

A GARLAND FOR SIR WALTER SCOTT

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THE career that came to an end just a century ago was marked by two achievements, one of which alone would more than justify an existence, and both of which in conjunction form a refreshing rarity: a rich personal life, and a pursuit with its product enriching in every way and to all concerned. That successful duality of being and doing which for the great majority is a bleak neither-nor, and for the small minority a grudging either-or, for this gentleman and genius was a lavish both-and. And since this enrichment was no egoistic monopoly, its shareholders and heirs constitute a huge body of beneficiaries. For the benefit emanating from the Laird of Abbotsford radiated like hearth-fire to the warmth of household, friends, and associates; and the profit accruing from the Wizard of the North diffuses like sunshine to the brightening of the landscape and the basking of the populace. The American Washington Irving spoke for us all when he wrote back to his Scottish host: "Somehow or other, there is a genial sunshine about you that warms every creeping thing into heart and confidence."

Its light is still strong enough to dispel the mortuary gloom that usually shrouds the centenary wreath of immortelles fashioned for the shrine of our notable dead, even though they get the tribute only because they were so alive when living that their vitality pulses on and they cannot all die. Scott's garland therefore should be lustrous, fragrant, dartling the red and the blue and every colour of the rainbow, showing only enough of the darker hues to give it dignity, depth, and completeness.

Bouquets are indeed no novelty to this recipient, and except for the special occasion there would seem to be no excuse for another spray bestowed upon Sir Walter Scott. He expressed himself so unstintedly, to begin with, that he sowed a thick field for biographer and critic. And the minute it was white to the harvest, such a corps of industrious and capable labourers began the garnering, and their successors have been gleaning away so thoroughly and on the whole so harmoniously that, on the threshold of the second century since, there is nothing new to add and little to qualify, correct, or contradict.

It is appropriate that Scott should be accepted as he himself accepted life; with graceful thanks for its bounty, with polite ignoring of what was not to his taste, and with humorous or at least cheerful resignation to the inevitably distressful and depressing. There is little call to be controversial over one who had so little of the militant or the metaphysical in his own disposition, albeit not at all lacking in lively prejudices and sturdy principles. What is left, then, is the unalloyed pleasure of appreciation. In so far as our present worldly generation is not allured by the old theologic bliss of eternally contemplating divine glory and holiness, it must all the more utilize its infrequent chances for brief contemplation of mundane charm and competence, perhaps the more attractive for being so wholly human, harboring no taint of the beastly or devilish and no tinge of the saintly or angelic.

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If we take Sir Walter's life to represent the flowers in his chaplet and his works the fruit, we find it easier to perceive their luxuriance than to separate them for closer scrutiny. Not only are the blossoms and oranges intertwined, but the gay and the sombre are blended, and the sweet and the bitter mingled.

Least difficult, however, is the first matter,—the proportionate disposal of his time. The years of Walter Scott were three score and one. This fairly ample allotment was filled full enough with the occupations of a householder, landed proprietor, public-spirited citizen, and professional wage-earner to be called a busy existence in itself. But instead of all this being a *iam satis* to Scott, it was merely routine business and recreation. From the time when, in early manhood and to his own pleased amazement, he discovered a gold mine located in himself, he made it his real vocation to dig and coin it for all it was worth, meanwhile enjoying the process so much he hardly knew whether the artistic creation or the munificent pay for it was the avocation and by-product.

For those who think this product consists of a few poems and quite a bit of fiction, a completer list might be interesting news. Scott's total output may be summarized as follows: a considerable volume of verse, including half a dozen long poems and several ballads and lyrics; over thirty novels, most of them the standard three-deckers of the time; compiling of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*; mammoth editions of Dryden, Swift and others; biographies, nearly a score of condensed *Lives of the Novelists*, and a *Life of Napoleon* in nine volumes; history for children, in the series called *Tales of a Grandfather*; half a dozen volumes of reviews and literary criticism, contributed to the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*; treatises, such as *Romance, Chivalry, and Drama*, and *Demonology and Witch-*

craft; correspondence, one volume of travelogue in *Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, and two of personal epistles; the journal kept for about five years; and the lengthy prefaces to the collected edition of the *Waverley Novels*, which would run into several volumes of essays by themselves, not to mention some youthful translation from the German. It is an item of some importance that all this was hand-written, and without benefit of secretary or amanuensis, save for the dictating done when the author was too ill to hold a pen, and gasped out the sentences between screams of agony. It is also a considerable feature that this writing entailed an enormous aftermath of proof-reading which, especially in the later years, consumed a large slice out of every day.

The secret of this Herculean accomplishment, crowded moreover into a quarter of a century, was the simple one of "never doing nothing." For the apparently care-free soul, ever ready to romp with youngsters, or organize excursions for guests, or dine and discourse by the hour, or pour whole libraries into his head, and the patently extravagant spendthrift, disbursing and investing with a prodigal unconcern, was really a systematic organizer who budgeted both time and money with methodical precision, always aware in his canny Scottish mind of the where and why of every expenditure.

To be sure, one has a better chance of managing a daily task equal to twenty-four printed pages under two conditions; first, that he gets up at five in the morning and turns the bulk of it off before the nine o'clock family breakfast; and second, that he writes with fluent ease, being fed from a copious memory and a teeming imagination, and not being worried over a polished meticulous style. Scott himself would have assented to Trollope when that facile Victorian, after rousing George Eliot's horrified protest against his own similar régime, gallantly conceded that of course *her* kind of art could not be produced in any such way.

Not only could Scott's art be produced in this way, but it could in turn produce pleasure for the million, "making dress-makers and duchesses weep," purveying comedy for the discerning, excitement for the bored, and causing those who never had nibbled at novels previously to devour them whole and beg for more. This popularity in its turn produced the golden shower that gave the author at fifty "more of fame and fortune than mere literature ever procured for a man before." In fact, when an obscure young lawyer received six hundred pounds for his first poem and one thousand for his second, mere literature had been self-supporting for less than a century. Still more of a feat for a man to be paid seven hundred and fifty pounds in advance for such hack work as

an edition of Dryden, and fifteen hundred for one of Swift. Among the novels, *Woodstock*, for example, written in three months, sold for over eight thousand; and the biography of Napoleon for eighteen thousand. True enough, as he wrote to his son when he pushed that young not-too-hopeful up from lieutenant to captain by buying him a commission for four thousand pounds, Papa could afford this luxury by favour of his "bold and very gullible friend, the Public, who through their Prime Minister, Mr. Constable, have been far more liberal than I had any title to expect." And he hopes his dear little daughter-in-law will feel the taller for being the captain's lady.

Likewise true that his definition of luxury was to play the gracious Lord Bountiful, scattering largesse with a princely hand, and standing treat in a splendid way to all and sundry. And so if some of his garland's effulgence is due to a metallic glitter, the original sheen is quickly softened to the lambent glow of generosity. Quite sincerely did Scott eulogize Byron for being devoid of selfishness, which he takes "to be the basest ingredient in the human composition." And while naught else but his own self-indulgence wrought the ruin that finally put the henbane into his bouquet, even that is plucked of its venom by the benevolence that precipitated the disaster, and the courage, sweetness, and enterprise that faced and conquered it.

If it is one of the world's wonders how a man who accumulated by writing alone a sum upwards of 150,000 pounds, in addition to two or three salaries and the private incomes of himself and his wife, could find himself at fifty-five in such a financial predicament: it is another one how he pulled himself out of it by his own hands. For, as everybody knows, when Hurst and Robinson toppled upon Constable, and Constable fell against Ballantyne, and Ballantyne collapsed on Scott, Scott—standing at the end of the tumbling line and having nobody to catch him—stood his ground and took the shock. And if, as he put it, "in the tumult of bulls and bears, a poor inoffensive lion is pushed to the wall," the lion braced his back there only long enough to lash his tail and roar himself free. Sir Walter thus at bay promptly displayed the Spartan spirit under its Epicurean flesh. He doubled and trebled his already long working day, retrenched at all practicable points, apologized for accepting such trifles as fifty or a hundred pounds, demolished his health and shortened his life, but discharged in the five years left to him 70,000 of the 117,000 pounds for which he was responsible, and made it possible for his publishers to advance to the creditors within a few months after his death the entire balance, for which

they reimbursed themselves out of his book sales in another dozen years or so. Nobody hurt, after all.

But how and why did the prosperous and thrifty Scott incur this stupendous debt in the first place? The answer to that is the one word *Abbotsford*, and that same word furnishes the whole clue to his character and circumstance. His was a symmetric four-square disposition, fronting life and open to it on the domestic, rural, patriotic, and feudal sides. His ruling passions were love of home, joy in nature, pride in his own country, and delight in the picturesque romantic past. To be able to gratify all these tastes and satisfy all these desires in one grand enterprise was indeed a marvellous piece of fortune and an irresistible lure. Hence to expand his modest little two-hundred-acre farm and cottage to a fourteen-hundred-acre estate with spacious manor house was the most zestful business of Scott's career. It was at once the stage for his happy family life, the theatre for sumptuous entertainments for no less than royalty itself, a retreat from the world and a magnet for it, an ornament to his native land, and an exemplification of the aristocratic mode of existence in which he so ardently believed.

Even this munificence, however, might have been financed by spot cash deals except for Scott's boyish impatience that made him want it now. Add to this his justifiable reliance on his own productivity, and his practice of mortgaging his own future does not look so rash. We have his own testimony that he thought of his method in the euphonious terms of "anticipated funds" rather than the blunt word "debt." Nothing does he caution his sons about more emphatically than the "uncomfortable and discreditable" situation of owing money. "Habits of debt," he warns them, "are easily acquired, and are most fatal to honour and independence of feeling." In another connection he admitted that *Abbotsford* had cost him a mint of money, but explained that "it is the surest way of settling a family, if one can do it without borrowing money or incurring interest." And if he did accept an advance from Constable in consideration of "four works of fiction," as yet unnamed and unplanned, he delivered the goods, and on time.

It is an ironic coincidence that the very second entry in the *Journal*, begun at the peak of his prosperity and under brilliant blue skies, should contain the first hint of a possible storm. But this cloud no bigger than a man's hand promptly evaporates in the sunlight of reassurance. Sir Walter reflects that with his capital of fifty thousand he could pay forty shillings to the pound, and his next novel will be out in two months, so why worry? Nevertheless, a few days later he is highly resolving to be more frugal, having

in fact no more temptation to be reckless, as Abbotsford is at last large enough even for his aspirations. Therefore, no new extensions (at least until times are safe), and no more books or expensive furnishings (that is, to any extent), and the application of this year's income to the erasing of old debts, which with his health and industry will be easy. Not so easy, retorts a grim Fate; and from then on the little book he bought to be so gay with—"so proud of my handsome locked volume"—becomes darkened with an increasingly sad record of a desperate effort to keep ahead of hounding obligations. Still, he can spare a wry smile for the relief and freedom brought by poverty. He comfortably ignores a mob of tourists "whom we must have dined before our misfortunes." He is doing the infernal *Demonology*, but not for love. He wishes he were a "quill-driving clerk on wages," when he is driving his own steady quill on two biographies, one history, one novel, and a troop of essays and reviews, all at once.

Toward the end, as the once so full and regular diary grows brief and intermittent, the note, "Wrote hard to-day," is followed on successive days with a *ditto, ditto*. "I only took one turn about the thicket, and have nothing to put down but to record my labours." Or again: "The same history occurs; my desk and my exercise. I am a perfect automaton." And finally comes the time when the sole entry is the one sentence: "Wrote six leaves to-day, and am tired—that's all." (One of his leaves made four pages of print).

This rigorous self-discipline of a naturally self-pampering temperament required the more will-power because of Scott's particular hatred of being coerced. Much as the born artist enjoyed writing, the born hedonist detested doing even that under compulsion. "Propose to me to do one thing," he confesses, "and it is inconceivable the desire I have to do something else—not that it is more easy or more pleasant, but just because it is escaping from an imposed task." Not to permit an escape is one thing he thinks the beloved "Gurnal" may be useful for, and he only hopes the zeal may last. It does at least constitute a safety-valve whereby he can explode at Duty as "an unreasonable bitch," or coax himself out of his refractory kicking against "must" and "ought." He thinks that even these annoying interruptions perform a dour service, for by arousing his mood of contrariness they make him keen on the work he is withheld from. Yet even while he balks like a school-boy at clearing up his room, and thumbs his nose at the pile of letters "which have been lying on my desk like snakes, hissing at me for my dilatoriness," he manages to write enough letters, counting only those available and selected for publication

and written within twenty-eight years, to fill some seven hundred large pages. And his bill for postage, then paid by the recipient, often mounted up to a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

Such a sum was, of course, a mere bagatelle in the palmy days before the dull business of paying the piper began. And for the long while that Scott danced to the festive tune, most of his merriment began and ended at home. His original excuse for moving over to the more expansible Abbotsford was that at Ashestiel it was a bit awkward, at a gathering of the clan, to crowd over thirty people into a house that would hold ten. And for fifteen of his twenty years in his baronial domain on the Tweed, life was a lovely thing.

When the novelist has his shrewd Flora MacIvor describing to artless Rose Bradwardine the future prospects of Edward Waverley, the bantering tone is doubtless directed as much to Walter as to Edward. "High and perilous enterprise," she says, "is not Waverley's forte. He would never have been his celebrated ancestor, Sir Nigel, but only Sir Nigel's eulogist and poet." He will be at home and in his place "in the quiet circle of domestic happiness, lettered indolence, and elegant enjoyments, of Waverley Honour." "And he will refit the old library in the most exquisite Gothic taste, and garnish its shelves with the rarest and most valuable volumes;—and he will draw plans and landscapes, and write verses, and rear temples, and dig grottoes;—and he will stand in a clear summer night in the colonnade before the hall, and gaze on the deer as they stray in the moonlight, or lie shadowed by the boughs of the huge old fantastic oaks;—and he will repeat verses to his beautiful wife, who will hang upon his arm;—and he will be a happy man."

"And she will be a happy woman," thought poor Rose.

Except for the indolence and the passive sentimentality, Flora MacIvor's Waverley might pass for a version of Williamina Stuart's Scott, whose suit also was rejected. And when Edward found himself well consoled by the spicily sweet and brightly radiant Rose, he might have said, as Walter did after years of congenial affection and loyalty with Charlotte, that his broken heart had been "handsomely pieced," even though the crack would remain till his dying day.

In any case, what atoned to Walter for anything that might need atonement was the adored and adoring circle that infused his idolized Abbotsford with mirth and cheer, peace and security. For two of his four children Scott made excellent marriages, in the good parental fashion of the old régime. And if not actually fonder of Sophia's husband and Walter's wife than of his own progeny, he was certainly the most devoted father-in-law on record.

In John Lockhart, the clever and engaging young writer and editor, the novelist found more real companionship and pride than in his own two brawny but not so brainy lads. Long before J. G. L. became a relative, he was looked upon as a sort of literary successor,—as Sir Walter wrote him one morning after a night of such excruciating pain he thought it might be his last. “I *waltzed* with Madam Cramp,” he says, “to my own sad music,” and goes on in his jocose rebound:—

I sighed and howled,
And groaned and growled,
A wild and wondrous sound.

Yet in the midst of all this he could be thinking of his young friend and planning for his future. The older man did not suspect then how closely that future was to be identified with his own,—that this admirable Lockhart was to become not only his son-in-law and the sole link with posterity (for the present generation are Lockhart-Scotts), but such a biographer as never was, save another Scotsman, and in some ways this one had the advantage over Boswell.

Sir Walter never had jollier days than those when John and Sophia lived in the cozy cottage two miles across the grounds and always came home for Sunday dinner, when little Hugh would ride his pony—smaller than some of the dogs—right into the house and up to the table for a dainty piece of bread, like the knights of chivalry, and when Papa Scott could run over and have breakfast with the young folk by the bonny brook. He was desolate when they moved to London, though highly gratified over John’s great honour and prestige in succeeding Gifford on the *Quarterly*. He computes how with her good management Sophia can live modestly in the city on three thousand pounds a year, and sees how handy it will be for brother Charles to have a place to stay when he runs up to town from Oxford.

This youngest of the flock was the only collegian, and therefore got all the parental exhortations meet for the student and man of the world. And in his advice about foresight, renunciation, and sagacity, Sir Walter makes a fine discriminating analysis of the requirements of high scholarship. Nor is the social side of the boy’s development neglected. His father is enthusiastic over Charles’s welcome into homes so good for his manners and morals as the Duchess of Buckingham’s, where from contact with genuine breeding and its simplicity he may acquire the proper contempt for the vulgar swaggering of the spurious and meretricious. Scott

is quite frank about wanting this son, who gave some signs of being a chip off the old block, to be really distinguished and not merely mediocre. As it happened, it was his nephew Walter, also sheltered under Scott's broad wing and furnished with technical training and wise counsel for foreign service, who rewarded this trust by becoming in due time a General in the Anglo-Indian army.

The military life was likewise destined for Walter, eldest son and heir, who represented his father's ambition for physical prowess, as Charles did for intellectual. In his own youth Scott was obliged to look wistfully on while one brother went into the army and another into the navy, leaving him to betake his limping leg to the bar. Hence his compensating delight in being the means of making his son both Sir Walter and Captain Scott.

The patriot is speaking when he writes to the young officer:

Nothing, my dear boy, which earth has to give me can afford me so much pleasure as to know that you are doing your duty like a man of sense and honour, and qualifying yourself to serve your king and country, and do credit to the name you bear.

And the father is speaking when he writes to the son:

While I see you the affectionate, considerate, and steady fellow you have always been, what have I to do with money that can be more agreeable to me than to assist your reasonable views? A little hospitality at Abbotsford and my country improvements are my sole expenses.

Even when he has to remonstrate against seemingly unfilial carelessness and rudeness, father does it with imperturbable patience and inexhaustible courtesy. And when the youth's boorish behaviour calls for extenuation to others, it is attributed to his misfortune in being the son of a celebrity. Ever since his high school days, when his schoolmates had nicknamed him The Lady of the Lake, the boy had suffered from being the lion's whelp, never having learned, the lion explains, that the truly gifted are not critical.

All the more triumph, then, when the doting parent found exactly the right bride for this more amiable than urbane young man. She too was shy and awkward, but the demure little thing, if "no dasher," had a warm heart, a clear head, a high code, and a substantial fortune. While the moral virtues are, of course, the chief attraction, the material asset is not to be snubbed. Her name may be Jane Jobson, but she is the Lady of Lochore and has titled connections. And with what gusto, after the compliant marriage, does Papa take the somewhat isolated and forsaken

estate in hand, and revel in this extra chance to indulge his hobby of landscape-gardening and park-planning.

With equal relish he sends his "pretty bird a pen-feather for her wing" when she is carried to Irish barracks by her black Hussar "like a partridge borne away by a hawk." Anticipating her fright at a pedantic correspondent, he tactfully instructs her not to mend a pen when she writes to him, or think for a moment about subject or expression. He is now sure of getting some news anyway and being able to read it, for even when Walter did write, his scrawl had "a happy resemblance to a partridge scratching in the dust below a hedge." Indeed this daughter-in-law more than anyone else seemed to evoke Scott's tenderness and chivalry and mirth. She is his dearest, his darling, his love, his sweet Anne Page,—this last in reference to the jest with which he first introduced the matrimonial subject to Walter, then alluded to as a chosen Slender with no disconcerting Mr. Fenton in the offing.

The mutual admiration society was complete when even the redoubtable Mrs. Jobson, who had opposed the alliance, capitulated to the magnetic Sir Walter. He admits that when she dines at Abbotsford it still takes all of Sophia's honey and oil to keep peace between Mamma and Anne and this trying guest; but when she shares a bachelor's supper with him up in Edinburgh, she is in high spirits and he has the vanity to suppose himself a prime favourite.

When father announces the projected visit to the newly weds again, he tactfully cautions Jane not to make a fuss over their entertainment, reminding her that when she was staying at Abbotsford they were in gala attire, but that ordinarily they lived very simply. While in Dublin he takes occasion to assure himself of Jane's capable and orderly housekeeping, at the same time that he is lavishly treating her to "the vile mammon of unrighteousness." He fears that his officious solicitude may be as annoying as a mustard plaster, but begs them to remember that, "like all old papas," he would rather play with his children than "be genteel, sensible, and clever with half the world beside."

It is pleasant for us to remember that this excursion to Ireland in the last perfectly happy summer of Scott's life was such a complete success. It is the first item recorded in the Journal begun the next November, with the complacent note that the jaunt cost five hundred pounds, "for we travelled a large party and in style." The large party consisted only of Scott, Lockhart, and Anne, for Charlotte was scared of roughing it, and Sophia had to take care of Littlejohn. Anne is praised by her father as a good sport, and indeed with her peppery tongue and daring spirit she was more

akin to John than any of them. Scott was greatly amused over a pun of hers about a meeting of railway stockholders at which "there was plenty of raillery if little wit." He might have added that according to their family creed, raillery was always better than railing.

Practically the only thing that could provoke Sir Walter to railing was Whiggism, with all its stubborn fallacies. He was particularly exasperated at having to campaign so hard to get John Wilson elected to the Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. But he could gloat the more over the Tory victory, won in spite of "the most desperate and unfair efforts by the Whigs" to prevent it. "It is odd," reflects this zealous supervisor of education, "the rage these gentlemen have for superintending education. They consider it as their own province." When a candidate has such apt qualifications as "literary ability, sound principles, gentleman-like conduct, and generosity of sentiment," it would seem that even a saucy "Christopher North" should be eligible to teach ethics and metaphysics without having his youthful escapades raked up against him. "But such is party!" Such is party also when Jeffrey addresses the labourers, and incites Scott to the scornful remark that "The Whigs will live and die in the heresy that the world is ruled by little pamphlets and speeches, and that if you can sufficiently demonstrate that a line of conduct is most consistent with men's interest, you have therefore and thereby demonstrated that they will at length, after a few speeches on the subject, adopt it of course."

Sir Walter's Toryism was, like most partisanship, an affair of the heart more than of the head, being rooted in the enchanting feudal lore. In his own life it gave him the same sincere pleasure to render homage to the Duke of Buccleuch, Head of his Clan, as to receive the respectful deference of Tom Purdie and the tribe of henchmen and hinds to whom he was master and chief. His own heredity, being a blend of Whig and Tory, made it quite natural and consistent for him to be a staunch Jacobite and a faithful Hanoverian, anything that was legitimate monarchy and firmly anti-Jacobin.

If Lady Fortune in a freakish humor meant to exhibit this sturdy Scotsman, whose mortal span sat evenly astride two centuries, as a show-piece for the edification of pessimists, she made two of her most dramatic gestures at his birth and death. His persistent parents had to beget and bury a full set of offspring before they could start a family at all. And after the first half dozen were dead and gone, they turned to and had another set to round

out the dozen of which Walter (the second) was number nine. Sixty years later this Walter's last public activity was fighting the Reform Bill, which was passed the year he passed on. So important were these two events that in combination they mark a more significant date for the inauguration of a new era than the accession of a Queen. Wherefore the Victorian Age is regarded as beginning in 1832 instead of 1837.

It was an offence to the grim Carlyle that his genial countryman was "at ease not only in Zion but in Babel." It is true that Scott was not given to volcanic eruption, but neither was he sunk in apathetic calm. When menaced with a visitation from Giant Despair, he puts his faith in God and goes for a walk. Even the rue of resignation and fortitude he wears with a certain drollery. When the zeal for his Journal finally flagged, he excused its lapses on the ground that it was useless to record "such an infinite quantity of nothing," and selfish to air his gloom, yet concluded, "but, hang it, I hate to be beat, so here goes for better behaviour." And when his autumn became "like the gray days that neither promise sunshine nor threaten rain; too melancholy for enjoyment and too tranquil for repining," he snatched all the compensation the climate allowed.

Nor was it quite fair of Carlyle to accuse Scott of having no philosophy. The modest pansies in his garland do not, to be sure, flaunt lurid Everlasting Nays and Yeas, but they breathe such sane little notions as "Be gay in moderation, that you may be gay long." They preach no fulminating Gospel of Work, but are content with a retrospective "Wrought a good task to-day." If their thoughts are not sublime, they escape being ridiculous. If not profound, neither are they morbid.

With all its hues and odors, the wreath of Sir Walter Scott is gleaming and perfumed with rosemary: his own transient memory of a satisfying life; our continuing remembrance of a character pungent without bitterness and experienced without disillusion. Such felicity was his and is ours largely because this man was "the hardest worker and heartiest player" of his time.