

ENGLISH CLASSICS FOR THE INTERMEDIATE EXAMINATION.

(Original Essays for Gaye's School Examiner.)

No. 1.—WALTER SCOTT.

In order to appreciate the portions of Scott's poetry set apart for our consideration, it is desirable to make acquaintance as fully as possible with the man of whose marvellously gifted and many-sided nature the poem in its vivid picturesqueness of character-drawing and landscape-colouring is the outcome. Nearly everything in Scott's writings we are able to trace to its source as seen in his biographies, an advantage which the student meets with in the case of few other great authors.

For the study of Walter Scott we possess three classical treatises, each by a noteworthy writer, the fullest and most elaborate being the large work by Scott's son-in-law, Lockhart; then one of the most charming in Morley's series of *bijou* biographies of English men of letters, by Richard N. Hutton; and Thomas Carlyle's essay. The last, like everything written by the illustrious thinker, of whom we are now on the eve of losing everything that can die, is well worth reading for its own sake, for the piquant force and peculiar vein of humour, but as a means of acquiring light, either about Scott or his writings, we hold its value to be *nil*. Criticism was not Carlyle's strong point. Witness his advice to students of poetic art, "Close thy Byron, open thy Goethe." Witness also, in the essay on Scott, his depreciation of such a living and breathing, albeit fantastic, type of feminine character as *Fenella*, in favour of the *Mignon* of that most unreadable book, *Wilhelm Meister*. In his "Scott" Carlyle makes little of the metrical romances and of the Waverly Novels because neither were written with a "purpose;" as if art had any business with "purpose."

Mr. Hutton's book, far more than Lockhart's, we recommend to the student; it does not contain nearly as much of the rough material of biography—letters, details, personal anecdotes—but is charmingly written, in the true critical and appreciative spirit, and with a genuine love for the pre-eminently lovable character of Scott. It may be useful to point to several matters which we consider worthy of special note in reading Mr. Hutton's chapters.

The first point we direct attention to is the strong degree to which the law of heredity as now recognized by science is illustrated in the case of Scott. Mr. Hutton tells well the capital story about Scott's moss-trooping ancestor, when on one of his freebooting raids, being captured by a feudal foe, and being given his choice of being hanged or of marrying the plainest of his host's three daughters, the large-mouthed or muckle-mouthed Meg, whose peculiarity in this respect the poet reproduced, a marked feature in his face being the long upper lip and large mouth, which, according to Mr. Hutton, were tokens of mental power. The character of less remote ancestors, and especially of his father and mother, is distinctly to be traced in Walter Scott. A second point, well illustrated in Mr. Hutton's earlier chapters, is the truth that creative genius really means the power of mental appreciation and reproduction. Scott possessed a memory with the power of retaining only what his mind could assimilate with pleasure. "Such a memory," Mr. Hutton