

School days of Eminent Men in Great-Britain.

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(Continued from our June Number.)

SIR WALTER SCOTT—HIS SCHOOLS AND READINGS.

This amiable poet and novelist, whose genius has gladdened many lands, and almost every country of the civilized world, was born at Edinburgh, in 1771, in a house at the head of the College Wynd. His father was a writer to the Signet; and his mother, the eldest daughter of Dr. Ruthorford, was a well-educated gentlewoman, mixed in literary society, and from her superintendence of the early tuition of her son Walter, there is reason to infer that such advantages influenced his habits and taste. In an autobiographical fragment discovered in an old cabinet at Abbotsford, after Sir Walter's death, he says he was an uncommonly healthy child, but had nearly died in consequence of his first nurse being ill of a consumption. The woman was dismissed, and he was consigned to a healthy peasant, who used to boast of her *laddie* being what she called a *grand gentleman*.

When about eighteen months old, after a fever, he lost the power of his right leg, and was over after lame. Yet, he was a remarkably active boy, dauntless, and full of fun and mischief, or, as he calls himself, in *Marmion*,

"A self will'd imp; a grandamo's child."

He was then sent to the farm-house of Sandy-Knowe, the residence of Scott's paternal grandfather. One Tibbie Hunter remembered the lame child coming to Sandy-Knowe—and that he was "a sweet-tempered bairn, a darling with all about the house." The young ewe-milkers delighted to carry him abroad on their backs among the crags; and he was very gleg (quick) at the uptake, and kenned every sheep and lamb by headmark as well as any of them. But his great favourite was Auld Sandy Ormiston, the cow-bailie; if the child saw him in the morning, he could not be satisfied unless the old man would set him astride on his shoulder, and take him to keep him company as he lay watching his charge:

"Here was poetic impulse given
By the green hill, and clear, blue heaven"

The cow-bailie blew a particular note on his whistle, which signified to the maid-servants in the house when the little boy wished to be carried home again. Scott told a friend, when spending a day in his old age among these well-remembered crags, that he delighted to roll about on the grass all day long in the midst of the flock, and that the sort of fellowship he thus formed with the sheep and lambs had impressed his mind with a degree of affectionate feeling towards them which had lasted through life. There is a story of his having been forgotten one day among the knolls when a thunderstorm came on; and his aunt, suddenly recollecting his situation, and running out to bring him home, is said to have found him lying on his back, clapping his hands at the lightning, and crying out, "Bonny! Bonny!" at every flash.

In his fourth year, Scott was taken by his aunt to Bath, in expectation that the waters might prove of some advantage to his lameness, but to little purpose. At Bath, he learned to read at a dame-school, and had an occasional lesson from his aunt. Afterwards, when grown a big boy, he had a few lessons at Edinburgh, but never acquired a just pronunciation, nor could he read with much propriety. At Bath, Scott saw the venerable John Home, author of *Douglas*; and his uncle, Captain Robert Scott, introduced him to the little amusements which suited his age, and to the theatre. One evening, when the play was *As You Like It*, Scott was so scandalized at the quarrel between Orlando and his brother, that he screamed out, "A'n't they brothers?"

Scott now returned to Edinburgh.

"In 1779 (he says), I was sent to the second class of the Grammar School, or High School of Edinburgh, then taught by Mr. Luke Fraser, a good Latin scholar, and a very worthy man. Our class contained some very excellent scholars. The first *Dux* was James Buchan, who retained his honoured place almost without a day's interval all the while we were at the High School. . . . The next best scholars (*sed longo intervallo*) were my friend David Douglas, the heir and *élève* of the celebrated Adam Smith, and James Hope, now a writer to the Signet. As for myself I glanced like a meteor from one end of the class to the other, and commonly disgusted my kind master as much by my negligence and frivolity, as I occasionally pleased him by flashes of intellect and talent. Among my companions, my good nature and a flow of ready imagination rendered me very popular. Boys are uncommonly just in their feelings,

and at least equally generous. My lameness, and the efforts which I made to supply that disadvantage, by making up in address what I wanted in activity, engaged the latter principle in my favour; and in the winter play-hours, when hard exercise was impossible, my tales used to assemble an admiring audience round Lukie Brown's fireside, and happy was he that could sit next to the inexhaustible narrator. I was also, though often negligent at my own task, always ready to assist my friends; and hence I had a little party of staunch partisans and adherents, stout of hand and heart, though somewhat dull of head, the very tools for raising a hero to eminence. So on the whole, I made a brighter figure in the yard than in the class."

Mr. Lockhart notes upon these reminiscences, that a school-fellow, Mr. Claud Russell, remembers Scott to have once made a great leap in his class, through the stupidity of some laggard on the duff's (dolt's) bench, who being asked, on bogging at *cum*, "what part of speech is *with*?" answered, "a substantive." The rector, after a moment's pause, thought it worth while to ask his *dun*—"Is *with* ever a substantive?" but all were silent till the query reached Scott, then near the bottom of the class, who instantly responded by quoting a verse from the book of Judges: "And Sampson said unto Delilah, if they bind me with seven green *wilts* that were never dried, thou shall I be weak, and as another man." Another upward movement, accomplished in a less laudable manner, Scott thus related to Mr. Rogers, the poet:

"There was a boy in my class at school, who stood always at the top, nor could I with all my efforts supplant him. Day came after day, and still he kept his place, do what I would; till at length I observed that when a question was asked him, he always fumbled with his fingers at a particular button on the lower part of his waistcoat. To remove it, therefore, became expedient in my eyes; and in an evil moment it was removed with a knife. Great was my anxiety to know the success of my measure; and it succeeded too well. When the boy was again questioned, his fingers sought again for the button, but it was not to be found. In his distress, he looked down for it; it was to be seen no more than to be felt. He stood confounded, and I took possession of his place; nor did he ever recover it or, ever, I believe, suspect who was the author of his wrong. Often in after-life has the sight of him smote me as I passed by him; and often have I resolved to make him some reparation; but it ended in good resolutions."

The autobiography tells us that Scott's translations in verse from Horace and Virgil were often approved by Dr. Adam. One of these little pieces, written in a weak, boyish scrawl, within pencil-marks still visible, had been carefully preserved by his mother; and was found folded up in a cover inscribed by the old lady—"My Walter's first lines, 1782."

At Kelso, at the age of thirteen, he first read Percy's *Reliques*, in an antique garden, under the shade of a huge plane-tree. This work had as great an effect in making him a poet as Spenser had on Cowley, but with Scott the seeds were long in germinating. Previous to this he had, indeed, tried his hand at verse. The following, among other lines, were discovered wrapped up in a cover inscribed by Dr. Adam, of the High School, "Walter Scott, July, 1783:—"

ON THE SETTING SUN.

Those evening clouds, that setting ray,
And beauteous tints serve to display
Their great Creator's praise:
Then let the short-lived thing called man,
Whose life's comprised within a span,
To him his homage raise.
We often praise the evening clouds,
And tints so gay and bold,
But seldom think upon our God,
Who tinged these clouds with gold.

In 1783, Scott was placed at the University of Edinburgh, where his studies were as irregular as at the High School.

Mr. Lockhart considers Scott to have underrated his own academic attainments. He had no pretensions to the claim of an extensive, far less of an accurate, Latin scholar; but he could read any Latin author, of any age, so as to catch without difficulty his meaning: and although his favourite Latin poet, as well as historian in later days, was Buchanan, he had preserved, or subsequently acquired, a strong tenish for some others of more ancient date—particularly Lucian and Claudian. Of Greek he had forgotten even the alphabet; and, in 1830, having occasion to introduce from some authority on his table two Greek words into his *Introduction to Popular Poetry*, he sent for Mr. Lockhart, who was in the house, to insert the words in the MS. At an early period, Scott enjoyed the real Tasso and Ariosto; and read Gil Blas in the original; and not much later, he acquired as much Spanish as served for the *Guerras Civiles de Granada*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, and above all,