LANG ANDREW

SIR WALTER SCOTT AND THE BORDER MINSTRELSY

Andrew Lang

Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25228708
Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy:

Содержание

Andrew Lang
Sir Walter Scott and the Border Minstrelsy

PREFACE

Persons not much interested in, or cognisant of, "antiquarian old womanries," as Sir Walter called them, may ask "what all the pother is about," in this little tractate. On my side it is "about" the veracity of Sir Walter Scott. He has been suspected of helping to compose, and of issuing as a genuine antique, a ballad, *Auld Maitland*. He also wrote about the ballad, as a thing obtained from recitation, to two friends and fellow-antiquaries. If to Scott's knowledge it was a modern imitation, Sir Walter deliberately lied.

He did not: he did obtain the whole ballad from Hogg, who got it from recitation – as I believe, and try to prove, and as Scott certainly believed. The facts in the case exist in published works, and in manuscript letters of Ritson to Scott, and Hogg to Scott, and in the original MS. of the song, with a note by Hogg to Laidlaw. If we are interested in the truth about the matter, we ought at least to read the very accessible material before bringing charges against the Sheriff and the Shepherd of Ettrick.

Whether *Auld Maitland* be a good or a bad ballad is not part of the question. It was a favourite of mine in childhood, and I agree with Scott in thinking that it has strong dramatic situations. If it is a bad ballad, such as many people could compose, then it is not by Sir Walter.

The *Ballad of Otterburne* is said to have been constructed from Herd's version, tempered by Percy's version, with additions from a modern imagination. We have merely to read Professor Child's edition of *Otterburne*, with Hogg's letter covering his MS. copy of *Otterburne* from recitation, to see that this is a wholly erroneous view of the matter. We have all the materials for forming a judgment accessible to us in print, and have no excuse for preferring our own conjectures.

"No one now believes," it may be said, "in the aged persons who lived at the head of Ettrick," and recited *Otterburne* to Hogg. Colonel Elliot disbelieves, but he shows no signs of having read Hogg's curious letter, in two parts, about these "old parties"; a letter written on the day when Hogg, he says, twice "pumped their memories."

I print this letter, and, if any one chooses to think that it is a crafty fabrication, I can only say that its craft would have beguiled myself as it beguiled Scott.

It is a common, cheap, and ignorant scepticism that disbelieves in the existence, in Scott's day, or in ours, of persons who know and can recite variants of our traditional ballads. The strange song of *The Bitter Withy*, unknown to Professor Child, was

recovered from recitation but lately, in several English counties. The ignoble lay of *Johnny Johnston* has also been recovered: it is widely diffused. I myself obtained a genuine version of *Where Goudie rins*, through the kindness of Lady Mary Glyn; and a friend of Lady Rosalind Northcote procured the low English version of *Young Beichan*, or *Lord Bateman*, from an old woman in a rural workhouse. In Shropshire my friend Miss Burne, the president of the Folk-Lore Society, received from Mr. Hubert Smith, in 1883, a very remarkable variant, undoubtedly antique, of *The Wife of Usher's Well*. [1] In 1896 Miss Backus found, in the hills of Polk County, North Carolina, another variant, intermediate between the Shropshire and the ordinary version. [2]

There are many other examples of this persistence of ballads in the popular memory, even in our day, and only persons ignorant of the facts can suppose that, a century ago, there were no reciters at the head of Ettrick, and elsewhere in Scotland. Not even now has the halfpenny newspaper wholly destroyed the memories of traditional poetry and of traditional tales even in the English-speaking parts of our islands, while in the Highlands a rich harvest awaits the reapers.

I could not have produced the facts, about *Auld Maitland* especially, and in some other cases, without the kind and ungrudging aid, freely given to a stranger, of Mr. William Macmath, whose knowledge of ballad-lore, and especially of

[1] Child, part vi. p. 513.

[2] Child, part x. p. 294.

the ballad manuscripts at Abbotsford, is unrivalled. As to *Auld Maitland*, Mr. T. F. Henderson, in his edition of the *Minstrelsy* (Blackwood, 1892), also made due use of Hogg's MS., and his edition is most valuable to every student of Scott's method of editing, being based on the Abbotsford MSS. Mr. Henderson suspects, more than I do, the veracity of the Shepherd.

I am under obligations to Colonel Elliot's book, as it has drawn my attention anew to *Auld Maitland*, a topic which I had studied "somewhat lazily," like Quintus Smyrnæus. I supposed that there was an inconsistency in two of Scott's accounts as to how he obtained the ballad. As Colonel Elliot points out, there was no inconsistency. Scott had two copies. One was Hogg's MS.: the other was derived from the recitation of Hogg's mother.

This trifle is addressed to lovers of Scott, of the Border, and of ballads, *et non aultres*.

It is curious to see how facts make havoc of the conjectures of the Higher Criticism in the case of *Auld Maitland*. If Hogg was the forger of that ballad, I asked, how did he know the traditions about Maitland and his three sons, which we only know from poems of about 1576 in the manuscripts of Sir Richard Maitland? These poems in 1802 were, as far as I am aware, still unpublished.

Colonel Elliot urged that Leyden would know the poems, and must have known Hogg. From Leyden, then, Hogg would get the information. In the text I have urged that Leyden did not know Hogg. I am able now to prove that Hogg and Leyden never met

till after Laidlaw gave the manuscript of *Auld Maitland* to Hogg.

The fact is given in the original manuscript of Laidlaw's *Recollections of Sir Walter Scott* (among the Laing MSS. in the library of the University of Edinburgh). Carruthers, in publishing Laidlaw's reminiscences, omitted the following passage. After Scott had read *Auld Maitland* aloud to Leyden and Laird Laidlaw, the three rode together to dine at Whitehope.

"Near the Craigbents," says Laidlaw, "Mr. Scott and Leyden drew together in a close and seemingly private conversation. I, of course, fell back. After a minute or two, Leyden reined in his horse (a black horse that Mr. Scott's servant used to ride) and let me come up. 'This Hogg,' said he, 'writes verses, I understand.' I assured him that he wrote very beautiful verses, and with great facility. 'But I trust,' he replied, 'that there is no fear of his passing off any of his own upon Scott for old ballads.' I again assured him that he would never think of such a thing; and neither would he at that period of his life.

"'Let him beware of forgery,' cried Leyden with great force and energy, and in, I suppose, what Mr. Scott used afterwards to call the *saw tones of his voice*."

This proves that Leyden had no personal knowledge of "this Hogg," and did not supply the shepherd with the traditions about Auld Maitland.

Mr. W. J. Kennedy, of Hawick, pointed out to me this passage in Laidlaw's *Recollections*, edited from the MS. by Mr. James Sinton, as reprinted from the *Transactions* of the Hawick

Archæological Society, 1905.

SCOTT AND THE BALLADS

It was through his collecting and editing of *The Border Minstrelsy* that Sir Walter Scott glided from law into literature. The history of the conception and completion of his task, "a labour of love truly, if ever such there was," says Lockhart, is well known, but the tale must be briefly told if we are to understand the following essays in defence of Scott's literary morality.

Late in 1799 Scott wrote to James Ballantyne, then a printer in Kelso, "I have been for years collecting Border ballads," and he thought that he could put together "such a selection as might make a neat little volume, to sell for four or five shillings." In December 1799 Scott received the office of Sheriff of Selkirkshire, or, as he preferred to say, of Ettrick Forest. In the Forest, as was natural, he found much of his materials. The people at the head of Ettrick were still, says Hogg, [3] like many of the Highlanders even now, in that they cheered the long winter nights with the telling of old tales; and some aged people still remembered, no doubt in a defective and corrupted state, many old ballads. Some of these, especially the ballads of Border raids and rescues, may never even have been written down by the original authors. The Borderers, says Lesley, Bishop of Ross, writing in 1578, "take much pleasure in their old music and

[3] Hogg to Scott, 30th June 1802, given later in full.

chanted songs, which they themselves compose, whether about the deeds of their ancestors, or about ingenious raiding tricks and stratagems." [4]

The historical ballads about the deeds of their ancestors would be far more romantic than scientifically accurate. The verses, as they passed from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation, would be in a constant state of flux and change. When a man forgot a verse, he would make something to take its place. A more or less appropriate stanza from another ballad would slip in; or the reciter would tell in prose the matter of which he forgot the versified form.

Again, in the towns, street ballads on remarkable events, as early at least as the age of Henry VIII., were written or printed. Knox speaks of ballads on Queen Mary's four Maries. Of these ballads only one is left, and it is a libel. The hanging of a French apothecary of the Queen, and a French waiting-maid, for child murder, has been transferred to one of the Maries, or rather to an apocryphal Mary Hamilton, with Darnley for her lover. Of this ballad twenty-eight variants – and extremely various they are – were collected by Professor Child in his *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (ten parts, 1882–1898). In one mangled form or another such ballads would drift at last even to Ettrick Forest.

A ballad may be found in a form which the first author could scarcely recognise, dozens of hands, in various generations, having been at work on it. At any period, especially in the

[4] See *De Origine, Moribus, et Rebus Gestis Scotorum*, p. 60 (1578).

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the cheap press might print a sheet of the ballads, edited and interpolated by the very lowest of printer's hacks; that copy would circulate, be lost, and become in turn a traditional source, though full of modernisms. Or an educated person might make a written copy, filling up gaps himself in late seventeenth or in eighteenth century ballad style, and this might pass into the memory of the children and servants of the house, and so to the herds and to the farm lasses. I suspect that this process may have occurred in the cases of *Auld Maitland* and of *The Outlaw Murray*– "these two bores" Mr. Child is said to have styled them.

When Allan Ramsay, about 1720, took up and printed a ballad, he altered it if he pleased. More faithful to his texts (wherever he got them), was David Herd, in his collection of 1776, but his version did not reach, as we shall see, old reciters in Ettrick. If Scott found any traditional ballads in Ettrick, as his collectors certainly did, they had passed through the processes described. They needed re-editing of some sort if they were to be intelligible, and readable with pleasure.

In 1800, apparently, while Scott made only brief flying visits from the little inn of Clovenfords, on Tweed, to his sheriffdom, he found a coadjutor. Richard Heber, the wealthy and luxurious antiquary and collector, looked into Constable's first little bookselling shop, and saw a strange, poor young student prowling among the books. This was John Leyden, son of a shepherd in Roxburghshire, a lad living in extreme poverty.

Leyden, in 1800, was making himself a savant. Heber spoke with him, found that he was rich in ballad-lore, and carried him to Scott. He was presently introduced into the best society in Edinburgh (which would not happen in our time), and a casual note of Scott's proves that he did not leave Leyden in poverty. Early in 1802, Leyden got the promise of an East Indian appointment, read medicine furiously, and sailed for the East in the beginning of 1803. It does not appear that Leyden went ballad-hunting in Ettrick before he rode thither with Scott in the spring of 1802. He was busy with books, with editorial work, and in aiding Scott in Edinburgh. It was he who insisted that a small volume at five shillings was far too narrow for the materials collected.

Scott also corresponded with the aged Percy, Bishop of Dromore, editor of the *Reliques*, and with Joseph Ritson, the precise collector, Percy's bitter foe. Unfortunately the correspondence on ballads with Ritson, who died in 1803, is but scanty; nor has most of the correspondence with another student, George Ellis, been published. Even in Mr. Douglas's edition of Scott's *Familiar Letters*, the portion of an important letter of Hogg's which deals with ballad-lore is omitted. I shall give the letter in full.

In 1800–01, "*The Minstrelsy* formed the editor's chief occupation," says Lockhart; but later, up to April 1801, the Forest and Liddesdale had yielded little material. In fact, I do not know that Scott ever procured much in Liddesdale, where he had

no Hogg or Laidlaw always on the spot, and in touch with the old people. It was in spring, 1802, that Scott first met his lifelong friend, William Laidlaw, farmer in Blackhouse, on Douglasburn, in Yarrow. Laidlaw, as is later proved completely, introduced Scott to Hogg, then a very unsophisticated shepherd. "Laidlaw," says Lockhart, "took care that Scott should see, without delay, James Hogg." [5] These two men, Hogg and Laidlaw, knowing the country people well, were Scott's chief sources of recited balladry; and probably they sometimes improved, in making their copies, the materials won from the failing memories of the old. Thus Laidlaw, while tenant in Traquair Knowe, obtained from recitation, *The Dæmon Lover*. Scott does not tell us whether or not he knew the fact that Laidlaw wrote in stanza 6 (half of it traditional), stanza 12 (also a ballad formula), stanzas 17 and 18 (necessary to complete the sense; the last two lines of 18 are purely and romantically modern).

We shall later quote Hogg's account of his own dealings with his raw materials from recitation.

In January 1802 Scott published the two first volumes of *The Minstrelsy*. Lockhart describes the enthusiasm of dukes, fine ladies, and antiquarians. In the end of April 1803 the third volume appeared, including ballads obtained through Hogg and Laidlaw in spring 1802. Scott, by his store of historic anecdote in his introductions and notes, by his way of vivifying the past, and by his method of editing, revived, but did not create, the interest

[5] Lockhart, vol. ii. p. 60 (1839).

in the romance of ballad poetry.

It had always existed. We all know Sidney's words on "The Douglas and the Percy"; Addison's on folk-poetry; Mr. Pepys' ballad collection; the ballads in Tom Durfey's and other miscellanies; Allan Ramsay's *Evergreen*; Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*; Herd's ballad volumes of 1776; Evans' collections; Burns' remakings of old songs; Ritson's publications, and so forth. But the genius of Burns, while it transfigured many old songs, was not often exercised on old narrative ballads, and when Scott produced *The Minstrelsy*, the taste for ballads was confined to amateurs of early literature, and to country folk.

Sir Walter's method of editing, of presenting his traditional materials, was literary, and, usually, not scientific. A modern collector would publish things – legends, ballads, or folk-tales – exactly as he found them in old broadsides, or in MS. copies, or received them from oral recitation. He would give the names and residences and circumstances of the reciters or narrators (Herd, in 1776, gave no such information). He would fill up no gaps with his own inventions, would add no stanzas of his own, and the circulation of his work would arrive at some two or three hundred copies given away!

As Lockhart says, "Scott's diligent zeal had put him in possession of a variety of copies in various stages of preservation, and to the task of selecting a standard text among such a diversity of materials he brought a knowledge of old manners and phraseology, and a manly simplicity of taste, such as had never

before been united in the person of a poetical antiquary."

Lockhart speaks of "The editor's conscientious fidelity.. which prevented the introduction of anything new, and his pure taste in the balancing of discordant recitations." He had already written that "Scott had, I firmly believe, interpolated hardly a line or even an epithet of his own." [6]

It is clear that Lockhart had not compared the texts in *The Minstrelsy* with the mass of manuscript materials which are still at Abbotsford. These, copied by the accurate Mr. Macmath, have been published in the monumental collection of *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, in ten parts, by the late Professor Child of Harvard, the greatest of scholars in ballad-lore. From his book we often know exactly what kinds of copies of ballads Scott possessed, and what alterations he made in his copies. The *Ballad of Otterburne* is especially instructive, as we shall see later. But of the most famous of Border historical ballads, *Kinmont Willie*, and its companion, *Jamie Telfer of the Fair Dodhead*, Scott has left no original manuscript texts. Now into each of these ballads Scott has written (if internal evidence be worth anything) verses of his own; stanzas unmistakably marked by his own spirit, energy, sense of romance, and, occasionally, by a somewhat inflated rhetoric. On this point doubt is not easy. When he met the names of his chief, Buccleuch, and of his favourite ancestor, Wat of Warden, Scott did, in two cases, for those heroes what, by his own confession, he did for anecdotes that came in his way – he

[6] Lockhart, vol. ii. pp. 130–135 (1839).

decked them out "with a cocked hat and a sword."

Sir Walter knew perfectly well that he was not "playing the game" in a truly scientific spirit. He explains his ideas in his "Essay on Popular Poetry" as late as 1830. He mentions Joseph Ritson's "extreme attachment to the severity of truth," and his attacks on Bishop Percy's purely literary treatment of the materials of his *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765).

As Scott says, "by Percy words were altered, phrases improved, and whole verses were inserted or omitted at pleasure." Percy "accommodated" the ballads "with such emendations as might recommend them to the modern taste." Ritson cried "forgery," but Percy, says Scott, had to win a hearing from his age, and confessed (in general terms) to his additions and decorations.

Scott then speaks reprovingly of Pinkerton's wholesale fabrication of *entire ballads* (1783), a crime acknowledged later by the culprit (1786). Scott applauds Ritson's accuracy, but regrets his preference of the worst to the better readings, as if their inferiority was a security for their being genuine. Scott preferred the best, the most poetical readings.

In 1830, Scott also wrote an essay on "Imitations of the Ancient Ballads," and spoke very leniently of imitations passed off as authentic. "There is no small degree of cant in the violent invectives with which impostors of this nature have been assailed." As to *Hardyknute*, the favourite poem of his infancy, "the first that I ever learned and the last that I shall forget," he

says, "the public is surely more enriched by the contribution than injured by the deception." Besides, he says, the deception almost never deceives.

His method in *The Minstrelsy*, he writes, was "to imitate the plan and style of Bishop Percy, observing only more strict fidelity concerning my originals." That is to say, he avowedly made up texts out of a variety of copies, when he had more copies than one. This is frequently acknowledged by Scott; what he does not acknowledge is his own occasional interpolation of stanzas. A good example is *The Gay Gosshawk*. He had a MS. of his own "of some antiquity," a MS. of Mrs. Brown, a famous reciter and collector of the eighteenth century; and the Abbotsford MSS. show isolated stanzas from Hogg, and a copy from Will Laidlaw. Mr. T. F. Henderson's notes [7] display the methods of selection, combination, emendation, and possible interpolation.

By these methods Scott composed "a standard text," now the classical text, of the ballads which he published. Ballad lovers, who are not specialists, go to *The Minstrelsy* for their favourite fare, and for historical elucidation and anecdote.

Scott often mentions his sources of all kinds, such as MSS. of Herd and Mrs. Brown; "an old person"; "an old woman at Kirkhill, West Lothian"; "an ostler at Carlisle"; Allan Ramsay's *Tea-Table Miscellany*; Surtees of Mainsforth (these ballads are by Surtees himself: Scott never suspected him); Caw's *Hawick Museum* (1774); Ritson's copies, others from Leyden;

[7] *Minstrelsy*, iii. 186–198.

the Glenriddell MSS. (collected by the friend of Burns); on several occasions copies from recitations procured by James Hogg or Will Laidlaw, and possibly or probably each of these men emended the copy he obtained; while Scott combined and emended all in his published text.

Sometimes Scott gives no source at all, and in these cases research finds variants in old broadsides, or elsewhere.

In thirteen cases he gives no source, or "from tradition," which is the same thing; though "tradition in Ettrick Forest" may sometimes imply, once certainly does, the intermediary Hogg, or Will Laidlaw.

We now understand Scott's methods as editor. They are not scientific; they are literary. We also acknowledge (on internal evidence) his interpolation of his own stanzas in *Kinmont Willie* and *Jamie Telfer*, where he exalts his chief and ancestor. We cannot do otherwise (as scholars) than regret and condemn Scott's interpolations, never confessed. As lovers of poetry we acknowledge that, without Scott's interpolation, we could have no more of *Kinmont Willie* than verses, "much mangled by reciters," as Scott says, of a ballad perhaps no more poetical than *Jock o' the Side*. Scott says that "some conjectural emendations have been absolutely necessary to render it intelligible." As it is now very intelligible, to say "conjectural emendations" is a way of saying "interpolations."

But while thus confessing Scott's sins, I cannot believe that he, like Pinkerton, palmed off on the world any ballad or ballads

of his own sole manufacture, or any ballad which he knew to be forged.

The truth is that Scott was easily deceived by a modern imitation, if he liked the poetry. Surtees hoaxed him not only with *Barthram's Dirge* and *Anthony Featherstonhaugh*, but with a long prose excerpt from a non-existent manuscript about a phantom knight. Scott made the plot of *Marmion* hinge on this myth, in the encounter of Marmion with Wilfred as the phantasmal cavalier. He tells us that in *The Flowers of the Forest* "the manner of the ancient minstrels is so happily imitated, that it required the most positive evidence to convince the editor that the song was of modern date." Really the author was Miss Jane Elliot (1747–1805), daughter of Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto. Herd published a made-up copy in 1776. The tune, Scott says, is old, and he has heard an imperfect verse of the original ballad —

> "I ride single on my saddle,
> For the flowers o' the forest are a' wede awa'"

The *constant* use of double rhymes within the line —

> "At e'en, in the gloaming, nae younkers are roaming,"

an artifice rare in genuine ballads, might alone have proved to Scott that the poem of Miss Elliot is not popular and ancient.

I have cleared my conscience by confessing Scott's literary sins. His interpolations, elsewhere mere stopgaps, are mainly to

be found in *Kinmont Willie* and *Jamie Telfer*. His duty was to say, in his preface to each ballad, "The editor has interpolated stanza" so and so; if he made up the last verses of *Kinmont Willie* from the conclusion of a version of *Archie o' Ca'field*, he should have said so; as he does acknowledge two stopgap interpolations by Hogg in *Auld Maitland*. But as to the conclusion of *Kinmont Willie*, he did, we shall see, make confession.

Professor Kittredge, who edited Child's last part (X.), says in his excellent abridged edition of Child (1905), "It was no doubt the feeling that the popular ballad is a fluid and unstable thing that has prompted so many editors – among them Sir Walter Scott, whom it is impossible to assail, however much the scholarly conscience may disapprove – to deal freely with the versions that came into their hands."

Twenty-five years after the appearance of *The Border Minstrelsy*, in 1827, appeared Motherwell's *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern*. Motherwell was in favour of scientific methods of editing. Given two copies of a ballad, he says, "perhaps they may not have a single stanza which is mutual property, except certain commonplaces which seem an integral portion of the original mechanism of all our ancient ballads.. " By selecting the most beautiful and striking passages from each copy, and making those cohere, an editor, he says, may produce a more perfect and ornate version than any that exists in tradition. Of the originals "the individuality entirely disappears."

Motherwell disapproved of this method, which, as a rule, is

Scott's, and, scientifically, the method is not defensible. Thus, having three ballads of rescues, in similar circumstances, with a river to ford, Scott confessedly places that incident where he thinks it most "poetically appropriate"; and in all probability, by a single touch, he gives poetry in place of rough humour. Of all this Motherwell disapproved. (See *Kinmont Willie*, *infra.*)

Aytoun, in *The Ballads of Scotland*, thought Motherwell hypercritical; and also, in his practice inconsistent with his preaching. Aytoun observed, "with much regret and not a little indignation" (1859), "that later editors insinuated a doubt as to the fidelity of Sir Walter's rendering. My firm belief, resting on documentary evidence, is that Scott was most scrupulous in adhering to the very letter of his transcripts, whenever copies of ballads, previously taken down, were submitted to him." As an example, Aytoun, using a now lost MS. copy of about 1689–1702, of *The Outlaw Murray*, says "Sir Walter has given it throughout just as he received it." Yet Scott's copy, mainly from a lost Cockburn MS., contains a humorous passage on Buccleuch which Child half suspects to be by Sir Walter himself. [8] It is impossible for me to know whether Child's hesitating conjecture is right or wrong. Certainly we shall see, when Scott had but one MS. copy, as of *Auld Maitland*, his editing left little or nothing to be desired.

But now Scott is assailed, both where he deserves, and where, in my opinion, he does not deserve censure.

[8] Child, part ix., 187.

Scott did no more than his confessed following of Percy's method implies, to his original text of the *Ballad of Otterburne*. This I shall prove from his original text, published by Child from the Abbotsford MSS., and by a letter from the collector of the ballad, the Ettrick Shepherd.

The facts, in this instance, apparently are utterly unknown to Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. Fitzwilliam Elliot, in his *Further Essays on Border Ballads* (1910), pp. 1–45.

Again, I am absolutely certain, and can demonstrate, that Scott did not (as Colonel Elliot believes) detect Hogg in forging *Auld Maitland*, join with him in this fraud, and palm the ballad off on the public. Nothing of the kind occurred. Scott did not lie in this matter, both to the world and to his intimate friends, in private letters.

Once more, without better evidence than we possess, I do not believe that, in *Jamie Telfer*, Scott transferred the glory from the Elliots to the Scotts, and the shame from Buccleuch to Elliot of Stobs. The discussion leads us into very curious matter. But here, with our present materials, neither absolute proof nor disproof is possible.

Finally, as to *Kinmont Willie*, I merely give such reasons as I can find for thinking that Scott *had* "mangled" fragments of an old ballad before him, and did not merely paraphrase the narrative of Walter Scott of Satchells, in his doggerel *True History of the Name of Scott* (1688).

The positions of Colonel Elliot are in each case the reverse of

mine. In the instance of *Auld Maitland* (where Scott's conduct would be unpardonable if Colonel Elliot's view were correct), I have absolute proof that he is entirely mistaken. For *Otterburne* I am equally fortunate; that is, I can show that Scott's part went no further than "the making of a standard text" on his avowed principles. For *Jamie Telfer*, having no original manuscript, I admit *decorative* interpolations, and for the rest, argue on internal evidence, no other being accessible. For *Kinmont Willie*, I confess that the poem, as it stands, is Scott's, but give reasons for thinking that he had ballad fragments in his mind, if not on paper.

It will be understood that Colonel Elliot does not, I conceive, say that his charges are *proved*, but he thinks that the evidence points to these conclusions. He "hopes that I will give reasons for my disbelief" in his theories; and "hopes, though he cannot expect that they will completely dispose of" his views about *Jamie Telfer*. [9]

I give my reasons, though I entertain but slight hope of convincing my courteous opponent. That is always a task rather desperate. But the task leads me, in defence of a great memory, into a countryside, and into old times on the Border, which are so alluring that, like Socrates, I must follow where the *logos* guides me. To one conclusion it guides me, which startles myself, but I must follow the *logos*, even against the verdict of Professor Child, *notre maître à tous*. In some instances, I repeat, positive proof of the correctness of my views is impossible; all that I can do is to

[9] *Further Essays*, p. 184.

show that Colonel Elliot's contrary opinions also fall far short of demonstration, or are demonstrably erroneous.

AULD MAITLAND

The ballad of *Auld Maitland* holds in *The Border Minstrelsy* a place like that of the *Doloneia*, or Tenth Book, in the *Iliad*. Every professor of the Higher Criticism throws his stone at the *Doloneia* in passing, and every ballad-editor does as much to *Auld Maitland*. Professor Child excluded it from his monumental collection of "English and Scottish Popular Ballads," fragments, and variants, for which Mr. Child and his friends and helpers ransacked every attainable collection of ballads in manuscript, and ballads in print, as they listened to the last murmurings of ballad tradition from the lips of old or young.

Mr. Child, says his friend and pupil, Professor Kittredge, "possessed a kind of instinct" for distinguishing what is genuine and traditional, or modern, or manipulated, or, if I may say so, "faked" in a ballad.

"This instinct, trained by thirty years of study, had become wonderfully swift in its operations, and almost infallible. A forged or retouched piece could not escape him for a moment: he detected the slightest jar in the ballad ring." [10]

But all old traditional ballads are masses of "retouches," made through centuries, by reciters, copyists, editors, and so forth. Unluckily, Child never gave in detail his reasons for rejecting that

[10] Child, vol. i. p. xxx.

treasure of Sir Walter's, *Auld Maitland*. Child excluded the poem *sans phrase*. If he did this, like Falstaff "on instinct," one can only say that antiquarian instincts are never infallible. We must apply our reason to the problem, "What is *Auld Maitland*?"

Colonel Elliot has taken this course. By far the most blighting of the many charges made by Colonel Elliot against Sir Walter Scott are concerned with the ballad of *Auld Maitland*. [11] After stating that, in his opinion, "several stanzas" of the ballad are by Sir Walter himself, Colonel Elliot sums up his own ideas thus:

"My view is that Hogg, in the first instance, tried to palm off the ballad on Scott, and failed; and then Scott palmed it off on the public, and succeeded.. let us, as gentlemen and honest judges, admit that the responsibility of the deception rests rather on the laird (Scott) than on the herd" (Hogg.) [12]

If Colonel Elliot's "views" were correct (and it is absolutely erroneous), the guilt of "the laird" would be great. Scott conspires with a shepherd, a stranger, to palm off a forgery on the public. Scott issues the forgery, and, what is worse, in a private letter to a learned friend, he utters what I must borrow words for: he utters "cold and calculated falsehoods" about the manner in which, and the person from whom, he obtained what he calls "my first copy" of the song. If Hogg and Scott forged the poem, then when Scott told his tale of its acquisition by himself from Laidlaw, Scott lied.

Colonel Elliot is ignorant of the facts in the case. He gropes his

---

[11] *Minstrelsy*, 2nd edition, vol iii. (1803).

[12] *Further Essays*, pp. 247, 248.

way under the misleading light of a false date, and of fragments torn from the context of a letter which, in its complete form, has never till now been published. Where positive and published information exists, it has not always come within the range of the critic's researches; had it done so, he would have taken the information into account, but he does not. Of the existence of Scott's "first copy" of the ballad in manuscript our critic seems never to have heard; certainly he has not studied the MS. Had he done so he would not assign (on grounds like those of Homeric critics) this verse to Hogg and that to Scott. He would know that Scott did not interpolate a single stanza; that spelling, punctuation, and some slight verbal corrections, with an admirable emendation, were the sum of his industry: that he did not even excise two stanzas of, at earliest, eighteenth century work.

I must now clear up misconceptions which have imposed themselves on all critics of the ballad, on myself, for example, no less than on Colonel Elliot: and must tell the whole story of how the existence of the ballad first became known to Scott's collector and friend, William Laidlaw, how he procured the copy which he presented to Sir Walter, and how Sir Walter obtained, from recitation, his "second copy," that which he printed in *The Minstrelsy* in 1803.

In 1801 Scott, who was collecting ballads, gave a list of songs which he wanted to Mr. Andrew Mercer, of Selkirk. Mercer knew young Will Laidlaw, farmer in Blackhouse on Yarrow,

where Hogg had been a shepherd for ten years. Laidlaw applied for two ballads, one of them *The Outlaw Murray*, to Hogg, then shepherding at Ettrick House, at the head of Ettrick, above Thirlestane. Hogg replied on 20th July 1801. He could get but a few verses of *The Outlaw* from his maternal uncle, Will Laidlaw of Phawhope. He said that, from traditions known to him, he could make good songs, "but without Mr. Scott's permission this would be an imposition, neither could I undertake it without an order from him in his own handwriting.. " [13] Laidlaw went on trying to collect songs for Scott. We now take his own account of *Auld Maitland* from a manuscript left by him. [14]

"I heard from one of the servant girls, who had all the turn and qualifications for a collector, of a ballad called *Auld Maitland*, that a grandfather (maternal) of Hogg could repeat, and she herself had several of the first stanzas, which I took a note of, and have still the copy. This greatly aroused my anxiety to procure the whole, for this was a ballad not even hinted at by Mercer in his list of desiderata received from Mr. Scott. I forthwith wrote to Hogg himself, requesting him to endeavour to procure the whole ballad. In a week or two I received his reply, containing *Auld Maitland* exactly as he had received it from the recitation of his uncle Will of Phawhope, corroborated by his mother, who both said they learned it from their father, a still older Will

[13] Carruthers, "Abbotsford Notanda," in R. Chambers's *Life of Scott*, pp. 115–117 (1891).

[14] *Ibid.*, *p.* 118.

of Phawhope, and an old man called Andrew Muir, who had been servant to the famous Mr. Boston, minister of Ettrick." Concerning Laidlaw's evidence, Colonel Elliot says not a word.

This copy of *Auld Maitland*, with the superscription outside —

Mr. William laidlaw,

Blackhouse,

all in Hogg's hand, is now at Abbotsford. We next have, through Carruthers using Laidlaw's manuscript, an account of the arrival of Scott and Leyden at Blackhouse, of Laidlaw's presentation of Hogg's manuscript, which Scott read aloud, and of their surprise and delight. Scott was excited, so that his *burr* became very perceptible. [15]

The time of year when Scott and Leyden visited Yarrow was not the *autumn* vacation of 1802, as Lockhart erroneously writes, [16] but the *spring* vacation of 1802. The spring vacation, Mr. Macmath informs me, ran from 11th March to 12th May in 1802. In May, apparently, Scott having obtained the *Auld Maitland* MS. in the vernal vacation of the Court of Session, gave his account of

[15] Carruthers, "Abbotsford Notanda," in R. Chambers's *Life of Scott*, pp. 115–117 (1891).

[16] Lockhart, vol. ii. p. 99.

his discovery to his friend Ellis (Lockhart does not date the letter, but wrongly puts it after the return to Edinburgh in November 1802).

Scott wrote thus: – "We" (John Leyden and himself) "have just concluded an excursion of two or three weeks through my jurisdiction of Selkirkshire, where, in defiance of mountains, rivers, and bogs, damp and dry, we have penetrated the very recesses of Ettrick Forest.. I have.. returned *loaded* with the treasures of oral tradition. The principal result of our inquiries has been a complete and perfect copy of "Maitland with his Auld Berd Graie," referred to by [Gawain] Douglas in his *Palice of Honour* (1503), along with John the Reef and other popular characters, and celebrated in the poems from the Maitland MS." (*circ.* 1575). You may guess the surprise of Leyden and myself when this was presented to us, copied down from the recitation of an old shepherd, by a country farmer.. Many of the old words are retained, which neither the reciter nor the copyer understood. Such are the military engines, sowies, *springwalls* (springalds), and many others.. " [17]

That Scott got the ballad in spring 1802 is easily proved. On 10th April 1802, Joseph Ritson, the crabbed, ill-tempered, but meticulously accurate scholar, who thought that ballad-forging should be made a capital offence, wrote thus to Scott: —

"I have the pleasure of enclosing my copy of a very ancient poem, which appears to me to be the original of *The Wee Wee*

[17] Lockhart, *Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart.*, vol. ii. pp. 99, 100 (1829).

Man, and which I learn from Mr. Ellis you are desirous to see." In Scott's letter to Ellis, just quoted, he says: "I have lately had from him" (Ritson) "*a copie* of 'Ye litel wee man,' of which I think I can make some use. In return, I have sent him a sight of *Auld Maitland*, the original MS.. I wish him to see it *in puris naturalibus*." "The precaution here taken was very natural," says Lockhart, considering Ritson's temper and hatred of literary forgeries. Scott, when he wrote to Ellis, had received Ritson's *The Wee Wee Man* "lately": it was sent to him by Ritson on 10th April 1802. Scott had already, when he wrote to Ellis, got "the original MS. of *Auld Maitland*" (now in Abbotsford Library). By 10th June 1802 Ritson wrote saying, "You may depend on my taking the utmost care of *Old Maitland*, and returning it in health and safety. I would not use the liberty of transcribing it into my manuscript copy of Mrs. Brown's ballads, but if you will signify your permission, I shall be highly gratified." [18] "Your ancient and curious ballad," he styles the piece.

Thus Scott had *Auld Maitland* in May 1802; he sent the original MS. to Ritson; Ritson received it graciously; he had, on 10th April 1802, sent Scott another MS., *The Wee Wee Man*: and when Scott wrote to Ellis about his surprise at getting "a complete and perfect copy of Maitland," he had but lately received *The Wee Wee Man*, sent by Ritson on 10th April 1802. He had made

---

[18] Ritson of 10th April 1802, in his *Letters of Joseph Ritson, Esq.*, vol. ii. p. 218. Letter of 10th June 1802, *Ibid.*, p. 207. Ritson returned the original manuscript of *Auld Maitland* on 28th February 1803, *Ibid.*, p. 230.

a spring, not an autumn, raid into the Forest.

We now know the external history of the ballad. Laidlaw, hearing his servant repeat some stanzas, asks Hogg for the full copy, which Hogg sends with a pedigree from which he never wavered. Auld Andrew Muir taught the song to Hogg's mother and uncle. Hogg took it from his uncle's recitation, and sent it, directed outside,

To Mr. William laidlaw,

Blackhouse,

and Laidlaw gave it to Scott, in March 12–May 12, 1802. But Scott, publishing the ballad in *The Minstrelsy* (1803), says it is given "as written down from the recitation of the mother of Mr. James Hogg, who sings, or rather chants, it with great animation" (manifestly he had heard the recitation which he describes).

It seems that Scott, before he wrote to Ellis in May 1802, had misgivings about the ballad. Says Carruthers, he "made another visit to Blackhouse for the purpose of getting Laidlaw as a guide to Ettrick," being "curious to see the poetical shepherd."

Laidlaw's MS., used by Carruthers, describes the wild ride by the marshes at the head of the Loch of the Lowes, through the

bogs on the knees of the hills, down a footpath to Ramseycleuch in Ettrick. They sent to Ettrick House for Hogg; Scott was surprised and pleased with James's appearance. They had a delightful evening: "the qualities of Hogg came out at every instant, and his unaffected simplicity and fearless frankness both surprised and pleased the Sheriff." [19] Next morning they visited Hogg and his mother at her cottage, and Hogg tells how the old lady recited *Auld Maitland*. Hogg gave the story in prose, with great vivacity and humour, in his *Domestic Manners of Sir Walter Scott* (1834).

In an earlier poetical address to Scott, congratulating him on his elevation to the baronetcy (1818), the Shepherd says —

> When Maitland's song first met your ear,
> How the furled visage up did clear.
> Beaming delight! though now a shade
> Of doubt would darken into dread,
> That some unskilled presumptuous arm
> Had marred tradition's mighty charm.
> Scarce grew thy lurking dread the less,
> Till she, the ancient Minstreless,
> With fervid voice and kindling eye,
> And withered arms waving on high,
> Sung forth these words in eldritch shriek,
> While tears stood on thy nut-brown cheek:
> "Na, we are nane o' the lads o' France,

[19] Carruthers, pp. 128, 131.

Nor e'er pretend to be;
We be three lads of fair Scotland,
Auld Maitland's sons a' three."

(Stanza xliii. as printed. In Hogg's MS. copy, given to Laidlaw there are two verbal differences, in lines 1 and 4.)

Then says Hogg —

Thy fist made all the table ring,
By – , sir, but that is the thing!

Hogg could not thus describe the scene in addressing Scott himself, in 1818, if his story were not true. It thus follows that his mother knew the sixty-five stanzas of the ballad by heart. Does any one believe that, as a woman of seventy-two, she learned the poem to back Hogg's hoax? That he wrote the poem, and caused her to learn it by rote, so as to corroborate his imposture?

This is absurd.

But now comes the source of Colonel Elliot's theory of a conspiracy between Scott and Hogg, to forge a ballad and issue the forgery. Colonel Elliot knows scraps of a letter to Hogg of 30th June 1802. He has read parts, not bearing on the question, in Mr. Douglas's *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott* (vol. i. pp. 12–15), and another scrap, in which Hogg says that "I am surprised to hear that *Auld Maitland* is suspected by some to be a modern forgery." This part of Hogg's letter of 30th June 1802 was published by Scott himself in the third volume of *The*

Minstrelsy (April 1803).

Not having the context of the letter, Colonel Elliot seems to argue, "Scott says he got his first copy in autumn 1802" (Lockhart's mistake), "yet here are Hogg and Scott corresponding about the ballad long before autumn, in June 1802. This is very suspicious." I give what appears to be Colonel Elliot's line of reflection in my own words. He decides that, as early as June 1802, "Hogg"(in the Colonel's 'view'), "in the first instance, tried to palm off the ballad on Scott, and failed; and that then Scott palmed it off on the public, and succeeded."

This is all a mare's nest. Scott, in March-May 1802, had the whole of the ballad except one stanza, which Hogg sent to him on 30th June.

I now print, for the first time, the whole of Hogg's letter of 30th June, with its shrewd criticism on ballads, hitherto omitted, and I italicise the passage about *Auld Maitland*: —

> *Ettrick House, June 30.*
>
> Dear Sir, – I have been perusing your minstrelsy very diligently for a while past, and it being the first book I ever perused which was written by a person I had seen and conversed with, the consequence hath been to me a most sensible pleasure; for in fact it is the remarks and modern pieces that I have delighted most in, being as it were personally acquainted with many of the modern pieces formerly. My mother is actually a living miscellany of old songs. I never believed that she had half so many until I

came to a trial. There are some (*sic*) in your collection of which she hath not a part, and I should by this time had a great number written for your amusement, thinking them all of great antiquity and lost to posterity, had I not luckily lighted upon a collection of songs in two volumes, published by I know not who, in which I recognised about half-a-score of my mother's best songs, almost word for word. No doubt I was piqued, but it saved me much trouble, paper, and ink; for I am carefully avoiding anything which I have seen or heard of being in print, although I have no doubt that I shall err, being acquainted with almost no collections of that sort, but I am not afraid that you too will mistake. I am still at a loss with respect to some: such as the Battle of Flodden beginning, "From Spey to the Border," a long poetical piece on the battle of Bannockburn, I fear modern: The Battle of the Boyne, Young Bateman's Ghost, all of which, and others which I cannot mind, I could mostly recover for a few miles' travel were I certain they could be of any use concerning the above; and I might have mentioned May Cohn and a duel between two friends, Graham and Bewick, undoubtedly very old. You must give me information in your answer. I have already scraped together a considerable quantity – suspend your curiosity, Mr. Scott, you will see them when I see you, of which I am as impatient as you can be to see the songs for your life. But as I suppose you have no personal acquaintance in this parish, it would be presumption in me to expect that you will visit my cottage, but I will attend you in any part of the Forest if you will send me word. I am far from supposing that a person of your

discernment, – d – n it, I'll blot out that, 'tis so like flattery. I say I don't think you would despise a shepherd's "humble cot an' hamely fare," as Burns hath it, yet though I would be extremely proud of a visit, yet hang me if I would know what to do wi' ye. I am surprised to find that the songs in your collection differ so widely from my mother's. Is Mr. Herd's MS. genuine? I suspect it. Jamie Telfer differs in many particulars. Johnny Armstrong of Gilnockie is another song altogether. I have seen a verse of my mother's way called Johny Armstrong's last good-night cited in the *Spectator*, and another in *Boswell's Journal*. It begins, "Is there ne'er a man in fair Scotland?" Do you know if this is in print, Mr. Scott? In the Tale of Tomlin the whole of the interlude about the horse and the hawk is a distinct song altogether. [20] Clerk Saunders is nearly the same with my mother's, until that stanza [xvi.] which ends, "was in the tower last night wi' me," then with another verse or two which are not in yours, ends Clerk Saunders. All the rest of the song in your edition is another song altogether, which my mother hath mostly likewise, and I am persuaded from the change in the stile that she is right, for it is scarce consistent with the forepart of the ballad. I have made several additions and variations out, to the printed songs, for your inspection, but only when they could be inserted without disjointing the songs as they are at present; to have written all the variations would scarcely be possible, and I thought would embarrass you exceedingly. *I have recovered another half verse of Old*

[20] *Sweet William's Ghost.*

Maitlan, and have rhymed it thus—

Remember Fiery of the Scot
Hath cowr'd aneath thy hand;
For ilka drap o' Maitlen's blood
I'll gie *thee* rigs o' land. —

The two last lines only are original; *you will easily perceive that they occur in the very place where we suspected a want. I am surprised to hear that this song is suspected by some to be a modern forgery*; *this will be best proved by most of the old people hereabouts having a great part of it by heart*; many, indeed, are not aware of the manners of this place, it is but lately emerged from barbarity, and till this present age the poor illiterate people in these glens knew of no other entertainment in the long winter nights than in repeating and listening to these feats of their ancestors, which I believe to be handed down inviolate from father to son, for many generations, although no doubt, had a copy been taken of them at the end of every fifty years, there must have been some difference, which the repeaters would have insensibly fallen into merely by the change of terms in that period. I believe that it is thus that many very ancient songs have been modernised, which yet to a connoisseur will bear visible marks of antiquity. The Maitlen, for instance, exclusive of its mode of description, is all composed of words, which would mostly every one spell and pronounce in the very same dialect that was spoken some centuries ago.

> Pardon, my dear Sir, the freedom I have taken in addressing you – it is my nature; and I could not resist the impulse of writing to you any longer. Let me hear from you as soon as this comes to your hand, and tell me when you will be in Ettrick Forest, and suffer me to subscribe myself, Sir, your most humble and affectionate servant,
> *James Hogg.*

In Scott's printed text of the ballad, two interpolations, of two lines each, are acknowledged in notes. They occur in stanzas vii., xlvi., and are attributed to Hogg. In fact, Hogg sent one of them (vii.) to Laidlaw in his manuscript. The other he sent to Scott on 30th June 1802.

Colonel Elliot, in the spirit of the Higher Criticism (*chimæra bombinans in vacuo*), writes, [21] "Few will doubt that the footnotes" (on these interpolations) "were inserted with the purpose of leading the public to think that Hogg made no other interpolations; but I am afraid I must go further than this and say that, since they were inserted on the editor's responsibility, the intention must have been to make it appear as if no other interpolations by any other hand had been inserted."

But no other interpolations by another hand *were* inserted! Some verbal emendations were made by Scott, but he never put in a stanza or two lines of his own.

Colonel Elliot provides us with six pages of the Higher Criticism. He knows how to distinguish between verses by Hogg,

---

[21] *Further Essays*, pp. 225, 226.

and verses by Scott! [22] But, save when Scott puts one line, a ballad formula, where Hogg has another line, Scott makes no interpolations, and the ballad formula he probably took, with other things of no more importance, from Mrs. Hogg's recitation. Oh, Higher Criticism!

I now print the ballad as Hogg sent it to Laidlaw, between August 1801 and March 1802, in all probability.

[Back of Hogg's MS.: Mr. William Laidlaw, Blackhouse.]

[22] *Further Essays*, pp. 227–234.

OLD MAITLAND
A VERY ANTIENT SONG

There lived a king in southern land
  King Edward hecht his name
Unwordily he wore the crown
  Till fifty years was gane.

He had a sister's son o's ain
  Was large o' blood and bane
And afterwards when he came up,
  Young Edward hecht his name.

One day he came before the king,
  And kneeld low on his knee
A boon a boon my good uncle,
  I crave to ask of thee

"At our lang wars i' fair Scotland
  I lang hae lang'd to be
If fifteen hunder wale wight men
  You'll grant to ride wi' me."

"Thou sal hae thae thou sal hae mae
  I say it sickerly;

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.