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John Gibson Lockhart

Excerpt

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MEMOIRS
OF THE
LIFE OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

CHAPTER I.

PUBLICATION OF PAUL'S LETTERS TO HIS KINSFOLK—GUY
MANNERING "TERRY-FIED"—DEATH OF MAJOR JOHN SCOTT
—LETTERS TO THOMAS SCOTT—PUBLICATION OF THE AN-
TIQUARY—HISTORY OF 1814 FOR THE EDINBURGH ANNUAL
REGISTER—LETTERS ON THE HISTORY OF SCOTLAND PRO-
JECTED—PUBLICATION OF THE FIRST TALES OF MY LAND-
LORD BY MURRAY AND BLACKWOOD—ANECDOTES BY MR
TRAIN—QUARTERLY REVIEW ON THE TALES—BUILDING AT
ABBOTSFORD BEGUN—LETTERS TO MORRITT, TERRY, MUR-
RAY, AND THE BALLANTYNES.

1816.

THE year 1815 may be considered as, for Scott's peaceful tenor of life, an eventful one. That which followed has left almost its only traces in the successive appearance of nine volumes, which attest the prodigal genius, and hardly less astonishing industry of the man. Early in January were published Paul's Letters to his Kinsfolk, of which I need not now say more than that they were received with lively curiosity, and gene-

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ral, though not vociferous applause. The first edition was an octavo, of 6000 copies; and it was followed, in the course of the next two or three years, by a second and a third, amounting together to 3000 more. The popularity of the novelist was at its height; and this admitted, if not avowed, specimen of Scott's prose, must have been perceived, by all who had any share of discrimination, to flow from the same pen.

Mr Terry produced in the spring of 1816 a dramatic piece, entitled, "Guy Mannering," which met with great success on the London boards, and still continues to be a favourite with the theatrical public; what share the novelist himself had in this first specimen of what he used to call "the art of *Terryfying*," I cannot exactly say; but his correspondence shows that the pretty song of the *Lullaby** was not his only contribution to it; and I infer that he had taken the trouble to modify the plot, and re-arrange, for stage purposes, a considerable part of the original dialogue. The casual risk of discovery, through the introduction of the song which had, in the mean time, been communicated to one of his humble dependents, the late Alexander Campbell, editor of Albyn's Anthology—(commonly known at Abbotsford as, by way of excellence, "*The Dunniewassail*,")—and Scott's suggestions on that difficulty, will amuse the reader of the following letter:—

To D. Terry, Esq. Alfred Place, Bloomsbury, London.

"Abbotsford, 18th April, 1816.

"My dear Terry,

"I give you joy of your promotion to the dignity of an householder, and heartily wish you all the success you so well deserve, to answer the approaching enlarge-

* See Scott's Poetical Works, (Edit. 1834), vol. xi., p. 317.

GUY MANNERING “TERRY-FIED.”

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ment of your domestic establishment. You will find a house a very devouring monster, and that the purveying for it requires a little exertion, and a great deal of self-denial and arrangement. But when there is domestic peace and contentment, all that would otherwise be disagreeable, as restraining our taste and occupying our time, becomes easy. I trust Mrs Terry will get her business easily over, and that you will soon ‘dandle Dickie on your knee.’ I have been at the spring circuit, which made me late in receiving your letter, and there I was introduced to a man whom I never saw in my life before, namely, the proprietor of all the Pepper and Mustard family, in other words, the genuine Dandie Dinmont. Dandie is himself modest, and says, ‘he b’lives its only the dougs that is in the buik, and no himsel.’ As the surveyor of taxes was going his ominous rounds past Hyndlea, which is the abode of Dandie, his whole pack rushed out upon the man of execution, and Dandie followed them (conscious that their number greatly exceeded his return), exclaiming, ‘the tae hauf o’ them is but whalps, man.’ In truth, I knew nothing of the man, except his odd humour of having only two names for twenty dogs. But there are lines of general resemblance among all these hill-men, which there is no missing; and Jamie Davidson of Hyndlea certainly looks Dandie Dinmont remarkably well. He is much flattered with the compliment, and goes uniformly by the name among his comrades, but has never read the book. Ailie used to read it to him, but it set him to sleep. All this you will think funny enough. I am afraid I am in a scrape about the song, and that of my own making; for as it never occurred to me that there was any thing odd in my writing two or three verses for you, which have no connexion with the novel, I was at no pains to disown them; and Campbell is just that

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sort of crazy creature, with whom there is no confidence, not from want of honour and disposition to oblige, but from his flighty temper. The music of *Cadil gù lo* is already printed in his publication, and nothing can be done with him, for fear of setting his tongue a-going. Erskine and you may consider whether you should barely acknowledge an obligation to an unknown friend, or pass the matter altogether in silence. In my opinion, my *first* idea was preferable to both, because I cannot see what earthly connexion there is between the song and the novel, or how acknowledging the one is fathering the other. On the contrary, it seems to me that acknowledgment tends to exclude the idea of farther obligation than to the extent specified. I forgot also that I had given a copy of the lines to Mrs Macleod of Macleod, from whom I had the air. But I remit the matter entirely to you and Erskine, for there must be many points in it which I cannot be supposed a good judge of. At any rate, don't let it delay your publication, and believe I shall be quite satisfied with what you think proper.

“ I have got from my friend Glengarry the noblest dog ever seen on the Border since Johnnie Armstrong's time. He is between the wolf and deer greyhound, about six feet long from the tip of the nose to the tail, and high and strong in proportion: he is quite gentle, and a great favourite: tell Will. Erskine he will eat off his plate without being at the trouble to put a paw on the table or chair. I showed him to Matthews, who dined one day in Castle Street before I came here, where, except for Mrs S., I am like unto

‘ The spirit who dwelleth by himself,
In the land of mist and snow ’—

for it is snowing and hailing eternally, and will kill all

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LETTER TO TERRY—APRIL, 1816.

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the lambs to a certainty, unless it changes in a few hours. At any rate, it will cure us of the embarrassments arising from plenty and low markets. Much good luck to your dramatic exertions: when I can be of use, command me. Mrs Scott joins me in regards to Mrs Terry, and considers the house as the greatest possible bargain: the situation is all you can wish. Adieu! yours truly,

WALTER SCOTT."

" P. S.— On consideration, and comparing difficulties, I think I will settle with Campbell to take my name from the verses, as they stand in his collection. The verses themselves I cannot take away without imprudent explanations; and as they go to other music, and stand without any name, they will probably not be noticed, so you need give yourself no farther trouble on the score. I should like to see my copy: pray send it to the post-office, under cover to Mr Freeling, whose unlimited privilege is at my service on all occasions."

Early in May appeared the novel of "the Antiquary," which seems to have been begun a little before the close of 1815. It came out at a moment of domestic distress.

Throughout the year 1815 Major John Scott had been drooping. He died on the 8th of May, 1816; and I extract the letter in which this event was announced to Mr Thomas Scott by his only surviving brother.

To Thomas Scott, Esq. Paymaster of the 70th Regiment, Canada.

" Edinburgh, 15th May, 1816.

" My dear Tom,

" This brings you the melancholy news of our brother John's concluding his long and lingering illness by death, upon Thursday last. We had thought it impos-

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sible he should survive the winter, but, as the weather became milder, he gathered strength, and went out several times. In the beginning of the week he became worse, and on Wednesday kept his bed. On Thursday, about two o'clock, they sent me an express to Abbotsford—the man reached me at nine. I immediately set out, and travelled all night—but had not the satisfaction to see my brother alive. He had died about four o'clock, without much pain, being completely exhausted. You will naturally feel most anxious about my mother's state of health and spirits. I am happy to say, she has borne this severe shock with great firmness and resignation, is perfectly well in her health, and as strong in her mind as ever you knew her. She feels her loss, but is also sensible that protracted existence, with a constitution so irretrievably broken up, could have been no blessing. Indeed I must say, that, in many respects, her situation will be more comfortable on account of this removal, when the first shock is over; for to watch an invalid, and to undergo all the changes of a temper fretted by suffering, suited ill with her age and habits. The funeral, which took place yesterday, was decent and private, becoming our father's eldest son, and the head of a quiet family. After it, I asked Hay Donaldson and Mr MacCulloch * to look over his papers, in case there should be any testamentary provision, but none such was found; nor do I think he had any intention of altering the destination which divides his effects between his surviving brothers.

Your affectionate

W. S."

* The late Mr Hay Donaldson, W.S.—an intimate friend of both Thomas and Walter Scott, and Mr Macculloch of Ardwell, the brother of Mrs Thomas Scott.

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DEATH OF MAJOR JOHN SCOTT—MAY, 1816. 7

A few days afterwards, he hands to Mr Thomas Scott a formal statement of pecuniary affairs ; the result of which was, that the Major had left something not much under L.6000. Major Scott, from all I have heard, was a sober, sedate bachelor, of dull mind and frugal tastes, who, after his retirement from the army, divided his time between his mother's primitive fireside, and the society of a few whist-playing brother officers, that met for an evening rubber at Fortune's tavern. But, making every allowance for his retired and thrifty habits, I infer that the payments made to each of the three brothers out of their father's estate must have, prior to 1816, amounted to L.5000. From the letter conveying this statement (29th May), I extract a few sentences :—

“ Dear Tom,

“ Should the possession of this sum, and the certainty that you must, according to the course of nature, in a short space of years succeed to a similar sum of L.3000 belonging to our mother, induce you to turn your thoughts to Scotland, I shall be most happy to forward your views with any influence I may possess ; and I have little doubt that, sooner or later, something may be done. But, unfortunately, every avenue is now choked with applicants, whose claims are very strong ; for the number of disbanded officers, and public servants dismissed in consequence of Parliament turning restive and refusing the income-tax, is great and increasing. Economy is the order of the day, and I assure you they are shaving properly close. It would, no doubt, be comparatively easy to get you a better situation where you are, but then it is bidding farewell to your country, at least for a long time, and separating your children from all knowledge of those with whom they are naturally connected. I shall anxiously expect to

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hear from you on your views and wishes. I think, at all events, you ought to get rid of the drudgery of the paymastership—but not without trying to exchange it for something else. I do not know how it is with you—but I do not feel myself quite so *young* as I was when we met last, and I should like well to see my only brother return to his own country and settle, without thoughts of leaving it, till it is exchanged for one that is dark and distant. . . . I left all Jack's personal trifles at my mother's disposal. There was nothing of the slightest value, excepting his gold watch, which was my sister's, and a good one. My mother says he had wished my son Walter should have it, as his male representative—which I can only accept on condition *your* little Walter will accept a similar token of regard from his remaining uncle.—Yours affectionately,

W. S."

The letter in which Scott communicated his brother's death to Mr Morrill, gives us his own original opinion of The Antiquary. It has also some remarks on the separation of Lord and Lady Byron—and the "domestic verses" of the noble poet.

To J. B. S. Morrill, Esq. M. P. London.

“Edinburgh, May 16, 1816.

“My dear Morrill,

“I have been occupied of late with scenes of domestic distress, my poor brother, Major John Scott, having last week closed a life which wasting disease had long rendered burthensome. His death, under all the circumstances, cannot be termed a subject of deep affliction; and though we were always on fraternal terms of mutual kindness and good-will, yet our habits of life, our taste for society and circles of friends were so totally

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DEATH OF MAJOR SCOTT.

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different, that there was less frequent intercourse between us than our connexion and real liking to each other might have occasioned. Yet it is a heavy consideration to have lost the last but one who was interested in our early domestic life, our habits of boyhood, and our first friends and connexions. It makes one look about and see how the scene has changed around him, and how he himself has been changed with it. My only remaining brother is in Canada, and seems to have an intention of remaining there; so that my mother, now upwards of eighty, has now only one child left to her out of thirteen whom she has borne. She is a most excellent woman, possessed, even at her advanced age, of all the force of mind and sense of duty which have carried her through so many domestic griefs, as the successive death of eleven children, some of them come to men and women's estate, naturally infers. She is the principal subject of my attention at present, and is, I am glad to say, perfectly well in body and composed in mind.

“ Nothing can give me more pleasure than the prospect of seeing you in September, which will suit our motions perfectly well. I trust I shall have an opportunity to introduce you to some of our glens which you have not yet seen. But I hope we shall have some mild weather before that time, for we are now in the seventh month of winter, which almost leads me to suppose that we shall see no summer this season. As for spring, that is past praying for. In the month of November last, people were skating in the neighbourhood of Edinburgh; and now, in the middle of May, the snow is lying white on Arthur's Seat, and on the range of the Pentlands. It is really fearful, and the sheep are perishing by scores. *Jam satis terræ nivis, &c.* may well be taken up as the song of eighteen hundred and sixteen.

“ So Lord Byron’s romance seems to be concluded for one while—and it is surely time, after he has announced, or rather they themselves have announced, half a dozen blackguard newspaper editors, to have been his confidants on the occasion. Surely it is a strange thirst of public fame that seeks such a road to it. But Lord Byron, with high genius and many points of a noble and generous feeling, has Childe Harolded himself, and outlawed himself, into too great a resemblance with the pictures of his imagination. He has one excuse, however, and it is a sad one. I have been reckoned to make a good hit enough at a pirate, or an outlaw, or a smuggling bandit; but I cannot say I was ever so much enchanted with my work as to think of carrying off a *drift* of my neighbour’s sheep, or half a dozen of his milk cows. Only I remember, in the rough times, having a scheme with the Duke of Buccleuch, that when the worst came to the worst, we should repair Hermitage Castle, and live, like Robin Hood and his merry men, at the expense of all round us. But this presupposed a grand *bouleversement* of society. In the mean while, I think my noble friend is something like my old peacock, who chooses to bivouac apart from his lady, and sit below my bedroom window, to keep me awake with his screeching lamentation. Only I own he is not equal in melody to Lord Byron, for *Fare-thee-well—and if for ever, &c.*, is a very sweet dirge indeed. After all, *C’est genie mal logé*, and that’s all that can be said about it.

“ I am quite reconciled to your opinions on the income-tax, and am not at all in despair at the prospect of keeping L.200 a-year in my pocket, since the ministers can fadge without it. But their throwing the helve after the hatchet, and giving up the malt-duty because they had lost the other, was droll enough. After all, our fat