

**ВАЛЬТЕР
СКОТТ**

SOME POEMS

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Some Poems

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
THE VISION OF DON RODERICK	7
PREFACE	7
INTRODUCTION	8
THE VISION OF DON RODERICK	12
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	17

Walter Scott

Some Poems

INTRODUCTION

Since there is room in this volume for more verses than Colonel Hay's ¹, I have added to them a few poems by Sir Walter Scott; the first written in 1811 at the time of the struggle with Napoleon in the Peninsula, the second in 1815, after Waterloo. Thus there is over all this volume a thin haze of battle through which we see only the finer feelings and the nobler hopes of man. The day is to come when war shall be no more, but wars have been and may again be necessary to bring on that day; and it is of such war, not untinged with the light of heaven, that we have passing shadows in this little book.

“The Vision of Don Roderick; a Poem, by Walter Scott, Esq.,” was printed at Edinburgh by James Ballantyne & Co. in 1811. They are the present representatives of that firm by whom it is here reprinted. It was originally inscribed “to John Whitmore, Esq., and to the Committee of Subscribers for relief of the Portuguese Sufferers, in which he presides,” as a “poem composed for the benefit of the Fund under their management.”

The Legend of Don Roderick will be given in the next volume of our “Companion Poets,” for Robert Southey founded upon it a Romantic Tale in Verse, which is one of the best tales of the kind in the English language. Southey's tale of Roderick himself was written at the same time when Walter Savage Landor was writing a play upon the subject, and Scott was, in the piece here reprinted, making it the starting-point of a vision of the war in the Peninsula. The fatal palace of Don Roderick may have been a fable connected with the ruins of a Roman amphitheatre. The fable, as translated by Scott from a Spanish History of King Roderick, was this: -

“One mile on the east side of the city of Toledo, among some rocks, was situated an ancient Tower of magnificent structure, though much dilapidated by time, which consumes all: four estades (*i. e.*, four times a man's height) below it, there was a Cave with a very narrow entrance, and a gate cut out of the solid rock, lined with a strong covering of iron, and fastened with many locks; above the gate some Greek letters are engraved, which, although abbreviated, and of doubtful meaning, were thus interpreted, according to the exposition of learned men: – *The King who opens this cave and discovers the wonders will discover both good and evil things*. Many kings desired to know the mystery of this Tower, and sought to find out the manner with much care; but when they opened the gate, such a tremendous noise arose in the Cave that it appeared as if the earth was bursting; many of those present sickened with fear, and others lost their lives. In order to prevent such great perils (as they supposed a dangerous enchantment was contained within), they secured the gate with new locks, concluding, that though a king was destined to open it, the fated time was not yet arrived. At last King Don Rodrigo, led on by his evil fortune and unlucky destiny, opened the Tower; and some bold attendants whom he had brought with him entered, although agitated with fear. Having proceeded a good way, they fled back to the entrance, terrified with a frightful vision which they had beheld. The King was greatly moved, and ordered many torches, so contrived that the tempest in the cave could not extinguish them, to be lighted. Then the King entered, not without fear, before all the others. He discovered, by degrees, a splendid hall, apparently built in a very sumptuous manner; in the middle stood a Bronze Statue of very ferocious appearance, which held a battle-axe in its hands. With this he struck the floor violently, giving it such heavy blows that the noise in the Cave was occasioned by the

¹ This eText comes from a book (Pike Country Ballads etc.) which contains a number of poems by John Hay. These have been released separately by Project Gutenberg under the title “Pike Country Ballads and Other Poems” by John Hay. They are not included here to avoid duplication.

motion of the air. The King, greatly affrighted and astonished, began to conjure this terrible vision, promising that he would return without doing any injury in the Cave, after he had obtained sight of what was contained in it. The Statue ceased to strike the floor, and the King, with his followers, somewhat assured, and recovering their courage, proceeded into the hall; and on the left of the Statue they found this inscription on the wall: *Unfortunate King, thou hast entered here in an evil hour.* On the right side of the wall the words were inscribed: *By strange Nations thou shalt be dispossessed, and thy subjects foully degraded.* On the shoulders of the Statue other words were written, which said, *I call upon the Arabs.* And upon his heart was written, *I do my office.* At the entrance of the hall there was placed a round bowl, from which a great noise, like the fall of waters, proceeded. They found no other thing in the hall, – and when the King, sorrowful and greatly affected, had scarcely turned about to leave the Cavern, the Statue again commenced its accustomed blows upon the floor. After they had mutually promised to conceal what they had seen, they again closed the Tower, and blocked up the gate of the Cavern with earth, that no memory might remain in the world of such a portentous and evil-boding prodigy. The ensuing midnight, they heard great cries and clamour from the Cave, resounding like the noise of Battle, and the ground shaking with a tremendous roar; the whole edifice of the old Tower fell to the ground, by which they were greatly affrighted, the Vision which they had beheld appearing to them as a dream.”

Scott’s poem on the Field of Waterloo was written to assist the Waterloo subscription.

H. M.

*“Quid dignum memorare tuis, Hispania, terris,
Vox humana valet!”* – CLAUDIAN.

THE VISION OF DON RODERICK

PREFACE

The following Poem is founded upon a Spanish Tradition, bearing, in general, that Don Roderick, the last Gothic King of Spain, when the invasion of the Moors was depending, had the temerity to descend into an ancient vault, near Toledo, the opening of which had been denounced as fatal to the Spanish Monarchy. The legend adds, that his rash curiosity was mortified by an emblematical representation of those Saracens who, in the year 714, defeated him in battle, and reduced Spain under their dominion. I have presumed to prolong the Vision of the Revolutions of Spain down to the present eventful crisis of the Peninsula, and to divide it, by a supposed change of scene, into, **THREE PERIODS**. The **FIRST** of these represents the Invasion of the Moors, the Defeat and Death of Roderick, and closes with the peaceful occupation of the country by the victors. The **SECOND PERIOD** embraces the state of the Peninsula when the conquests of the Spaniards and Portuguese in the East and West Indies had raised to the highest pitch the renown of their arms; sullied, however, by superstition and cruelty. An allusion to the inhumanities of the Inquisition terminates this picture. The **LAST PART** of the Poem opens with the state of Spain previous to the unparalleled treachery of **BUONAPARTE**, gives a sketch of the usurpation attempted upon that unsuspecting and friendly kingdom, and terminates with the arrival of the British succours. It may be further proper to mention, that the object of the Poem is less to commemorate or detail particular incidents, than to exhibit a general and impressive picture of the several periods brought upon the stage.

EDINBURGH, *June* 24, 1811.

INTRODUCTION

I

Lives there a strain, whose sounds of mounting fire
May rise distinguished o'er the din of war;
Or died it with yon Master of the Lyre
Who sung beleaguered Ilion's evil star?
Such, WELLINGTON, might reach thee from afar,
Wafting its descant wide o'er Ocean's range;
Nor shouts, nor clashing arms, its mood could mar,
All, as it swelled 'twixt each loud trumpet-change,
That clangs to Britain victory, to Portugal revenge!

II

Yes! such a strain, with all o'er-pouring measure,
Might melodise with each tumultuous sound
Each voice of fear or triumph, woe or pleasure,
That rings Mondego's ravaged shores around;
The thundering cry of hosts with conquest crowned,
The female shriek, the ruined peasant's moan,
The shout of captives from their chains unbound,
The foiled oppressor's deep and sullen groan,
A Nation's choral hymn, for tyranny o'erthrown.

III

But we, weak minstrels of a laggard day
Skilled but to imitate an elder page,
Timid and raptureless, can we repay
The debt thou claim'st in this exhausted age?
Thou givest our lyres a theme, that might engage
Those that could send thy name o'er sea and land,
While sea and land shall last; for Homer's rage
A theme; a theme for Milton's mighty hand -
How much unmeet for us, a faint degenerate band!

IV

Ye mountains stern! within whose rugged breast
The friends of Scottish freedom found repose;
Ye torrents! whose hoarse sounds have soothed their rest,
Returning from the field of vanquished foes;
Say, have ye lost each wild majestic close
That erst the choir of Bards or Druids flung,
What time their hymn of victory arose,
And Cattræth's glens with voice of triumph rung,
And mystic Merlin harped, and grey-haired Llywarch sung?

V

Oh! if your wilds such minstrelsy retain,
As sure your changeful gales seem oft to say,
When sweeping wild and sinking soft again,
Like trumpet-jubilee, or harp's wild sway;
If ye can echo such triumphant lay,
Then lend the note to him has loved you long!
Who pious gathered each tradition grey
That floats your solitary wastes along,
And with affection vain gave them new voice in song.

VI

For not till now, how oft soe'er the task
Of truant verse hath lightened graver care,
From Muse or Sylvan was he wont to ask,
In phrase poetic, inspiration fair;
Careless he gave his numbers to the air,
They came unsought for, if applauses came:
Nor for himself prefers he now the prayer;
Let but his verse befit a hero's fame,
Immortal be the verse! – forgot the poet's name!

VII

Hark, from yon misty cairn their answer tost:
“Minstrel! the fame of whose romantic lyre,

Capricious-swelling now, may soon be lost,
Like the light flickering of a cottage fire;
If to such task presumptuous thou aspire,
Seek not from us the meed to warrior due:
Age after age has gathered son to sire
Since our grey cliffs the din of conflict knew,
Or, pealing through our vales, victorious bugles blew.

VIII

“Decayed our old traditionary lore,
Save where the lingering fays renew their ring,
By milkmaid seen beneath the hawthorn hoar,
Or round the marge of Minchmore’s haunted spring;
Save where their legends grey-haired shepherds sing,
That now scarce win a listening ear but thine,
Of feuds obscure, and Border ravaging,
And rugged deeds recount in rugged line,
Of moonlight foray made on Teviot, Tweed, or Tyne.

IX

“No! search romantic lands, where the near Sun
Gives with unstinted boon ethereal flame,
Where the rude villager, his labour done,
In verse spontaneous chants some favoured name,
Whether Olalia’s charms his tribute claim,
Her eye of diamond, and her locks of jet;
Or whether, kindling at the deeds of Græme,
He sing, to wild Morisco measure set,
Old Albin’s red claymore, green Erin’s bayonet!

X

“Explore those regions, where the flinty crest
Of wild Nevada ever gleams with snows,
Where in the proud Alhambra’s ruined breast
Barbaric monuments of pomp repose;
Or where the banners of more ruthless foes
Than the fierce Moor, float o’er Toledo’s fane,
From whose tall towers even now the patriot throws
An anxious glance, to spy upon the plain

The blended ranks of England, Portugal, and Spain.

XI

“There, of Numantian fire a swarthy spark
Still lightens in the sunburnt native’s eye;
The stately port, slow step, and visage dark,
Still mark enduring pride and constancy.
And, if the glow of feudal chivalry
Beam not, as once, thy nobles’ dearest pride,
Iberia! oft thy crestless peasantry
Have seen the plumed Hidalgo quit their side,
Have seen, yet dauntless stood – ’gainst fortune fought and died.

XII

“And cherished still by that unchanging race,
Are themes for minstrelsy more high than thine;
Of strange tradition many a mystic trace,
Legend and vision, prophecy and sign;
Where wonders wild of Arabesque combine
With Gothic imagery of darker shade,
Forming a model meet for minstrel line.
Go, seek such theme!” – the Mountain Spirit said.
With filial awe I heard – I heard, and I obeyed.

THE VISION OF DON RODERICK

I

Rearing their crests amid the cloudless skies,
And darkly clustering in the pale moonlight,
Toledo's holy towers and spires arise,
As from a trembling lake of silver white.
Their mingled shadows intercept the sight
Of the broad burial-ground outstretched below,
And nought disturbs the silence of the night;
All sleeps in sullen shade, or silver glow,
All save the heavy swell of Teio's ceaseless flow.

II

All save the rushing swell of Teio's tide,
Or, distant heard, a courser's neigh or tramp;
Their changing rounds as watchful horsemen ride,
To guard the limits of King Roderick's camp.
For through the river's night-fog rolling damp
Was many a proud pavilion dimly seen,
Which glimmered back, against the moon's fair lamp,
Tissues of silk and silver twisted sheen,
And standards proudly pitched, and warders armed between.

III

But of their Monarch's person keeping ward,
Since last the deep-mouthed bell of vespers tolled,
The chosen soldiers of the royal guard
The post beneath the proud Cathedral hold:
A band unlike their Gothic sires of old,
Who, for the cap of steel and iron mace,
Bear slender darts, and casques bedecked with gold,
While silver-studded belts their shoulders grace,
Where ivory quivers ring in the broad falchion's place.

IV

In the light language of an idle court,
They murmured at their master's long delay,
And held his lengthened orisons in sport: -
"What! will Don Roderick here till morning stay,
To wear in shrift and prayer the night away?
And are his hours in such dull penance past,
For fair Florinda's plundered charms to pay?"
Then to the east their weary eyes they cast,
And wished the lingering dawn would glimmer forth at last.

V

But, far within, Toledo's Prelate lent
An ear of fearful wonder to the King;
The silver lamp a fitful lustre sent,
So long that sad confession witnessing:
For Roderick told of many a hidden thing,
Such as are lothly uttered to the air,
When Fear, Remorse, and Shame the bosom wring,
And Guilt his secret burden cannot bear,
And Conscience seeks in speech a respite from Despair.

VI

Full on the Prelate's face, and silver hair,
The stream of failing light was feebly rolled:
But Roderick's visage, though his head was bare,
Was shadowed by his hand and mantle's fold.
While of his hidden soul the sins he told,
Proud Alaric's descendant could not brook,
That mortal man his bearing should behold,
Or boast that he had seen, when Conscience shook,
Fear tame a monarch's brow, Remorse a warrior's look.

VII

The old man's faded cheek waxed yet more pale,
As many a secret sad the King bewrayed;

As sign and glance eked out the unfinished tale,
When in the midst his faltering whisper stayed.
“Thus royal Witiza was slain,” – he said;
“Yet, holy Father, deem not it was I.”
Thus still Ambition strives her crimes to shade. -
“Oh, rather deem ’twas stern necessity!
Self-preservation bade, and I must kill or die.

VIII

“And if Florinda’s shrieks alarmed the air,
If she invoked her absent sire in vain,
And on her knees implored that I would spare,
Yet, reverend Priest, thy sentence rash refrain!
All is not as it seems – the female train
Know by their bearing to disguise their mood:”
But Conscience here, as if in high disdain,
Sent to the Monarch’s cheek the burning blood -
He stayed his speech abrupt – and up the Prelate stood.

IX

“O hardened offspring of an iron race!
What of thy crimes, Don Roderick, shall I say?
What alms, or prayers, or penance can efface
Murder’s dark spot, wash treason’s stain away!
For the foul ravisher how shall I pray,
Who, scarce repentant, makes his crime his boast?
How hope Almighty vengeance shall delay,
Unless, in mercy to yon Christian host,
He spare the shepherd, lest the guiltless sheep be lost?”

X

Then kindled the dark tyrant in his mood,
And to his brow returned its dauntless gloom;
“And welcome then,” he cried, “be blood for blood,
For treason treachery, for dishonour doom!
Yet will I know whence come they, or by whom.
Show, for thou canst – give forth the fated key,
And guide me, Priest, to that mysterious room,
Where, if aught true in old tradition be,

His nation's future fates a Spanish King shall see.”

XI

“Ill-fated Prince! recall the desperate word,
Or pause ere yet the omen thou obey!
Bethink, yon spell-bound portal would afford
Never to former Monarch entrance-way;
Nor shall it ever ope, old records say,
Save to a King, the last of all his line,
What time his empire totters to decay,
And treason digs, beneath, her fatal mine,
And, high above, impends avenging wrath divine.” -

XII

“Prelate! a Monarch's fate brooks no delay;
Lead on!” – The ponderous key the old man took,
And held the winking lamp, and led the way,
By winding stair, dark aisle, and secret nook,
Then on an ancient gateway bent his look;
And, as the key the desperate King essayed,
Low muttered thunders the Cathedral shook,
And twice he stopped, and twice new effort made,
Till the huge bolts rolled back, and the loud hinges brayed.

XIII

Long, large, and lofty was that vaulted hall;
Roof, walls, and floor were all of marble stone,
Of polished marble, black as funeral pall,
Carved o'er with signs and characters unknown.
A paly light, as of the dawning, shone
Through the sad bounds, but whence they could not spy;
For window to the upper air was none;
Yet, by that light, Don Roderick could descry
Wonders that ne'er till then were seen by mortal eye.

XIV

Grim sentinels, against the upper wall,
Of molten bronze, two Statues held their place;
Massive their naked limbs, their stature tall,
Their frowning foreheads golden circles grace.
Moulded they seemed for kings of giant race,
That lived and sinned before the avenging flood;
This grasped a scythe, that rested on a mace;
This spread his wings for flight, that pondering stood,
Each stubborn seemed and stern, immutable of mood.

XV

Fixed was the right-hand Giant's brazen look
Upon his brother's glass of shifting sand,
As if its ebb he measured by a book,
Whose iron volume loaded his huge hand;
In which was wrote of many a fallen land
Of empires lost, and kings to exile driven:
And o'er that pair their names in scroll expand -
"Lo, DESTINY and TIME! to whom by Heaven
The guidance of the earth is for a season given." -

XVI

Even while they read, the sand-glass wastes away;
And, as the last and lagging grains did creep,
That right-hand Giant 'gan his club upsway,
As one that startles from a heavy sleep.
Full on the upper wall the mace's sweep
At once descended with the force of thunder,
And hurtling down at once, in crumbled heap,
The marble boundary was rent asunder,
And gave to Roderick's view new sights of fear and wonder.

XVII

For they might spy, beyond that mighty breach,
Realms as of Spain in visioned prospect laid,
Castles and towers, in due proportion each,
As by some skilful artist's hand portrayed:
Here, crossed by many a wild Sierra's shade,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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