

THE SUCCESS OF IVANHOE.

If literary success could have either filled Scott's head or hardened his heart, we should have no such letters as those of December, 1819. Ivanhoe was received throughout England with a more clamorous delight than any of the *Scotch novels* had been. The volumes (three in number) were now, for the first time, of the post 8vo. form, with a finer paper than hitherto, the press-work much more elegant, and the price accordingly raised from eight shillings the volume to ten; yet the copies sold in this original shape were twelve thousand.

I ought to have mentioned sooner, that the original intention was to bring out Ivanhoe as the production of a new hand, and that, to assist this impression, the work was printed in a size and manner unlike the preceding ones; but Constable, when the day of publication approached, remonstrated against this experiment, and it was accordingly abandoned.

The reader has already been told that Scott dictated the greater part of this romance. The portion of MS. which is his own appears, however, not only as well and firmly executed as that of any of the Tales of My Landlord, but distinguished by having still fewer erasures and interlineations, and also by being in a smaller hand. The fragment is beautiful to look at—many pages together without one alteration. It is, I suppose, superfluous to add, that in no instance did Scott re-write his prose before sending it to the press. Whatever may have been the case with his poetry, the world uniformly received the *prima cura*, of the novelist.

As a work of art, Ivanhoe is perhaps the first of all Scott's efforts, whether in prose or in verse; nor have the strength and splendour of his imagination been displayed to higher advantage than in some of the scenes of this romance. But I believe that no reader who is capable of thoroughly comprehending the author's Scotch characters and Scotch dialogue will ever place even Ivanhoe, as a work of genius, on the same level with Waverley or the Heart of Mid-Lothian.

There is, to me, something so remarkably characteristic of Scott's mind and manner in a particular passage of the Introduction, which he penned ten years afterwards for this work, that I must be pardoned for extracting it here. He says:—"The character of the fair Jewess found so much favour in the eyes of some fair readers, that the writer was censured, because, when arranging the fates of the characters of the drama, he had not assigned the hand of Wilfred to Rebecca, rather than the less interesting Rowena. But not to mention that the prejudices of the age rendered such an union almost impossible, the author may, in passing, observe, that he thinks a character of a highly virtuous and lofty stamp, is degraded rather than exalted by an attempt to reward virtue with temporal prosperity. Such is not the recompense which Providence has deemed worthy of suffering merit; and it is a dangerous and fatal doctrine to teach young persons, the most common readers of romance, that rectitude of conduct and of principle are either naturally allied with, or adequately rewarded by, the gratification of our passions, or attainment of our wishes. In a word, if a virtuous and self-denied character is dismissed with temporal wealth, greatness, rank, or the indulgence of such a rashly formed or ill assorted passion as that of Rebecca for Ivanhoe, the reader will be apt to say, verily Virtue has had its reward. But a glance on the great picture of life will show that the duties of self-denial, and the sacrifice of passion to principle, are seldom thus remunerated; and that the internal consciousness of their high-minded discharge of duty, produces on their own reflections a more adequate recompense, in the form of that peace which the world cannot give or take away."

The introduction of the charming Jewess and her father originated, I find, in a conversation that Scott held with his friend Skene during the severest season of his bodily sufferings in the early part of this year. "Mr. Skene," says that gentleman's wife, "sitting by his bedside, and trying to amuse him as well as he could in the intervals of pain, happened to get on the subject of the Jews, as he had observed them when he spent some time in Germany

in his youth. Their situation had naturally made a strong impression; for in those days they retained their own dress and manners entire, and were treated with considerable austerity by their Christian neighbours, being still locked up at night in their own quarter by great gates; and Mr. Skene, partly in seriousness, but partly from the mere wish to turn his mind at the moment upon something that might occupy and divert it, suggested that a group of Jews would be an interesting feature if he could contrive to bring them into his next novel." Upon the appearance of Ivanhoe, he reminded Mr. Skene of this conversation, and said, "You will find this book owes not a little to your German reminiscences." Mr. Skene adds: "Dining with us one day, not long before Ivanhoe was begun, something that was mentioned led him to describe the sudden death of an advocate of his acquaintance, a Mr. Elphinstone, which occurred in the *Outer-house* soon after he was called to the bar. It was, he said, no wonder, that he had left a vivid impression on his mind, for it was the first sudden death he ever witnessed; and he now related it so as to make us all feel as if we had the scene passing before our eyes. In the death of the Templar in Ivanhoe, I recognised the very picture—I believe I may safely say the very words."*

By the way, before Ivanhoe made its appearance, I had myself been formally admitted to the author's secret; but had he favoured me with no such confidence, it would have been impossible for me to doubt that I had been present some months before at the conversation which suggested, and indeed supplied all the materials of, one of its most amusing chapters. I allude to that in which our Saxon terms for animals in the field, and our Norman equivalents for them as they appear on the table, and so on, are explained and commented on. All this Scott owed to the after-dinner talk one day in Castle-street, of his old friend Mr. William Clerk, who, among other elegant pursuits, has cultivated the science of philology very deeply.

I cannot conclude this chapter without observing that the publication of Ivanhoe marks the most brilliant epoch in Scott's history as the literary favourite of his contemporaries. With the novel which he next put forth, the immediate sale of these works began gradually to decline; and though even when that had reached its lowest declension, it was still far above the most ambitious dreams of any other novelist, yet the publishers were afraid the announcement of any thing like a falling-off might cast a damp over the spirits of the author. He was allowed to remain, for several years, under the impression that whatever novel he threw off commanded at once the old triumphant sale of ten or twelve thousand, and was afterwards, when included in the collective edition, to be circulated in that shape also as widely as Waverley or Ivanhoe. In my opinion, it would have been very unwise in the book-sellers to give Scott any unfavourable tidings upon such subjects after the commencement of the malady which proved fatal to him, for that from the first shook his mind; but I think they took a false measure of the man when they hesitated to tell him exactly how the matter stood, throughout 1820 and the three or four following years, when his intellect was as vigorous as it ever had been, and his heart as courageous; and I regret their scruples (among other reasons), because the years now mentioned were the most costly ones in his life; and for every twelvemonth in which any man allows himself, or is encouraged by others, to proceed in a course of unwise expenditure, it becomes proportionably more difficult, as well as painful for him to pull up, when the mistake is at length detected or recognised.—*Lockhart's Life of Sir Walter Scott.*

* See Waverley Novels, vol. xvii p. 379.

WOMAN.—To a young man whose feelings are fresh and yet unblasted by worldly experience, there is a charm even in the most unimpassioned intercourse with the other sex—Woman! To him how vast a charm is comprised in the narrow compass of a word. In this single abstraction, unconnected it may be with any individual reality, are united all his purest dreams of happiness, all his brightest conceptions of imaginary beauty—with it no thought of grossness or sensuality comes to contaminate his fancy or heart.

MEMORY.

BY MRS. CRAWFORD.

Ah! what is life? a little bloom;
Sweet looks and converse sweet beguile;
Anon, the winding sheet and tomb
Are all that's left of bloom and smile.
About my heart green memories throng,
Of joys that whilom tarried there;
Poor heart! thou could'st not keep them long,
As "winged dreams" they winged were.

As one who, when the sun goes down,
Still lingers on the rosy west,
Shaping the shady clouds, to crown
Some vision on the dreamer's breast:
So I, in mem'ry's sunset sky,
Do shape and fashion things as bright;
And build me bowers, that seem to lie
Beyond the reach of woe and night.
Metropolitan for October.

THOUGHTS ON COMMONPLACE SUBJECTS.

SOIREES.

We are friends to soirees. There are a prodigious improvement upon public dinners, though not as yet capable of superseding these assemblages. Perhaps this sheet goes into the hands of thousands of people in England who do not rightly comprehend what we mean by soiree. Soiree (pronounced swarrey) is a French word signifying evening party. Social evening meetings among private persons have been for a number of years known in this country by this suitable foreign appellation, but lately the term has been applied to assemblages of a large or public nature, in which a desire for rational amusement, the acquisition of some kind of interesting intelligence, or the inculcation and exchange of moral sentiment, have formed the object of meeting. We do not know how far these public soirees have come into fashion in the large English towns, but we know that for the last year or two they have been pretty frequent, and become exceedingly popular, in the principal towns in Scotland. The credit of originating them, and bringing them into general appreciation, rests, we believe, in a great measure with the Scottish dissenters, who are generally disposed to encourage the great object of moral improvement which the temperance societies have in view—at least, they have come prominently forward on all occasions to promote the cause of abstinence from intoxicating fluids. Soirees are, in our opinion, the very kind of thing which is calculated to extirpate drunkenness; for in taking away one kind of gratification—the base gratification of drinking—they give another, which is of an innocent and improving quality; and this is an important point in the cause of social advancement.

There is one feature in the character of the soiree entertainment, which is eminently deserving of notice. The party, which may consist of several hundreds of persons, is composed of both sexes. The humanising influence of woman is present. There is the respectable tradesman with his wife and daughters; there is the young mechanic or shopkeeper with his sweetheart, she whom he delighted to honour; there are the young and old; and there are also the different ranks of persons—clergymen, masters, and servants, all met in the "bond of peace" and harmony of feeling. The refreshments consist of tea, coffee, and some light affair of confectionary or fruit, with a due supply of lemonade or other liquid equally simple, the whole causing an expense of not more than a shilling a head. With these trifles for physical solacement, the company, who are quite lively and chatty with each other, are ever and anon entertained with a speech on some subject of interest; the amusement being varied with pieces of vocal music executed by a few of the best singers in the company. In short, all is as it should be. Every one goes home satisfied with what he has heard and seen. There has been no excess; and several hours have been agreeably and profitably spent in what is felt to be real enjoyment.