

INTRODUCTORY

THE BORDER ELLIOTS

THE Scottish Borderland in its widest sense embraces the country from the Ken to Berwick, and from the Solway and the Cheviots to the backbone of mountain which runs from Merrick to the Lammermoors and cradles all the streams of the Lowlands. In that broad region the Britons of Strathclyde, the Northmen from the sea, and the later immigrants have so mixed their blood as to produce a certain uniformity of type, akin to and yet something different from other Lowland stocks. The history of each valley has been the same tale of poor soil, inclement seasons, stunted cattle and niggardly crops, a hard life varied by constant bickering among neighbours and raids into England; these valleys lay, too, in the track of the marching armies, whenever there was war between Stuart and Plantagenet and Tudor, and, save for the religious houses and the stone castles of the nobles, there could be few enduring marks of human occupation. It was a gipsy land, where life could not settle on its lees, since any night the thatch might be flaring to heaven, and the plenishing of a farm moving southward under the prick of the raiders' spears. There the hand must keep the head, and a tough, watchful race was the consequence, hardy as the black cattle of their hills, tenacious of a certain rude honour, loyal to their leaders, staunch friends, and most patient and pestilent foes. Rough as the life was, it had its codes and graces. The Borderer was quarrelsome, but he was also merciful, and was curiously averse to the shedding of blood. He was hospitable to a fault, scrupulously faithful to his word, and in giving and taking hard knocks preserved a certain