

attempting so great a subject and returns to what he calls his "rude legend," the very essence of which was, however, a passionate appeal to the spirit of national independence? What can be more germane to the poem than the delineation of the strength the poet had derived from musing in the bare and rugged solitudes of St. Mary's Lake, in the introduction to the second canto? Or than the striking autobiographical study of his own infancy which I have before extracted from the introduction to the third? It seems to me that "Marmion" without these introductions would be like the hills which border Yarrow, without the stream and lake in which they are reflected.

Never at all events in any later poem was Scott's touch as a mere painter so terse and strong. What a picture of a Scotch winter is given in these few lines :

"The sheep before the pinching heaven
To shelter'd dale and down are driven,
Where yet some faded herbage pines,
And yet a watery sunbeam shines :
In meek despondency they eye
The wither'd sward and wintry sky,
And from beneath their summer hill
Stray sadly by Glenkinnon's rill."

Again, if Scott is ever Homeric—which I cannot think he often is, in spite of Sir Francis Doyle's able criticism—(he is too short, too sharp, and too eagerly bent on his rugged way, for a poet who is always delighting to find loopholes, even in battle, from which to look out upon the great story of human nature), he is certainly nearest to it in such a passage as this :

"The Isles-men carried at their backs
The ancient Danish battle-axe.
They raised a wild and wondering cry
As with his guide rode Marmion by.
Loud were their clannouring tongues, as
when
The clanging sea-fowl leave the fen,
And, with their cries discordant mix'd,
Grumbled and yell'd the pipes betwixt."

In hardly any of Scott's poetry do we find much of what is called the

curiosa felicitas of expression—the magic use of words, as distinguished from the mere general effect of vigour, purity, and concentration of purpose. But in "Marmion" occasionally we do find such a use. Take this description, for instance, of the Scotch tents near Edinburgh :

"A thousand did I say? I ween
Thousands on thousands there were seen,
That chequer'd all the heath between
The streamlet and the town ;
In crossing ranks extending far,
Forming a camp irregular ;
Of giving way where still there stood
Some relics of the old oak wood,
That darkly huge did intervene,
And tam'd the glaring white with green ;
In these extended lines there lay
A martial kingdom's vast array."

The line I have italicized seems to me to have more of the poet's special magic of expression than is at all usual with Scott. The conception of the peaceful green oak-wood *taming* the glaring white of the tented field is as fine in idea as it is in relation to the effect of the mere colour on the eye. Judge Scott's poetry by whatever test you will—whether it be a test of that which is peculiar to it, its glow of national feeling, its martial ardour, its swift and rugged simplicity, or whether it be a test of that which is common to it with most other poetry, its attraction for all romantic excitements, its special feeling for the pomp and circumstance of war, its love of light and colour—and tested either way, "Marmion" will remain his finest poem. The "Battle of Flodden Field" touches his highest point in its expression of stern patriotic feeling, in its passionate love of daring, and in the force and swiftness of its movement, no less than in the brilliancy of its romantic interest, the charm of its picturesque detail, and the glow of its scenic colouring. No poet ever equalled Scott in the description of wild and simple scenes and the expression of wild and simple feelings.