

## SCOTT AND HIS PERIOD

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A THOROUGH knowledge of a poet involves, to some extent, a knowledge of his contemporary poets, for in literature, as in other matters, certain characteristics are found to be popular in each age, and thus by their prevalence to become the leading feature of the period. These peculiarities are generally the result of known causes,—the influence of a foreign literature, the stimulating effect of some great domestic event, even the influence of some great man, and, finally, the very nature of poetry and thought. A glance at English literature will show us that it naturally resolves itself into several great periods or clusters of poets having well-marked peculiarities and following each other in natural sequence. Practically beginning with the initiative period of Chaucer, following the stirring times of the birth of the English nation proper, and modelled after the early French and Italian literatures, our literature has passed through several natural phases, alternately creative and critical. (When some great national event stirs the passions of men and agitates the nation to its very centre, we may expect the intellectual activities also to be quickened, and hence immediately following, or associated with such event, there will be a great productive period in the literary life of the nation. Some corresponding period in a foreign literature gives it tone, and the whole literature of the nation clusters around a few great men till the impulse is gradually expended, and writers, no longer feeling the national spur, begin to associate art and criticism with their productions, and content themselves with a strict ad-

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