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Sir Walter Scott.

IN the summer of last year I went again to Abbotsford, and for a week roamed about on the Scottish borders where Sir Walter Scott has for all time left his impressions. It was years since I had made the pilgrimage before, and I wondered how it would all strike me now. But I need hardly have wondered. The old glamour, the old thrill, was still there, and Sir Walter remains one of the idols at whose shrine I unceasingly worship.

He is, of course, the greatest man of letters that Scotland has produced, and John Buchan would add, the greatest man, "because the most representative."

From many points of view his worth may be assessed. As a poet, though he can hardly be put in the highest rank, he is not by any means to be despised, and his typical verse has a vigour and a sincerity that hold the mind and quicken the pulse. As an historian he is less widely known, and he cannot be called "scholarly," but his *Tales of a Grandfather* are still as good an introduction to the romantic glamour of Scottish history as one will get anywhere. As a novelist he stands undoubtedly among the greatest, and in some respects his work has never been surpassed; though the finest part of it, namely, his delineation of Scottish peasant life must, because of the dialect, make him to some extent "caviare to the general."

But it is chiefly as a man that Scott holds his place in the affection of his admirers. He has been described with loving faithfulness by Lockhart, his son-in-law, in one of the greatest biographies in literature. "All other books on Scott are but its satellites," says Andrew Lang, "and their glory, be it brighter or fainter, is a borrowed radiance." In Lockhart, Scott has been painted for all time, "warts and all," and we know him to the centre as we know few men in history.

But how triumphantly Scott emerges from under the light that is thrown upon him! He was not a plaster saint by any means; his feelings were strong; sometimes he swore, and sometimes he drank rather more than was good for him; also there was in him a fondness for social distinction that seems rather odd in one who was, generally speaking, so forthright and robust. But, admit all that his fiercest detractors can say, what a splendid, generous-hearted, truly heroic man he was! "No affectation, no fantasticality or distortion dwelt in him," says Carlyle, "no shadow of cant. Nay, withal was he not a right brave and

strong man according to his kind? Healthy in body, healthy in soul—no sounder piece of British manhood was put together in that eighteenth century of time." "All who knew him intimately loved him," said Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, "nay, many of them almost worshipped him. He was the only man I ever knew whom no man, either poor or rich, held at ill-will." "Drunk or sober," said another, "he was aye the gentleman." "He spoke to all as if he was their blood-relation," and there is a typical story of a poor tailor on his estate whom Scott went to see when he lay dying. "When he heard the laird's voice, eagerly and wistfully the dying man sat up, and with his closing breath gasped out, 'The Lord bless and reward you.'" No one was ever more deeply loved, and the reason lay in his manly honesty and sincerity. Even Byron, whose experience had made him cynical and distrustful, declared that Scott was "nearly as thorough a good man as can be," and to all time Scott stands surrounded by friends who delight in his companionship and love to listen to his speech.

We cannot, therefore, be surprised that religion, in the highest sense of the term, was the mainspring of all Scott's life. He was a devout Christian, and, without any hysterics, he once declared himself ready to give his life for his faith. In the supreme moments of his life it was to his Saviour that he turned. In 1819 he thought himself to be dying, and calling his children about his bed "he took leave of them with solemn tenderness. 'For myself,' he said, 'I am unconscious of ever having done any man an injury or omitting any fair opportunity of doing any man a benefit. I well know that no human life can appear otherwise than weak and filthy in the eyes of God, but I rely on the merits and intercessions of the Redeemer.' He then laid his hands on their heads and said, 'God bless you. Live so that you may all hope to meet each other in a better place hereafter. And now leave me that I may turn my face to the wall.'" As he lay on his deathbed fifteen years later, in his half-conscious moments he was heard to repeat the Stabat Mater, texts of Scripture and verses of the Scottish Psalms. Four days before he died he woke to consciousness again, and in his last charge to Lockhart he said, "I may have but a minute to speak to you. My dear, be a good man—be virtuous—be religious—be a good man. Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here." It was in that faith that Scott passed the whole of his life.

So far as the forms of religion were concerned, his sympathies were Episcopalian. He did not often attend public worship, but regularly he conducted devotions for his household, and it was the English prayer-book that he used. At Abbotsford it was his custom, after dinner, to walk to the bowling-green

so that he might listen to the evening worship of Peter Mathieson, his coachman, and no one that knew him ever doubted the deep piety that was the foundation of his character.

It has been suggested that in his work he was unfair to the "beastly Covenanters," as he once described them to Southey. "You can hardly conceive," he says, "the perfidy, cruelty, and stupidity of these people, according to the accounts of themselves they have preserved." Borrow, in his appendix to *The Romany Rye*, has suggested that this was due to "Charlie-o'er-the-waterism," and a sneaking fondness for the mumbo-jumbo of Rome. But nothing could be more ridiculous. John Buchan, who has himself worked over the period, claims that Scott does "ample justice to the best in the Covenant and does not exaggerate the worst," and, if he makes it clear that he has no sympathy with half-hearted fanaticism, he shows again and again the beauty and strength of simple, pure, honest faith in Christ. No one in the whole realm of fiction, it is safe to say, had a firmer grasp of the essentials of true religion, and no one has done more by his work to commend them. Search his works where you will, you will find nothing that even the most fastidious need blush for. Scott had no interest in the perverted discoveries of pathological psychology. In him there was a fundamental sanity, and, while he tried to see life fearlessly, he tried also to "see it steadily and see it whole." He was himself, by inclination and temperament, wholesome and balanced and good; and his novels are the mirror of his mind.

Nothing has been said on the question of his bankruptcy. The more one reads the story, the more incredible it sounds. That Scott, so essentially shrewd and sensible, should have got his affairs into such a hopeless tangle is something that is beyond our understanding. But once the crash had come and the blow had fallen, how nobly and heroically he gave his life to redeem his honour! Nothing was liker Scott than his resolve to take the whole responsibility upon himself, and the wonderful fight he made is one of the epics of literature.

Take him all in all, Scott is one of the noblest men that ever lived, and Mark Antony's eulogy on Brutus may well be applied to him.

> His life was gentle, and the elements
> So made up in him that Nature might stand up
> And say to all the world, "This was a man."

HENRY COOK.