

MARMION.

" Their marshalled lines stretched east and west,
And fronted north and south,
And distant salutation passed
From the loud cannon mouth."



DESCRIPTIVE passages of equal force and beauty abound in *Marmion*. Throughout the poem a warlike spirit prevails, and the din of battle is heard almost incessantly. This does not at all surprise us, as Scott was not only a poet but an active soldier. On all subjects he ranks high as a painter in words. In a nature so warm, color was sure not to be wanting, and the best judges have declared that he possessed this gift in an eminent degree. In *Marmion* as in the *Lady of the Lake*, beautiful sunsets, rushing rivers, raging seas, and deep woodland glades are brought before the reader with panoramic effect. In his hands nature is endowed with life. He makes her sympathize with the human drama, as for instance in the lines at the end of the *Convent Canto*, which are said to rival the opening of *Hamlet*. Where exciting incidents are to be portrayed his pen is equal to the task. What can surpass for vivid force the *Combat of James Fitz-James with Roderick Dhu*, and the battle of *Flodden*. These are pictures that none but true genius could paint.

Scott's descriptions in *Marmion* are minute to the utmost degree. This is well illustrated in *Canto I.* where *Marmion* enters the *Castle*. There the minutest circumstances are pictured to us in rapid succession. These various particulars, inconsiderable, it may be, in themselves have the effect of giving truth and animation to the picture, and bring the scenes before our minds with startling reality; nor could we enter the *Castle* with Lord *Marmion* with so thorough an appreciation of the surroundings were any of the minute touches omitted. Again, what could be more realistic than his description of a *Scottish winter* as given in these few lines:—

" The sheep, before the pinching heaven,
To sheltered dale and down are driven,
Where yet some faded herbage pines,
And yet a watery sunbeam shines ;

In meek despondency they eye
The withered sward and wintry sky,
And far beneath their summer hill,
Stray sadly by *Glenkinnon's rill* ;
The shepherd shifts his mantle's fold,
And wraps him closer from the cold ;
His dogs no merry circles wheel,
But, shivering follow at his heel ;
A cowering glance they often cast,
As deeper moans the gathering blast."

In *Canto VI.* the mode of describing the unexpected meeting of *Clare* and *De Wilton* is particularly fine. The poet acknowledges his inability to paint such a touching scene in these words :—

" What skilful limner ere would choose
To paint the rainbow's varying hues,
Unless to mortals it were given
To dip his brush in dyes of heaven ?"

He regards the task as even more difficult than an attempt to paint the rainbow. At the same time his allusion to the beautiful tints of the picture are sufficient to indicate its surpassing loveliness. These, and similar scenes, the poet delineates with exquisite skill, but it is in the battle of *Flodden* that his genius soars to its loftiest flight in the expression of stern patriotic feelings. From this point to the end of the poem, there is not an ordinary line. There is a flight of five or six hundred verses through which the reader is carried forward with a rapidity of movement, a splendor of imagery and nobility of sentiment, as has seldom been attained in our literature.

As an additional charm to the poem the author has thrown in by way of incident, several beautiful old ballads. In these songs the metre, rhyme and quaintness of language and sentiment are used with admirable effect, and the variation thus afforded gives a pleasing break to the monotony of the rhyming couplets.

Marmion abounds in beautiful passages like the ones alluded to and quoted, yet it has faults too glaring to be passed without notice. There is a lowness of tone and vulgarity of sentiment in some passages which must be offensive to every reader of delicate feeling, and which are not, for the most part, redeemed by vigor or picturesque effect.