The Female Portrait Gallery, From Sir Walter Scott

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FEMALE PORTRAIT GALLERY, FROM SIR WALTER SCOTT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE IMPROVISATRICE."

No. I.—Flora M'Ivor and Rose Bradwardine.

Sir Walter Scott was the Luther of literature. He reformed and he regenerated. To say that he founded a new school is not saying the whole truth; for there is something narrow in the idea of a school, and his influence has been universal. Indeed, there is no such thing as a school in literature; each great writer is his own original, and "none but himself can be his parallel." We hear of the school of Dryden and of Pope, but where and what are their imitators? Parnassus is the very reverse of Mont Blanc. There the summit is gained by treading closely in the steps of the guides; but in the first, the height is only to be reached by a pathway of our own. The influence of a genius like Scott's is shown by the fresh and new spirit he pours into literature.

No merely literary man ever before exercised the power over his age exercised by Scott. It is curious to note the wealth circulated through his means, and the industry and intelligence to which he gave the impetus. The innkeepers of Scotland ought to have no sign but his head. When Waverley appeared, a tour through Scotland was an achievement: now, how few there are but have passed an autumn at least amid its now classic scenery. I own it gave my picturesque fancies at first a shock, to hear of a steam-boat on Loch Katrine; but I was wrong. Nothing could be a more decisive proof of the increased communication between England and Scotland—and communication is the regal road to improvement of every kind. How many prejudices have floated away on the tremulous line of vapour following the steam-vessel; and what a store of poetical enjoyment must the voyagers have carried home! More than one touch of that sly humour, which seems to me peculiarly and solely marking the *Scotch*, has been bestowed on the cockney invaders of the "land of brown heath and shaggy wood." May I, a Londoner bred, say a word in defence of the feeling which takes such to the shore of

> "Lovely Loch Achray!
> Where shall they find on foreign land,
> So lone a lake, so sweet a strand?"

But the dwellers in the country have little understanding of, and therefore little sympathy with, the longing for green fields which haunts the dweller in towns. The secret dream of almost every inhabitant in those dusky streets where even a fresh thought would scarcely seem to enter, is to realise an independence, and go and live in the country. Where is every holiday spent but in the country! What do the smoky geraniums, so carefully tended in many a narrow street and blind alley attest, but the inherent love of the country! To whom do the blooming and sheltered villas, which are a national feature in English landscape, belong, but to men who pass the greater part of their lives in small dim counting-houses! This love of nature is divinely given to keep alive, even in the most toiling and world-worn existence, something of the imaginative and the apart. It is a positive good quality; and one good quality has some direct, or indirect tendency to produce another. It were an unphilosophical creation, that of a human being—

> "Linked with one virtue, and a thousand crimes."

That virtue would have been a sweet lure to better companions. Schiller is nearer truth when he says—

> "Never, believe me, appear the immortals—
> Never alone."

Scott has a peculiar faculty of awakening this love of the country, and of idealising it into a love of the picturesque. Who can wonder then, that when such descriptions came accompanied with all the associations of romance—all the interest of stirring narrative—that a visit to "Caledonia, stern and wild," became the day-dream of all who looked to their summer excursion as the delight and reward of the year. I have never visited Scotland—in all human probability I never shall; but were a fairy, that pleasant remover of all ordinary difficulties, to give me the choice of what country I wished to see, my answer would be—Scotland; and that solely to realise the pictures, which reading Scott has made part of my memory.

Another noticeable fact is, the number of books which have grown out of the Waverley novels. How many local and antiquarian tomes have brought forth a world of curious and attractive information, in which no one before took an interest! And here I may be allowed to allude to the prejudice, for such it is, that the historical novel is likely to be taken for, and to interfere with history. Not such novels as Scott wrote, certainly. In the first place, his picture of the time is as exact as it is striking: the reader must inevitably add to his stock of knowledge, as well as of amusement: he must acquire a general notion of the time; its good and its evil are brought in a popular shape before him; while the estimate of individual character is as true as it is forcible. Secondly, there must be something inherently vacant and unproductive in the mind which his pages stimulate to no further inquiry.

In such hands it would be of little consequence whether a fictitious or an actual chronicle were placed—either would lead to no result. Scott's works have done more towards awakening a rational curiosity, than a whole world of catechisms and abridgments would ever have accomplished. History has been read owing to his stimulus.

Prose fiction was at its lowest ebb when Waverley appeared. Scott gives in his preface a most amusing picture of the supply then in the market: a castle was no castle without a ghost, or at least what seemed one till the last chapter, and the heroine was a less actual creation than the harp which ever accompanied her. These heroines were always faultless: the heroes were divided into two classes; either as perfect as their impossible mistresses, or else rakes who were reformed in the desperate extremity of a third volume. Waverley must have taken the populace of novel readers quite by surprise: there is in its pages the germ of every excellence, afterwards so fully developed—the description, like a painting; the skill in giving the quaint and peculiar in character; the dramatic narrative; and above all, that tone of romance before unknown to English prose literature. Flora M'Ivor is the first conception of female character in which the highly imaginative is the element.

Perhaps we must except the Clementina of Richardson—a poetical creation, which only genius could have conceived amid the formal and narrow-motived circle which surrounded her. Clarissa is more domestic and pathetic; though in the whole range of our dramatic poetry, so fertile in touching situation, there is nothing more heart-rending than the visit of her cousin to her in the last volume. He finds the happy and blooming girl whom he left the idol of her home circle, accustomed to affection and attention, surrounded by cheerful pleasures and graceful duties —he finds her in a miserable lodging, among strangers, faded, heartbroken, and for daily employ making her shroud. A French critic says: "Even Richardson himself did not dare hazard making Clarissa in love with his hero." Richardson had far too fine a perception of character to do any such thing. What was there in Lovelace that Clarissa should love him? He is witty; but wit is the last quality to excite passion, or to secure affection. Liberty is the element of love; and from the first he surrounds her with restraint, and inspires her with distrust. Moreover, he makes no appeal to the generosity of her nature; and to interest those generous feelings, so active in the feminine temperament, is the first step in gaining the citadel of her heart. To have loved, would not have detracted one touch from the delicate colouring of Clarissa's character; to have loved a man like Lovelace would. In nothing, more than in attachment is "the nature subdued to what it works in." But Lovelace is now an historical picture; it represents a class long since passed away, and originally of foreign importation. It belonged to the French *régime*, when the young men of birth and fortune had no sphere of activity but the camp; all more honourable and useful occupation shut, and when, as regarded his country, he was a civil cipher. The Lovelace or the Lauzun could never have been more than an exception in our stirring country, where pursuits and responsibility are in the lot of all, They may, however, be noted as proofs that where the political standard is low, the moral standard will be still lower.

Excepting, therefore, the impassioned Italian of Sir Charles Grandison, Flora M'Ivor is the first female character of our novels in which poetry is the basis of the composition. She has all Clementine wants; picturesque accessories, and the strong moral purpose. Generally speaking, the mind of a woman is developed by the heart; the being is incomplete till love brings out either its strength or its weakness. This is not the case with the beautiful Highlander; and Scott is the first who has drawn a heroine, and put the usual master-passion aside. We believe few women go down to the grave without at some time or other feeling the full force of the affections. Flora, had not her career been cut short in the very fulness of its flower, would have loved, loved with all the force of a character formed before it loved. Scott's picture is, at the time when she is introduced, as full of truth as of beauty. The strong mind has less immediate need of an object than the weak one. Rose Bradwardine falls in love at once, compelled by "the sweet necessity of loving." Flora M'Ivor feels no such necessity; her imagination is occupied; her on-lookings to the future, excited by the fortunes of the ill-fated House to which her best sympathies and most earnest hopes are given. The House of Stuart has at once her sense of justice and of generosity on its side; it is connected with the legends of her earliest years; she is impelled towards it with true female adherence to the unfortunate. Moreover, her affections have already an object in her brother. There is no attachment stronger, more unselfish, than the love between brother and sister, thrown on the world orphans at an early age, with none to love them save each other. They feel how much they stand alone, and this draws them more together. Constant intercourse has given that perfect understanding which only familiarity can do; hopes, interests, sorrows, are alike in common. Each is to either a source of pride; it is the tenderness of love without its fears, and the confidence of marriage, without its graver and more anxious character. The fresh impulses of youth are all warm about the heart.

It would have been an impossibility for Flora to have attached herself to Edward Waverley. A woman must look up to love: she may deceive herself, but she must devoutly believe in the superiority of her lover. With one so constituted as Flora—proud, high-minded, with that tendency to idealise inseparable from the imagination, Flora must have admired before she could have loved. The object of her attachment must have had something to mark him out from "the undistinguishable many." Now, Edward Waverley is just like nine-tenths of our acquaintance, or at least what they seem to us—pleasant, amiable, and gentlemanlike, but without one atom of the picturesque or the poetical about them. Flora is rather the idol of his imagination than of his heart, and it might well be made a question whether he be most in love with the rocky torrent, the Highland harp, the Gaelic ballad, or the lovely singer. They would have been unhappy had they married. Flora's decision of temper would have deepened into harshness, when placed in the unnatural position of exercising it for a husband; while Edward would have had too much quickness of perception not to know the influence to which he submitted—he would have been mortified even while too indolent to resist. Respect and reserve would have become their household deities; and where these alone reign, the hearth is but cold.

Rose Bradwardine is just the ideal of a girl—simple, affectionate, ready to please and to be pleased—likely to be formed by her associates, ill-fitted to be placed in difficult situations; but whose sweet and kindly nature is brought out by happiness and sunshine. She would be content to gaze on the plans her husband drew for "ornamental grottoes and temples," and, content that they were his, ask not if his talents did not need a more useful range and a higher purpose. Rose would have kept her husband for ever at Waverley Honour—Flora would have held

"Shame to the coward thought that ere betrayed
The noon of manhood to a myrtle shade.

But, alas! to such—the decided and the daring—Fate deals a terrible measure of retribution. I know nothing in the whole range of fiction—that fiction whose truth is life—so deeply affecting as "Flora in a large gloomy apartment, seated by a latticed window, sewing what seemed to be a garment of white flannel." It is the shroud of her brother—the last of his ancient line—the brave—the generous—the dearly-loved Fergus! How bitter is her anguish when she exclaims, "The strength of mind on which Flora prided herself has murdered her brother! Volatile and ardent, he would have divided his energies amid a thousand objects. It was I who taught him to concentrate them. Oh! that I could recollect that I had but once said to him, 'He that striketh with the sword shall die by the sword!'"

It is a fearful responsibility, the exercise of influence: let our own conduct bring its own consequences—we may well meet the worst; not so when we have led another to pursue any given line of action: if they suffer, how tenfold is that suffering visited on ourselves! For Flora life could offer nothing but the black veil of the Benedictine convent. There are no associations so precious as those of our earlier years. It is upon them that the heart turns back amid after-cares and sorrows:—the nursery, the old garden, the green field, remain the latest things that memory cherishes. They keep alive something of their own freshness and purity; and the affections belonging to those uncalculating hours have a faith and warmth unknown to after-life. To this ordinary but most sweet love Flora had added the ideal and the picturesque—and love, to reach its highest order, must be worked up by the imagination. She saw in her brother the chieftain of their line—the last descendant of Ivor. He was the support of the cause whose loyalty to its ill-fated adherents was as religion—their lofty enthusiasm was as much in common as their daily habits; they looked back and they looked forward together. When the last Vich Ian Vohr had perished on the scaffold, there remained for his lonely and devoted sister but the convent—a brief resting-place before the grave.

L. E. L.

FEMALE PORTRAIT GALLERY, FROM SIR WALTER SCOTT*.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE IMPROVVISATRICE."

No. II.—CONSTANCE.

IT is a curious thing, after years have elapsed, to go back upon the pages of a favourite author. Nothing shows us more forcibly the change that has taken place in ourselves. The book is a mental mirror—the mind starts from its own face, so much freshness, and so much fire has passed away. The colours and the light of youth have gone together. The judgment of the man rarely confirms that of the boy. What was once sweet has become mawkish, and the once exquisite simile appears little more than an ingenious conceit. The sentiment which the heart once beat to applaud has now no answering key-note within, and the real is perpetually militating against the imagined. It is a great triumph to the poet when we return to the volume, and find that our early creed was, after all, the true religion. Few writers stand this test so well as Sir Walter Scott. We read him at first with an eagerness impetuous as his own verse: years elapse, we again take up those living pages, and we find ourselves carried away as before. Our choice has changed, perhaps, as to favourite passages, but we still find favourites. Scott is the epic poet of England; he does for chivalry what Homer did for the heroic age. He caught it just fading into dim oblivion, living by tradition, veiled by superstition, uncertain and exaggerated; yet not less the chaos from whence sprang the present, which must trace to that morning checquered darkness, the acquisitions and the characteristics of to-day. What constitutes the great epic poet? his power of revivifying the past. It is not till a nation has gained a certain point in civilization that it desires to look back; but when action allows a breathing time for thought, and the mechanical and customary has succeeded to the adventurous and unexpected, then we desire to trace the Nile of our moral progress to its far and hidden fountains. It is this desire which is the inspiration of Walter Scott. From the dim waters he evokes the shining spirit, and from scattered fragments constructs the glorious whole. We cannot sympathize with the regret that he expresses in one of the exquisite introductions to "Marmion," when but for want of kingly countenance—

> "Dryden, in immortal strain,
> Had raised the Table Round again."

Dryden lived in an age when the political and moral standards were set at too low a water-mark for the high tides of poetry. With the most splendid and vigorous versification, with an energy of satire and wit that had the point of the dagger and the weight of the axe, Dryden was deficient in what Scott possessed. He would have lacked the picturesque which calls up yesterday, and the sentiment which links it with to-day. The machinery of guardian angels which he proposed is enough to show that the first design was a failure. It is a great poetical mistake to revive exploded superstition. The gods are effective in Homer, because both the age of which he wrote and that in which he wrote believed devoutly in the terrors of their thunder. But the guardian angels of England, Ireland, and Scotland—St. George, St. Patrick, and St. Andrew—could never have been more than ingenious human inventions. Scott did as much with superstition as any modern writer could venture. He gave the omen, the prophecy, and the gramarye, without which the picture he drew would have been incomplete. And what a picture he has drawn! how true, how breathing! It is England exactly as England was—full of tumult and of adventure, but with a rude sense of justice and a dawn of information destined to produce such vast after-growth of knowledge and prosperity. No writer has the art of conveying so much by a slight intimation. Sir Hugh the Heron Bold urges his invitation on the English Baron, that he "may breathe his war-horse well," for—

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* Continued from No. ccv., p. 39.

"The Scots can rein a mettled steed,
And love to couch a spear.
St. George! a stirring life they lead
That have such neighbours near."

Wat Tinlyn gives in three lines an equally vivid notion of the consequences of such "pleasant pastime:"—

"They burn'd my little lonely tower;
The foul fiend rive their souls therefore!
It had not been burn'd a year or more."

Not to have your house burned over your head for a twelvemonth seems an unwonted piece of domestic quiet. The metre, too, of these noble poems was admirably chosen. It is entirely English—it belongs to the period it illustrates—and the battle alone in "Marmion" may show what was its spirit and strength. It must, indeed, have rung like a silver trumpet amid the silken inanities of the Hayley and Seward school. It is quite odd now to read the sort of deprecating praise with which these poems were received by the established critical authorities. The expression of popular applause is too strong to be resisted, but while Mr. Scott's talents are universally admitted, he is constantly admonished to choose some loftier theme, as if any theme could have been better suited to a great national poet than one belonging to the history of that country whose youth is renewed in his stirring lines.

Never did any one age produce two minds so essentially opposed as those of Byron and Scott. Byron idealised and expressed that bitter spirit of discontent which has at the present moment taken a more material and tangible form. He is the incarnation of November. From time immemorial it has been an Englishman's privilege to grumble, and Byron gave picturesque language to the universal feeling. He embodied in his heroes what is peculiarly our insular character—its shyness, its sensitiveness, and its tendency to morbid despondency. Scott, on the contrary, took the more commercial and fighting side of the character; he embodied its enterprise and resistance. The difference is strongly shown in the delineation of their two most marked heroes—"Lara" and "Marmion." Both are men brave, unscrupulous, and accustomed to action; but Lara turns disgusted from a world which to him has neither an illusion nor a pleasure. Marmion, on the contrary, desires to pursue his career of worldly advancement: he looks forward to increased riches and power, and indulges in no misanthropic misgivings as to the worth of the acquisition when once gained. Both are attended by a Page—that favourite creation of the olden dramatists; Byron's is little more than the shadowy but graceful outline: Scott has worked out his creation truly and severely. The Pages in the old drama are entirely poetical creations; they occupy the debatable ground between the fanciful and the existing; they belong exclusively to the romantic in literature. They could only have been fancied when poetry delighted to hold love a creed as well as a passion. The heart called up the ideal to redeem the real, and an attachment was elevated by disinterestedness and moral beauty. There is none of this high-toned imagination in the classic fictions. Women were then considered as articles of property. The

> Seven lovely captives of the Lesbian line,
> Skill'd in each art, unmatch'd in form divine—

with whom Agamemnon seeks to propitiate the wrath of Achilles—hold an inferior place to the "twice ten vases of refulgent gold"—or to the twelve race-horses destined to form part of the offering. Achilles, though he protests that he loves the "beautiful captive of his spear," yet, not only parts with her, but, what would almost have been worse to a woman, parts with her without an adieu, and she is received again in silent indifference. She departs without a farewell, and returns without a welcome. Briseïs, however, loses ground in our sympathy, by her lamentation over the body of Patroclus:—

> "The first loved consort of my virgin bed,
> Before these eyes in fatal battle bled:
> Thy friendly hand uprear'd me from the plain,
> And dried my sorrows for a husband slain.
> Achilles' care you promised I should prove,
> The first, the dearest partner of his love."

Certainly the promise of a second husband may be very effective consolation for the loss of the first; still it says little for the delicacy or the constancy of the lady who was so consoled. But Christianity brought its own heaven to the things of earth; every passion was refined, and every affection exalted. Only under the purifying influence of that inward world to which it gave light, could sentiment have had its birth—and sentiment is the tenth Muse and the fourth Grace of modern poetry.

But in the description of Constance there also is that strong perception of the actual, which is Scott's most marked characteristic. He paints her exactly what in all probability she would have been; he works out the severe lesson of retribution and of degradation. What is the current of Marmion's mind, when

> "Constance, late betray'd and scorn'd,
> All lovely on his soul return'd:
> Lovely, as when, at treacherous call,
> She left her convent's peaceful wall;

Crimson'd with shame, with terror mute,
Dreading alike, escape, pursuit;
Till love, victorious o'er alarms,
Hid fears and blushes in his arms?

Such is the first picture; what is the second?

Alas! thought he, how changed that mien,
How changed those timid looks have been!
Since years of guilt and of disguise
Have arm'd the terrors of her eyes.
No more of virgin terror speaks
The blood that mantled in her cheeks:
Fierce and unfeminine are there,
Frenzy for joy, for grief despair."

It is the strangest problem of humanity—one too, for which the closest investigation can never quite account—to trace the progress by which innocence becomes guilt, and how those who formerly trembled to think of crime, are led on to commit that at which they once shuddered. The man the most steeped in wickedness, must have had his innocent and his happy moments—a child, he must have played in the sunshine with spirits as light as the golden curls that toss on the wind. His little hands must have been clasped in prayer at his mother's knee; he must, during some moment of youth's generous warmth, have pitied human suffering, and wondered how man's blood could ever be shed by man: and if this holds good of man—how much more so of woman! But that it is one of those stern truths which experience forces us to know—we never could believe in murder as a feminine crime; yet, from the days of Clytemnestra, down to those of Mrs. Johnson, who took her trial for murder, "looking very respectable in a black silk cloak and straw bonnet," woman has been urged on to that last and most desperate wickedness. But the causes of masculine sin are more various than those which act upon the gentler sex. A woman's crime has almost always its origin in that which was given to be the sweetest and best part of her nature—her affections: a man's influence is much greater over a woman than hers over him—almost unconsciously she models her sentiments upon his—she adopts his opinions, she acquires the greater portion of her information through his means. As to her character—by character, I would wish to express that mental bent, which, once taken, always influences, more or less, that character—"Love gave it energy, as love gave it birth." An attachment is a woman's great step in life; for the first time she is called up to decide and on that decision how much of the future will rest! There are, of course, many exceptions to this rule—there are instances in which the wife has been the redeeming angel—but, in nine cases out of ten, the man raises or depresses his companion to his own moral level. I remember once staying with a lady who was robbed of a valuable gold chain. The policeman was sent for, and his first inquiry was, as to who "the maid kept company with? for the London thieves have a regular set of lovers—and that is how half the robberies are committed." Constance is worked out in darker colours than Scott often uses for his feminine portraits. Our sex, at least, ought to be grateful to him, for how divine is the faith he holds in all that is good in us! Even with

Constance, how much the soul is "subdued by pity!"—how is the horror relieved by beauty! I know no description conveying such an idea of exquisite loveliness, as that of Constance before her judges:—

> "Her sex a page's dress belied,
> Obscured her charms, but could not hide.
> A monk undid the silken band,
>   That tied her tresses fair;
> And down her slender form they spread,
>   In ringlets rich and rare.
> When thus her face was given to view,
> Although so pallid was her hue,
> It did a ghastly contrast bear
> To those bright ringlets glistering fair:
> Her look composed, and steady eye,
> Bespoke a matchless constancy;
> And there she stood, so calm and pale,
> That, but her breathing did not fail,
> And motion slight of eye and head,
> And of her bosom, warranted
> That neither sense nor pulse she lacks,
> You might have thought a form of wax,
> Wrought to the very life, was there,
> So still she was, so pale, so fair."

It is wonderful how much Scott contrives to suggest to the imagination. The above picture brings Constance's previous existence so vividly to mind! The fugitive nun is again beneath the sway from whence she once fled:—she fled, timid, trusting, and hopeful; the beating heart, impatient of restraint, and confident of happiness—the lurking daring shown in the very escape; and the native courage in the resolve that could brave all the terrors of superstition; time passes on—

> "For three long years I bow'd my pride,
> A horse-boy in his train to ride."

Here again the spirit of determination is shown; Constance will not dwell alone, apart—

> "Within some lonely bower."

No; she will keep at her lover's side—in the wide and weary world she has nothing to do but to wait upon Marmion's steps. But even that haughty spirit has its sad weak moments: Sir Hugh has

> "Often mark'd his cheeks were wet
> With tears he fain would hide."

It is a cruel proof of the want of generosity in human nature, that an affection too utterly self-sacrificing always meets with an evil return. The obligation for which we know there is no requital becomes a burden hard to be borne; we take refuge in ingratitude. Secondly, the conscience is never quite without

> "That shuddering chill
> Which follows fast on deed of ill."

And we are glad to lay the blame on any rather than ourselves; and lastly—for small misfortunes are harder to bear than great ones—we are impatient under the minor annoyances, inevitable in consequence:—Marmion had not so much exhausted his love for Constance as that he was

"Weary to hear the desperate maid
Threaten by turn, beseech, upbraid."

Years of misery and mortification had done their work: right and wrong were confounded together in the first instance. Constance could neither look forward nor back; she was forced to exist intensely in the present; and that is one of the worst punishments that guilt can know. Our youth is gone from us with all its kindlinesses, its innocent fondness, and its graceful amusements; memory can only

"lead us back
In mournful mockery o'er the shining track
Of our young life, and point out every ray
Of hope and truth we've lost upon the way."

Our future is obscure and threatening; the eyes involuntarily turn away—they can see nothing but the phantom—more terrible for its indistinctness—of slow, but certain retribution. Remorse, unattended by repentance, always works for evil—it adds bitterness and anger to error.

Such are the dark materials out of which the character of Constance is formed; we can trace its degradation step by step—we see how the timid has grown hardened—the resolute reckless—and the affectionate only passionate. Constant contact with coarser natures has seared the finer perceptions, and the sense of right and wrong is deadened by hardship, suffering, and evil communion. The character so formed has now to be worked upon by the most fearful passion which can agitate the human heart—that which is strong as death and cruel as the grave—the passion of jealousy. The name of jealousy is often taken in vain—Henry VIII. is called jealous when he was only tyrannical;—the mere desire of influence, envy, and irritability of temper, are often veiled under the name of jealousy; and many a husband and wife talk of "being jealous," while in reality profoundly indifferent to each other, and only desiring a decent excuse for anger: it is oftener envy than any other feeling. But the passion of jealousy cannot exist without the passion of love, and is like its parent, creative, impetuous, and credulous. Earth holds no misery so great as that of doubting the affection, which is dearer than life itself—and perhaps it takes its worst shape to a woman. Her attachment is to her more than it ever can be to a man. It enters into her ordinary course of existence—it belongs to the small sweet cares of every day—while it is not less the great aim and end of her being. With her, but "once to doubt" is not "once to be resolved," but to plunge into a chaos of small distracting fears. How much more must this be the case when the affection has been one of sacrifice and of dishonour! Constance must have watched for weary hours the slightest sign of change—she must have feared before she felt—expected long before it came—yet scarce believed when it did come. At length the fatal hour arrives; she knows that she is "betrayed and scorned." In the fearful solitude of Lindisfarne, how bitterly must she have numbered every sacrifice made to "that false knight and falser lover!" Youth, innocence, hours of tender watchfulness, hope on earth, and belief in heaven—all these have been given for his sake, who leaves her to perish by a dreadful death—and, what is the worst sting of that death, leaves her for another;—she has attempted the life of her rival, and failed:—a darker doom yet remains, she will

> "Give him to the headsman's stroke,
> Although her heart that instant broke."

Marmion shall not live on with a fairer bride—that heart, which had been so unutterably precious to her, shall never be the resting-place of another. The fierce and daring love which has ruled her through life is with her even in death. She gave the fatal packet—

> "But to assure her soul that none
> Shall ever wed with Marmion."

There is here one exquisite touch of knowledge in feminine nature—the grave yawns beneath her feet, opened by her lover's falsehood—her revenge has pointed the pathway to his scaffold—yet her heart turns to him with an inconsistent reliance—and menaces that dark conclave with fiery visitings if "Marmion's vengeance late should wake:" she has yet a lingering pride in the brave and powerful baron

> "First amid England's chivalry."

Scott deprecates censure on him who

> "Died a gallant knight—
> With sword in hand for England's right."

Still more might we deprecate it for her "who died in Holy Isle." The morality of pity is deeper and truer than that of censure. The sweetest and best qualities of our nature may be turned to evil, by the strong force of circumstance and of temptation.

Constance is but the general history of those who escape from the convent cell of restraint, and lose the softest feathers of the dove's wing in the effort; a few feverish years flit by—and then comes the end—despair and death!—For such a grave there is but one inscription—"*Implora pace!*"

L. E. L.

FEMALE PORTRAIT GALLERY, FROM SIR WALTER SCOTT.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE IMPROVVISATRICE."

No. III.—ALICE LEE.

FROM Marmion to Woodstock is a wide step—it passes over the greater portion of Sir Walter's life—they belong indeed to periods as widely different as they are widely apart. Marmion belongs to the spring, Woodstock to the autumn. The one is fresh, eager, and impetuous, there are the winds of March, and the flowers of April; it abounds with that prodigality of power and beauty which belongs to the year's first and lavish season. The other has the same power and the same beauty—but the exercise of the one is skilful, and the display of the other mellowed. But it is in the writer's self that the chief change is found—many a hue has faded from the landscape—many a green leaf turned yellow since the exquisite introductions ushered in the various cantos. Many a pulse, too, has lost its elasticity—many a warm quick emotion sleeps to awaken no more: the heart loses its youth while the mind is in all its vigour. In one of the memoranda of the deeply-affecting journal in the last volume of "Scott's Life," he observes:—"People say that the whole human frame in all its parts and divisions, is gradually, in the act, decaying and renewing. What a curious timepiece it would be that could indicate to us the moment this gradual and insensible change had so completely taken place that no atom was left of the original person who had existed at a certain period, but there existed in his stead another person having the same thews and sinews, the same face and lineaments, the same consciousness—a new ship built on an old plank—a pair of transmigrated stockings like those of Sir John Cutler, all green without one thread of the original black left! singular, to be at once another and the same."

By-the-by, this doctrine of perpetual transmigration would be a curious plea to urge for the non-fulfilment of former engagements; seven years is I believe the term allotted for the entire change. Now, might not a man encumbered with debt plead at the expiration of the period in the Courts of Westminster, that he was not the person who actually contracted those debts? Or might not an inconstant couple sue for a divorce, on the plea that neither were the individuals who originally married? But as—

"In these nice quibbles of the law,
Good sooth, I am no wiser than a daw,"

I shall leave these intricate questions to closer casuists. But if the outward world be changed, how much more changed is that within!

"'Tis not from youth's smooth cheek alone,
The bloom that fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of the heart is gone
Before its youth be past."

We set out in life, generous, frank, and confiding; the first emotion is always kind and lofty—we are eager to love, for we feel that affection is enjoyment, and that "happiness was born a twin. The world seems filled with beauty, and our very fancies are tangible delights."

"We clothe the palpable and the familiar
With golden exhalations from the dawn."

But the mist melts away, and with it half the loveliness of the landscape: we are startled to find in how many illusions we have indulged. The dew-drops that glittered as if just melted from some fairy rainbow, are shaken from the bough, and there hangs the bare and thorny branch—old friends have fallen from us, and their memory is sad:—

"They come in long procession led
The cold, the faithless, and the dead."

It is no longer easy to supply their place—love is no longer the easy and the credulous. We investigate the motive, where we once trusted to the impulse: we doubt, because we have been deceived: we cannot choose but remember how often our kindliest feelings have been wasted, and our confidence been betrayed. The dark past flings its shadow forward on our path like a perpetual warning; it is no longer easy to spring into the sunshine. We all grow wiser, but assuredly we are grown colder and graver. The sadness of youth is half poetry. Wordsworth truly says

"In youth sad fancies we affect,
In luxury of disrespect,
Of our own prodigal excess
Of too familiar happiness."

Youth has sorrows, but maturity has cares, and the care is harder to bear than the sorrow. Circumstances, too, may change around us; and the trouble that comes late in the day is a heavy burden. We have no longer the alacrity of spirit that feels but half the weight it carries. I know nothing so touching as the account in "Scott's Memoirs" of how different the modes of composition which led to the production of Marmion and of Woodstock. The poet of Marmion delighted in the external impulse—the verse rose sounding in his ears while loitering beneath the tall old ash-trees with the wind in their branches and the sunshine on their leaves. He caught his melody when

> "—— thoughts awake
> By lone St. Mary's silent lake."

The battle of Flodden filled his mind when "he used to delight in walking his powerful black steed up and down by himself on the Porto Bello sands within the beating of the surge, and now and then you would see him plunge in his spurs, and go off as if at the charge, with the spray dashing about him. As we rode back to Musselburgh, he often came and placed himself beside me * to repeat the verses that he had been composing during the pauses of our exercise." Lockhart remarks, "I well remember his saying, as I rode with him across the hills from Ashetiel to Newark one day in his declining years—'Oh, man, I had many a grand gallop among these braes, when I was thinking of Marmion, but a trotting canny pony must serve me now.'".

Scott apologising—ah, how needlessly!—for the exquisite epistles to his friends in "Marmion" says—"I was still young, light-hearted, and happy—and 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.'"

> "Look on this picture and on this."

It would be sacrilege to alter one word of Lockhart's touching, deeply touching, description of his literary labours years afterwards.

"He read, and noted, and indexed, with the pertinacity of some pale compiler in the British Museum; but rose from such employment, not radiant and buoyant as after he had been feasting himself among the teeming harvests of fancy, but with an aching brow, and eyes on which the dimness of years had began to plant some specks, before they were subjected again to that straining over small print and difficult MS. which had no doubt been familiar to them in the early time, when, in Shortreed's phrase, 'he was making himself.' It was a pleasant sight when one happened to take a peep into his den, to see the white head erect, and the smile of conscious inspiration on his lips; while the pen, held boldly and at a commanding distance, glanced steadily and gaily along a fast blackening page of the 'Talisman.' It now often made me sorry to catch a glimpse of him; stooping and poring with his spectacles, amidst piles of authorities, a little note-book in the left hand, that had always been at liberty for patting Maida." Sir Walter himself often alludes in his Journal to his disinclination for composition, and the way in which, during the progress of Woodstock, he had to force his mind to the task. In one part, it is "I hope to sleep better to-night; if I do not, I shall get ill, and then I shall not be able to keep my engagements." Then come continual enumerations of the number of pages written, and remarks on the physical weakness. "I am a good deal jaded, and will not work till after dinner. There is a sort of drowsy vacillation of the mind attends fatigue with me:—I can command my pen as the school-copy recommends, but cannot equally command my thoughts, and often write one word for another." In addition are perpetual recurrences to the pecuniary difficulties in which he is involved:—difficulties whose endurance sets the rack and wheel at defiance; they are—

> "Tortures the poor alone can know,
> The proud alone can feel."

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* Mr. Skene.

Yet these were the circumstances under which Woodstock, one of the most striking and original of his works, was produced. The history of most fictions would be far stranger than the fictions themselves; but it would be a dark and sad chronicle. Half the works that constitute the charm of our leisure, that give their own interest to the long November evening, or add to the charm of a summer noon beneath the greenwood tree, are the offspring of poverty and of pain. Dr. Johnson wrote Rasselas to pay the last decent respect of the living to the dead—his mother's funeral expenses. How often is the writer obliged to put his own trouble, his suffering, or his sorrow aside, to finish his task! The hand may tremble, the eyes fill with unbidden tears, and the temples throb with feverish pain, yet how often is there some hard and harsh necessity, which says, "the work must be done." Readers, in general, think little of this: they will say, "Dear! how delightful to be able to write such charming things! how it must amuse you!" I believe if there were only the author's amusement in the case it would fall very short of their own; not but what composition has its moments of keen and rapid delight when the scene rises vividly before you, and the mind is warm with the consciousness of its own powers: but these are only "angel visits," they do not form the staple of any work. Literature soon becomes a power, not what it once was, a passion; but literary success, like all others, is only to be obtained, and retained, by labour—and labour and inclination do not always go together. Take all our most eminent writers, and the quantity of work, hard work, they have got through, will be found enormous and perpetual. Literature, as a profession, allows little leisure, and less indulgence. The readers are the gainers: to them how little difference does it make that Marmion was written in youth, health, and prosperity; while Woodstock was the weary task of breaking health, and broken fortunes—their amusement is the same! But even to the most careless, a deeper interest is thrown around these volumes, and every little touch of individuality seems like the familiar intercourse of a friend. Lockhart says in the Memoir, "I know not how others interpreted various passages in Woodstock, but there were not a few that carried deep meaning, for such of Scott's own friends as were acquainted with, not his pecuniary misfortunes alone, but the drooping health of his wife, and the consolation afforded him by the dutiful devotion of his daughter Anne, in whose character and demeanour a change had occurred exactly similar to that painted in poor Alice Lee—'a light joyous air, with something of a humorous expression, which seemed to be looking for amusement, had vanished before the touch of affection, and a calm melancholy had supplied its place, which seemed on the watch to administer comfort to others.'"

There is a very touching allusion to Miss Scott's anxiety about her father's enjoyments, in the Diary:—"Anne is practising Scottish songs, which I take as a kind compliment to my own taste, as her's leads her chiefly to foreign music. I think the good girl sees that I want and must miss her sister's peculiar talent in singing the airs of our native country, which, imperfect as my musical ear is, make, and have always made, the most pleasing impression on me; and so, if she puts a constraint on herself for my sake, I can only say in requital, 'God bless her!'" There is sunshine in a shady place, and it is soothing to imagine the pleasure that Scott must have had while investing the creature of his imagination with the love and devotion which had been his own solace. There is a striking reality about the character of Alice Lee. They are indeed unfortunate who can recall no likeness, who are not reminded of some actual instance of affection lightening adversity, and shedding its own sweetness over the sorrow which it could at least share. Alice Lee is among the most loveable of Scott's feminine creations. No writer possessed, to a greater degree, that faculty which Coleridge so prettily describes in one line—

> " My eyes make pictures when they're shut."

And every appearance of Alice Lee is a picture. We see her first in the shadowy twilight, the light step of youth subdued to the heavier tread of age; and in the dialogue that follows, with what force, and yet what delicacy, we are made acquainted with the innermost recesses of the maiden's heart! Alice is at the most interesting period of a woman's existence—when the character is gradually forming under circumstances that develop all the latent qualities. The rose has opened to the summer—the girl has suddenly become a woman.

Alice Lee's predominate feeling is attachment to her father: her love for her cousin is a gentle and quiet love; it belongs to the ease and familiarity of childhood; it is constantly subdued by a rival and holier sentiment. Alice's devotion to her father is not merely the fulfilment of a duty, it is a warmer and keener emotion—there is pity and enthusiasm blended with her filial piety—she sees the kind-hearted old man bowed by adversity, mortified in all those innocent vanities which sit closely to every heart; his old age is deprived of those comforts with which youth may dispense—but which are hard to lose when they are, and have long been, matters both of right and habit. No wonder that his child clings to him with a deeper, sadder, tenderness. Who can avoid bringing the picture home to Scott himself? his difficulties seem peculiarly adapted to awaken the most painful sympathy. They came upon him in his old age, yet were met with the noblest spirit of resistance. From the time that he felt labour to be a duty—with what unflinching earnestness did he set about that labour! Not even when working to achieve the dearest objects of his ambition—to become the master of Abbotsford—to settle an eldest and beloved son in life—did Scott exert himself as he did when the exertion was for his creditors. It seems doubly hard when we think how much others had to do with the burden whose weight was upon him even to the grave.

While on this subject, may I be permitted a few words concerning one to whose memory but harsh and scanty justice has been allotted—I allude to the late Mr. Constable? Perhaps I may be biassed by the recollection of kindness extended to myself when very young. Mr. Constable was the first publisher with whom I had ever any communication. His peculiarly kind and courteous manner (I went to visit some near relatives in the North under his escort) left an indelible impression. I was then a child in everything, especially judgment; and would as little now venture to pronounce on affairs of which I can know nothing. But I may be allowed to dwell on the general benevolence of Mr. Constable's character. Sir Walter Scott particularly remarks, that Constable's individual expenses were moderate, and within what his income would have seemed to justify: if he failed, it was in the cause of that literature to which he devoted himself with an enthusiasm of an order far beyond the mere speculations of profit. There must have been delicacy, as well as generosity, in the mind that concealed from the author any comparative failure in the sale of his works, lest it should damp his genius. Look what its first great publisher did for the publishing trade in Edinburgh; with him it rose into existence and prosperity, and with him it died. He originated our first periodical—and, both in literature and in politics, what vast influence has been, and is exercised by the "Edinburgh Review!" He, too, was the first person who saw the growing demand of the public mind for intellectual food; and the plan of cheap publication, so general now, and profitable to so many, was Mr. Constable's idea. In his long career, how many owed to him kindness and assistance—and how melancholy were its closing scenes! The body destroyed—the mind broken down: such was the close of the great publisher—and of the great author!

"Woodstock" belongs to a better time. Scott felt his powers vigorous as ever—and no one could imagine and dwell upon such a creation as Alice Lee, and not be the better and the happier. Every time she appears on the scene she brings with her an atmosphere of purity and beauty. How lovely is the scene conjured up in the little hut, when the evening hymn disturbs, but to make musical, the silence of the forest glades; and the words of faith and hope, cheering the gentle and maiden heart, which was their worthy temple! Again, in what a noble and high spirit is her rejection of Charles's ungenerous suit. Only one of a school, whose profligacy was the cold result of vanity, could have insulted a purity so simple and so apparent, by dishonourable affection. But it is mockery to use the word affection in such a case. I do not believe that affection can exist without truth, without the ideal, and without blending with itself all that is best and most earnest in our nature. Charles thinks far less of Alice than of the sneer of Buckingham and the jest of Rochester.

As I said before, a series of pictures might be formed of Alice in the various situations of "Woodstock." There are three which have always singularly impressed my imagination. The first is the little turret, with Dr. Rochecliffe in the little turret-chamber, when he proposes to her to make a seeming assignation with the King: there is the dignity that would light her eyes, the timidity that would colour her cheek, and the intuitive sense of right that could not for a moment tamper with its fine sense of maidenly propriety. Then the second, where she stands in the green coppice looking, as she thinks, her last on the lover who leaves her under the most bitter perversion of her real meaning: her cheek is white as monumental marble, and her long fair curls damp with the heavy dews—they are the faint outward sign of what is passing in her heart. The third is where, escaped from a danger which had seemed so certain and so imminent, she throws herself half in thankfulness, half in affection, into her father's arms, and then is suddenly recalled into a sweet and timid consciousness of Markham Everard's presence.

None of Sir Walter's novels end more satisfactorily than "Woodstock." There could be but one destiny for Alice—the genial and quiet circle of an English home, whose days are filled with pleasant duties, and whose sphere lies around the hearth. The devoted daughter is what she ought to be—the affectionate mother and the happy wife.

L. E. L.