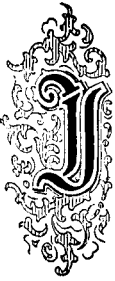


## SIR RODERICK DHU.

IN THE "LADY OF THE LAKE."



In the "Lady of the Lake," as in all romantic poems, we find one character that represents the "evil genius" of the tale, and in the poem under consideration Sir Roderick Dhu plays this important part. When Fitz-James, Helen and the Graeme have been introduced to us, Roderick Dhu appears on the scene. Here the author's genius is plainly visible. In Sir Roderick Dhu we feel we recognize a chief figure of the story. The wild, half Gaelic chorus and the fierce sentiments it expresses are in perfect harmony with the true character of Roderick Dhu. We are told of his great love for Helen but before we can test it we are hurried off to meet another important character in the person of Lord Douglas. The hospitality that Roderick extends to Douglas is not dictated by kindness or by any nobility of nature, but by the mere custom of his clan. Roderick's fierce character is forcibly expressed in these words of the "Ancient Minstrel":—

"For who through all this western wild  
Named black Sir Roderick e'er and smiled."

Ellen's sentiments towards Roderick are fully expressed in the few lines following, where, speaking of the debt due to him, she says,

"And could I pay it with my blood  
Allan! Sir Roderick should command  
My blood, my life,—but not my hand."

Again she says:

"The hand that for my father fought  
I honor, as his daughter ought;  
But can I clasp it, reeking red,  
From peasants slaughtered in their shed?  
No! Wildly while his virtues gleam,  
They make his passions darker seem,  
And flash along his spirit high  
Like lightning o'er the midnight sky."

Soon we see the rivals meet. The scornful sarcasm of Roderick and his defiance of the royal James come in opportunely when he speaks from wounded pride and moreover to his successful rival-Malcolm's defiance of Roderick and hasty departure terminate the unseemly quarrel. Malcolm proposes to find shelter for

Douglas and his fair daughter among his own clan. Roderick sets about collecting his men to meet the Saxons.

Towards the middle of the third canto our sympathy is entirely with the haughty Roderick in his great grief. His anxious care gained for him our respect, and now his hovering near his lost treasure, his pride in not visiting her and his impassioned, but too true forebodings, all enlist us on his side. In the beginning of the fourth canto we hear the prophecy and wonder if it will prove true. The terror in "clan Alpine's rugged swarm" prepares us for some impending evil. Fitz-James is the very opposite of Roderick in love. The latter could not have controlled his passion as did the former. Then Blanche makes her prophecy, a warning to Fitz-James. In her dying hour we lose all sympathy for Roderick and in Fitz-James we seek an avenger of her wrongs. Then we see Sir Roderick leave his clan and this strange action excites our surprise. But his reason for doing so is soon apparent. Audacity, self-confidence and pride lead him to depend entirely on his own strength to baffle his rival, to slay Fitz-James. In the fifth canto we witness the combat between Fitz-James and Roderick Dhu. Here our interest is at its height. Ellen is alone and in distress, deserted by her father, who has gone we know not where, and by her lover whom Roderick's jealousy and her father's outlawry kept away. The Douglas believing himself to be the cause of all this trouble to his friends and yet scorning to lift a rebellious hand against his sovereign, has disappeared. Roderick fearful of the approaching Saxons and wounded by the sting of unrequited love, is gathering his clan. Fitz-James, the self-appointed avenger of the unfortunate Blanche, is led back by his love for Helen, treated as a rebel, and led away by a spy, to a lonely glen, where he is called upon to face in mortal combat the chieftain whom he has insulted. When Fitz-James is lost in the forest he is met by a chieftain whom he fails to recognize. The chieftain, none other than Roderick himself, offers Fitz-James his assistance as a guide: