

his secret is very discreetly kept, and most felicitously revealed. If we were to scrutinize the fable with malicious severity we might also remark that Malcolm Græme has too insignificant a part assigned to him, considering the favor in which he is held both by Ellen and the author; and that in bringing out the shaded and imperfect character of Roderick Dhu as a contrast to the purer virtue of his rival, Mr. Scott seems to have fallen into the common error of making him more interesting than him whose virtues he was intended to set off, and converted the villain of the piece in some measure into its hero. There are several improbabilities, too, in the story. Allowing that the King of Scotland might have twice disappeared for several days, without exciting any alarm in his court, it is certainly rather extraordinary that neither the Lady Margaret nor old Allan-bane should have recognized his person, and, almost as wonderful, that he should have found any difficulty in discovering the family of his entertainers. There is something rather awkward, too, in the sort of blunder or misunderstanding which gives occasion to Sir Roderick's gathering, and all its consequences; nor can any machinery be conceived more clumsy for effecting the deliverance of a distressed hero than the introduction of a mad woman, who, without knowing or caring about the wanderer, warns him *by a song*. Though great pains have evidently been taken with Brian the Hermit, we think his whole character a failure and mere deformity, hurting the interest of the story by its improbability, and rather heavy and disagreeable than sublime or terrible in its details. The quarrel between Malcolm Græme and Roderick is also ungraceful and offensive.

II. Scott was early a drinker at the fountain of German poetry, but his robust and manly character of mind, however, and his strong nationalism, with the innate disposition of his mind to live in the past rather than in the future, saved him from the puerilities or the extravagances into which the imitation of German writers had led others. Having found the same qualities that charmed him in his foreign favourites in the popular ballad poetry, he soon gave himself up exclusively to the more congenial inspiration of that native minstrelsy. His poems are all lays or romances of chivalry, but infinitely finer than any that had before been written. With all their irregularity and carelessness, that element of life in all writing which comes of the excited feeling and earnest belief of the writer exists in greater strength in no poetry than in that of Scott, redeeming a thousand defects, and triumphing over all the reclamations of criticism. All cultivated and perfect enjoyment of poetry, or of any other of the fine arts, is partly emotional and partly critical; the enjoyment and appreciation are only perfect when these two qualities are blended. But most of the poetry that had been produced among us in modern times had arrived at affording chiefly, if not exclusively, a critical gratification. The Lay of the Last Minstrel surprised readers of all degrees with a long and elaborate poem, which carried them onward with an excitement of heart as well as of head. The narrative form of the poems, no doubt, did much to produce this effect, giving to it, even without poetry, the interest and excitement of a novel; but all readers felt also the charm of the verse, and the poetic glow with which the work was all alive. *Marmion* carried the same feelings to a much higher pitch; it is undoubtedly Scott's greatest poem, or the one, at any rate, in which the noblest passages are found; though the more domestic attractions of the *Lady of the Lake* made it the most popular on its first appearance.

Notwithstanding the previous appearance of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and some other writers, it was Scott who first in his day made poetry the rage, and with him properly commences the busy poetical production of the period. But what is still more worthy of note is, that Scott's poetry impressed its own character upon all the poetry that was produced among us for many years after: it put an end to long works in verse of a didactic or merely reflective character, and directed the current of all writing