

MEMOIRS
OF THE
LIFE OF SIR WALTER SCOTT.

CHAPTER I.

MARRIAGE OF LIEUTENANT WALTER SCOTT—LETTER TO LADY DAVY — PROJECT OF CONSTABLE'S MISCELLANY — TERRY AND THE ADELPHI THEATRE—PUBLICATION OF THE TALES OF THE CRUSADERS—PREPARATIONS FOR THE LIFE OF BUONAPARTE—LETTERS TO MR TERRY, MRS WALTER SCOTT, &c.—

1825.

WITH all his acuteness Captain Basil Hall does not seem to have caught any suspicion of the real purpose and meaning of the ball for which he was invited back to Abbotsford on the 9th of January, 1825. That evening was one of the very proudest and happiest in Scott's brilliant existence. Its festivities were held in honour of a young lady, whom the Captain names cursorily among the guests as "the pretty heiress of Lochore." It was known to not a few of the party, and I should have supposed it might have been surmised by the rest, that those halls were displayed for the first time in all their splendour, on an occasion not less interesting to the Poet than the conclusion of a treaty of marriage between the heir of his name and fortunes, and the amiable niece of his friends, Sir Adam and Lady Fer-

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guson. It was the first regular ball given at Abbotsford, and the last. Nay, though twelve years have elapsed, I believe nobody has ever danced under that roof since then. I myself never again saw the whole range of apartments thrown open for the reception of company except once—on the day of Sir Walter Scott's funeral.

The lady's fortune was a handsome one, and her guardians exerted the powers with which they were invested, by requiring that the marriage-contract should settle Abbotsford (with reservation of Sir Walter's own liferent) upon the affianced parties, in the same manner as Lochore. To this condition he gave a ready assent, and the moment he had signed the deed, he exclaimed, "I have now parted with my lands with more pleasure than I ever derived from the acquisition or possession of them; and if I be spared for ten years, I think I may promise to settle as much more again upon these young folks." It was well for himself and his children that his auguries, which failed so miserably as to the matter of worldly wealth, were destined to no disappointment as respected considerations of a higher description. I transcribe one of the letters by which he communicated the happy event to the wide circle of friends, who were sure to sympathize in his feelings of paternal satisfaction.

To the Lady Davy, Grosvenor Street, London.

"Edinburgh, 24th January, 1825.

"My dear Lady Davy,

"As I know the kind interest which you take in your very sincere friend and Scotch cousin, I think you will like to hear that my eldest hope, who, not many years ago, was too bashful to accept your offered salute, and procured me the happiness of a kiss on his account, beside that which I always claim on my own, has, as he

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has grown older, learned a little better how such favours are to be estimated. In a word, Walter, then an awkward boy, has now turned out a smart young fellow, with good manners, and a fine figure, if a father may judge, standing well with the Horse-Guards, and much master of the scientific part of his profession, retaining at the same time much of the simple honesty of his original character, though now travelled, and acquainted with courts and camps. Some one of these good qualities, I know not which, or whether it were the united force of the whole, and particularly his proficiency in the attack of strong places, has acquired him the affection and hand of a very sweet and pretty Mrs Anne Page, who is here as yet known by the name of Miss Jobson of Lochore, which she exchanges next week for that of Mrs Scott of Abbotsford. It would seem some old flirtation betwixt Walter and her had hung on both their minds, for at the conclusion of a Christmas party we learned the pretty heiress had determined to sing the old tune of—

‘Mount and go—mount and make you ready,
Mount and go, and be a soldier’s lady.’

Though her fortune be considerable, the favours of the public will enable me to make such settlements as her friends think very adequate. The only impediment has been the poor mother (a Highland lady of great worth and integrity), who could not brook parting with the sole object of her care and attention, to resign her to the vicissitudes of a military life, while I necessarily refused to let my son sink into a mere fox-hunting, muir-fowl-shooting squire. She has at length been obliged to acquiesce rather than consent—her friends and counselors being clear-sighted enough to see that her daughter’s happiness could scarce be promoted by compelling the

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girl to break off a mutual attachment, and a match with a young lieutenant of hussars, sure of having a troop very soon, with a good estate in reversion, and as handsome a fellow as ever put his foot in a stirrup. So they succeeded in bringing matters to a bearing, although old Papa has practised the ‘profane and unprofitable art of poem-making’—and the youngster wears a pair of formidable mustachios. They are to be quiet at Abbotsford for a few days, and then they go to town to make their necessary purchases of carriage, and so forth; they are to be at my old friend, Miss Dumergue’s, and will scarcely see any one; but as I think you will like to call on my dear little Jane, I am sure she will see you, and I know you will be kind and indulgent to her. Here is a long letter when I only meant a line. I think they will be in London about the end of February, or beginning of March, and go from thence to Ireland, Walter’s leave of absence being short. My kindest compliments to Sir Humphry, and pray acquaint him of this change in our family, which opens to me another vista in the dark distance of futurity, which, unless the lady had what Sir Hugh Evans calls *good gifts*, could scarce otherwise have happened during my lifetime—at least without either imprudence on Walter’s part, or restrictions of habits of hospitality and comfort on my own.—Always, dear Lady Davy, your affectionate and respectful friend and cousin,

WALTER SCOTT.”

The marriage took place at Edinburgh on the 3d day of February, and when the young couple left Abbotsford two or three weeks afterwards, Sir Walter promised to visit them at their regimental quarters in Ireland in the course of the summer. Before he fulfilled that purpose he had the additional pleasure of seeing his

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son gazetted as Captain in the King's Hussars—a step for which Sir Walter advanced the large sum of L.3500. Some other incidents will be gathered from his letters to his son and daughter-in-law—of which, however, I give such copious extracts chiefly for the illustration they afford of his truly paternal tenderness for the young lady who had just been admitted into his family—and which she, from the first hour of their connexion to the last, repaid by a filial love and devotedness that formed one of the sweetest drops in his cup of life.

To Mrs Waller Scott, Dublin.

“ Abbotsford, March 20, 1825.

“ My dearest Child,

“ I had the great pleasure of receiving your kind and attentive letter from London a few days later than I ought to have done, because it was lying here while I was absent on a little excursion, of which I have to give a most interesting account. Believe me, my love, I am VERY grateful for the time you bestow on me, and that you cannot give so great happiness to any one as to me by saying you are well and happy. My daughters, who deserve all the affection a father can bestow, are both near me; and in safe guardianship, the one under the charge of a most affectionate husband, and the other under the eye of her parents. For my sons, I have taught them, and what was more difficult, I have taught myself the philosophy, that for their own sake and their necessary advancement in life, their absences from my house must be long, and their visits short; and as they are both, I hope, able to conduct themselves wisely and honourably, I have learned to be contented to hope the best, without making myself or them uneasy by fruitless anxiety. But for you, my dear Jane, who have come among us with such generous and confiding affection, my stoicism

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must excuse me if I am more anxious than becomes either a philosopher or a hackneyed man of the world, who uses in common cases to take that world as it goes. I cannot help worrying myself with the question, whether the object of such constant and affectionate care may not feel less happy than I could wish her in scenes which must be so new, and under privations which must be felt by you the more that your earlier life has been an entire stranger to them. I know Walter's care and affection will soften and avert these as much as possible, and if there be any thing in the power of old papa to assist him in the matter, you will make him most happy by tasking that power to the utmost. I wrote to him yesterday that he might proceed in bargain for the troop, and send me the terms that I might provide the needful, as mercantile folks call it, in time and place suitable. The rank of Captain gives, I am aware, a degree of consideration which is worth paying for; and what is still more, my little Jane, as a Captain's lady, takes better accommodation every way than is given to a subaltern's. So we must get the troop by all means, *coute qui coute*.

“ Now I will plague you with no more business; but give you an account of myself in the manner of Mr Jonathan Oldbuck, if ever you heard of such a person. You must suppose that you are busy with your work, and that I am telling you some long story or other, and that you now and then look round and say *eh*, as you do when you are startled by a question or an assertion—it is not quite *eh* neither, but just a little quiet interjection, which shows you are attending. You see what a close observer papa is of his child.

“ Well then, when, as I calculate (as a Yankee would say), you were tossing on the waves of the Irish Channel, I was also tossing on the Vadum Scotticum of

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LETTERS TO MRS WALTER SCOTT.

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Ptolemy, on my return from the celebrated *Urbs Orrea* of Tacitus. ‘Eh,’ says Jane; ‘Lord, Walter, what can the old gentleman mean?’—‘*Weiss nichts davon,*’ says the hussar, taking his cigar from under his moustaches (no, I beg pardon, he does not take out the cigar, because, from the last advices, he has used none in his London journey). He says *weiss nichts*, however, which is, in Italian, *No so*—in French, *Je ne’n scais rien*—in broad Scotch, *I neither ken nor care*—Well—you ask Mr Edgeworth, or the chaplain of the regiment, or the first scholar you come by—that is to say, you don’t attempt to pronounce the hieroglyphical word, but you fold down the letter just at the place, show the talismanic *Urbs Orrea* and no more, and ask him in which corner of the earth Sir Walter can have been wandering? So, after a moment’s recollection, he tells you that the great Roman general, Agricola, was strangely put to his trumps at the *Urbs Orrea* during his campaign in Caledonia, and that the ninth legion was surprised there by the British and nearly destroyed; then he gets a county history and a Tacitus, and Sir Robert Sibbald’s Tracts, and begins to fish about, and finds at length that the *Urbs Orrea* is situated in the kingdom of Fife*—that it is now called Lochore—that it belonged to the Lochores—the De Vallences—the Wardlaws—the Malcolms—and Lord knows whom in succession—and then, in a sheet wet from the press, he finds it is now the property of a pretty and accomplished young lady, who, in an unthrift generosity, has given it—with a much more valuable present, namely, *her own self*—to a lieutenant of hussars. So there the scholar shuts his book, and observes that as there are many cairns and tumuli and other memo-

* According to the general creed (out of the “Kingdom of Fife,” that is to say)—Mr Oldbuck was quite wrong as to the identification of this *prætorium*.

rials upon the scene of action, he wonders whether Sir Walter had not the curiosity to open some of them. 'Now heaven forbid,' says Jane; 'I think the old knight has stock enough for boring one with his old Border ballads and battles, without raising the bones of men who have slept 1000 years quietly on my own estate to assist him.' Then I can keep silence no longer, but speak in my own proper person. 'Pray do you not bore me, Mrs Jane, and have not I a right to retaliate?'—'Eh,' says the Lady of Lochore, 'how is it possible I should bore you, and so many hundred miles between us?'—'That's the very reason,' says the Laird of Abbotsford, 'for if you were near me the thing would be impossible—but being, as you say, at so many hundred miles distant, I am always thinking about you, and asking myself an hundred questions which I cannot answer; for instance, I cannot go about my little improvements without teasing myself with thinking whether Jane would like the green-house larger or less—and whether Jane would like such line of walk, or such another—and whether that stile is not too high for Jane to step over.' 'Dear papa,' says Jane, '*your own style* is really too high for my comprehension.'

"Well then, I am the most indulgent papa in the world, and so you see I have turned over a new leaf. The plain sense of all this rambling stuff, which escapes from my pen as it would from my tongue, is that I have visited for a day, with Isaac Bayley,* your dominions of Lochore, and was excellently entertained and as happy as I could be, where every thing was putting me in mind that she was absent whom I could most have wished present. It felt, somehow, like an intrusion; and as if it was not quite right that I should be in Jane's house,

* A cousin of the young lady, and the legal manager of her affairs.

while Jane herself was amongst strangers ; this is the sort of false colouring which imagination gives to events and circumstances. Well, but I was much pleased with all I saw, and particularly with the high order Mr Bayley has put every thing into ; and I climbed Bennarty like a wild goat, and scrambled through the old crags like a wild-cat, and pranced through your pastures like a wild-buck (fat enough to be in season though), and squattered through your drains like a wild-duck, and had nearly lost myself in your morasses like the ninth legion, and visited the old castle, which is *not a stupid place*, and in short, wandered from Dan to Beersheba, and tired myself as effectually in your dominions as I did you in mine upon a certain walk to the Rhymer's Glen. I had the offer of your pony, but the weather being too cold, I preferred walking ; a cheerful little old gentleman, Mr Burrell, and Mr Gray the clergyman, dined with us, and your health was not forgotten. On my retreat (Border fashion) I brought away your pony and the little chaise, believing that both will be better under Peter Mathieson's charge than at Lochore, in case of its being let to strangers. Don't you think Jane's pony will be taken care of ?

“ The day we arrived the weather was gloomy and rainy, the climate sorrowful for your absence I suppose ; the next, a fine sunny frost ; the third, when I came off, so checkered with hail showers as to prevent a visit I had meditated to two very interesting persons in the neighbourhood. ‘ The Chief Commissioner and Charles Adam, I suppose ? ’— ‘ Not a bit, guess again.’— ‘ O, Mr Beaton of Contal, or Mr Sym of Blair ? ’— ‘ Not a bit, guess again.’— ‘ I won't guess any more.’— Well then, it was two honest gentlemen hewn in stone—some of the old knights of Lochore, who were described to me as lying under your gallery in the kirk ;

but as I had no reason to expect a warm reception from them, I put off my visit till some more genial season.

“ This puts me in mind of Warwick unvisited, and of my stupidity in not letting you know that the church is as well worth seeing as the castle, and you might have seen that, notwithstanding the badness of the morning. All the tombs of the mighty Beauchamps and Nevilles are to be seen there, in the most magnificent style of Gothic display, and in high preservation. However, this will be for another day, and you must comfort yourself that life has something still to show.

“ I trust you will soon find yourself at Edgeworthstown, where I know you will be received with open arms, for Miss Edgeworth’s kindness is equal to her distinguished talents.

“ I am glad you like my old acquaintance, Mathews. Some day I will make him show his talent for your amusement in private ; for I know him well. It is very odd, he is often subject to fits of deep melancholy.

“ This is a letter of formidable length, but our bargain is, long or short, just as the humour chances to be, and you are never to mend a pen or think upon a sentence, but write whatever comes readiest. My love to Walter. I am rather anxious to know if he has got his horses well over, and whether all his luggage has come safe. I am glad you have got a carriage to your mind ; it is the best economy to get a good one at once. Above all, I shall be anxious to hear how you like the society of the ladies of the 15th. I know my Jane’s quiet prudence and good sense will save her from the risk of making sudden intimacies, and induce her to consider for a little while which of her new companions may suit her best ; in the mean-while being civil to all.

“ You see that I make no apology for writing silly letters ; and why should you think that I can think yours