

Of those which followed "The Lady of the Lake" was the first revelation to the world of the lovely scenery and the poetry of clan life which lay enclasped and unknown to the cultivated world in the Highlands, into the fastnesses of which, physical and social, he had penetrated on a legal errand. This gave the poem an immense popularity. Otherwise "Marmion" is the greatest of his poems, while the "Lay" is the freshest. "Rokeby" and "The Lord of the Isles" shew exhaustion, the last in a sad degree. Two minor romances "The Bridal of Triermain" and "Harold the Dauntless," have not taken rank with the five: "Harold the Dauntless" is weak; but "Triermain," in narrative skill and picturesqueness, is certainly superior to "The Lord of the Isles." "The vision of Don Roderick" has been justly described by Mr. Palgrave as an unsuccessful attempt to blend the past history of Spain with the interests of the Peninsular War. The epistles introductory to the cantos of "Marmion" have been deemed out of place; but they are in themselves charming pictures of Scott among his literary friends. They seem also to shew that he well knew he was living in the present while he amused himself and his readers with the romantic past; although he was sometimes enough under the illusion to be taken with rapture by the mock-feudalism of George the Fourth's coronation, and to play with heart and soul the Cockney Highlander on the occasion of the same monarch's farcical visit to Scotland.

Before "The Lord of the Isles," "Waverley" appeared. Scott's career as a novelist began as his career as a poet ended. His vein was worked out, his popularity flagged, he was being eclipsed by Byron, one part of whose talisman the high-minded and self-repressing gentleman certainly would not have condescended to borrow.

Scott has vindicated the *mètre* of his tales as preferable to Pope's couplet; in the case of a romance which was a development of the ballad, the vindication was needless. Scott's *mètre* is the true English counterpart, if there be one, of Homer. In "The Lady of the Lake" and "Rokeby" it is the simple eight-syllable couplet. In the other poems variations are freely introduced with the best effect. Scott had no ear for music, but he had an ear for verse.

In each of the romances, "The Lord of the Isles" perhaps excepted, there is an exciting story, well told, for Scott was a thorough master of narration. In "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," it is true, the *diablerie* sits lorn on the general plot; but it was an imposed task, not his own idea. We are always carried on, as the writer was himself when he was composing "Marmion," by the elastic stride of a strong horse over green turf and in the freshest air. Abounding power, alike of invention and expression, is always there; and we feel throughout the influence of Scott's strong though genial and sympathetic character and the control of his masculine sense, which never permits bad taste or extravagance. The language, however, always good and flowing, is never very choice or memorable. There is not seldom a want of finish; and under the seductive influence of the facile measure, the wonderful ease not seldom runs into diffuseness, and sometimes, in the weaker poems, into a prolixity of common-place.

"Though wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,
Flow forth, flow unrestrained, my tale!"

Scott was a little too fond of unrestrained flow; and perhaps it rather pleased him to think that his works were carelessly thrown off by a gentleman writing for his amusement, not laboured by a professional writer.

He was a painter of action rather