



EDINBURGH CASTLE.

THE AUGUSTAN DAYS OF EDINBURGH.



"There were giants in those days."



THINK of Edinburgh, or mention it to any one who has ever beheld it, and what is the picture called up in the mind? First, always, that stately street or terrace where from his shrine amid the greensward Scott looks down upon the passers-by, and the grey old fortress crowning the rocky height in the background looks down upon Scott. Seen from the old town and from the new; from north, south, east and west; the monument dominates Edinburgh as the genius to which it is dedicated dominates Edinburgh and dominates Scotland.

Could Sir Walter have been free to choose the manner in which the honour and the love of his countrymen should find visible expression, can we doubt that he would have chosen (had modesty permitted) that splendid Gothic monument—so in harmony with the spirit of his genius, and that fitting site between the city of his dreams and the city of his daily

life. For the Edinburgh of which Scott sang was not the Edinburgh in which he lived and moved and had his literary triumphs. Just as his marvellous memory had the gift of forgetting what he willed not to remember, as well as of remembering what he willed not to forget, so his romantic imagination had the power of blotting out the noble streets of the new city that lay before his bodily eyes, and conjuring up the grimmer grandeur and the stormier life of old Stewart days.

But had Scott never written or never lived, the earlier half of the nineteenth century would still rank as the Golden Age of Scottish literature. It is pleasant enough to stroll through the streets of Edinburgh to-day; but what a zest must have been given to such a stroll when one had the chance of meeting Christopher North, or the Ettrick Shepherd, or Henry Mackenzie, or Jeffrey, or Rutherford, or Cockburn, or Dugald Stewart, or Alison, or Sir William Hamilton, or Aytoun, or Lockhart, or Carlyle. The Augustan days came—as such days generally do—with a rush. The Act of Union—at first bitterly opposed, and for many years sullenly resented in Scotland—had been followed by a long period of torpor. Many who might have been staunch friends to the Protestant succession, became foes to it when the Parliament—the outward and visible sign of their independence as a people—was done away with. London, in those days of slow locomotion, was little known save as the capital of the English; and the English were still to old-fashioned Scots the "auld enemy." The events of the '15" and "the '45" did not mend matters. Forgetting what before they had proudly boasted, that not the English but themselves had given a prince to the United Kingdom, they chose to take the attitude and affect the injuries of a conquered nation, and in true Scotch fashion had a fit of the "black dorts." About the middle of the eighteenth century Edinburgh began to revive, and from 1775 to 1794 three million pounds sterling were spent in improvements. National as well as civic spirit was aroused. The Scottish bar and the Scottish pulpit were already celebrated—the former for learning and wit; the latter for learning and piety (and not seldom for wit as well); but their fame was

at that time chiefly national. When Scott began to sing, however, the south turned to the north with new and curious interest. And when, later, *Waverley* was given to the world, and the Edinburgh reviewers poured out their vials, and Maga alternately charmed and thundered, Scotland awoke to find herself famous.

The period was, both politically and socially, a transition one. In politics, indeed, the change was sentimental rather than real; the last active opposition to the reigning house had gone down under the Butcher of Culloden. The death of the Cardinal of York, however, led to some curiously inconsistent—I am tempted to say ridiculously inconsistent—proceedings on the part of certain high Tories. Professing to abate none of their old enthusiasm for their ancient dynasty, their eyes were nevertheless opened to recognize in the First Gentleman in Europe the Stewarts' legitimate successor and the Lord's Anointed. In other words, while they abjured and abhorred the principles by virtue of which the House of Hanover had ascended the throne, they took to their hearts the worst of that—or of any—line, and gilded his base brows with the aureole of Right Divine. That such a man as Scott should have been the high priest of this *culte*, can only be accounted for on the supposition that his loyalty was of so fervid a nature it could not help spending itself upon something, and therefore preferred an unworthy object to no object at all.

In manners and in morals—particularly as regarded the drinking habits of the times—the change was radical. The Scots, it is unnecessary to say, had never lacked pride; but frequently, it must be owned, it was of that doubtful variety that puts a long pedigree before individual gifts: even Dr. Johnson, when he came blustering down upon them, was but "the dominie, the auld English dominie, wha keepit a schule, and ca'ed it an academy." The pride was not always accompanied by corresponding refinement. Kirkpatrick Sharpe—"the Scottish Walpole"—writing to Robert Chambers, gives a curious picture: "My father told me that the first time he ever saw the (future) Duchess of Gordon, she was riding astride upon a sow in the High Street, and (the future) Lady Wallace thumping it with a stick." Sharpe claimed that he himself could remember when certain, "now very fine Scotch ladies," used to "scud about without stockings when they were past fifteen." Ladies of rank went eagerly to hear murder trials, and took their little girls with them. The fair sex read, and heard read