



**THE LIFE OF SIR
WALTER SCOTT**

VOL. V: 1820 -- 1825

JOHN GIBSON LOCKHART

The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Vol. 5: 1820 - 1825

John Gibson Lockhart

Contents:

[The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Vol. 5: 1820 - 1825](#)

[Chapter I.](#)

[Chapter II.](#)

[Chapter III.](#)

[Chapter IV.](#)

[Chapter V.](#)

[Chapter VI.](#)

[Chapter VII.](#)

[Chapter VIII.](#)

[Chapter IX.](#)

[Chapter X.](#)

[Chapter XI.](#)

[Chapter XII.](#)

[Chapter XIII.](#)

The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Vol. 5: 1820 - 1825, J. G.

Lockhart

Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck

86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9

Germany

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
www.facebook.com/jazzybeeverlag
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

The Life of Sir Walter Scott, Vol. 5: 1820 - 1825

Chapter I.

*AUTUMN AT ABBOTSFORD—SCOTT'S HOSPITALITY—
VISIT OF SIR HUMPHRY DAVY—HENRY MACKENZIE—DR
WOLLASTON AND WILLIAM STEWART ROSE—
COURSING ON NEWARK HILL—SALMON-FISHING—THE
FESTIVAL AT BOLDSIDE—THE ABBOTSFORD HUNT—
THE KIRN, ETC. 1820.*

About the middle of August (1820), my wife and I went to Abbotsford; and we remained there for several weeks, during which I became familiarized to Sir Walter Scott's mode of existence in the country. It was necessary to observe it, day after day, for a considerable period, before one could believe that such was, during nearly half the year, the routine of life with the most productive author of his age. The humblest person who stayed merely for a short visit, must have departed with the impression, that what he witnessed was an occasional variety; that Scott's courtesy prompted him to break in upon his habits when he had a stranger to amuse; but that it was physically impossible, that the man who was writing the Waverley romances at

the rate of nearly twelve volumes in the year, could continue, week after week, and month after month, to devote all but a hardly perceptible fraction of his mornings to out of doors' occupations, and the whole of his evenings to the entertainment of a constantly varying circle of guests.

The hospitality of his afternoons must alone have been enough to exhaust the energies of almost any man; for his visitors did not mean, like those of country houses in general, to enjoy the landlord's good cheer and amuse each other; but the far greater proportion arrived from a distance, for the sole sake of the Poet and Novelist himself, whose person they had never before seen, and whose voice they might never again have any opportunity of hearing. No other villa in Europe. was ever resorted to from the same motives, and to any thing like the same extent, except Ferney; and Voltaire never dreamt of being visible to his hunters, except for a brief space of the day; few of them even dined with him, and none of them seem to have slept under his roof. Scott's establishment, on the contrary, resembled in every particular that of the affluent idler, who, because he has inherited, or would fain transmit, political influence in some province, keeps open house receives as many as he has room for, and sees their apartments occupied, as soon as they vacate them, by another troop of the same description. Even on gentlemen guiltless of inkshed, the exercise of hospitality upon this sort of scale is found to impose a heavy tax; few of them, nowadays, think of maintaining it for any large portion of the year: very few indeed below the highest rank of the nobility in whose case there is usually a staff of led-captains, led-chaplains, servile dandies, and semi-professional talkers and jokers from London, to take the chief part of the burden. Now, Scott had often in his mouth the pithy verses—

*“Conversation is but carving,—
Give no more to every guest,
Than he’s able to digest;
Give him always of the prime,
And but a little at a time;
Carve to all but just enough,
Let them neither starve nor stuff;
And that you may have your due,
Let your neighbours carve for you:”—*

and he, in his own familiar circle always, and in other circles where it was possible, furnished a happy exemplification of these rules and regulations of the Dean of St Patrick’s. But the same sense and benevolence which dictated adherence to them among his old friends and acquaintance, rendered it necessary to break them, when he was receiving strangers of the class I have described above at Abbotsford: he felt that their coming was the best homage they could pay to his celebrity, and that it would have been as uncourteous in him not to give them their fill of his talk, as it would be in your every-day lord of manors to make his casual guests welcome indeed to his venison, but keep his grouse-shooting for his immediate allies and dependants.

Every now and then he received some stranger who was not indisposed to take his part in the carving; and how good-humouredly he surrendered the lion’s share to any one that seemed to covet it—with what perfect placidity he submitted to be bored even by bores of the first water, must have excited the admiration of many besides the daily observers of his proceedings. I have heard a spruce Senior Wrangler lecture him for half an evening on the niceties of the Greek epigram; I have heard the poorest of all parliamentary blunderers try to detail to him the pros and cons of what he called the Truck System; and in either case

the same bland eye watched the lips of the tormentor. But, with such ludicrous exceptions, Scott was the one object of the Abbotsford pilgrims; and evening followed evening only to show him exerting, for their amusement, more of animal spirits, to say nothing of intellectual vigour, than would have been considered by any other man in the company as sufficient for the whole expenditure of a week's existence. Yet this was not the chief marvel; he talked of things that interested himself, because he knew that by doing so he should give most pleasure to his guests; but how vast was the range of subjects on which he could talk with unaffected zeal; and with what admirable delicacy of instinctive politeness did he select his topic according to the peculiar history, study, pursuits or social habits of the stranger! How beautifully he varied his style of letter-writing, according to the character and situation of his multifarious correspondents, the reader has already been enabled to judge; but to carry the same system into practice at sight—to manage utter strangers, of many and widely different classes, in the same fashion, and with the same effect—called for a quickness of observation and fertility of resource such as no description can convey the slightest notion of to those who never witnessed the thing for themselves. And all this was done without approach to the unmanly trickery of what is called catching the tone of the person one converses with. Scott took the subject on which he thought such a man or woman would like best to hear him speak—but not to handle it in their way, or in any way but what was completely, and most simply his own;—not to flatter them by embellishing, with the illustration of his genius, the views and opinions which they were supposed to entertain, but to let his genius play out its own variations, for his own delight and theirs, as freely and easily, and with as endless a multiplicity of delicious novelties, as ever the magic of Beethoven or Mozart could fling over the few primitive notes of a village air.

It is the custom in some, perhaps in many country houses, to keep a register of the guests, and I have often regretted that nothing of the sort was ever attempted at Abbotsford. It would have been a curious record—especially if so contrived—(as I have seen done)—that the names of each day should, by their arrangement on the page, indicate the exact order in which the company sat at dinner. It would hardly, I believe, be too much to affirm, that Sir Walter Scott entertained, under his roof, in the course of the seven or eight brilliant seasons when his prosperity was at its height, as many persons of distinction in rank, in politics, in art, in literature, and in science, as the most princely nobleman of his age ever did in the like space of time. I turned over, since I wrote the preceding sentence, Mr. Lodge's compendium of the British Peerage, and on summing up the titles which suggested to myself some reminiscence of this kind, I found them nearly as one out of six.—I fancy it is not beyond the mark to add, that of the eminent foreigners who visited our island within this period, a moiety crossed the Channel mainly in consequence of the interest with which his writings had invested Scotland—and that the hope of beholding the man under his own roof was the crowning motive with half that moiety. As for countrymen of his own, like him ennobled, in the higher sense of that word, by the display of their intellectual energies, if any one such contemporary can be pointed out as having crossed the Tweed, and yet not spent a day at Abbotsford, I be surprised.

It is needless to add, that Sir Walter was familiarly known, long before the days I am speaking of, to almost all the nobility and higher gentry of Scotland; and consequently, that there seldom wanted a fair proportion of them to assist him in doing the honours of his country. It is still more superfluous to say so respecting the heads of his own

profession at Edinburgh: *Sibi et amicis*—Abbotsford was their villa whenever they pleased to resort to it, and few of them were ever absent from it long. He lived meanwhile in a constant interchange of easy visits with the gentlemen's families of Teviotdale and the Forest; so that, mixed up with his superfine admirers of the Mayfair breed, his staring worshippers from foreign parts, and his quick-witted coevals of the Parliament-House—there was found generally some hearty homespun laird, with his dame—the young laird—a bashful bumpkin, perhaps, whose ideas did not soar beyond his gun and pointer—or perhaps a little pseudo-dandy, for whom the Kelso race-course and the Jedburgh ball were “Life,” and “the World;” and not forgetting a brace of “Miss Rawbones,” in whom, as their mamma prognosticated, some of Sir Walter's young Waverleys or Osbaldistones might peradventure discover a Flora MacIvor or a Die Vernon. To complete the olla podrida, we must remember that no old acquaintance, or family connexions, however remote their actual station or style of manners from his own, were forgotten or lost sight of. He had some, even near relations who, except when they visited him, rarely, if ever, found admittance to what the haughty dialect of the upper world is pleased to designate exclusively as society. These were welcome guests, let who might be under that roof; and it was the same with many a worthy citizen of Edinburgh, habitually moving in the obscurest of circles, who had been in the same class with Scott at the High School, or his fellow-apprentice when he was proud of earning threepence a-page by the use of his pen. To dwell on nothing else, it was surely a beautiful perfection of real universal humanity and politeness, that could enable this great and good man to blend guests so multifarious in one group, and contrive to make them all equally happy with him, with themselves, and with each other.

I remember saying to William Allan one morning as the whole party mustered before the porch after breakfast, "a faithful sketch of what you at this moment see would be more interesting a hundred years hence, than the grandest so-called historical picture that you will ever exhibit in Somerset-House;" and my friend agreed with me so cordially, that I often wondered afterwards he had not attempted to realize the suggestion. The subject ought, however, to have been treated conjointly by him (or Wilkie) and Edwin Landseer. It was a clear, bright, September morning, with a sharpness in the air that doubled the animating influence of the sunshine, and all was in readiness for a grand coursing match on Newark Hill. The only guest who had chalked out other sport for himself was the stanchest of anglers, Mr. Rose; but he, too, was there on his shely, armed with his salmon-rod and landing-net, and attended by his humorous squire Hinves, and Charlie Purdie, a brother of Tom, in those days the most celebrated fisherman of the district. This little group of Waltonians, bound for Lord Somerville's preserve, remained lounging about to witness the start of the main cavalcade. Sir Walter, mounted on Sibyl, was marshalling the order of procession with a huge hunting-whip; and among a dozen frolicsome youths and maidens, who seemed disposed to laugh at all discipline, appeared, each on horseback, each as eager as the youngest sportsman in the troop, Sir Humphry Davy, Dr. Wollaston, and the patriarch of Scottish belles-lettres, Henry Mackenzie. The Man of Feeling, however, was persuaded with some difficulty to resign his steed for the present to his faithful negro follower, and to join Lady Scott in the sociable, until we should reach the ground of our battue. Laidlaw, on a long-tailed wiry Highlander, yclept Hoddin Grey, which carried him nimbly and stoutly, although his feet almost touched the ground as he sat, was the adjutant. But the most picturesque figure was the illustrious inventor of the safety-lamp. He had come for his

favourite sport of angling, and had been practising it successfully with Rose, his travelling companion, for two or three days preceding this, but he had not prepared for coursing fields, or had left Charlie Purdie's troop for Sir Walter's on a sudden thought, and his fisherman's costume—a brown hat with flexible brims, surrounded with line upon line of catgut, and innumerable fly-hooks—jack-boots worthy of a Dutch smuggler, and a fustian surtout dabbled with the blood of salmon, made a fine contrast with the smart jackets, white-cord breeches, and well polished jockey-boots of the less distinguished cavaliers about him. Dr. Wollaston was in black, and with his noble serene dignity of countenance, might have passed for a sporting archbishop. Mr. Mackenzie, at this time in the 76th year of his age, with a white hat turned up with green, green spectacles, green jacket, and long brown leathern gaiters buttoned upon his nether anatomy, wore a dog-whistle round his neck, and had all over the air of as resolute a devotee as the gay captain of Huntly Burn. Tom Purdie and his subalterns had preceded us by a few hours with all the greyhounds that could be collected at Abbotsford, Darnick, and Melrose; but the giant Maida had remained as his master's orderly, and now gambolled about Sibyl Grey, barking for mere joy like a spaniel puppy.

The order of march had been all settled, and the sociable was just getting under weigh, when the Lady Anne broke from the line, screaming with laughter, and exclaimed, "Papa, papa, I knew you could never think of going without your pet." Scott looked round, and I rather think there was a blush as well as a smile upon his face, when he perceived a little black pig frisking about his pony, and evidently a self-elected addition to the party of the day. He tried to look stern, and cracked his whip at the creature, but was in a moment obliged to join in the general cheers. Poor piggy soon found a strap round its neck, and was dragged into

the background:—Scott, watching the retreat, repeated with mock pathos the first verse of an old pastoral song—

“What will I do gin my hoggie die?
My joy, my pride, my hoggie!
My only beast, I had nae mae,
And wow! but I was vogie!”*

** Hog signifies in the Scotch dialect a young sheep that has never been shorn. Hence, no doubt, the name of the Poet of Ettrick derived from a long line of shepherds. Mr. Charles Lamb, however, in one of his sonnets, suggests this pretty origin of his “Family Name:”—*

*“Perhaps some shepherd on Lincolnian plains,
In manners guileless as his own sweet flocks,
Received it first amid the merry mocks,
And arch allusions of his fellow swains.”*

—the cheers were redoubled and the squadron moved on.

This pig had taken, nobody could tell how, a most sentimental attachment to Scott, and was constantly urging its pretensions to be admitted a regular member of his tail along with the greyhounds and terriers; but, indeed, I remember him suffering another summer under the same sort of pertinacity on the part of an affectionate hen. I leave the explanation for philosophers—but such were the facts. I have too much respect for the vulgarly calumniated donkey to name him in the same category of pets with the pig and the hen; but a year or two after this time, my wife used to drive a couple of these animals in a little garden chair, and whenever her father appeared at the door of our cottage, we were sure to see Hannah More and Lady Morgan (as Anne Scott had wickedly christened them) trotting from their pasture to lay their noses over the paling, and, as Washington Irving says of the old whitehaired hedger with

the Parisian snuff-box, “to have a pleasant crack wi’ the laird.”

But to return to our chasse. On reaching Newark Castle, we found Lady Scott, her eldest daughter, and the venerable Mackenzie, all busily engaged in unpacking a basket that had been placed in their carriage, and arranging the luncheon it contained upon the mossy rocks overhanging the bed of the Yarrow. When such of the company as chose had partaken of this refecton, the Man of Feeling resumed his pony, and all ascended the mountain, duly marshalled at proper distances, so as to beat in a broad line over the heather, Sir Walter directing the movement from the right wing—towards Blackandro. Davy, next to whom I chanced to be riding, laid his whip about the fern like an experienced hand, but cracked many a joke, too, upon his own jackboots, and surveying the long eager battalion of bush-rangers, exclaimed “Good heavens! is it thus that I visit the scenery of the Lay of the Last Minstrel?” He then kept muttering to himself, as his glowing eye (the finest and brightest that I ever saw) ran over the landscape, some of those beautiful lines from the Conclusion of the Lay—

— — *“But still,
When summer smiled on sweet Bowhill,
And July’s eve, with balmy breath,
Waved the blue-bells on Newark heath,
When throstles sung in Hareheadshaw,
And corn was green on Carterhaugh,
And flourished, broad, Blackandro’s oak,
The aged harper’s soul awoke,” &c.*

Mackenzie, spectacled though he was, saw the first sitting hare, gave the word to slip the dogs, and spurred after them like a boy. All the seniors, indeed, did well as long as

the course was upwards, but when puss took down the declivity, they halted and breathed themselves upon the knoll—cheering gaily, however, the young people, who dashed at full speed past and below them. Coursing on such a mountain is not like the same sport over a set of fine English pastures. There were gulfs to be avoided, and bogs enough to be threaded—many a stiff nag stuck fast—many a bold rider measured his length among the peat-hags—and another stranger to the ground besides Davy plunged neck-deep into a treacherous well-head, which, till they were floundering in it, had borne all the appearance of a piece of delicate green turf. When Sir Humphry emerged from his involuntary bath, his habiliments garnished with mud, slime, and mangled water-cresses, Sir Walter received him with a triumphant encore! But the philosopher had his revenge, for joining soon afterwards in a brisk gallop, Scott put Sibyl Grey to a leap beyond her prowess, and lay humbled in the ditch, while Davy, who was better mounted, cleared it and him at a bound. Happily there was little damage done—but no one was sorry that the sociable had been detained at the foot of the hill.

I have seen Sir Humphry in many places, and in company of many different descriptions; but never to such advantage as at Abbotsford. His host and he delighted in each other, and the modesty of their mutual admiration was a memorable spectacle. Davy was by nature a poet—and Scott, though any thing but a philosopher in the modern sense of that term, might, I think it very likely, have pursued the study of physical science with zeal and success, had he happened to fall in with such an instructor as Sir Humphry would have been to him, in his early life. Each strove to make the other talk—and they did so in turn more charmingly than I ever heard either on any other occasion whatsoever. Scott in his romantic narratives touched a deeper chord of feeling than usual, when he had

such a listener as Davy: and Davy, when induced to open his views upon any question of scientific interest in Scott's presence, did so with a degree of clear energetic eloquence, and with a flow of imagery and illustration, of which neither his habitual tone of tabletalk (least of all in London), nor any of his prose writings (except, indeed, the posthumous *Consolations of Travel*) could suggest an adequate notion. I say his prose writings—for who that has read his sublime quatrains on the doctrine of Spinoza can doubt that he might have united, if he had pleased, in some great didactic poem, the vigorous ratiocination of Dryden and the moral majesty of Wordsworth? I remember William Laidlaw whispering to me, one night, when their "rapt talk" had kept the circle round the fire until long after the usual bedtime of Abbotsford—"Gude preserve us! this is a very superior occasion! Eh, sirs!" he added, cocking his eye like a bird, "I wonder if Shakspeare and Bacon ever met to screw ilk other up?"

Since I have touched on the subject of Sir Walter's autumnal diversions in these his later years, I may as well notice here two annual festivals, when sport was made his pretext for assembling his rural neighbours about him—days eagerly anticipated, and fondly remembered by many. One was a solemn bout of salmon-fishing for the neighbouring gentry and their families, instituted originally, I believe, by Lord Somerville, but now, in his absence, conducted and presided over by the Sheriff. Charles Purdie, already mentioned, had charge (partly as lessee) of the salmon fisheries for three or four miles of the Tweed, including all the water attached to the lands of Abbotsford, Gala, and Allwyn; and this festival had been established with a view, besides other considerations, of recompensing him for the attention he always bestowed on any of the lairds or their visitors that chose to fish, either from the banks or the boat, within his jurisdiction. His selection of

the day, and other precautions, generally secured an abundance of sport for the great anniversary; and then the whole party assembled to regale on the newly caught prey, boiled, grilled, and roasted in every variety of preparation, beneath a grand old ash, adjoining Charlie's cottage at Boldside, on the northern margin of the Tweed, about a mile above Abbotsford. This banquet took place earlier in the day or later, according to circumstances; but it often lasted till the harvest moon shone on the lovely scene and its revellers. These formed groups that would have done no discredit to Watteau—and a still better hand has painted the background in the Introduction to the Monastery:—"On the opposite bank of the Tweed might be seen the remains of ancient enclosures, surrounded by sycamores and ash-trees of considerable size. These had once formed the crofts or arable ground of a village, now reduced to a single hut, the abode of a fisherman, who also manages a ferry. The cottages, even the church which once existed there, have sunk into vestiges hardly to be traced without visiting the spot, the inhabitants having gradually withdrawn to the more prosperous town of Galashiels, which has risen into consideration, within two miles of their neighbourhood. Superstitious eld, however, has tenanted the deserted grove with aerial beings, to supply the want of the mortal tenants who have deserted it. The ruined and abandoned churchyard of Boldside has been long believed to be haunted by the Fairies, and the deep broad current of the Tweed, wheeling in moonlight round the foot of the steep bank, with the number of trees originally planted for shelter round the fields of the cottagers, but now presenting the effect of scattered and detached groves, fill up the idea which one would form in imagination for a scene that Oberon and Queen Mab might love to revel in. There are evenings when the spectator might believe, with Father Chaucer, that the

— — *‘Queen of Faery,
With harp, and pipe, and symphony,
Were dwelling in the place.’* — —

Sometimes the evening closed with a “burning of the water;” and then the Sheriff, though now not so agile as when he practised that rough sport in the early times of Ashestiel, was sure to be one of the party in the boat, held a torch, or perhaps took the helm, and seemed to enjoy the whole thing as heartily as the youngest of his company—

*“Tis blithe along the midnight tide,
With stalwart arm the boat to guide—
On high the dazzling blaze to rear,
And heedful plunge the barbed spear;
Rock, wood, and scaur, emerging bright,
Fling on the stream their ruddy light,
And from the bank our band appears
Like Genii armed with fiery spears.”*

The other “superior occasion” came later in the season; the 28th of October, the birthday of Sir Walter’s eldest son, was, I think, that usually selected for the Abbotsford Hunt. This was a coursing-field on a large scale, including, with as many of the young gentry as pleased to attend, all Scott’s personal favourites among the yeomen and farmers of the surrounding country. The Sheriff always took the field, but latterly devolved the command upon his good friend Mr. John Usher, the ex-laird of Toftfield; and he could not have had a more skilful or a better-humoured lieutenant. The hunt took place either on the moors above the Cauld-Shiels Loch, or over some of the hills on the estate of Gala, and we had commonly, ere we returned, hares enough to supply the wife of every farmer that attended with soup for a week following. The whole then dined at Abbotsford, the Sheriff in the chair, Adam

Ferguson croupier, and Dominie Thomson, of course, chaplain. George, by the way, was himself an eager partaker in the preliminary sport; and now he would favour us with a grace, in Burns's phrase, "as long as my arm," beginning with thanks to the Almighty, who had given man dominion over the fowls of the air, and the beasts of the field, and expatiating on this text with so luculent a commentary, that Scott, who had been fumbling with his spoon long before he reached his Amen, could not help exclaiming as he sat down, "Well done, Mr. George, I think we've had every thing but the view holla!" The company, whose onset had been thus deferred, were seldom, I think, under thirty in number, and sometimes they exceeded forty. The feast was such as suited the occasion—a baron of beef, roasted, at the foot of the table, a salted round at the head, while tureens of hare-soup, hotchpotch, and cockyleekie extended down the centre, and such light articles as geese, turkeys, entire sucking pigs, a singed sheep's head, and the unfailing haggis, were set forth by way of side-dishes. Blackcock and moorfowl, bushels of snipe, black puddings, white puddings, and pyramids of pancakes, formed the second course. Ale was the favourite beverage during dinner, but there was plenty of port and sherry for those whose stomachs they suited. The quaighs of Glenlivet were filled brimful, and tossed off as if they held water. The wine decanters made a few rounds of the table, but the hints for hot punch and toddy soon became clamorous. Two or three bowls were introduced, and placed under the supervision of experienced manufacturers—one of these being usually the Ettrick Shepherd,—and then the business of the evening commenced in good earnest. The faces shone and glowed like those at Camacho's wedding: the chairman told his richest stories of old rural life, Lowland or Highland; Ferguson and humbler heroes fought their peninsular battles o'er again; the stalwart Dandie Dinmonts lugged out their last winter's snow-storm, the parish scandal, perhaps,

or the dexterous bargain of the Northumberland tryste; and every man was knocked down for the song that he sung best, or took most pleasure in singing. Sheriff-substitute Shortreed (a cheerful hearty little man, with a sparkling eye and a most infectious laugh) gave us Dick o' the Cow, or, Now Liddesdale has ridden a raid; a weatherbeaten, stiff-bearded veteran, Captain Ormistoun, as he was called (though I doubt if his rank was recognised at the Horse Guards), had the primitive pastoral of Cowden-knowes in sweet perfection; Hogg produced The Women folk, or, The Kye comes hame, and, in spite of many grinding notes, contrived to make every body delighted, whether with the fun or the pathos of his ballad; the Melrose doctor sang in spirited style some of Moore's masterpieces; a couple of retired sailors joined in Bould Admiral Duncan upon the high sea;—and the gallant croupier crowned the last bowl with Ale good ale, thou art my darling! Imagine some smart Parisian savant—some dreamy pedant of Halle or Heidelberg—a brace of stray young lords from Oxford or Cambridge, or perhaps their prim college tutors, planted here and there amidst these rustic wassailers—this being their first vision of the author of Marmion and Ivanhoe, and he appearing as heartily at home in the scene as if he had been a veritable Dandie himself—his face radiant, his laugh gay as childhood, his chorus always ready. And so it proceeded until some worthy, who had fifteen or twenty miles to ride home, began to insinuate that his wife and bairns would be getting sorely anxious about the fords, and the Dumpies and Hoddins were at last heard neighing at the gate, and it was voted that the hour had come for dock an dorrach—the stirrup-cup—to wit, a bumper all round of the unmitigated mountain dew. How they all contrived to get home in safety Heaven only knows—but I never heard of any serious accident except upon one occasion, when James Hogg made a bet at starting that he would leap over his wall-eyed poney as she stood, and broke his nose in this

experiment of “o’ervaulting ambition.” One comely goodwife, far off among the hills, amused Sir Walter by telling him, the next time he passed her homestead after one of these jolly doings, what her husband’s first words were when he alighted at his own door—“Ailie, my woman, I’m ready for my bed—and oh, lass (he gallantly added), I wish I could sleep for a towmont, for there’s only ae thing in this world worth living for, and that’s the Abbotsford hunt!”

It may well be supposed that the President of the Boldside Festival and the Abbotsford Hunt, did not omit the good old custom of the Kirn. Every November before quitting the country for Edinburgh, he gave a harvest-home, on the most approved model of former days, to all the peasantry on his estate, their friends and kindred, and as many poor neighbours besides as his barn could hold. Here old and young danced from sunset to sunrise, John of Skye’s bagpipe being relieved at intervals by the violin of some “Wandering Willie;”—and the laird and all his family were present during the early part of the evening, he and his wife to distribute the contents of the first tub of whisky-punch, and his young people to take their due share in the endless reels and hornpipes of the earthen floor. As Mr. Morritt has said of him as he appeared at Laird Nippey’s kirn of earlier days, “to witness the cordiality of his reception might have unbent a misanthrope.” He had his private joke for every old wife or “gausie carle,” his arch compliment for the ear of every bonny lass, and his hand and his blessing for the head of every little Eppie Daidle from Abbotstown or Broomylees.

“The notable paradox,” he says in one of the most charming of his essays, “that the residence of a proprietor upon his estate is of as little consequence as the bodily presence of a stockholder upon Exchange, has, we believe, been

renounced. At least, as in the case of the Duchess of Suffolk's relationship to her own child, the vulgar continue to be of opinion that there is some difference in favour of the next hamlet and village, and even of the vicinage in general, when the squire spends his rents at the manor-house, instead of cutting a figure in France or Italy. A celebrated politician used to say he would willingly bring in one bill to make poaching felony, another to encourage the breed of foxes, and a third to revive the decayed amusements of cock-fighting and bull-baiting—that he would make, in short, any sacrifice to the humours and prejudices of the country gentlemen, in their most extravagant form, provided only he could prevail upon them to 'dwell in their own houses' be the patrons of their own tenantry, and the fathers of their own children.'"*

** Essay on Landscape Gardening, Miscellaneous Prose Works, vol. xxi., p. 77.*

Chapter II.

PUBLICATION OF THE ABBOT—THE BLAIR-ADAM CLUB—KELSO—WALTONHALL, ETC.—BALLANTYNE'S NOVELIST'S LIBRARY—ACQUITTAL OF QUEEN CAROLINE—SERVICE OF THE DUKE OF BUCCLEUCH—SCOTT ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH—THE CELTIC SOCIETY—LETTERS TO LORD MONTAGU—CORNET SCOTT—CHARLES SCOTT—ALLAN CUNNINGHAM, ETC.—KENILWORTH PUBLISHED. 1820-1821.

In the September of 1820, Longman, in conjunction with Constable, published *The Abbot*—the continuation, to a certain extent, of *The Monastery*, of which I barely mentioned the appearance under the preceding March. I had nothing of any consequence to add to the information which the subsequent Introduction affords us respecting the composition and fate of the former of these novels. It was considered as a failure—the first of the series on which any such sentence was pronounced; nor have I much to allege in favour of the *White Lady of Avenel*, generally criticised as the primary blot, or of *Sir Percy Shafton*, who was loudly, though not quite so generally, condemned. In either case, considered separately, he seems to have erred from dwelling (in the German taste) on materials that might have done very well for a rapid sketch. The phantom with whom we have leisure to become familiar is sure to fail—even the witch of Endor is contented with a momentary appearance and five syllables of the shade she evokes. And we may say the same of any grotesque absurdity in human manners; Scott might have considered with advantage how lightly and briefly Shakspeare introduces his Euphuism—though actually the prevalent humour of the hour when he was writing. But perhaps

these errors might have attracted little notice, had the novelist been successful in finding some reconciling medium capable of giving consistence and harmony to his naturally incongruous materials. "These," said one of his ablest critics, "are joined but they refuse to blend: Nothing can be more poetical in conception, and sometimes in language, than the fiction of the White Maid of Avenel; but when this ethereal personage, who rides on the cloud which 'for Araby is bound' who is

*'Something between heaven and hell,
Something that neither stood nor fell'—*

whose existence is linked by an awful and mysterious destiny to the fortunes of a decaying family; when such a being as this descends to clownish pranks, and promotes a frivolous jest about a tailor's bodkin, the course of our sympathies is rudely arrested, and we feel as if the author had put upon us the old-fashioned pleasantry of selling a bargain."*

** Adolphus's Letters to Heber, p. 13.*

The beautiful natural scenery, and the sterling Scotch characters and manners introduced in the Monastery are, however, sufficient to redeem even these mistakes; and, indeed, I am inclined to believe that it will ultimately occupy a securer place than some romances enjoying hitherto a far higher reputation, in which he makes no use of Scottish materials.

Sir Walter himself thought well of *The Abbot* when he had finished it. When he sent me a complete copy, I found on a slip of paper at the beginning of volume first, these two lines from Tom Crib's Memorial to Congress—

*“Up he rose in a funk, lapped a toothful of brandy,
And to it again!—any odds upon Sandy!”—*

and whatever ground he had been supposed to lose in the Monastery, part at least of it was regained by this tale, and especially by its most graceful and pathetic portraiture of Mary Stuart. “The Castle of Lochleven,” says the Chief-Commissioner Adam, “is seen at every turn from the northern side of Blair-Adam. This castle, renowned and attractive above all the others in my neighbourhood, became an object of much increased attention, and a theme of constant conversation, after the author of Waverley had, by his inimitable power of delineating character—by his creative poetic fancy in representing scenes of varied interest—and by the splendour of his romantic descriptions, infused a more diversified and a deeper tone of feeling into the history of Queen Mary’s captivity and escape.”

I have introduced this quotation from a little book privately printed for the amiable Judge’s own family and familiar friends, because Sir Walter owned to myself at the time, that the idea of *The Abbot* had arisen in his mind during a visit to Blair-Adam. In the pages of the tale itself, indeed, the beautiful localities of that estate are distinctly mentioned, with an allusion to the virtues and manners that adorn its mansion, such as must have been intended to satisfy the possessor (if he could have had any doubts on the subject) as to the authorship of those novels.

The Right Honourable William Adam (who must pardon my mentioning him here as the only man I ever knew that rivalled Sir Walter Scott in uniform graciousness of bonhammie and gentleness of humour)—was appointed, in 1815, to the Presidency of the Court for Jury Trial in Civil Cases, then instituted in Scotland, and he thenceforth spent a great part of his time at his paternal seat in

Kinross-shire. Here, about midsummer 1816, he received a visit from his near relation William Clerk, Adam Ferguson, his hereditary friend and especial favourite, and their lifelong intimate, Scott. They remained with him for two or three days, in the course of which they were all so much delighted with their host, and he with them, that it was resolved to reassemble the party, with a few additions, at the same season of every following year. This was the origin of the Blair-Adam Club, the regular members of which were in number nine; viz., the four already named—the Chief Commissioner's son, Admiral Sir Charles Adam—his son-in-law, the late Mr. Anstruther Thomson of Charleton, in Fifeshire—Mr. Thomas Thomson, the Deputy Register of Scotland—his brother, the Rev. John Thomson, minister of Duddingston, who, though a most diligent and affectionate parish-priest, has found leisure to make himself one of the first masters of the British School of Landscape Painting—and the Right Hon. Sir Samuel Shepherd, who, after filling with high distinction the office of Attorney-General in England, became Chief Baron of the Court of Exchequer in Scotland, shortly after the third anniversary of this brotherhood, into which he was immediately welcomed with unanimous cordiality. They usually contrived to meet on a Friday; spent the Saturday in a ride to some scene of historical interest within an easy distance; enjoyed a quiet Sunday at home—"duly attending divine worship at the Kirk of Cleish (not Cleishbotham)"—gave Monday morning to another Antiquarian excursion, and returned to Edinburgh in time for the Courts of Tuesday.

From 1816 to 1831 inclusive, Sir Walter was a constant attendant at these meetings. He visited in this way Castle Campbell, Magus Moor, Falkland, Dunfermline, St Andrews, and many other scenes of ancient celebrity; to one of those trips we must ascribe his dramatic sketch of

Macduff's Cross—and to that of the dog-days of 1819, we owe the weightier obligation of The Abbot.

I expect an easy forgiveness for introducing from the liber rarissimus of Blair-Adam the page that belongs to that particular meeting which, though less numerous than usual, is recorded as having been “most pleasing and delightful.” “There were,” writes the President, “only five of us; the Chief Baron, Sir Walter, Mr. Clerk, Charles Adam, and myself. The weather was sultry, almost beyond bearing. We did not stir beyond the bounds of the pleasure-ground, indeed not far from the vicinity of the house; wandering from one shady place to another; lolling upon the grass, or sitting upon prostrate trees, not yet carried away by the purchaser. Our conversation was constant, though tranquil; and what might be expected from Mr. Clerk, who is a superior converser, and whose mind is stored with knowledge; and from Sir Walter Scott, who has let the public know what his powers are. Our talk was of all sorts (except of beeves). Besides a display of their historic knowledge, at once extensive and correct, they touched frequently on the pleasing reminiscences of their early days. Shepherd and I could not go back to those periods; but we could trace our own intimacy and constant friendship for more than forty years back, when in 1783 we began our professional pursuits on the Circuit. So that if Scott could describe, with inconceivable humour, their doings at Mr. Murray's of Simprim, when emerging from boyhood; when he, and Murray, and Clerk, and Adam Ferguson acted plays in the schoolroom (Simprim making the dominie bear his part)—when Ferguson was prompter, orchestra, and audience—and as Scott said, representing the whole pit, kicked up an ‘O. P.’ row by anticipation; and many other such recollections Shepherd and I could tell of our Circuit fooleries, as old Fielding (the son of the great novelist) called them—of the Circuit songs which Will

Fielding made and sung,—and of the grave Sir William Grant (then a briefless barrister), ycleped by Fielding the Chevalier Grant, bearing his part in those fooleries, enjoying all our pranks with great zest, and who talked of them with delight to his dying day. When the conversation took a graver tone, and turned upon literary subjects, the Chief-Baron took a great share in it; for notwithstanding his infirmity of deafness, he is a most pleasing and agreeable converser, and readily picks up what is passing; and having a classical mind, and classical information, gives a pleasing, gentlemanly, and well-informed tone to general conversation.—Before I bring these recollections of our social and cheerful doings to a close, let me observe, that there was a characteristic feature attending them, which it would be injustice to the individuals who composed our parties not to mention. The whole set of us were addicted to take a full share of conversation, and to discuss every subject that occurred with sufficient keenness. The topics were multifarious, and the opinions of course various; but during the whole time of our intercourse, for so many years, four days at a time, and always together, except when we were asleep, there never was the least tendency on any occasion to any unruly debate, nor to any thing that deviated from the pure delight of social intercourse.”

The Chief-Commissioner adds the following particulars in his appendix:—“Our return from Blair-Adam (after the first meeting of the Club) was very early on a Tuesday morning, that we might reach the Courts by nine o’clock. An occurrence took place near the Hawe’s Inn, which left little doubt upon my mind that Sir Walter Scott was the author of *Waverley*, of *Guy Mannering*, and of the *Antiquary*, his only novels then published. The morning was prodigiously fine, and the sea as smooth as glass. Sir Walter and I were standing on the beach, enjoying the prospect; the other gentlemen, were not come from the boat. The porpoises

were rising in great numbers, when Sir Walter said to me, 'Look at them, how they are showing themselves; what fine fellows they are! I have the greatest respect for them: I would as soon kill a man as a phoca.' I could not conceive that the same idea could occur to two men respecting this animal, and set down that it could only be Sir Walter Scott who made the phoca have the better of the battle with the Antiquary's nephew, Captain M'Intyre.

"Soon after, another occurrence quite confirmed me as to the authorship of the novels. On that visit to Blair-Adam, in course of conversation, I mentioned an anecdote about Wilkie, the author of the *Epigoniad*, who was but a formal poet, but whose conversation was most amusing, and full of fancy. Having heard much of him in my family, where he had been very intimate, I went, when quite a lad, to St Andrews, where he was a Professor, for the purpose of visiting him. I had scarcely let him know who I was, when he said, 'Mr. William, were you ever in this place before?' I said no. 'Then, sir, you must go and look at Regulus' Tower, —no doubt you will have something of an eye of an architect about you;—walk up to it at an angle, advance and recede until you get to see it at its proper distance, and come back and tell me whether you ever saw any thing so beautiful in building: till I saw that tower, and studied it, I thought the beauty of architecture had consisted in curly-wurlies, but now I find it consists in symmetry and proportion.' In the following winter *Rob Roy* was published, and there I read, that the Cathedral of Glasgow was 'a respectable Gothic structure, without any curly-wurlies.'

"But what confirmed, and was certainly meant to disclose to me the author (and that in a very elegant manner), was the mention of the Kier Craigs— picturesque piece of scenery in the grounds of Blair-Adam—as being in the

vicinity of Kelty Bridge, the howf of Auchtermuchty, the Kinross carrier.

“It was only an intimate friend of the family, in the habit of coming to Blair-Adam, who could know any thing of the Kiery Craigs, or its name; and both the scenery and the name had attractions for Sir Walter.

“At our first meeting after the publication of the ‘Abbot,’ when the party was assembled on the top of the rock, the Chief-Baron Shepherd, looking Sir Walter full in the face, and stamping his staff on the ground, said, ‘Now, Sir Walter, I think we be upon the top of the Kiery Craggs.’ Sir Walter preserved profound silence; but there was a conscious looking down, and a considerable elongation of his upper lip.”

Since I have obtained permission to quote from this private volume, I may as well mention that I was partly moved to ask that favour, by the author’s own confession, that his “Blair-Adam, from 1733 to 1834,” originated in a suggestion of Scott’s. “It was,” says the Judge, “on a fine Sunday, lying on the grassy summit of Bennarty, above its craggy brow, that Sir Walter said, looking first at the flat expanse of Kinross-shire (on the south side of the Ochils), and then at the space which Blair-Adam fills between the hill of Drumglow (the highest of the Cleish hills), and the valley of Lochore—‘What an extraordinary thing it is, that here to the north so little appears to have been done, when there are so many proprietors to work upon it; and to the south, here is a district of country entirely made by the efforts of one family, in three generations, and one of them amongst us in the full enjoyment of what has been done by his two predecessors and himself? Blair-Adam, as I have always heard, had a wild, uncomely, and unhospitable appearance, before its improvements were begun. It would

be most curious to record in writing its original state, and trace its gradual progress to its present condition.” Upon this suggestion, enforced by the approbation of the other members present, the President of the Blair-Adam Club commenced arranging the materials for what constitutes a most instructive as well as entertaining history of the Agricultural and Arboricultural progress of his domains, in the course of a hundred years, under his grandfather, his father (the celebrated architect), and himself. And Sir Walter had only suggested to his friend of Kinross-shire what he was resolved to put into practice with regard to his own improvements on Tweed-side; for he began at precisely the same period to keep a regular Journal of all his rural transactions, under the title of “*Sylva Abbotsfordiensis*.”

For reasons, as we have seen, connected with the affairs of the Ballantynes, Messrs Longman published the first edition of *The Monastery*; and similar circumstances induced Sir Walter to associate this house with that of Constable in the succeeding novel. Constable disliked its title, and would fain have had the *Nunnery* instead: but Scott stuck to his *Abbot*. The bookseller grumbled a little, but was soothed by the author’s reception of his request that Queen Elizabeth might be brought into the field in his next romance, as a companion to the Mary Stuart of the *Abbot*. Scott would not indeed indulge him with the choice of the particular period of Elizabeth’s reign, indicated in the proposed title of *The Armada*; but expressed his willingness to take up his own old favourite, the legend of Meikle’s ballad. He wished to call the novel, like the ballad, *Cumnor-hall*, but in further deference to Constable’s wishes, substituted “*Kenilworth*.” John Ballantyne objected to this title, and told Constable the result would be “something worthy of the kennel;” but Constable had all reason to be satisfied with the child of his christening. His

partner, Mr. Cadell, says "his vanity boiled over so much at this time, on having his suggestion gone into, that when in his high moods he used to stalk up and down his room, and exclaim, 'By G——, I am all but the author of the Waverley Novels!'" Constable's bibliographical knowledge, however, it is but fair to say, was really of most essential service to Scott upon many of these occasions; and his letter (now before me) proposing the subject of *The Armada*, furnished the Novelist with such a catalogue of materials for the illustration of the period as may, probably enough, have called forth some very energetic expression of thankfulness.

Scott's kindness secured for John Ballantyne the usual interest in the profits of *Kenilworth*, the last of his great works in which this friend was to have any concern. I have already mentioned the obvious drooping of his health and strength; and a document to be introduced presently, will show that John himself had occasional glimpses, at least, of his danger, before the close of 1819. Nevertheless, his spirits continued, at the time of which I am now treating, to be in general as high as ever; nay, it was now, after his maladies had taken a very serious shape, and it was hardly possible to look on him without anticipating a speedy termination of his career, that the gay, hopeful spirit of the shattered and trembling invalid led him to plunge into a new stream of costly indulgence. It was an amiable point in his character that he had always retained a tender fondness for his native place. He had now taken up the ambition of rivalling his illustrious friend, in some sort, by providing himself with a summer retirement amidst the scenery of his boyhood; and it need not be doubted, at the same time, that in erecting a villa at Kelso, he anticipated and calculated on substantial advantages from its vicinity to Abbotsford.