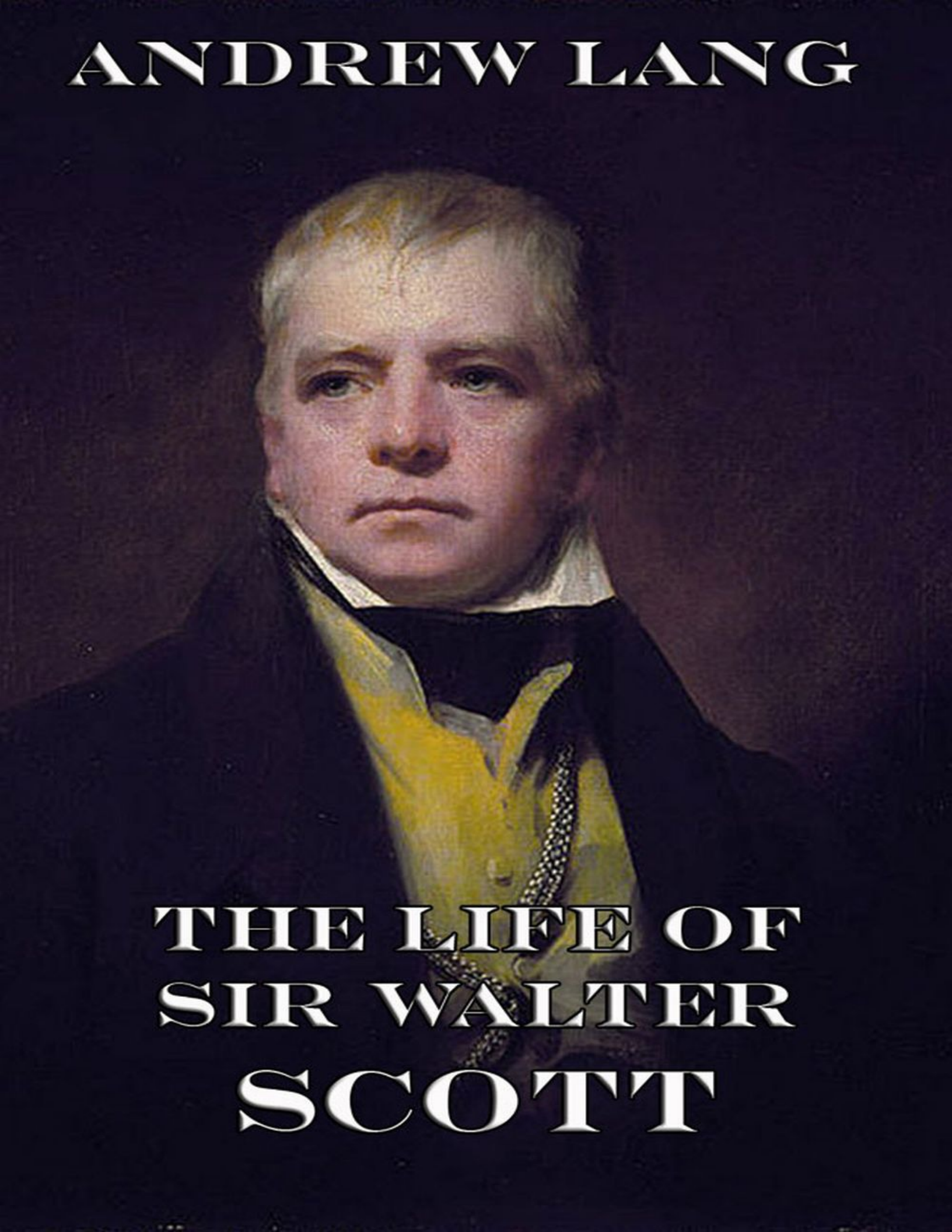


ANDREW LANG

A detailed oil painting portrait of Sir Walter Scott, showing him from the chest up. He has light-colored hair, a serious expression, and is wearing a dark coat over a yellow waistcoat and a white cravat. A watch chain is visible on his waistcoat. The background is dark and indistinct.

THE LIFE OF  
SIR WALTER  
SCOTT

# **The Life Of Sir Walter Scott**

**Andrew Lang**

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## **ANDREW LANG (1844-1912)**

Biographical Sketch from "Portraits And Sketches" by  
Edmund Gosse

INVITED to note down some of my recollections of Andrew Lang, I find myself suspended between the sudden blow of his death and the slow development of memory, now extending in unbroken friendship over thirty-five years. The magnitude and multitude of Lang's performances, public and private, during that considerable length of time almost paralyse expression; it is difficult to know where to begin or where to stop. Just as his written works are so extremely numerous as to make a pathway through them a formidable task in bibliography, no one book standing out predominant, so his character, intellectual and moral, was full -of so many apparent inconsistencies, so many pitfalls for rash assertion, so many queer caprices of impulse, that in a whole volume of analysis, which would be tedious, one could scarcely do justice to them all. I will venture to put down, almost at haphazard, what I remember that seems to me to have been overlooked, or inexactly stated, by those who wrote, often very sympathetically, at the moment of his death, always premising that I speak rather of a Lang of from 1877 to 1890, when I saw him very frequently, than of a Lang whom younger people met chiefly in Scotland.

When he died, all the newspapers were loud in proclaiming his "versatility." But I am not sure that he was not the very opposite of versatile. I take "versatile" to mean changeable, fickle, constantly ready to alter direction with the weather-cock. The great instance of versatility in literature is Ruskin, who adopted diametrically different views of the same subject at different times of his life, and defended them with equal ardour. To be versatile seems to be unsteady, variable. But Lang was through his long career singularly unaltered; he never changed his point of view; what he liked and admired as a youth he liked and admired as an elderly man. It is true that his interests and knowledge were vividly drawn along a surprisingly large number of channels, but while there was abundance there does not seem to me to have been versatility. If a huge body of water boils up from a crater, it may pour down a dozen paths, but these will always be the same; unless there is an earthquake, new cascades will not form nor old rivulets run dry. In some authors earthquakes do take place as in Tolstoy, for instance, and in S. T. Coleridge but nothing of this kind was ever manifest in Lang, who was extraordinarily multiform, yet in his varieties strictly consistent from Oxford to the grave. As this is not generally perceived, I will take the liberty of expanding my view of his intellectual development.

To a superficial observer in late life the genius of Andrew Lang had the characteristics which we are in the habit of identifying with precocity. Yet he had not been, as a writer, precocious in his youth. One slender volume of verses represents all that he published in book-form before his thirty-fifth year. No doubt we shall learn in good time what he was doing before he flashed upon the world of journalism in all his panoply of graces, in 1876, at the close of his Merton fellowship. He was then, at all events, the finest finished product of his age, with the bright armour of

Oxford burnished on his body to such a brilliance that humdrum eyes could hardly bear the radiance of it. Of the terms behind, of the fifteen years then dividing him from St. Andrews, we know as yet but little; they were years of insatiable acquirement, incessant reading, and talking, and observing gay preparation for a life to be devoted, as no other life in our time has been, to the stimulation of other people's observation and talk and reading. There was no cloistered virtue about the bright and petulant Merton don. He was already flouting and jesting, laughing with Ariosto in the sunshine, performing with a snap of his fingers tasks which might break the back of a pedant, and concealing under an affectation of carelessness a literary ambition which knew no definite bounds.

In those days, and when he appeared for the first time in London, the poet was paramount in him. Jowett is said to have predicted that he would be greatly famous in this line, but I know not what evidence Jowett had before him. Unless I am much mistaken, it was not until Lang left Balliol that his peculiar bent became obvious. Up to that time he had been a promiscuous browser upon books, much occupied, moreover, in the struggle with ancient Greek, and immersed in Aristotle and Homer. But in the early days of his settlement at Merton he began to concentrate his powers, and I think there were certain influences which were instant and far-reaching. Among them one was pre-eminent. When Andrew Lang came up from St. Andrews he had found Matthew Arnold occupying the ancient chair of poetry at Oxford. He was a listener at some at least of the famous lectures which, in 1865, were collected as "Essays in Criticism"; while one of his latest experiences as a Balliol undergraduate was hearing Matthew Arnold lecture on the study of Celtic literature. His conscience was profoundly stirred by "Culture and Anarchy" (1869); his sense of prose-form largely determined by "Friendship's Garland" (1871). I

have no hesitation in saying that the teaching and example of Matthew Arnold prevailed over all other Oxford influences upon the intellectual nature of Lang, while, although I think that his personal acquaintance with Arnold was very slight, yet in his social manner there was, in early days, not a little imitation of Arnold's aloofness and superfine delicacy of address. It was unconscious, of course, and nothing would have enraged Lang more than to have been accused of "imitating Uncle Matt."

The structure which his own individuality now began to build on the basis supplied by the learning of Oxford, and in particular by the study of the Greeks, and "dressed" by courses of Matthew Arnold, was from the first eclectic. Lang eschewed as completely what was not sympathetic to him as he assimilated what was attractive to him. Those who speak of his "versatility" should recollect what large tracts of the literature of the world, and even of England, existed outside the dimmest apprehension of Andrew Lang. It is, however, more useful to consider what he did apprehend; and there were two English books, published in his Oxford days, which permanently impressed him: one of these was "The Earthly Paradise," the other D. G. Rossetti's "Poems." In after years he tried to divest himself of the traces of these volumes, but he had fed upon their honey-dew and it had permeated his veins.

Not less important an element in the garnishing of a mind already prepared for it by academic and aesthetic studies was the absorption of the romantic part of French literature. Andrew Lang in this, as in everything else, was selective. He dipped into the wonderful lucky-bag of France wherever he saw the glitter of romance. Hence his approach, in the early seventies, was threefold: towards the mediaeval *lais* and *chansons*, towards the sixteenth-century Pleiade, and towards the school of which Victor Hugo was

the leader in the nineteenth century. For a long time Ronsard was Lang's poet of intensest predilection; and I think that his definite ambition was to be the Ronsard of modern England, introducing a new poetical dexterity founded on a revival of pure humanism. He had in those days what he lost, or at least dispersed, in the weariness and growing melancholia of later years a splendid belief in poetry as a part of the renown of England, as a heritage to be received in reverence from our fathers, and to be passed on, if possible, in a brighter flame. This honest and beautiful ambition to shine as one of the permanent benefactors to national verse, in the attitude so nobly sustained four hundred years ago by Du Bellay and Ronsard, was unquestionably felt by Andrew Lang through his bright intellectual April, and supported him from Oxford times until 1882, when he published "Helen of Troy." The cool reception of that epic by the principal judges of poetry caused him acute disappointment, and from that time forth he became less eager and less serious as a poet, more and more petulantly expending his wonderful technical gift on fugitive subjects. And here again, when one comes to think of it, the whole history repeated itself, since in "Helen of Troy" Lang simply suffered as Ronsard had done in the "Franciade." But the fact that 1882 was his year of crisis, and the tomb of his brightest ambition, must be recognised by every one who closely followed his fortunes at that time. Lang's habit of picking out of literature and of life the plums of romance, and these alone, comes to be, to the dazzled observer of his extraordinarily vivid intellectual career, the principal guiding line. This determination to dwell, to the exclusion of all other sides of any question, on its romantic side is alone enough to rebut the charge of versatility. Lang was in a sense encyclopaedic; but the vast dictionary of his knowledge had blank pages, or pages pasted down, on which he would not, or could not, read what experience had printed. Absurd as it sounds, there

was always something maidenly about his mind, and he glossed over ugly matters, sordid and dull conditions, so that they made no impression whatever upon him. He had a trick, which often exasperated his acquaintances, of declaring that he had " never heard " of things that everybody else was very well aware of. He had " never heard the name " of people he disliked, of books that he thought tiresome, of events that bored him; but, more than this, he used the formula for things and persons whom he did not wish to discuss. I remember meeting in the street a famous professor, who advanced with uplifted hands, and greeted me with " What do you think Lang says now? That he has never heard of Pascal! " This merely signified that Lang, not interested (at all events for the moment) in Pascal nor in the professor, thus closed at once all possibility of discussion.

It must not be forgotten that we have lived to see him, always wonderful indeed, and always passionately devoted to perfection and purity, but worn, tired, harassed by the unceasing struggle, the lifelong slinging of sentences from that inexhaustible ink-pot. In one of the most perfect of his poems, " Natural Theology," Lang speaks of Cagn, the great hunter, who once was kind and good, but who was spoiled by fighting many things. Lang was never " spoiled," but he was injured; the surface of the radiant coin was rubbed by the vast and interminable handling of journalism. He was jaded by the toil of writing many things. Hence it is not possible but that those who knew him intimately in his later youth and early middle-age should prefer to look back at those years when he was the freshest, the most exhilarating figure in living literature, when a star seemed to dance upon the crest of his already silvering hair. Baudelaire exclaimed of Theophile Gautier: " Homme heureux! homme digne d'envie! il n'a jamais aimé que le Beau!" and of Andrew Lang in those brilliant days the same



might have been said. As long as he had confidence in beauty he was safe and strong; and much that, with all affection and all respect, we must admit was rasping and disappointing in his attitude to literature in his later years, seems to have been due to a decreasing sense of confidence in the intellectual sources of beauty. It is dangerous, in the end it must be fatal, to sustain the entire structure of life and thought on the illusions of romance. But that was what Lang did he built his house upon the rainbow.

The charm of Andrew Lang's person and company was founded upon a certain lightness, an essential gentleness and elegance which were relieved by a sharp touch; just as a very dainty fruit may be preserved from mawkishness by something delicately acid in the rind of it. His nature was slightly inhuman; it was unwise to count upon its sympathy beyond a point which was very easily reached in social intercourse. If any simple soul showed an inclination, in eighteenth-century phrase, to "repose on the bosom" of Lang, that support was immediately withdrawn, and the confiding one fell among thorns. Lang was like an Angora cat, whose gentleness and soft fur, and general aspect of pure amenity, invite to caresses, which are suddenly met by the outspread paw with claws awake. This uncertain and freakish humour was the embarrassment of his friends, who, however, were preserved from despair by the fact that no malice was meant, and that the weapons were instantly sheathed again in velvet. Only, the instinct to give a sudden slap, half in play, half in fretful caprice, was incorrigible. No one among Lang's intimate friends but had suffered from this feline impulse, which did not spare even the serenity of Robert Louis Stevenson. But, tiresome as it sometimes was, this irritable humour seldom cost Lang a friend who was worth preserving. Those who really knew him recognised that he was always shy and usually tired.

His own swift spirit never brooded upon an offence, and could not conceive that any one else should mind what he himself minded so little and forgot so soon. Impressions swept over him very rapidly, and injuries passed completely out of his memory. Indeed, all his emotions were too fleeting, and in this there was something fairy-like; quick and keen and blithe as he was, he did not seem altogether like an ordinary mortal, nor could the appeal to gross human experience be made to him with much chance of success. This, doubtless, is why almost all imaginative literature which is founded upon the darker parts of life, all squalid and painful tragedy, all stories that " don't end well" all religious experiences, all that is not superficial and romantic, was irksome to him. He tried sometimes to reconcile his mind to the consideration of real life; he concentrated his matchless powers on it; but he always disliked it. He could persuade himself to be partly just to Ibsen or Hardy or Dostoieffsky, but what he really enjoyed was Dumas père, because that fertile romance-writer rose serene above the phenomena of actual human experience. We have seen more of this type in English literature than the Continental nations have in theirs, but even we have seen no instance of its strength and weakness so eminent as Andrew Lang. He was the fairy in our midst, the wonder-working, incorporeal, and tricky fay of letters, who paid for all his wonderful gifts and charms by being not quite a man of like passions with the rest of us. In some verses which he scribbled to R.L.S. and threw away, twenty years ago, he acknowledged this unearthly character, and, speaking of the depredations of his kin, he said:

Faith, they might steal me, w? ma will,  
And, ken'd I ony fairy hill  
I#d lay me down there, snod and still,  
Their land to win;

For, man, I maistly had my fill  
O' this world's din

His wit had something disconcerting in its impishness. Its rapidity and sparkle were dazzling, but it was not quite human; that is to say, it conceded too little to the exigencies of flesh and blood. If we can conceive a seraph being fanny, it would be in the manner of Andrew Lang. Moreover, his wit usually danced over the surface of things, and rarely penetrated them. In verbal parry, in ironic misunderstanding, in breathless agility of topsy-turvy movement, Lang was like one of Milton's "yellow-skirted fays," sporting with the helpless, moon-bewildered traveller. His wit often had a depressing, a humiliating effect, against which one's mind presently revolted. I recollect an instance which may be thought to be apposite: I was passing through a phase of enthusiasm for Emerson, whom Lang very characteristically detested, and I was so ill-advised as to show him the famous epigram called "Brahma." Lang read it with a snort of derision (it appeared to be new to him), and immediately he improvised this parody:

If the wild bowler thinks he bowls,  
Or if the batsman thinks he's bowled,  
They know not, poor misguided souls,  
They, too, shall perish unconsolated.  
I am the batsman and the bat,  
I am the bowler and the ball,  
The umpire, the pavilion cat,  
The roller, pitch and stumps, and all

This would make a pavilion cat laugh, and I felt that Emerson was done for. But when Lang had left me, and I was once more master of my mind, I reflected that the parody was but a parody, wonderful for its neatness and

quickness, and for its seizure of what was awkward in the roll of Emerson's diction, but essentially superficial. However, what would it be if it were profound? I must leave it there, feeling that I have not explained why Lang's extraordinary drollery in conversation so often left on the memory a certain sensation of distress.

But this was not the characteristic of his humour at its best, as it was displayed throughout the happiest period of his work. If, as seems possible, it is as an essayist that he will ultimately take his place in English literature, this element will continue to delight fresh generations of enchanted readers. I cannot imagine that the preface to his translation of "Theocritus," "Letters to Dead Authors," "In the Wrong Paradise," "Old Friends," and "Essays in Little" will ever lose their charm; but future admirers will have to pick their way to them through a tangle of history and anthropology and mythology, where there may be left no perfume and no sweetness. I am impatient to see this vast mass of writing reduced to the limits of its author's delicate, true, but somewhat evasive and ephemeral genius. However, as far as the circumstances of his temperament permitted, Andrew Lang has left with us the memory of one of our most surprising contemporaries, a man of letters who laboured without cessation from boyhood to the grave, who pursued his ideal with indomitable activity and perseverance, and who was never betrayed except by the loftiness of his own endeavour. Lang's only misfortune was not to be completely in contact with life, and his work will survive exactly where he was most faithful to his innermost illusions.

## **THE LIFE OF SIR WALTER SCOTT**

## **Preface**

IF all reading mankind had time to read Lockhart's Life of Scott, a brief volume on Sir Walter would be a thing without excuse. I am informed, however, by the Editor of this Series that the appreciation of Time, in our age, does not permit Lockhart to be universally read. I have therefore tried to compress as much as I may of the essence of Lockhart's great book into small space, with a few additions from other sources. In such efforts one compiler will present matter for which another cannot find room. The volume differs from its excellent predecessors by the late Mr. Hutton, and by Mr. Saintsbury, in being the work of one who comes from Sir Walter's own countryside, and has worked over much of his historical ground, and over most of the MS. materials which were handled by Lockhart.

The late regretted Mr. David Carnegie, after twice crossing the Australian desert, summed up his results in the saying that no explorer need go thither again. The Abbotsford MSS. are not a desert, but Lockhart has omitted nothing in them which is of value, nothing which bore essentially on his theme. No explorer need go thither again, save to confirm his appreciation of the merits of Lockhart's work. All other books on Scott are but its satellites, and their glow, be it brighter or fainter, is a borrowed radiance.

ST. ANDREWS,  
December 25, 1905.

## **CHAPTER I - Ancestry, Childhood, Youth, First Love, Marriage**

THE visitor to Abbotsford, looking up at the ceiling of the hall, beholds, in the painted shields, the heraldic record of the " heredity " of Sir Walter Scott. In his time the doctrine of heredity had not won its way into the realm of popular science, but no man was more interested in pedigree than the Laird. His ancestors were part of himself, though he was not descended from a " Duke of Buccleuch of the fourteenth century," as the Dictionary of National Biography declares, with English innocence. Three of the shields are occupied by white cloudlets on a blue ground; the arms of certain of the Rutherford ancestors, cadets of Hunthill, could not be traced. For the rest, if we are among those who believe that genius comes from the Celtic race alone, we learn with glee that the poet was not without his share of Celtic blood. He descended, on the female side, from the Macdougals of Makerston, and the Macdougals are perhaps the oldest family in Scotland, are certainly among the four or five oldest families. But they stood for the English cause against Bruce, a sorrow, no doubt, to their famous descendant. The wife, again, of Scott's great grandfather, " Beardie " the Jacobite, was a Miss Campbell of Silvercraigs, counting cousins with the Campbells, (who are at least as much Douglasses as Campbells) of Blythswood. Finally, the name of Scott, I presume, was originally borne by some infinitely remote forefather, who was called " The Scot " because he was Irish by birth though his family was settled, first in Lanarkshire, later among the Cymri and English of Ettrickdale and Teviotdale. So much for the Celtic side of Sir Walter.

On the other hand, the Rutherfords - his mother was a Rutherford - are probably sprung from the Anglo-Norman

noblesse who came into Scotland with David I, and obtained the lands whence they derive their name. They are an older family, on the Border, than the Scotts, who are not on record in Rankilburn before 1296. One of them (from whose loins also comes the present genealogist) frequently signs (or at all events seals,) the charters of David I about 1140. The Swintons, famous in our early wars, and the Haliburtons, cadets of Dirleton, have a similar origin, so that in Scott met the blood of Highlands and Lowlands, Celtic, Teutonic, and Norman. "There are few in Scotland," says Lockhart, "under the titled nobility, who could trace their blood to so many stocks of historical distinction." All Scottish men have a share in Sir Walter. The people of Scotland, "gentle" or "simple," have ever set store on such ancestral connexions, and they certainly were a source of great pleasure to Scott.

His mind was, in the first place, historical; rooted in and turning towards the past, as the only explanation of the present. Before he could read with ease, say at the age of four or five, he pored over Scott of Satchells' rhyming True History of several Honourable Families of the Right Honourable Name of Scot. "I mind spelling these lines," he said, when Constable gave him a copy of the book, in 1818. Indeed, he was always "spelling" the legends and history of his race, while he was making it famous by his pen, since accident forbade him to make it glorious by his sword. One legend of the Scotts of Harden, the most celebrated of all, is, I think, a Scotch tale, or popular tale, the story of Muckle Muckie Meg and her forced marriage with young Harden. Suppose the unlikely case that William Scott, younger, of Harden, did undertake a long expedition to seize the cattle of Murray of Elibank, on the upper Tweed. I deem this most improbable, in the reign of James VI, when he was seated on the English throne. But suppose it occurred, who can believe that Elibank would dare to threaten young Harden

with hanging on the Elibank doom tree? Even if Scots law would have borne him out, Elibank dared not face the feud of the strongest name on the Border. Thus it is not to be credited that young Harden chose " Muckle Mou'd Meg," Elibank's daughter, as an alternative to the gallows. Moreover, the legend, I am informed, recurs in a province of Germany. If so, the tale may be much older than the Harden-Elibank marriage. The contract of that marriage is extant, and is not executed " on the parchment of a drum," as Lockhart romantically avers. Scott, better than most men, must have known how more than doubtful is the old legend.

He let no family tradition drop: rather, he gave a sword and a cocked hat, in his own phrase, to each story. The ballad of Kinmont Willie, the tale of the most daring and bloodless of romantic exploits, certainly owes much to him, and he " brought out with a wet finger" (in Randolph's phrase), all the dim exploits and fading legends of Tweed, Ettrick, Ail, Yarrow, and Teviot; streams, Dr. John Brown says, " fabulosi as ever was Hydaspes."

The son of a Writer to the Signet, Scott was grandson of a speculative Border yeoman, who laid out the entire sum necessary for stocking his farm on one mare, and sold her at a double advantage. Possibly Scott may have inherited the sanguine disposition of this adventurer. He was born to make all the world familiar with the life and history of an ancient kingdom, that, as a kingdom, had ceased to be, and with adventures rapidly winning their way to oblivion.

Just when Scotland, seventy years after she was " no longer Scotland " (according to Lockhart of Carnwath), merged into England, Nature sent Burns to make Scottish peasant life immortal, and Scott to give immortality to chivalrous Scottish romance. There are traces of love of history and



traces of intellectual ability in Scott's nearest kin. His lawyer father, born in 1729, was naturally more devoted to "analysing abstruse feudal doctrines," and to studying "Knox's and Spottiswoode's folios" of the history of Kirk and State, than to the ordinary business of his calling. Scott's maternal uncle, Dr. Rutherford, "was one of the best chemists in Europe" we have Sir Walter's word for it. Scott's mother was not only fond of the best literature, but had a memory for points of history and genealogy almost as good as his own. "She connected a long period of time with the present generation." Scott wrote when she died (1819), "for she remembered, and had often spoken with a person who perfectly recollected the battle of Dunbar. . . ." She knew all about the etiquette of the Covenanting conventicles under the Restoration, when the lairds' wives, little to the comfort of their lords, sat on their saddles on the ground, listening to preachers like Walsh or Cameron.

Fortunate indeed was Scott in his mother, who did not spoil him, though he must have been her favourite child. His eldest brother who attained maturity not only fought under the glorious Rodney, but "had a strong talent for literature," and composed admirable verses. His brother Thomas was credited by Sir Walter with considerable genius, and was put forward by popular rumour as the author of the Waverley novels. His only surviving sister, Anne (died 1801), "lived in an ideal world, which she had framed to herself by the force of imagination." Scott himself was well aware of his own tendency "to live in fantasy," in the kingdom of dreams, and in the end he discovered that in the kingdom of dreams he had actually been living, as regards his own affairs, despite his strong practical sense, and "the thread of the attorney" in his nature. His genius, in short, was the flower and consummation of qualities existing in his family; while it was associated, though we may presume not causally, with