interspersions on the part of the poet of extended lyrical effusions—which on the whole constitute one of its chief charms—but rather by the general want of cohesion of the parts, and especially of the many incidents in the main body of the story.

There are several historical inaccuracies in the poem, especially in Canto III. It will suffice to mention two of these:

The substitution of Lady Ford for her husband as a hostage of the Scottish Court, and the placing of nuns at Holy Island, in the house dedicated to St. Cuthbert, where women never resided.

Besides being inaccurate Scott was, at times, unjust, particularly in describing anything pertaining to Catholicism. In the words of an eminent critic: "His saints are madmen, his monks half fool and half beast, his lay Catholics scoundrels or pretended heretics." But in spite of these defeats it will generally be conceded that for richness and variety of incident and character, for elegance of diction and for force of colouring, in the representation of action and emotion, Marmion holds its own among the poetic productions of Scott as well as of his contemporaries; whereas the pathetic form and grandeur of the description of the battle of the Flodden surpasses anything that has been produced in the English language since Milton.

J. C. MORIARTY, '91.