

ment. The preceding chapters have been filled with scenes from that stormy period of Scottish history when the Solemn League and Covenant was in the midst of its death wrestle with Charles; and nowhere, in history or in novel, do the strongly marked characters of the period appear before us with such vivid reality as in the pages of *Old Mortality*; the troopers of Claverhouse with the reckless Bothwell at their head, Claverhouse himself, the haughty but faithful Graham, and all the stern breed of Scotch Cameronianism; the heavily wrung spirit of Habbakuk Mucklewraith, who from his prison tower of the Bass rock saw signs and heard voices in the stormy waters around him—a maniac, yet dying with the exalted breath of prophecy and prayer on his lips; the sublime fanaticism of Macbriar, fed with the fires of old Hebrew inspiration and dangerously tintured at times with old Hebrew ferocity, but at the last purified by suffering into the softer flame of the Christian martyr; and that stern soldier of the Covenant, John Balfour of Burley, whose hand has been heavy on the malignant, and whose garments have been dyed in blood. All these and many other types of the time have played their parts on the field of Drumclog, Bothwell Bridge, or elsewhere, with a truth of nature which only four or five men in the history of the world, an Aristophanes, a Homer, a Shakespeare or a Calderon have rivalled. But the period of conflict is past; Scotland and Presbyterianism have fought their fight successfully, and under William and Mary may now look forward to a period of peace. The battle of constitutionalism and religious freedom has been won; the only refractory elements now are a small band of loyal Highlanders in the north under Claverhouse, and a group of malcontent Cameronians, old soldiers of the Solemn League and Covenant, who have found out that William's government after all is worldly minded and Erastian, and not disposed to encourage any reign of the saints, even in Scotland. In such circumstances Henry Morton, after ten years of foreign service, returns to his native country and pays a visit to the scene of his earlier adventures.

And now Scott, from this splendid point of vantage, begins to wind up the threads of destiny in his tale:—

It was on a delightful summer evening that a stranger, well mounted and having the appearance of a military man of rank, rode down a winding descent, which terminated in view of the romantic ruins of Bothwell Castle and the river Clyde, which winds so beautifully between rocks and woods to sweep around the towers formerly built by Aymer de Valence. Bothwell Bridge was at a little distance, and also in sight. The opposite field, once the scene of slaughter and conflict, now lay as placid and quiet as the surface of a summer lake. The trees and bushes, which grew around in a romantic variety of shades, were hardly seen to stir under the influence of the evening breeze. The very murmur

of the river seemed to soften itself into union with the stillness of the scene around.

That passage is finer than Scott's ordinary narrative style, a degree more careful in arrangement and more graceful in expression than the full but somewhat commonplace flow of his description. The writer has felt the fine dramatic moment in his tale and responded to it. That picture of the solitary horseman travelling down the winding road, which G. P. R. James took up and made so hackneyed; that romantic historical touch, "the towers formerly built by Aymer de Valence;" and that suggestion of the idyllic peacefulness of the summer evening hardly broken by the murmur of the Clyde as it passes Bothwell Castle,—

O Bothwell banks that bloom sae fair!

—are all finely felt, and very effective examples of the great romancer's art.

But in mere narrative and description Scott can be equalled and even surpassed by other novelists, as, for example, he is surpassed by his Italian imitator, Manzoni (Compare chap. 20 of *I Promessi Sposi*). It is when he comes to the dramatic part, the dramatic exhibition of character, that he is unapproachable in the fulness of his power and the felicity and ease of his manner. In the dialogue which Morton, who preserves his *incognito*, has with his former servant, Cuddie Headrigg, now comfortably established on a small farm with that once coquettish Abigail, Jennie Dennison, as its mistress, there is the variety and freshness of nature itself, and the tones of pathos and humour are blended in a way that belongs only to the highest art. How finely the memories of the old conflict, reminiscences of Claverhouse and the Cameronians, of Drumshinnel and Bothwell Bridge are recalled for the reader in the talk of Cuddie, who is unconscious he is addressing one who had been a prominent figure in it all!

Morton asks about the state of the country.

"Country?" replied Cuddie. "Ou, the country's weel enough, an it werena that dour devil, Claverse (they ca' him Dundee now), that's stirring about yet in the Highlands, they say, wi' a' the Donalds, and Duncans, and Dugalds, that ever wore bottomless breeks, driving about wi' him, to set things asteer again, now we hae gotten them a' reasonably well settled. But Mackay will pit him down, there's little doubt o' that; he'll gie him his fairing, I'll be caution for it."

"What makes you so positive of that, my friend?" asked the horseman.

"I heard it wi' my ain lugs," answered Cuddie, "foretauld to him by a man that had been three hours stone dead, and came back to this earth again just to tell him his mind. It was at a place they ca' Drumshinnel..... They ca'd the man Habbakuk Mucklewraith; his brain was a wee bit ajeer, but he was a braw preacher for a' that."

There is the same dramatic truth and naturalness of manner in the homely tenderness of Cuddie's re-