



THE OLD CROSS OF EDINBURGH.

by gentlemen, and discussed with the utmost nonchalance, books for which in the present day no respectable publisher could be found in Great Britain. Even when the tide of public opinion in this matter began to turn, a good many women were found bold enough to resist it. Mrs. Crewe, on being told by Sharpe that Aphra Behn's novels were not fit reading for ladies, coolly replied: "Oh, I don't mind that; genius is of no sex, you know."

The drinking habits of those days are without parallel. In the early part of this century, not only drinking, but drunkenness, was, in the best society, compulsory. Dean Ramsay devotes a chapter of his delightful *Reminiscences of Old Scottish Conviviality*, and the stories with which the subject is illustrated are almost incredible. The departure of the ladies from the dining-room was not only awaited with impatience, but was actually hastened by their ungallant lords. "At Glasgow," on one occasion, "when the time had come for the bowl to be introduced, some jovial and thirsty member of the company proposed as a toast, 'The trade of Glasgow and the outward bound!' The hint was taken, and silks and satins moved off to the drawing-room."

"There was," says the Dean, "a sort of infatuation in the supposed dignity and manliness attached to powers of deep potation." It was held that a person who could not drink must be feeble and imbecile. Lord Cockburn relates an anecdote illustrative of this. Scott, William Erskine and Cranstoun (afterwards Lord Corehouse) had dined with a drunken Selkirk writer (lawyer). On the party breaking up, the host expressed his admiration of Scott's prowess in the matter of the punch, and assured him that he would rise high in his profession. "But, I'll tell you what, Maister Walter," he added, "that lad Cranstoun may get to the tap o' the bar, if he can; but, take my word for it, it'll no be by drinkin'."

Claret was the favourite drink among the upper classes, and a man was famous according to the number of "lang craigs" (bottles) he could dispose of. Dr. Alexander Webster, a clergyman of the Church of Scotland, was a five bottle man. Lord Hermand, a learned judge who drank all night and went to court quite able for his work in the morning, held a staunch drinker in the highest estimation. On one occasion a counsel pleaded before him that his client was drunk when he committed the offence for which he was being tried. "Drunk!" exclaimed Lord Hermand, "if he could do such a thing when he was drunk, what might he not have done when he was sober?" Henry Mackenzie relates that, being at a dinner party and seeing one person after another fall under the table, he slipped down himself to avoid further drinking. In a short time he felt small fingers fumbling at his throat, and on enquiring who was there, a piping voice replied: "I'm the lad that lows the neckcloths." "Lowsing" (untying) the neckcloths was of some importance to the fallen, for the

bandaged throats then in fashion must have been almost as favourable to apoplexy as the claret was.

By the end of the first quarter of this century these excesses had disappeared. "The old claret-drinkers," says a writer in 1824, "are brought to nothing, and some of them are under the sod." Cocked hats and dress swords, or rapiers—which had been tenaciously adhered to in Scotland for some time after their disappearance in England—vanished with the claret-drinkers.

The new town of Edinburgh has been so immensely enlarged since Sir Walter Scott's day that it is worth our while to recall it as he knew it. The splendid extension of the city north and west of Manor Place has all been made within the last twenty years, or little more. But the Edinburgh of Sir Walter was much more circumscribed than even that we remember, when Moray Place was very far west indeed, and Manor Place was the Ultima Thule. The ground now occupied by Moray Place, and the noble streets around it, was, until six or eight years before Scott's death, all open country or wooded park, in the centre of which stood Drumsheugh, the seat of the Earl of Moray. Castle street, still highly respectable, was one of the best streets in Edinburgh when Scott set up his household goods therein.

Edinburgh itself was at that period of far greater relative importance than now. Increased facilities of locomotion, the tendency of our age to rush where the greatest crowd is, and other causes, have transferred to London much of the importance formerly belonging to the northern capital. In the Augustan days, Scotsmen were not only content to be, but proud of being, Scotsmen. The "skies so dull and grey" had no effect on the minstrel's song or the reviewer's wit; nor did the comparative poverty of the land frighten the professional man of promise to the richer south. The titular capital was then much more than beautiful and romantic. It was a centre of intellectual life and vigour, to which distinguished persons from every part of the world repaired.

Henry Mackenzie may be regarded as the Nestor of the illustrious company at which we are about to glance. The intimate in his youth of the great ones of the preceding century—Robertson, Adam Smith, Hume and others—he lived to be eighty-five, dying only one year before Scott. Mr. Lawrence Hutton,* in announcing to the world with all the book-reviewers' flourish of trumpets, a new edition of the *Man of Feeling*, asserts that its gentle author is forgotten by his countrymen; and that if Greyfriars' Churchyard, where he is laid, is ever visited, it is only by pilgrims to the grave of Greyfriars' Bob—the faithful little dog that refused to forsake his master's grave. Henry Mackenzie and Greyfriars' Bob may point an effective antithesis in the mind of Mr. Lawrence Hutton; to us who can love a canine friend as well as Sir Walter did Maidd, or Dr. John Brown Rab, the names form rather a pleasant conjunction. But when Mr. Hutton thinks himself the one person in the world who has stood reverently beside the grave of Henry Mackenzie, he is as much mistaken as a certain prophet was

* In *Harper's Magazine*.

when he imagined himself the one person in the world who had not bowed the knee to Baal.

If Henry Mackenzie is the Nestor of the Augustan days, Sir Walter Scott is its Achilles. It has been said that had Scott's pen exercised itself with other than national subjects, he would probably not have been distinguished above his brother writers. The rare union of poetical imagination, historic insight, practical common-sense, and untiring industry, which he possessed, must have made him celebrated whatever his subject; but that his Scottish novels are his best, goes without saying. He was such a passionate lover of Scotland, both country and nation, that he saw it not only with that sixth sense by which all poets discern "the light that never was on land or sea," but from a veritable Mount of Transfiguration, and I question if, since his death, the least imaginative person in the world has ever visited his country without seeing it to some extent through his eyes.

No. 39 Castle street—the home of Scott for 26 years, is now the most famous house in Edinburgh. The study in which his most brilliant works were written is thus described by Lockhart:—



STATUE OF SCOTT UNDERNEATH CANOPY OF MONUMENT.

"It had a single venetian window, opening on a patch of turf not much larger than itself, and the aspect of the place was sombrous. A dozen volumes or so, needful for immediate purposes of reference, were placed close by him on a small movable form. All the rest were in their proper niches, and wherever a volume had been lent its room was occupied by a wooden block of the same size, having a card with the name of the borrower and date of the lending tacked on its front. The only table was a massive piece of furniture which he had had constructed on the model of one at Rokeby, with a desk and all its appurtenances on either side, and small tiers of drawers reaching down to the floor. His own writing apparatus was a very handsome old



JOHN KNOX'S HOUSE, EDINBURGH.