

The author of "Waverley" possessed no remarkable power of delineating character, though he could draw forcibly a single passion or peculiarity. Furthermore, his eye for nature was hardly such as to observe her in the glory and beauty of poetic vision, but all his faculties were quickened and rendered more poetical by that spirit of the past, which of itself raised his thoughts from the actual to the ideal, that this power of reviving the spirit of the past was the predominating element of his genius may not only be seen in his works, but inferred by either tracing the growth of that genius in his own history, or observing the effects which it left behind it. Now, to appropriate and renew the spirit of the past, belongs only to a genius which has the depth and thoroughness that slowness gives, and that power of seizing strongly a mental tact or habit which implies strength and innerness. A reliable authority in literary matters, Mr. F. T. Palgrave, has described Scott's distinguishing qualities in terms which fully confirm me in the view I have taken of this magnificent writer of romance. "It would be difficult to name another instance of a mind so habitually balanced between the real and the unreal," says Mr. Palgrave, referring to Scott's genius. "There have been those who had, for example, a stronger grasp of past ages; but they have either comprehended them regretting, as Hallam and Macaulay; or having distinctly preferred them and adopted their ways of thought. Poets, again, have manifested as great a power as Scott over the actual and the present, as Burnes and Crabbe—but they had no sympathy with the past, or have chosen their subjects in the past, as Dryden in his Fables, and Byron in his Plays,—but theirs was a simple poetical expedient, not a sympathetic revival of former times; or they have lived in an ideal world, a Shelley, but then that world was their own creation, and entirely absorbed them: or they have believed in and reproduced, their own age, together with long anterior, as Milton, but then their older subject matter was religion; or, in another way, as Shakespeare, they have recast all ages in their own mind; or were barely conscious of the difference between the ages, as Chancer and Dante. But it will strike every reader

how decidedly Scott's poetical conception of the past and his relations to the present, differ from those just enumerated. As a child of the critical eighteenth century, and the son of a shrewd Scotch solicitor, Scott was, on one side a born sceptic in romance, the middle ages, and Jacobitism,—as a cadet of the Scotts of Hayden and a man of the strongest imaginative temperament, he was likewise a born believer. For, not only his writings, which in the strictest sense reproduce himself, but his life and character, present a continual half-conscious attempt at a real and practical compromise between these elements." In the details, what struck his contemporaries was plain but genial common sense; in the whole, what strikes the later student is the predominance of the poetical impulse." Mr. Palgrave is perfectly correct so far as he goes. I have essayed to trace the roots of Scott's genius somewhat further, with what success it is not for me to say. Let me conclude this portion of my subject with a general remark on Scott and his writings. From Scott's earliest years his genius fed on tales of the past and Scotch tradition, and grew into conformity with these; and the sum total of the effects of his works, alike in poetry and in his prose, was to generate a mediæval, high-church, monarchical spirit, and to surround all Scotland with such a halo of romance that it became all classic ground. Let me take the pleasure of adding that he was a genius also who joined to his great talents the worth of a good, honest, and honorable man.

But of Scotland's many highly-gifted sons, Burns was the most richly endowed with the sacred fire of poetry. He was alike gifted and wretched; the glory and the shame of literature. As in general the highest development of the spirit of man can be attained only when its native tendencies are in harmony with external influences, so was Burns the very impersonation of the mind of his countrymen, endowed, however, with a spirit whose vital action was poetic rapture, and which was tuned by the hand of nature herself to form in sympathy with all her voices. The full harmony of his genius flowed into his songs, of which the remark of Mr. Pitt was pre-eminently true, that he could think