

The interest excited by the anonymous appearance of the *Waverley Novels* was extraordinary, and efforts to elucidate the mystery were numerous. Under date October 31st, 1814, Miss Mitford writes to a friend:—

"Have you read Walter Scott's '*Waverley*'? I have ventured to say 'Walter Scott's,' though I hear he denies it, just as a young girl denies the imputation of a lover; but if there be any belief in internal evidence, it must be his. It is his by a thousand indications—by all the faults and all the beauties—by the unspeakable and uncollectable names—by the vile pedantry of French, Latin, Gaelic, and Italian—by the hanging the clever hero, and marrying the stupid one—by the praise (well deserved, certainly, for when had Scotland ever such a friend! but thrust in by the head and shoulders) of the late Lord Melville—by the sweet lyric poetry—by the perfect costume—by the excellent keeping of the picture—by the liveliness and gayety of the dialogues—and last, not least, by the entire and admirable individuality of every character in the book, high as well as low—the life and soul which animates them all with a distinct existence, and brings them before our eyes like the portraits of Fielding and Cervantes. Upon reading this sentence over (backward, by-the-way, with the view of finding where it began), I am struck with the manner in which I have contrived, without story-telling, to convey to you a higher idea of the work than I entertain myself. There is nothing that I would unsay, and yet you would infallibly think that I like it better than I really do; though I do like it very much indeed."

Two months later she says:—

"I am still firmly of opinion that Walter Scott had some share in '*Waverley*;' and I know not the evidence that should induce me to believe that Dugald Stewart had anything to do with it."

The extraordinary popularity of these *Novels* is strikingly attested in an incident she relates. Speaking of "Guy Mannering" she states:—

"Do you know that this book has brought astrology into some degree of repute again? An instance of this has actually occurred in my own knowledge. A young Oxfordshire lady, of a character exactly resembling Miss Austen's 'Harriet Smith,' with the same prettiness, the same good-humour, the same simplicity, and the same knack of falling into love, and out of love, and into love again, had a scheme of life erected about two months ago. The conjurer took care to tell her several things which had happened in her family, and were well known to all the neighborhood—many things too, he told her of lovers and offers—much of husbands and children; but as the last and most solemn warning, he told her to beware of fire in her thirtieth year. She heard it with horror—a horror that shocked and alarmed the whole family. It was some time before she could be prevailed upon to reveal the cause, and when discovered she took to her bed for a fortnight."

On almost every page there is something that we would like to extract; but we have only room for one more from a letter dated 1817:—

"Mr. Wordsworth not only exacts an entire relinquishment of all other tastes besides taste for his poetry but if an unlucky votary chance to say 'Of all your beautiful passages I most admire so-and-so,' he knocks him down by saying, 'Sir, I have a thousand passages more beautiful than that. Sir, you know nothing of the matter.' One's conscience may be pretty well absolved for not admiring this man: he admires himself enough for all the world put together."

"The best estimate I ever met with of Wordsworth's powers is in Coleridge's very out-of-the-way, but very amusing '*Biographia Literaria*.' It is in the highest degree flattering, but it admits that he may have faults, and Mr. Lamb, who knows them both well, says he is sure Mr. Wordsworth will never speak to Mr. Coleridge again. Have you met with the '*Biographia Literaria*?' It has, to be sure, rather more absurdities than ever were collected together in a printed book before; but there are passages written with sunbeams. The pleasantries throughout is as ungraceful as a dancing cow, and every page gives you reason to suspect that the author had forgotten the page that preceded it. I have lately heard a curious anecdote of Mr. Coleridge, which, at the risk—at the certainty—of spoiling it in the telling, I can not forbear sending you. He had for some time relinquished his English mode of intoxication by brandy and water for the Turkish fashion of intoxication by opium; but at length the earnest remonstrances of his friends, aided by his own sense of right, prevailed on him to attempt to conquer this destructive habit. He put himself under watch and ward; went to lodge at an apothecary's at Highgate, whom he cautioned to lock up his opiates; gave his money to a friend to keep; and desired his druggist not to trust him. For some days all went on well. Our poet was ready to hang himself; could not write, could not eat, could not—incredible as it may seem—could not talk. The stimulus was wanting, and the apothecary contented. Suddenly, however, he began to mend; he wrote, he read, he talked, he harangued; Coleridge was himself again! And the apothecary began to watch within doors and without. The next day the culprit was detected; for the next day came a second supply of laudanum from Murray's, well wrapped up in proof-sheets of the '*Quarterly Review*.'"

From these few extracts, taken almost at random from the first volume, the value and interest of the work may be judged. To the last year of her life, 1854, she continued thus to criticise all the books that appeared, and her letters will, doubtless, afford much useful material to future biographers and historians.

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