



***WALTER
SCOTT***

***MARMION:
A TALE
OF FLODDEN
FIELD***



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[INTRODUCTION.](#)

[INTRODUCTION TO CANTO FIRST.](#)

[CANTO FIRST. The Castle.](#)

[INTRODUCTION TO CANTO SECOND.](#)

[CANTO SECOND. The Convent.](#)

[INTRODUCTION TO CANTO THIRD.](#)

[CANTO THIRD. The Inn.](#)

[INTRODUCTION TO CANTO FOURTH.](#)

[CANTO FOURTH. The Camp.](#)

[INTRODUCTION TO CANTO FIFTH.](#)

[CANTO FIFTH. The Court.](#)

[INTRODUCTION TO CANTO SIXTH.](#)

[CANTO SIXTH. The Battle.](#)

[L'Envoy. TO THE READER.](#)

INTRODUCTION.

[Table of Contents](#)

THE “Lay of the Last Minstrel,” Scott’s first romantic tale, was published in January, 1805, and won for its author his first great success. The writing of “Marmion” was begun in November, 1806. Constable offered as publisher to pay at once a thousand guineas for the copyright, when he heard that the new poem was begun, though he had not yet seen a line of it. Miller and Murray joined, each taking a fourth part of the venture, and John Murray said, “We both view it as honourable, profitable, and glorious to be concerned in the publication of a new poem by Walter Scott.” Scott, thirty-five years old, had the impulse upon his mind of a preceding great success, took more than usual pains, and thoroughly enjoyed the writing. On pleasant knolls, under trees, and by the banks of Yarrow, many lines were written; and trotting quietly over the hills in later life he said to Lockhart, his son-in-law, “Oh, man, I had many a grand gallop among these bracs when I was thinking of ‘Marmion.’” The description of the battle of Flodden was shaped in the autumn of 1807, when Scott was out practising with the Light Horse Volunteers, which had been formed in prospect of an invasion from France, and of which Scott was quartermaster and secretary. Scott at those gatherings was full of companionable mirth, and in intervals between drill he would sometimes ride his charger at full speed up and down on the sands of Portobello within spray of the wave, while his mind was at work on such lines as—

“They close, in clouds of smoke and dust,
With sword-sway and with lance’s thrust;
And such a yell was there,
Of sudden and portentous birth,
As if men fought in upper earth,
And fiends in upper air.”

“Marmion” was published early in the year 1808; its first edition of two thousand, in the form, then usual, of a quarto volume, priced at a guinea and a half, was sold in a month. Then came the editions in octavo, of which there were twelve, between 1808 and 1825.

Francis Jeffrey, in the *Edinburgh Review*, complained of anti-Scottish feeling, and otherwise criticised his friend’s work in a way that alienated Scott, not from Jeffrey, but from the Review, and opened to John Murray a prospect of securing Scott for a contributor to another Review, the *Quarterly*, which he would found as a representative of other political opinions with which Scott would be more in accord. “Marmion” thus has a place in the story of the origin of the *Quarterly Review*. Of the great popularity of “Marmion,” Scott himself said at the time that it gave him “such a heeze that he had almost lost his footing.” The Letters introducing the several Books are, in all Scott’s verse, perhaps the poems that most perfectly present to us his own personality. They form no part of “Marmion,” in fact there had been a plan for their publication as a distinct book. As they stand they interweave the poet with his poem, making “Marmion,” too, a “Lay of the Last Minstrel,” in the first days of its publication. George Ellis playfully observed to Scott that “the personal appearance of the

Minstrel who, though the Last, is by far the most charming of all minstrels, is by no means compensated by the idea of an author shorn of his picturesque beard, deprived of his harp, and writing letters to his intimate friends." The Minstrel of the Lay was but a creature of imagination; the Minstrel of "Marmion" is Scott himself.

H. M.

INTRODUCTION TO CANTO FIRST.

[Table of Contents](#)

TO WILLIAM STEWART ROSE, ESQ.

Ashestiel, Ettrick Forest.

November's sky is chill and drear,
November's leaf is red and sear:
Late, gazing down the steepy linn
That hems our little garden in,
Low in its dark and narrow glen
You scarce the rivulet might ken,
So thick the tangled greenwood grew,
So feeble thrilled the streamlet through:
Now, murmuring hoarse, and frequent seen
Through bush and briar, no longer green,
An angry brook, it sweeps the glade,
Brawls over rock and wild cascade,
And foaming brown, with doubled speed,
Hurries its waters to the Tweed.

No longer Autumn's glowing red
Upon our forest hills is shed;
No more, beneath the evening beam,
Fair Tweed reflects their purple gleam:

Away hath passed the heather-bell
That bloomed so rich on Needpath Fell;
Sallow his brow, and russet bare
Are now the sister-heights of Yair.
The sheep, before the pinching heaven,
To sheltered dale and down are driven,
Where yet some faded herbage pines,
And yet a watery sunbeam shines:
In meek despondency they eye
The withered sward and wintry sky,
And far beneath their summer hill,
Stray sadly by Glenkinnon's rill:
The shepherd shifts his mantle's fold,
And wraps him closer from the cold;
His dogs no merry circles wheel,
But, shivering, follow at his heel;
A cowering glance they often cast,
As deeper moans the gathering blast.

My imps, though hardy, bold, and wild,
As best befits the mountain child,
Feel the sad influence of the hour,
And wail the daisy's vanished flower;
Their summer gambols tell, and mourn,
And anxious ask: "Will spring return,
And birds and lambs again be gay,
And blossoms clothe the hawthorn spray?"

Yes, prattlers, yes. The daisy's flower
Again shall paint your summer bower;
Again the hawthorn shall supply
The garlands you delight to tie;

The lambs upon the lea shall bound,
The wild birds carol to the round,
And while you frolic light as they,
Too short shall seem the summer day.

To mute and to material things
New life revolving summer brings;
The genial call dead Nature hears,
And in her glory reappears.
But oh! my country's wintry state
What second spring shall renovate?
What powerful call shall bid arise
The buried warlike and the wise;
The mind that thought for Britain's weal,
The hand that grasped the victor steel?
The vernal sun new life bestows
Even on the meanest flower that blows;
But vainly, vainly may he shine,
Where glory weeps o'er Nelson's shrine;
And vainly pierce the solemn gloom,
That shrouds, O Pitt, thy hallowed tomb!

Deep graved in every British heart,
Oh never let those names depart!
Say to your sons—Lo, here his grave,
Who victor died on Gadite wave;
To him, as to the burning levin,
Short, bright, resistless course was given.
Where'er his country's foes were found,
Was heard the fated thunder's sound,
Till burst the bolt on yonder shore,
Rolled, blazed, destroyed—and was no more.

Nor mourn ye less his perished worth,
Who bade the conqueror go forth,
And launched that thunderbolt of war
On Egypt, Hafnia, Trafalgar;
Who, born to guide such high emprise,
For Britain's weal was early wise;
Alas! to whom the Almighty gave,
For Britain's sins, an early grave!
His worth, who, in his mightiest hour,
A bauble held the pride of power,
Spurned at the sordid lust of pelf,
And served his Albion for herself;
Who, when the frantic crowd amain
Strained at subjection's bursting rein,
O'er their wild mood full conquest gained,
The pride he would not crush restrained,
Showed their fierce zeal a worthier cause,
And brought the freeman's arm to aid the freeman's laws.

Hadst thou but lived, though stripped of power,
A watchman on the lonely tower,
Thy thrilling trump had roused the land,
When fraud or danger were at hand;
By thee, as by the beacon-light,
Our pilots had kept course aright;
As some proud column, though alone,
Thy strength had propped the tottering throne:
Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon-light is quenched in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill!

Oh think, how to his latest day,
When Death, just hovering, claimed his prey,
With Palinure's unaltered mood,
Firm at his dangerous post he stood;
Each call for needful rest repelled,
With dying hand the rudder held,
Till in his fall, with fateful sway,
The steerage of the realm gave way!
Then, while on Britain's thousand plains
One unpolluted church remains,
Whose peaceful bells ne'er sent around
The bloody tocsin's maddening sound,
But still, upon the hallowed day,
Convoke the swains to praise and pray;
While faith and civil peace are dear,
Grace this cold marble with a tear—
He who preserved them, Pitt, lies here!

Nor yet suppress the generous sigh,
Because his rival slumbers nigh;
Nor be thy *requiescat* dumb,
Lest it be said o'er Fox's tomb.
For talents mourn, untimely lost
When best employed, and wanted most;
Mourn genius high, and lore profound,
And wit that loved to play, not wound;
And all the reasoning powers divine,
To penetrate, resolve, combine;
And feelings keen, and fancy's glow—
They sleep with him who sleeps below:
And if thou mourn'st they could not save

From error him who owns this grave,
Be every harsher thought suppressed,
And sacred be the last long rest.
Here, where the end of earthly things
Lays heroes, patriots, bards, and kings;
Where stiff the hand, and still the tongue,
Of those who fought, and spoke, and sung;
Here, where the fretted aisles prolong
The distant notes of holy song,
As if some angel spoke again,
"All peace on earth, goodwill to men;"
If ever from an English heart,
Oh, *here* let prejudice depart,
And, partial feeling cast aside,
Record that Fox a Briton died!
When Europe crouched to France's yoke,
And Austria bent, and Prussia broke,
And the firm Russian's purpose brave
Was bartered by a timorous slave,
Even then dishonour's peace he spurned,
The sullied olive-branch returned,
Stood for his country's glory fast,
And nailed her colours to the mast!
Heaven, to reward his firmness, gave
A portion in this honoured grave,
And ne'er held marble in its trust
Of two such wondrous men the dust.

With more than mortal powers endowed,
How high they soared above the crowd!
Theirs was no common party race,

Jostling by dark intrigue for place;
Like fabled gods, their mighty war
Shook realms and nations in its jar;
Beneath each banner proud to stand,
Looked up the noblest of the land,
Till through the British world were known
The names of Pitt and Fox alone.
Spells of such force no wizard grave
E'er framed in dark Thessalian cave,
Though his could drain the ocean dry,
And force the planets from the sky,
These spells are spent, and, spent with these,
The wine of life is on the lees.
Genius, and taste, and talent gone,
For ever tombed beneath the stone,
Where—taming thought to human pride!—
The mighty chiefs sleep side by side.
Drop upon Fox's grave the tear,
'Twill trickle to his rival's bier;
O'er Pitt's the mournful requiem sound,
And Fox's shall the notes rebound.
The solemn echo seems to cry—
"Here let their discord with them die.
Speak not for those a separate doom,
Whom Fate made brothers in the tomb;
But search the land of living men,
Where wilt thou find their like again?"
Rest, ardent spirits! till the cries
Of dying Nature bid you rise;
Not even your Britain's groans can pierce

The leaden silence of your hearse;
Then, oh, how impotent and vain
This grateful tributary strain!
Though not unmarked, from northern clime,
Ye heard the Border minstrel's rhyme
His Gothic harp has o'er you rung;
The bard you deigned to praise, your deathless names has
sung.

Stay yet, illusion, stay a while,
My wildered fancy still beguile!
From this high theme how can I part,
Ere half unloaded is my heart!
For all the tears e'er sorrow drew,
And all the raptures fancy knew,
And all the keener rush of blood,
That throbs through bard in bardlike mood,
Were here a tribute mean and low,
Though all their mingled streams could flow—
Woe, wonder, and sensation high,
In one spring-tide of ecstasy!
It will not be—it may not last—
The vision of enchantment's past:
Like frostwork in the morning ray
The fancied fabric melts away;
Each Gothic arch, memorial-stone,
And long, dim, lofty aisle, are gone;
And lingering last, deception dear,
The choir's high sounds die on my ear.
Now slow return the lonely down,
The silent pastures bleak and brown,

The farm begirt with copsewood wild,
The gambols of each frolic child,
Mixing their shrill cries with the tone
Of Tweed's dark waters rushing on.

Prompt on unequal tasks to run,
Thus Nature disciplines her son:
Meeter, she says, for me to stray,
And waste the solitary day,
In plucking from yon fen the reed,
And watch it floating down the Tweed;
Or idly list the shrilling lay
With which the milkmaid cheers her way,
Marking its cadence rise and fall,
As from the field, beneath her pail,
She trips it down the uneven dale:
Meeter for me, by yonder cairn,
The ancient shepherd's tale to learn;
Though oft he stop in rustic fear,
Lest his old legends tire the ear
Of one who, in his simple mind,
May boast of book-learned taste refined.

But thou, my friend, canst fitly tell,
(For few have read romance so well)
How still the legendary lay
O'er poet's bosom holds its sway;
How on the ancient minstrel strain
Time lays his palsied hand in vain;
And how our hearts at doughty deeds,
By warriors wrought in steely weeds,
Still throb for fear and pity's sake;

As when the Champion of the Lake
Enters Morgana's fated house,
Or in the Chapel Perilous,
Despising spells and demons' force,
Holds converse with the unburied corse;
Or when, Dame Ganore's grace to move,
(Alas, that lawless was their love!)
He sought proud Tarquin in his den,
And freed full sixty knights; or when,
A sinful man, and unconfessed,
He took the Sangreal's holy quest,
And, slumbering, saw the vision high,
He might not view with waking eye.

The mightiest chiefs of British song
Scorned not such legends to prolong:
They gleam through Spenser's elfin dream,
And mix in Milton's heavenly theme;
And Dryden, in immortal strain,
Had raised the Table Round again,
But that a ribald king and court
Bade him toil on, to make them sport;
Demanded for their niggard pay,
Fit for their souls, a looser lay,
Licentious satire, song, and play;
The world defrauded of the high design,
Profaned the God-given strength, and marred the lofty line.

Warmed by such names, well may we then,
Though dwindled sons of little men,
Essay to break a feeble lance
In the fair fields of old romance;

Or seek the moated castle's cell,
Where long through talisman and spell,
While tyrants ruled, and damsels wept,
Thy Genius, Chivalry, hath slept:
There sound the harpings of the North,
Till he awake and sally forth,
On venturous quest to prick again,
In all his arms, with all his train,
Shield, lance, and brand, and plume, and scarf,
Fay, giant, dragon, squire, and dwarf,
And wizard with his want of might,
And errant maid on palfrey white.
Around the Genius weave their spells,
Pure Love, who scarce his passion tells;
Mystery, half veiled and half revealed;
And Honour, with his spotless shield;
Attention, with fixed eye; and Fear,
That loves the tale she shrinks to hear;
And gentle Courtesy; and Faith,
Unchanged by sufferings, time, or death;
And Valour, lion-mettled lord,
Leaning upon his own good sword.

Well has thy fair achievement shown
A worthy meed may thus be won;
Ytene's oaks—beneath whose shade
Their theme the merry minstrels made,
Of Ascapart, and Bevis bold,
And that Red King, who, while of old,
Through Boldrewood the chase he led,
By his loved huntsman's arrow bled—

Ytene's oaks have heard again
Renewed such legendary strain;
For thou hast sung how he of Gaul,
That Amadis so famed in hall,
For Oriana foiled in fight
The necromancer's felon might;
And well in modern verse hast wove
Partenopex's mystic love:
Hear, then, attentive to my lay,
A knightly tale of Albion's elder day.

CANTO FIRST. The Castle.

[Table of Contents](#)

I.

DAY set on Norham's castled steep,
And Tweed's fair river, broad and deep,
And Cheviot's mountains lone;
The battled towers, the donjon keep,
The loophole grates where captives weep,
The flanking walls that round it sweep,
In yellow lustre shone.
The warriors on the turrets high,
Moving athwart the evening sky,
Seemed forms of giant height:
Their armour, as it caught the rays,
Flashed back again the western blaze,
In lines of dazzling light.

II.

Saint George's banner, broad and gay,
Now faded, as the fading ray
Less bright, and less, was flung;
The evening gale had scarce the power
To wave it on the donjon tower,
So heavily it hung.
The scouts had parted on their search,
The castle gates were barred;
Above the gloomy portal arch,
Timing his footsteps to a march,
The warder kept his guard;
Low humming, as he paced along,
Some ancient Border gathering song.

III.

A distant trampling sound he hears;
He looks abroad, and soon appears
O'er Horncliff Hill a plump of spears,
Beneath a pennon gay;
A horseman, darting from the crowd,
Like lightning from a summer cloud,
Spurs on his mettled courser proud,
Before the dark array.
Beneath the sable palisade
That closed the castle barricade,
His bugle-horn he blew;
The warder hasted from the wall,
And warned the captain in the hall,
For well the blast he knew;
And joyfully that knight did call,
To sewer, squire, and seneschal.

IV.

“Now broach ye a pipe of Malvoisie,
Bring pasties of the doe,
And quickly make the entrance free,
And bid my heralds ready be,
And every minstrel sound his glee,
And all our trumpets blow;
And, from the platform, spare ye not
To fire a noble salvo-shot:
Lord Marmion waits below!”
Then to the castle’s lower ward
Sped forty yeomen tall,
The iron-studded gates unbarred,
Raised the portcullis’ ponderous guard,
The lofty palisade unsparred,
And let the drawbridge fall.

V.

Along the bridge Lord Marmion rode,
Proudly his red-roan charger trode,
His helm hung at the saddlebow;
Well by his visage you might know
He was a stalwart knight, and keen,
And had in many a battle been;
The scar on his brown cheek revealed
A token true of Bosworth field;
His eyebrow dark, and eye of fire,
Showed spirit proud and prompt to ire;
Yet lines of thought upon his cheek
Did deep design and counsel speak.
His forehead, by his casque worn bare,

His thick moustache, and curly hair,
Coal-black, and grizzled here and there,
But more through toil than age;
His square-turned joints, and strength of limb,
Showed him no carpet knight so trim,
But in close fight a champion grim,
In camps a leader sage.

VI.

Well was he armed from head to heel,
In mail and plate of Milan steel;
But his strong helm, of mighty cost,
Was all with burnished gold embossed;
Amid the plumage of the crest,
A falcon hovered on her nest,
With wings outspread, and forward breast:
E'en such a falcon, on his shield,
Soared sable in an azure field:
The golden legend bore aright,
"Who checks at me, to death is dight."
Blue was the charger's brodered rein;
Blue ribbons decked his arching mane;
The knightly housing's ample fold
Was velvet blue, and trapped with gold.

VII.

Behind him rode two gallant squires,
Of noble name and knightly sires:
They burned the gilded spurs to claim;
For well could each a war-horse tame,
Could draw the bow, the sword could sway,
And lightly bear the ring away;

Nor less with courteous precepts stored,
Could dance in hall, and carve at board,
And frame love-ditties passing rare,
And sing them to a lady fair.

VIII.

Four men-at-arms came at their backs,
With halbert, bill, and battle-axe:
They bore Lord Marmion's lance so strong,
And led his sumpter-mules along,
And ambling palfrey, when at need
Him listed ease his battle-steed.
The last and trustiest of the four,
On high his forky pennon bore;
Like swallow's tail, in shape and hue,
Fluttered the streamer glossy blue,
Where, blazoned sable, as before,
The towering falcon seemed to soar.
Last, twenty yeomen, two and two,
In hosen black, and jerkins blue,
With falcons broidered on each breast,
Attended on their lord's behest:
Each, chosen for an archer good,
Knew hunting-craft by lake or wood;
Each one a six-foot bow could bend,
And far a clothyard shaft could send;
Each held a boar-spear tough and strong,
And at their belts their quivers rung.
Their dusty palfreys, and array,
Showed they had marched a weary way.

IX.