ВАЛЬТЕР СКОТТ

MARMION

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Marmion

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Содержание

Walter Scott
Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field in Six Cantos

EDITOR'S PREFACE

I. SCOTT AT ASHESTIEL

Sir Walter Scott's love of the country induced him, after his marriage in 1797, to settle in a cottage at the pretty village of Lasswade, near Edinburgh. Four years after leaving this district he took Mr. Morritt of Rokeby to see the little dwelling, telling him that, though not worth looking at, 'it was our first house when newly married, and many a contrivance it had to make it comfortable.' He then enumerated various devices, by which he had secured for Mrs. Scott and himself what seemed to both, at the time, additional convenience and elegance in and about their home. His reminiscences culminated in an account of an arch over the gate-way, which he had constructed by fastening together the tops of two convenient willows and placing above them 'a cross made of two sticks.' This is very beautiful and characteristic; and there is much freshness and charm in the further picture of the young cottagers rejoicing over the success of the arrangements. 'To be sure,' Scott concluded, 'it is not much of a lion to show a stranger; but I wanted to see it again myself, for I assure you after I constructed it, Mamma (Mrs. Scott) and I both of us thought it so fine, we turned out to see it by moonlight, and walked backwards from it to the cottage-door in admiration of our own magnificence and its picturesque effect.' It was his way to invest his circumstances with an interest over and above what intrinsically belonged to them, and to prompt his friends to a share in his delight.

When, in 1804, Scott was appointed Sheriff of Selkirkshire, a condition attaching to his post was that he should reside during part of the year within the bounds of his sheriffdom. He then removed from Lasswade, and settled at Ashestiel on the Tweed, seven miles from Selkirk. This is his own account of the new home: -

'We found a delightful retirement, by my becoming the tenant of my intimate friend and cousin-german, Colonel Russell, in his mansion of Ashestiel, which was unoccupied during his absence on military service in India. The house was adequate to our accommodation, and the exercise of a limited hospitality. The situation is uncommonly beautiful, by the side of a fine river, whose streams are there very favourable for angling, surrounded by the remains of natural woods, and by hills abounding in game. In point of society, according to the heartfelt phrase of Scripture, we dwelt "amongst our own people"; and as the distance from the metropolis was only thirty miles, we were not out of reach of our Edinburgh friends, in which city we spent the terms of the summer and winter Sessions of the Court, that is, five or six months in the year.'

The functions of the Sheriff of Selkirkshire admitted of considerable leisure, and Scott settled at Ashestiel full of literary projects, as well as heartily prepared to meet his new responsibilities and to add to his numerous and valuable friendships. An enterprise that early engaged his attention was a complete edition of the British poets, but the deliberations on the subject came to nothing except in so far as they helped towards the preparation of Campbell's 'Specimens of the British Poets,' which appeared in 1819. Writing Scott regarding his project of a complete edition of the poets, his friend George Ellis said, 'Much as I wish for a corpus poetarum, edited as you would edit it, I should like still better another Minstrel Lay by the last and best Minstrel; and the general demand for the poem seems to prove that the public are of my opinion.' The work of editing, however, he seemed at the

time determined on having, and he finally abandoned the idea of an exhaustive issue of the British poetry previous to his own time and settled down to edit Dryden. This was a work much needed, and Scott did it extremely well, as may be seen by comparing his own issue of Dryden's Life and Works in 1808 with the recent reproduction of it, admirably edited by Mr. George Saintsbury.

He had likewise, as he mentions in the General Preface to the Novels, begun Waverley 'about 1805,' and other literary engagements received their share of attention. He wrote articles for the Edinburgh Review, besides doing such minor if useful literary service as editing for Constable 'Original Memoirs written during the Great Civil Wars,' and so on. At the same time, there were prospects of professional advancement, an account of which he gives in the following terms, in the 1830 Introduction to 'Marmion': -

'An important circumstance had, about the same time, taken place in my life. Hopes had been held out to me from an influential quarter, of a nature to relieve me from the anxiety which I must have otherwise felt, as one upon the precarious tenure of whose own life rested the principal prospects of his family, and especially as one who had necessarily some dependence upon the favour of the public, which is proverbially capricious; though it is but justice to add, that, in my own case, I have not found it so. Mr. Pitt had expressed a wish to my personal friend, the Right Hon. William Dundas, now Lord Clerk Register of Scotland, that some fitting opportunity should be taken to be of service to me; and as my views and wishes pointed to a future rather than an immediate provision, an opportunity of accomplishing this was soon found. One of the Principal Clerks of Session, as they are called, (official persons who occupy an important and responsible situation, and enjoy a considerable income,) who had served upwards of thirty years, felt himself, from age, and the infirmity of deafness with which it was accompanied, desirous of retiring from his official situation. As the law then stood, such official persons were entitled to bargain with their successors, either for a sum of money, which was usually a considerable one, or for an interest in the emoluments of the office during their life. My predecessor, whose services had been unusually meritorious, stipulated for the emoluments of his office during his life, while I should enjoy the survivorship, on the condition that I discharged the duties of the office in the meantime. Mr. Pitt, however, having died in the interval, his administration was dissolved, and was succeeded by that known by the name of the Fox and Grenville Ministry. My affair was so far completed, that my commission lay in the office subscribed by his Majesty; but, from hurry or mistake, the interest of my predecessor was not expressed in it, as had been usual in such cases. Although, therefore, it only required payment of the fees, I could not in honour take out the commission in the present state, since, in the event of my dying before him, the gentleman whom I succeeded must have lost the vested interest which he had stipulated to retain. I had the honour of an interview with Earl Spencer on the subject, and he, in the most handsome manner, gave directions that the commission should issue as originally intended; adding, that the matter having received the royal assent, he regarded only as a claim of justice what he would have willingly done as an act of favour. I never saw Mr. Fox on this, or on any other occasion, and never made any application to him, conceiving that in doing so I might have been supposed to express political opinions contrary to those which I had always professed. In his private capacity, there is no man to whom I would have been more proud to owe an obligation, had I been so distinguished.

'By this arrangement I obtained the survivorship of an office, the emoluments of which were fully adequate to my wishes; and as the law respecting the mode of providing for superannuated officers was, about five or six years after, altered from that which admitted the arrangement of assistant and successor, my colleague very handsomely took the opportunity of the alteration, to accept of the retiring annuity provided in such cases, and admitted me to the full benefit of the office.'

At Ashestiel Scott systematically planned his day. He had his mornings for his multifarious work, and the after part of the day was given to necessary recreation and to his friends. He was an ardent member of the Edinburgh Light Horse, at a time when volunteers of a practical and energetic character seemed likely to be needed, and at Ashestiel he combined a certain military routine with

his legal and literary arrangements. James Skene of Rubislaw, one of his best friends and most frequent visitors, mentions that 'before beginning his desk-work in the morning he uniformly visited his favourite steed, and neither *Captain* nor *Lieutenant*, nor the *Lieutenant's* successor, *Brown Adam* (so called after one of the heroes of the Minstrelsy), liked to be fed except by him.' Skene is the friend to whom Scott addresses the Introduction to Canto IV, charged with touching and beautiful reminiscences of earlier days. They were comrades in the Edinburgh Light Horse Volunteers, Scott being Quartermaster and Skene Cornet. Their friendship had been one of eleven years' standing when the dedicatory epistle was written: -

'Eleven years we now may tell,
Since we have known each other well;
Since, riding side by side, our hand
First drew the voluntary brand.'

With regard to the Introductions, it may now be said that they are better where they are than if the poet had published them separately, as at one time he seems to have intended (see Notes, p. 187). It is sometimes said by those anxious to learn the story that these introductory Epistles should be steadily ignored, and the cantos read in strict succession. In answer to an assertion of opinion like this, it is hardly necessary to say more than that probably those interested in the narrative alone could not do better than avoid the Introductions. But it will be well for them to miss various other things besides: will they, for example, care for the impassioned address of Constance to her judges, for the landlord's tale of grammarye, for Sir David Lyndsay's narrative, or even for the many descriptive passages that interrupt the free progress of the tale? Their reading would appear to be done on the plan of those who get through novels, or other works of imagination, by carefully omitting the dialogue and all those passages in which the author pauses to describe or to reflect. It is needless to say that this is not the spirit in which to approach 'Marmion' as it stands. Scott wrote with his friends about him, and it was part of his own enjoyment of his work to interest them in what for the time was receiving the main part of his attention. His talk with Mr. Morritt in front of the little cottage at Lasswade is highly significant as illustrative of his attitude towards his friends. His healthy, humorous, happy nature wanted sympathy, appreciation, sociality, and good cheer for its complete normal development, and this alone would explain the writing of the Introductions. But there is more than this. He talked over his subject and his progress with friends competent to discuss and advise, and he showed them portions of the poem as he advanced. There are indications in the Introductions of certain discussions that had arisen over his conception and treatment, and surely few readers would like to miss from the volume the clever and humorous apology for his own method which the poet advances in the Introduction to the third canto. William Erskine, refined critic and life-long friend, is asked to be patient and generous while the poet proceeds in his own way: -

'Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
And in the minstrel spare the friend,
Though wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,
Flow forth, flow unrestrain'd, my Tale!'

Further, the Introductions do not in any case interrupt the progress of the Poem. Scott was dealing with a great national theme-a cause he and his friends could understand and appreciate-and both before starting and at every pause he has something to say that is apposite and suggestive. His country's wintry state is the key-note of the first Introduction, which is an appropriate prelude to a great national tragedy; weird Border legends and the touching and mysterious silences of lone St. Mary's Lake fitly introduce the 'mysterious Man of Woe'; the third and the fourth Introductions, with

their features of personal interest and their bright reminiscences of 'tales that charmed' and scenes on 'the field-day, or the drill,' are easily connected with the Hostel and the Camp; Spenser's 'wandering Squire of Dames,' the vigorous description of the 'Queen of the North,' and the tribute to the notes that 'Marie translated, Blondel sung,' all tell in their due place as preparatory to the canto on The Court; while the ominous record, emanating from a Yule-tide retreat, could not be more fitly interrupted than by a battle of national disaster. Scott, then, may have thought of publishing the Introductions separately, but it is well that he ultimately allowed his better judgment to prevail. It is not necessary to dwell on their special descriptive features, which readily assert themselves and give Scott a high and honoured place among Nature-poets. His quick and minute observation, his sense of colour and harmonious effects, and his skill of arrangement are admirable throughout.

II. COMPOSITION OF 'MARMION

'In 1791 Scott accompanied an uncle into Northumberland, and made his first acquaintance with the scene of Flodden. Writing to his friend William Clerk (Lockhart's Life, ii. 182), he says, 'Never was an affair more completely bungled than that day's work was. Suppose one army posted upon the face of a hill, and secured by high grounds projecting on each flank, with the river Till in front, a deep and still river, winding through a very extensive valley called Milfield Plain, and the only passage over it by a narrow bridge, which the Scots artillery, from the hill, could in a moment have demolished. Add that the English must have hazarded a battle while their troops, which were tumultuously levied, remained together; and that the Scots, behind whom the country was open to Scotland, had nothing to do but to wait for the attack as they were posted. Yet did two-thirds of the army, actuated by the *perfervidum ingenium Scotorum*, rush down and give an opportunity to Stanley to occupy the ground they had quitted, by coming over the shoulder of the hill, while the other third, under Lord Home, kept their ground, and having seen their King and about 10,000 of their countrymen cut to pieces, retired into Scotland without loss.' Fifteen years after this was written Scott began the composition of 'Marmion,' and it is interesting to note that, so early in life as the date of this letter indicates, he was so keenly alive to the great blunder in military tactics made by James IV and his advisers, and so manifestly stirred to eloquent expression of his feeling.

In November 1806 Scott began 'Marmion,' designed as a romance of Feudalism to succeed the Border study in 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel.' The circumstances of the time, no doubt, to some extent prompted the choice of subject. Napoleon was diligently working out his ambitious scheme of a Western Empire, and plotting the ruin of Great Britain as an indispensable feature of the arrangement. Scott was not always intimately acquainted with the details of current politics, but when a subject fairly roused his interest he was not slow to take part in its discussion. This is notably illustrated, in this very year 1806, by the outspoken and energetic political ballad he produced over the acquittal of Lord Melville from a serious charge. This ballad, which went very straight to the heart of its subject, and left no doubt as to the party feeling of the writer, not only arrested general attention but gave considerable offence to the leaders on the side so sharply handled. It is given, with an explanation of the circumstances that called it forth, in Lockhart's Life, ii. 106, 1837 ed.

While, however, party politics was not always a subject that interested Scott, patriotism was a constituent element of his character. He had a keen sense of national dignity and honour-as the extract from his Flodden letter alone sufficiently testifies-and, had circumstances demanded it of him, he would almost certainly have distinguished himself as a trooper on the field of battle. Thus it was not only his love of a picturesque theme that inspired him with his Tale of Flodden Field, but likewise his patriotic ardour and his desire to touch the national heart. 'Marmion' is epical in character and movement; and it is at the same time a brilliant and suggestive delineation of a national effort, illustrating keen sense of honour, resolute purpose, and pathetic manly devotion. James IV was probably wrong, and he was certainly very rash, in attempting to do battle with Henry VIII, but

although his people were aware of his mistake, and his advisers did all in their power to dissuade him, he was supported to the last with a heroism that recalls Thermopylae. This was a display of national character that appealed directly and powerfully to Scott, prompting him to the production of his loftiest and most energetic verse. Mournful associations will ever cluster around the tragic battle of Flodden-that 'most dolent day,' as Lyndsay aptly calls it-but all the same the record remains of what heroic men had it in them to do for King and country, where

'Groom fought like noble, squire like knight,
As fearlessly and well.'

Scott intended to work slowly and carefully through his new poem, but, as he explains in the 1830 Introduction, circumstances interrupted his design. 'Particular passages,' he says, 'of a poem, which was finally called "Marmion," were laboured with a good deal of care, by one by whom much care was seldom bestowed.' The publication, however, was hastened by 'the misfortunes of a near relation and friend.' Lockhart (Life, ii. 115) explains that the reference is to 'his brother Thomas's final withdrawal from the profession of Writer to the Signet, which arrangement seems to have been quite necessary towards the end of 1806.' At any rate, the poem was finished in a shorter time than had been at first intended. The subject suited Scott so exactly that, even in default of a special stimulus, there need be no surprise at the rapidity of his composition after he had fairly begun to move forward with it. Dryden, it may be remembered, was so held and fascinated by his 'Alexander's Feast' that he wrote it off in a night. Cowper had a similar experience with 'John Gilpin,' and Burns's powerful dramatic tale, 'Tam O'Shanter,' was produced with great ease and rapidity. De Quincey records that, in his own case, his very best work was frequently done when he was writing against time. Scott's energy and fluency of composition are clearly indicated in the following passage in Lockharts Life, ii. 117: -

'When the theme was of a more stirring order, he enjoyed pursuing it over brake and fell at the full speed of his *Lieutenant*. I well remember his saying, as I rode with him across the hills from Ashestiel to Newark one day in his declining years-"Oh, man, I had many a grand gallop among these braes when I was thinking of 'Marmion,' but a trotting canny pony must serve me now." His friend, Mr. Skene, however, informs me that many of the more energetic descriptions, and particularly that of the battle of Flodden, were struck out while he was in quarters again with his cavalry, in the autumn of 1807. "In the intervals of drilling," he says, "Scott used to delight in walking his powerful black steed up and down by himself upon the Portobello sands, within the beating of the surge; and now and then you would see him plunge in his spurs and go off as if at the charge, with the spray dashing about him. As we rode back to Musselburgh, he often came and placed himself beside me to repeat the verses that he had been composing during these pauses of our exercise."'

This is wholly in keeping with the production of such poetry of movement as that of 'Marmion,' and it deserves its due place in estimating the work of Scott, just as Wordsworth's staid and sober walks around his garden, or among the hills by which he was surrounded, are carefully considered in connexion with his deliberate, meditative verse. Scott wrote the Introduction to Canto IV just a year after he had begun the poem, and between that time and the middle of February 1808 the work was finished. There is no rashness in saying that rapidity of production did not detract from excellence of result. Indeed, it is admiration rather than criticism that is challenged by the reflection that, in these short months, the poet should have turned out so much verse of high and enduring quality.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POEM

'Marmion' is avowedly a descriptive poem. It is a series of skilful and impressive pictures, not only remarkable in themselves, but conspicuous in their own kind in poetical literature. Scott is said to have been deficient, or at any rate imperfectly trained, in certain sense activities, but there is no

denying his quick perception of colour and his strong sense of the leading points in a landscape. Even minute features are seized and utilized with ease and precision, while the larger elements of a scene are depicted with breadth, sense of proportion, and clearness and impressiveness of arrangement. This holds true whether the description is merely a vivid presentment of what the imagination of the poet calls from the remote past, or a delineation of what has actually come under his notice. Norham at twilight, with the solitary warder on the battlements, and Crichtoun castle, as Scott himself saw it, instantly commend themselves by their realistic vigour and their consistent verisimilitude. Any visitor to Norham will still be able to imagine the stir and the imposing spectacle described in the opening stanzas of the first canto; and it is a pleasure to follow Scott's minute and faithful picture of Crichtoun by examining the imposing ruin as it stands at the present day. Then it is impossible not to feel that the Edinburgh of the sixteenth century was exactly as it is depicted in the poem, and that the troops on the Borough Moor were disposed as seen by the trained military eye of Sir Walter Scott. It would be difficult to find anywhere a more striking ancient stronghold than Tantallon, nor would it be easy to conceive a more appropriate scene for that grim and exciting morning interview in which the venerable Douglas found that he had harboured a recreant knight. Above all, there is the great battle scene, standing alone in literature for its carefully detailed delineation-its persistent minuteness, its rapidity of movement, its balanced effects, its energetic purpose-and surpassing everything in modern verse for its vivid Homeric realism. Fifteen years before, as we have seen, Scott had the progress of the battle in his mind's eye, and at length he produced his description as if he had been present in the character of a skilful and interested spectator. There are envious people who decline to admit that Scott discovered his scenery, and who contend that others knew all about it before and appreciated it in their own way. Be it so; and yet the fact remains that Scott likewise saw and appreciated in the way peculiar to him, and thereby enabled his numerous readers to share his enjoyment. A very interesting and suggestive account of the new popularity given to the Flodden district by the publication of 'Marmion' will be found in Lockhart's Life, iii. 12. In the autumn of 1812 Scott visited Rokeby, doing the journey on horseback, along with his eldest boy and girl on ponies. The following is an episode of the way: -

'Halting at Flodden to expound the field of battle to his young folks, he found that "Marmion" had, as might have been expected, benefited the keeper of the public-house there very largely; and the village Boniface, overflowing with gratitude, expressed his anxiety to have a *Scott's Head* for his sign-post. The poet demurred to this proposal, and assured mine host that nothing could be more appropriate than the portraiture of a foaming tankard, which already surmounted his doorway. "Why, the painter man has not made an ill job," said the landlord, "but I would fain have something more connected with the book that has brought me so much good custom." He produced a well-thumbed copy, and handing it to the author, begged he would at least suggest a motto from the Tale of Flodden Field. Scott opened the book at the death-scene of the hero, and his eye was immediately caught by the "inscription" in black letter: -

"Drink, weary pilgrim, drink, and pray
For the kind soul of Sibyl Grey," &c.

"Well, my friend," said he, "what more would you have? You need but strike out one letter in the first of these lines, and make your painter-man, the next time he comes this way, print between the jolly tankard and your own name: -

'Drink, weary pilgrim, drink, and PAY.'"

Scott was delighted to find, on his return, that this suggestion had been adopted, and for aught I know the romantic legend may still be visible.'

The characters in the poem are hardly less vigorous in conception and presentation than the descriptions. It may be true, as Carlyle asserts in his ungenerous essay on Scott, that he was inferior to Shakespeare in delineation of character, but, even admitting that, we shall still have ample room for approval and admiration of his work. So far as the purposes of the poem are concerned the various personages are admirably utilized. We come to know Marmion himself very intimately, the interest gradually deepening as the real character of the Palmer and his relations to the hero are steadily developed. These two take prominent rank with the imaginary characters of literature. James IV, that 'champion of the dames,' and likewise undoubted military leader, is faithfully delineated in accordance with historical records and contemporary estimates. Those desirous of seeing him as he struck the imagination of a poet in his own day should read the eulogy passed upon him by Barclay in his 'Ship of Fools.' The passage in which this occurs is an interpolation in the division of the poem entitled 'Of the Ruine and Decay of the Holy Faith Catholique.' The other characters are all distinctly suited to the parts they have to perform. Acting on the licence sanctioned by Horatian authority: -

'Atque ita mentitur, sic veris falsa remiscet,
Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum'-

Scott appropriates Sir David Lyndsay to his purpose, presenting him, even as he presents the stately and venerable Angus, with faithful and striking picturesqueness. Bishop Douglas is exactly suited to his share in the development of events; and had room likewise been found for the Court poet Dunbar-author of James's Epithalamium, the 'Thrissill and the Rois'-it would have been both a fit and a seemly arrangement. Had Scott remembered that Dunbar was a favourite of Queen Margaret's he might have introduced him into an interesting episode. The passage devoted to the Queen herself is exquisite and graceful, its restrained and effective pathos making a singularly direct and significant appeal. The other female characters are well conceived and sustained, while Constance in the Trial scene reaches an imposing height of dramatic intensity.

After the descriptions and the characterisation, the remaining important features of the poem are its marked practical irony and its episodes. Marmion, despite his many excellences, is throughout-and for obvious reasons-the victim of a persistent Nemesis. Scott is much interested in his hero; one fancies that if it were only possible he would in the end extend his favour to him, and grant him absolution; but his sense of artistic fitness prevails, and he will abate no jot of the painful ordeal to which he feels bound to submit him. Marmion is a knight with a claim to nothing more than the half of the proverbial qualifications. He is *sans peur*, but not *sans reproche*; and it is one expression of the practical irony that constantly lurks to assail him that even his fearlessness quails for a time before the Phantom Knight on Gifford Moor. The whole attitude of the Palmer is ironical; and, after the bitter parting with Angus at Tantallon, Marmion is weighted with the depressing reflection that numerous forces are conspiring against him, and with the knowledge that it is his old rival De Wilton that has thrown off the Palmer's disguise and preceded him to the scene of war. In his last hour the practical irony of his position bears upon him with a concentration of keen and bitter thrusts. Clare, whom he intended to defraud, ministers to his last needs; he learns that Constance died a bitter death at Lindisfarne; and just when he recognises his greatest need of strength his life speedily ebbs away. There is a certain grandeur of impressive tragical effort in his last struggles, as he feels that whatever he may himself have been he suffers in the end from the merciless machinery of a false ecclesiastical system. The practical irony follows him even after his death, for it is a skilful stroke that leaves his neglected remains on the field of battle and places a nameless stranger in his stately tomb.

As regards the episodes, it may just be said in a word that they are appropriate, and instead of retarding the movement of the piece, as has sometimes been alleged, they serve to give it breadth and massiveness of effect. Of course, there will always be found those who think them too long, just as there are those whose narrowness of view constrains them to wish the Introductions away. If the

poet's conception of Marmion be fully considered, it will be seen that the Host's Tale is an integral part of his purpose; and there is surely no need to defend either Sir David Lyndsay's Tale or the weird display at the cross of Edinburgh. The episode of Lady Heron's singing carries its own defence in itself, seeing that the song of 'Lochinvar' holds a place of distinction among lyrics expressive of poetical motion. After all, we must bear in mind that though it pleases Scott to speak of his tale as flowing on 'wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,' he was still conscious that he was engaged upon a poem, and that a poem is regulated by certain artistic laws. If we strive to grasp his meaning we shall not be specially inclined to carp at his method. It may at the same time be not unprofitable to look for a moment at some of the notable criticisms of the poem.

IV. CRITICISMS OF THE POEM

When 'Marmion' was little more than begun Scott's publishers offered him a thousand pounds for the copyright, and as this soon became known it naturally gave rise to varied comment. Lord Byron thought it sufficient to warrant a gratuitous attack on the author in his 'English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.' This is a portion of the passage: -

'And think'st thou, Scott! by vain conceit perchance,
On public taste to foist thy stale romance.
Though Murray with his Miller may combine
To yield thy muse just half-a-crown per line?
No! when the sons of song descend to trade,
Their bays are sear, their former laurels fade.'

As a matter of fact, there was on Scott's part no trade whatever in the case. If a publisher chose to secure in advance what he anticipated would be a profitable commodity, that was mainly the publisher's affair, and the poet would have been a simpleton not to close with the offer if he liked it. Scott admirably disposes of Byron as follows in the 1830 Introduction: -

'The publishers of the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," emboldened by the success of that poem, willingly offered a thousand pounds for "Marmion." The transaction being no secret, afforded Lord Byron, who was then at general war with all who blacked paper, an apology for including me in his satire, entitled "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." I never could conceive how an arrangement between an author and his publishers, if satisfactory to the persons concerned, could afford matter of censure to any third party. I had taken no unusual or ungenerous means of enhancing the value of my merchandise-I had never higgled a moment about the bargain, but accepted at once what I considered the handsome offer of my publishers. These gentlemen, at least, were not of opinion that they had been taken advantage of in the transaction, which indeed was one of their own framing; on the contrary, the sale of the Poem was so far beyond their expectation, as to induce them to supply the author's cellars with what is always an acceptable present to a young Scottish housekeeper, namely, a hogshead of excellent claret.'

A second point on which Scott was attacked was the character of Marmion. It was held that such a knight as he undoubtedly was should have been incapable of forgery. Scott himself; of course, knew better than his critics whether or not this was the case, but, with his usual good nature and generous regard for the opinion of others, he admitted that perhaps he had committed an artistic blunder. Dr. Leyden, in particular, for whose judgment he had special respect, wrote him from India 'a furious remonstrance on the subject.' Fortunately, he made no attempt to change what he had written, his main reason being that 'corrections, however in themselves judicious, have a bad effect after publication.' He might have added that any modification of the hero's guilt would have entirely altered the character of the poem, and might have ruined it altogether. He had never, apparently,

gone into the question thoroughly after his first impressions of the type of knights existing in feudal times, for though he states that 'similar instances were found, and might be quoted,' he is inclined to admit that the attribution of forgery was a 'gross defect.' Readers interested in the subject will find by reference to Pike's 'History of Crime,' i. 276, that Scott was perfectly justified in his assumption that a feudal knight was capable of forgery. Those who understand how intimate his knowledge was of the period with which he was dealing will, of course, be the readiest to believe him rather than his critics; but when he seems doubtful of himself, and ready to yield the point, it is well that the strength of his original position can thus be supported by the results of recent investigation.

Jeffrey, in the *Edinburgh Review*, not being able to understand and appreciate this new devotion to romance, and probably stimulated by his misreading of the reference to Fox in the Introduction to Canto I, did his utmost to cast discredit on 'Marmion.' Scott was too large a man to confound the separate spheres of Politics and Literature; whereas it was frequently the case with Jeffrey-as, indeed, it was to some extent with literary critics on the other side as well-to estimate an author's work in reference to the party in the State to which he was known to belong. It was impossible to deny merits to Scott's descriptions, and the extraordinary energy of the most striking portions of the Poem, but Jeffrey groaned over the inequalities he professed to discover, and lamented that the poet should waste his strength on the unprofitable effort to resuscitate an old-fashioned enthusiasm. They had been the best of friends previously-and Scott, as we have seen, worked for the *Edinburgh Review*-but it was now patent that the old literary intimacy could not pleasantly continue. Nor is it surprising that Scott should have felt that the *Edinburgh Review* had become too autocratic, and that he should have given a helping hand towards the establishing of the *Quarterly Review*, as a political and literary organ necessary to the balance of parties.

V. THE TEXT OF THE POEM

Scott himself revised 'Marmion' in 1831, and the interleaved copy which he used formed the basis of the text given by Lockhart in the uniform edition of the Poetical Works published in 1833. This will remain the standard text. It is that which is followed in the present volume, in which there will be found only three-in reality only two-important instances of divergence from Lockhart's readings. The earlier editions have been collated with that of 1833, and Mr. W. J. Rolfe's careful and scholarly Boston edition has likewise been consulted. It has not been considered necessary to follow Mr. Rolfe in several alterations he has made on Lockhart; but he introduces one emendation which readily commends itself to the reader's intelligence, and it is adopted in the present volume. This is in the punctuation of the opening lines in the first stanza of Canto II. Lockhart completes a sentence at the end of the fifth line, whereas the sense manifestly carries the period on to the eleventh line. In the third Introd., line 228, the reading of the earlier editions is followed in giving 'From me' instead of 'For me,' as the meaning is thereby simplified and made more direct. In III. xiv. 234, the modern versions of Lockhart's text give 'proudest princes *veil* their eyes,' where Lockhart himself agrees with the earlier editions in reading '*vail*'. The restoration of the latter form needs no defence. The Elizabethan words in the Poem are not infrequent, giving it, as they do, a certain air of archaic dignity, and there can be little doubt that 'vail' was Scott's word here, used in its Shakespearian sense of 'lower' or 'cast down,' and recalling Venus as 'she vailed her eyelids.'

MARMION*A TALE OF FLODDEN FIELD*IN SIX CANTOS

Alas! that Scottish maid should sing
The combat where her lover fell!
That Scottish Bard should wake the string,
The triumph of our foes to tell!

LEYDEN.

ADVERTISEMENT

* * *

It is hardly to be expected, that an Author whom the Public have honoured with some degree of applause, should not be again a trespasser on their kindness. Yet the Author of MARMION must be supposed to feel some anxiety concerning its success, since he is sensible that he hazards, by this second intrusion, any reputation which his first Poem may have procured him. The present story turns upon the private adventures of a fictitious character; but is called a Tale of Flodden Field, because the hero's fate is connected with that memorable defeat, and the causes which led to it. The design of the Author was, if possible, to apprize his readers, at the outset, of the date of his Story, and to prepare them for the manners of the Age in which it is laid. Any Historical Narrative, far more an attempt at Epic composition, exceeded his plan of a Romantic Tale; yet he may be permitted to hope, from the popularity of THE LAY OF THE LAST MINSTREL, that an attempt to paint the manners of the feudal times, upon a broader scale, and in the course of a more interesting story, will not be unacceptable to the Public.

The Poem opens about the commencement of August, and concludes with the defeat of Flodden, 9th September, 1513. Ashestiel, 1808,

INTRODUCTION TO CANTO FIRST

TO WILLIAM STEWART ROSE, ESQ

Ashestiel, Ettrick Forest

November's sky is chill and drear,
November's leaf is red and sear:
Late, gazing down the steepy linn,
That hems our little garden in,
Low in its dark and narrow glen,
You scarce the rivulet might ken,
So thick the tangled greenwood grew,
So feeble trill'd the streamlet through:
Now, murmuring hoarse, and frequent seen
Through bush and brier, no longer green,
An angry brook, it sweeps the glade,
Brawls over rock and wild cascade,
And, foaming brown with double speed,
Hurries its waters to the Tweed.

No longer Autumn's glowing red
Upon our Forest hills is shed;
No more, beneath the evening beam,
Fair Tweed reflects their purple gleam;
Away hath pass'd the heather-bell
That bloom'd so rich on Needpath-fell;
Sallow his brow, and russet bare
Are now the sister-heights of Yair.
The sheep, before the pinching heaven,
To sheltered dale and down are driven,
Where yet some faded herbage pines,
And yet a watery sunbeam shines:
In meek despondency they eye
The withered sward and wintry sky,
And far beneath their summer hill,
Stray sadly by Glenkinnon's rill:
The shepherd shifts his mantle's fold,
And wraps him closer from the cold;
His dogs no merry circles wheel,
But, shivering, follow at his heel;
A cowering glance they often cast,
As deeper moans the gathering blast.

My imps, though hardy, bold, and wild,
As best befits the mountain child,
Feel the sad influence of the hour,
And wail the daisy's vanish'd flower;
Their summer gambols tell, and mourn,
And anxious ask, – Will spring return,
And birds and lambs again be gay,
And blossoms clothe the hawthorn spray?

Yes, prattlers, yes. The daisy's flower
Again shall paint your summer bower;
Again the hawthorn shall supply
The garlands you delight to tie;
The lambs upon the lea shall bound,
The wild birds carol to the round,
And while you frolic light as they,
Too short shall seem the summer day.

To mute and to material things
New life revolving summer brings;
The genial call dead Nature hears,
And in her glory reappears.
But oh! my Country's wintry state
What second spring shall renovate?
What powerful call shall bid arise
The buried warlike and the wise;
The mind that thought for Britain's weal,
The hand that grasp'd the victor steel?
The vernal sun new life bestows
Even on the meanest flower that blows;
But vainly, vainly may he shine,
Where Glory weeps o'er NELSON'S shrine:
And vainly pierce the solemn gloom,
That shrouds, O PITT, thy hallow'd tomb!

Deep graved in every British heart,
O never let those names depart!
Say to your sons, – Lo, here his grave,
Who victor died on Gadite wave;
To him, as to the burning levin,
Short, bright, resistless course was given.
Where'er his country's foes were found,
Was heard the fated thunder's sound,
Till burst the bolt on yonder shore,
Roll'd, blazed, destroyed, – and was no more.

Nor mourn ye less his perished worth,
Who bade the conqueror go forth,
And launch'd that thunderbolt of war

On Egypt, Hafnia, Trafalgar;
Who, born to guide such high emprize,
For Britain's weal was early wise;
Alas! to whom the Almighty gave,
For Britain's sins, an early grave!
His worth, who, in his mightiest hour,
A bauble held the pride of power,
Spum'd at the sordid lust of pelf,
And served his Albion for herself;
Who, when the frantic crowd amain
Strain'd at subjection's bursting rein,
O'er their wild mood full conquest gain'd,
The pride, he would not crush, restrain'd,
Show'd their fierce zeal a worthier cause,
And brought the freeman's arm, to aid the freeman's laws.

Had'st thou but lived, though stripp'd of power,
A watchman on the lonely tower,
Thy thrilling trump had roused the land,
When fraud or danger were at hand;
By thee, as by the beacon-light,
Our pilots had kept course aright;
As some proud column, though alone,
Thy strength had propp'd the tottering throne:
Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon-light is quench'd in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill!

Oh, think, how to his latest day,
When Death, just hovering, claim'd his prey,
With Palinure's unalter'd mood,
Firm at his dangerous post he stood;
Each call for needful rest repell'd,
With dying hand the rudder held,
Till, in his fall, with fateful sway,
The steerage of the realm gave way!
Then, while on Britain's thousand plains,
One unpolluted church remains,
Whose peaceful bells ne'er sent around
The bloody tocsin's maddening sound,
But still, upon the hallow'd day,
Convoke the swains to praise and pray;
While faith and civil peace are dear,
Grace this cold marble with a tear,
He, who preserved them, PITT, lies here!

Nor yet suppress the generous sigh,
Because his rival slumbers nigh;

Nor be thy *requiescat* dumb,
Lest it be said o'er Fox's tomb.
For talents mourn, untimely lost,
When best employ'd, and wanted most;
Mourn genius high, and lore profound,
And wit that loved to play, not wound;
And all the reasoning powers divine,
To penetrate, resolve, combine;
And feelings keen, and fancy's glow, -
They sleep with him who sleeps below:
And, if thou mourn'st they could not save
From error him who owns this grave,
Be every harsher thought suppress'd,
And sacred be the last long rest.
Here, where the end of earthly things
Lays heroes, patriots, bards, and kings;
Where stiff the hand, and still the tongue,
Of those who fought, and spoke, and sung;
Here, where the fretted aisles prolong
The distant notes of holy song,
As if some angel spoke agen,
'All peace on earth, good-will to men;'
If ever from an English heart,
O, *here* let prejudice depart,
And, partial feeling cast aside,
Record, that Fox a Briton died!
When Europe crouch'd to France's yoke,
And Austria bent, and Prussia broke,
And the firm Russian's purpose brave,
Was barter'd by a timorous slave,
Even then dishonour's peace he spurn'd,
The sullied olive-branch return'd,
Stood for his country's glory fast,
And nail'd her colours to the mast!
Heaven, to reward his firmness, gave
A portion in this honour'd grave,
And ne'er held marble in its trust
Of two such wondrous men the dust.

With more than mortal powers endow'd,
How high they soar'd above the crowd!
Theirs was no common party race,
Jostling by dark intrigue for place;
Like fabled Gods, their mighty war
Shook realms and nations in its jar;
Beneath each banner proud to stand,
Look'd up the noblest of the land,
Till through the British world were known
The names of PITT and Fox alone.

Spells of such force no wizard grave
E'er framed in dark Thessalian cave,
Though his could drain the ocean dry,
And force the planets from the sky.
These spells are spent, and, spent with these,
The wine of life is on the lees.
Genius, and taste, and talent gone,
For ever tomb'd beneath the stone,
Where-taming thought to human pride! -
The mighty chiefs sleep side by side.
Drop upon Fox's grave the tear,
'Twill trickle to his rival's bier;
O'er PITT'S the mournful requiem sound,
And Fox's shall the notes rebound.
The solemn echo seems to cry, –
'Here let their discord with them die.
Speak not for those a separate doom,
Whom Fate made Brothers in the tomb;
But search the land of living men,
Where wilt thou find their like agen?'

Rest, ardent Spirits! till the cries
Of dying Nature bid you rise;
Not even your Britain's groans can pierce
The leaden silence of your hearse;
Then, O, how impotent and vain
This grateful tributary strain!
Though not unmark'd from northern clime,
Ye heard the Border Minstrel's rhyme:
His Gothic harp has o'er you rung;
The Bard you deign'd to praise, your deathless names has sung.

Stay yet, illusion, stay a while,
My wilder'd fancy still beguile!
From this high theme how can I part,
Ere half unloaded is my heart!
For all the tears e'er sorrow drew,
And all the raptures fancy knew,
And all the keener rush of blood,
That throbs through bard in bard-like mood,
Were here a tribute mean and low,
Though all their mingled streams could flow-
Woe, wonder, and sensation high,
In one spring-tide of ecstasy! -
It will not be-it may not last-
The vision of enchantment's past:
Like frostwork in the morning ray,
The fancied fabric melts away;
Each Gothic arch, memorial-stone,

And long, dim, lofty aisle, are gone;
And, lingering last, deception dear,
The choir's high sounds die on my ear.
Now slow return the lonely down,
The silent pastures bleak and brown,
The farm begirt with copsewood wild
The gambols of each frolic child,
Mixing their shrill cries with the tone
Of Tweed's dark waters rushing on.

Prompt on unequal tasks to run,
Thus Nature disciplines her son:
Meeter, she says, for me to stray,
And waste the solitary day,
In plucking from yon fen the reed,
And watch it floating down the Tweed;
Or idly list the shrilling lay,
With which the milkmaid cheers her way,
Marking its cadence rise and fail,
As from the field, beneath her pail,
She trips it down the uneven dale:
Meeter for me, by yonder cairn,
The ancient shepherd's tale to learn;
Though oft he stop in rustic fear,
Lest his old legends tire the ear
Of one, who, in his simple mind,
May boast of book-learn'd taste refined.

But thou, my friend, canst fitly tell,
(For few have read romance so well,)
How still the legendary lay
O'er poet's bosom holds its sway;
How on the ancient minstrel strain
Time lays his palsied hand in vain;
And how our hearts at doughty deeds,
By warriors wrought in steely weeds,
Still throb for fear and pity's sake;
As when the Champion of the Lake
Enters Morgana's fated house,
Or in the Chapel Perilous,
Despising spells and demons' force,
Holds converse with the unburied corse;
Or when, Dame Ganore's grace to move,
(Alas, that lawless was their love!)
He sought proud Tarquin in his den,
And freed full sixty knights; or when,
A sinful man, and unconfess'd,
He took the Sangreal's holy quest,
And, slumbering, saw the vision high,

He might not view with waking eye.

The mightiest chiefs of British song
Scorn'd not such legends to prolong:
They gleam through Spenser's elfin dream,
And mix in Milton's heavenly theme;
And Dryden, in immortal strain,
Had raised the Table Round again,
But that a ribald King and Court
Bade him toil on, to make them sport;
Demanded for their niggard pay,
Fit for their souls, a looser lay,
Licentious satire, song, and play;
The world defrauded of the high design,
Profaned the God-given strength, and marr'd the lofty line.

Warm'd by such names, well may we then,
Though dwindled sons of little men,
Essay to break a feeble lance
In the fair fields of old romance;
Or seek the moated castle's cell,
Where long through talisman and spell,
While tyrants ruled, and damsels wept,
Thy Genius, Chivalry, hath slept:
There sound the harpings of the North,
Till he awake and sally forth,
On venturous quest to prick again,
In all his arms, with all his train,
Shield, lance, and brand, and plume, and scarf,
Fay, giant, dragon, squire, and dwarf,
And wizard with his wand of might,
And errant maid on palfrey white.
Around the Genius weave their spells,
Pure Love, who scarce his passion tells;
Mystery, half veil'd and half reveal'd;
And Honour, with his spotless shield;
Attention, with fix'd eye; and Fear,
That loves the tale she shrinks to hear;
And gentle Courtesy; and Faith,
Unchanged by sufferings, time, or death;
And Valour, lion-mettled lord,
Leaning upon his own good sword.
Well has thy fair achievement shown,
A worthy meed may thus be won;
Ytene's oaks-beneath whose shade
Their theme the merry minstrels made,
Of Ascapart, and Bevis bold,
And that Red King, who, while of old,
Through Boldrewood the chase he led,

By his loved huntsman's arrow bled-
Ytene's oaks have heard again
Renew'd such legendary strain;
For thou hast sung, how He of Gaul,
That Amadis so famed in hall,
For Oriana, foil'd in fight
The Necromancer's felon might;
And well in modern verse hast wove
Partenopex's mystic love;
Hear, then, attentive to my lay,
A knightly tale of Albion's elder day.

CANTO FIRST.
THE CASTLE

I

Day set on Norham's castled steep,
And Tweed's fair river, broad and deep,
  And Cheviot's mountains lone:
The battled towers, the donjon keep,
The loophole grates, where captives weep,
The flanking walls that round it sweep,
  In yellow lustre shone.
The warriors on the turrets high,
Moving athwart the evening sky,
Seem'd forms of giant height:
Their armour, as it caught the rays,
Flash'd back again the western blaze,
  In lines of dazzling light.

II

Saint George's banner, broad and gay,
Now faded, as the fading ray
  Less bright, and less, was flung;
The evening gale had scarce the power
To wave it on the Donjon Tower,
  So heavily it hung.
The scouts had parted on their search,
  The Castle gates were barr'd;
Above the gloomy portal arch,
Timing his footsteps to a march,
  The Warder kept his guard;
Low humming, as he paced along,
Some ancient Border gathering-song.

III

A distant trampling sound he hears;
He looks abroad, and soon appears,
O'er Horncliff-hill a plump of spears,

Beneath a pennon gay;
A horseman, darting from the crowd,
Like lightning from a summer cloud,
Spurs on his mettled courser proud,
Before the dark array.
Beneath the sable palisade,
That closed the Castle barricade,
His buglehorn he blew;
The warder hasted from the wall,
And warn'd the Captain in the hall,
For well the blast he knew;
And joyfully that knight did call,
To sewer, squire, and seneschal.

IV

'Now broach ye a pipe of Malvoisie,
Bring pasties of the doe,
And quickly make the entrance free
And bid my heralds ready be,
And every minstrel sound his glee,
And all our trumpets blow;
And, from the platform, spare ye not
To fire a noble salvo-shot;
Lord MARMION waits below!'
Then to the Castle's lower ward
Sped forty yeomen tall,
The iron-studded gates unbarr'd,
Raised the portcullis' ponderous guard,
The lofty palisade unsparr'd,
And let the drawbridge fall.

V

Along the bridge Lord Marmion rode,
Proudly his red-roan charger trode,
His helm hung at the saddlebow;
Well by his visage you might know
He was a stalworth knight, and keen,
And had in many a battle been;
The scar on his brown cheek reveal'd
A token true of Bosworth field;
His eyebrow dark, and eye of fire,
Show'd spirit proud, and prompt to ire;
Yet lines of thought upon his cheek

Did deep design and counsel speak.
His forehead by his casque worn bare,
His thick mustache, and curly hair,
Coal-black, and grizzled here and there,
But more through toil than age;
His square-turn'd joints, and strength of limb,
Show'd him no carpet knight so trim,
But in close fight a champion grim,
In camps a leader sage.

VI

Well was he arm'd from head to heel,
In mail and plate of Milan steel;
But his strong helm, of mighty cost,
Was all with burnish'd gold emboss'd;
Amid the plumage of the crest,
A falcon hover'd on her nest,
With wings outspread, and forward breast;
E'en such a falcon, on his shield,
Soar'd sable in an azure field:
The golden legend bore aright,
Who checks at me, to death is dight.
Blue was the charger's broider'd rein;
Blue ribbons deck'd his arching mane;
The knightly housing's ample fold
Was velvet blue, and trapp'd with gold.

VII

Behind him rode two gallant squires,
Of noble name, and knightly sires;
They burn'd the gilded spurs to claim:
For well could each a warhorse tame,
Could draw the bow, the sword could sway,
And lightly bear the ring away;
Nor less with courteous precepts stored,
Could dance in hall, and carve at board,
And frame love-ditties passing rare,
And sing them to a lady fair.

VIII

Four men-at-arms came at their backs,
With halbert, bill, and battle-axe:
They bore Lord Marmion's lance so strong,
And led his sumpter-mules along,
And ambling palfrey, when at need
Him listed ease his battle-steed.
The last and trustiest of the four,
On high his forky pennon bore;
Like swallow's tail, in shape and hue,
Flutter'd the streamer glossy blue,
Where, blazon'd sable, as before,
The towering falcon seem'd to soar.
Last, twenty yeomen, two and two,
In hosen black, and jerkins blue,
With falcons broider'd on each breast,
Attended on their lord's behest.
Each, chosen for an archer good,
Knew hunting-craft by lake or wood;
Each one a six-foot bow could bend,
And far a cloth-yard shaft could send;
Each held a boar-spear tough and strong,
And at their belts their quivers rung.
Their dusty palfreys, and array,
Show'd they had march'd a weary way.

IX

'Tis meet that I should tell you now,
How fairly arm'd, and order'd how,
The soldiers of the guard,
With musket, pike, and morion,
To welcome noble Marmion,
Stood in the Castle-yard;
Minstrels and trumpeters were there,
The gunner held his linstock yare,
For welcome-shot prepared:
Enter'd the train, and such a clang,
As then through all his turrets rang,
Old Norham never heard.

X

The guards their morrice-pikes advanced,
  The trumpets flourish'd brave,
The cannon from the ramparts glanced,
  And thundering welcome gave.
A blithe salute, in martial sort,
  The minstrels well might sound,
For, as Lord Marmion cross'd the court,
  He scatter'd angels round.
'Welcome to Norham, Marmion!
  Stout heart, and open hand!
Well dost thou brook thy gallant roan,
  Thou flower of English land!'

XI

Two pursuivants, whom tabarts deck,
With silver scutcheon round their neck,
  Stood on the steps of stone,
By which you reach the donjon gate,
And there, with herald pomp and state,
  They hail'd Lord Marmion:
They hail'd him Lord of Fontenaye,
Of Lutterward, and Scrivelbaye,
  Of Tamworth tower and town;
And he, their courtesy to requite,
Gave them a chain of twelve marks' weight,
  All as he lighted down.
'Now, largesse, largesse, Lord Marmion,
  Knight of the crest of gold!
A blazon'd shield, in battle won,
Ne'er guarded heart so bold.'

XII

They marshall'd him to the Castle-hall,
  Where the guests stood all aside,
And loudly nourish'd the trumpet-call,
  And the heralds loudly cried,
-'Room, lordings, room for Lord Marmion,
  With the crest and helm of gold!

Full well we know the trophies won
In the lists at Cottiswold:
There, vainly Ralph de Wilton strove
'Gainst Marmion's force to stand;
To him he lost his lady-love,
And to the King his land.
Ourselves beheld the listed field,
A sight both sad and fair;
We saw Lord Marmion pierce his shield,
And saw his saddle bare;
We saw the victor win the crest,
He wears with worthy pride;
And on the gibbet-tree, reversed,
His foeman's scutcheon tied.
Place, nobles, for the Falcon-Knight!
Room, room, ye gentles gay,
For him who conquer'd in the right,
Marmion of Fontenaye!'

XIII

Then stepp'd, to meet that noble Lord,
Sir Hugh the Heron bold,
Baron of Twisell, and of Ford,
And Captain of the Hold.
He led Lord Marmion to the deas,
Raised o'er the pavement high,
And placed him in the upper place
They feasted full and high;
The whiles a Northern harper rude
Chanted a rhyme of deadly feud,
'*How the fierce Thirwalls, and Ridleys all, Stout Willimondswick, And Hardriding Dick, And Hughie of Hawdon, and Will o' the Wall, Have set on Sir Albany Featherstonhaugh, And taken his life at the Deadman's-shaw*.'
Scantly Lord Marmion's ear could brook
The harper's barbarous lay;
Yet much he praised the pains he took,
And well those pains did pay
For lady's suit, and minstrel's strain,
By knight should ne'er be heard in vain,

XIV

‘Now, good Lord Marmion,’ Heron says,
‘Of your fair courtesy,
I pray you bide some little space
In this poor tower with me.
Here may you keep your arms from rust,
May breathe your war-horse well;
Seldom hath pass’d a week but giust
Or feat of arms befell:
The Scots can rein a mettled steed;
And love to couch a spear: -
Saint George! a stirring life they lead,
That have such neighbours near.
Then stay with us a little space,
Our northern wars to learn;
I pray you, for your lady’s grace!’-
Lord Marmion’s brow grew stern.

XV

The Captain mark’d his alter’d look,
And gave a squire the sign;
A mighty wassell-bowl he took,
And crown’d it high with wine.
‘Now pledge me here, Lord Marmion:
But first I pray thee fair,
Where hast thou left that page of thine,
That used to serve thy cup of wine,
Whose beauty was so rare?
When last in Raby towers we met,
The boy I closely eyed,
And often mark’d his cheeks were wet,
With tears he fain would hide:
His was no rugged horse-boy’s hand,
To burnish shield or sharpen brand,
Or saddle battle-steed;
But meeter seem’d for lady fair,
To fan her cheek, or curl her hair,
Or through embroidery, rich and rare,
The slender silk to lead:
His skin was fair, his ringlets gold,
His bosom-when he sigh’d,
The russet doublet’s rugged fold
Could scarce repel its pride!
Say, hast thou given that lovely youth
To serve in lady’s bower?
Or was the gentle page, in sooth,
A gentle paramour?’

XVI

Lord Marmion ill could brook such jest;
He roll'd his kindling eye,
With pain his rising wrath suppress'd,
Yet made a calm reply:
'That boy thou thought'st so goodly fair,
He might not brook the northern air.
More of his fate if thou wouldst learn,
I left him sick in Lindisfarn:
Enough of him. – But, Heron, say,
Why does thy lovely lady gay
Disdain to grace the hall to-day?
Or has that dame, so fair and sage,
Gone on some pious pilgrimage?'-
He spoke in covert scorn, for fame
Whisper'd light tales of Heron's dame.

XVII

Unmark'd, at least unreck'd, the taunt,
Careless the Knight replied,
'No bird, whose feathers gaily flaunt,
Delights in cage to bide:
Norham is grim and grated close,
Hemm'd in by battlement and fosse,
And many a darksome tower;
And better loves my lady bright
To sit in liberty and light,
In fair Queen Margaret's bower.
We hold our greyhound in our hand,
Our falcon on our glove;
But where shall we find leash or band,
For dame that loves to rove?
Let the wild falcon soar her swing,
She'll stoop when she has tired her wing.'-

XVIII

'Nay, if with Royal James's bride
The lovely Lady Heron bide,

Behold me here a messenger,
Your tender greetings prompt to bear;
For, to the Scottish court address'd,
I journey at our King's behest,
And pray you, of your grace, provide
For me, and mine, a trusty guide.
I have not ridden in Scotland since
James back'd the cause of that mock prince,
Warbeck, that Flemish counterfeit,
Who on the gibbet paid the cheat.
Then did I march with Surrey's power,
What time we razed old Ayton tower.'-

XIX

'For such-like need, my lord, I trow,
Norham can find you guides enow;
For here be some have prick'd as far,
On Scottish ground, as to Dunbar;
Have drunk the monks of St. Bothan's ale,
And driven the beeves of Lauderdale;
Harried the wives of Greenlaw's goods,
And given them light to set their hoods.'-

XX

'Now, in good sooth,' Lord Marmion cried,
'Were I in warlike wise to ride,
A better guard I would not lack,
Than your stout forayers at my back;
But as in form of peace I go,
A friendly messenger, to know,
Why through all Scotland, near and far,
Their King is mustering troops for war,
The sight of plundering Border spears
Might justify suspicious fears,
And deadly feud, or thirst of spoil,
Break out in some unseemly broil:
A herald were my fitting guide;
Or friar, sworn in peace to bide;
Or pardoner, or travelling priest,
Or strolling pilgrim, at the least.'

XXI

The Captain mused a little space,
And pass'd his hand across his face.
-'Fain would I find the guide you want,
But ill may spare a pursuivant,
The only men that safe can ride
Mine errands on the Scottish side:
And though a bishop built this fort,
Few holy brethren here resort;
Even our good chaplain, as I ween,
Since our last siege, we have not seen:
The mass he might not sing or say,
Upon one stinted meal a-day;
So, safe he sat in Durham aisle,
And pray'd for our success the while.
Our Norham vicar, woe betide,
Is all too well in case to ride;
The priest of Shoreswood-he could rein
The wildest war-horse in your train;
But then, no spearman in the hall
Will sooner swear, or stab, or brawl.
Friar John of Tillmouth were the man:
A blithesome brother at the can,
A welcome guest in hall and bower,
He knows each castle, town, and tower,
In which the wine and ale is good,
'Twixt Newcastle and Holy-Rood.
But that good man, as ill befalls,
Hath seldom left our castle walls,
Since, on the vigil of St. Bede,
In evil hour, he cross'd the Tweed,
To teach Dame Alison her creed.
Old Bughtrig found him with his wife;
And John, an enemy to strife,
Sans frock and hood, fled for his life.
The jealous churl hath deeply swore,
That, if again he venture o'er,
He shall shrieve penitent no more.
Little he loves such risks, I know;
Yet, in your guard, perchance will go.'

XXII

Young Selby, at the fair hall-board,

Carved to his uncle and that lord,
And reverently took up the word.
‘Kind uncle, woe were we each one,
If harm should hap to brother John.
He is a man of mirthful speech,
Can many a game and gambol teach;
Full well at tables can he play,
And sweep at bowls the stake away.
None can a lustier carol bawl,
The needfullest among us all,
When time hangs heavy in the hall,
And snow comes thick at Christmas tide,
And we can neither hunt, nor ride
A foray on the Scottish side.
The vow’d revenge of Bughtrig rude,
May end in worse than loss of hood.
Let Friar John, in safety, still
In chimney-corner snore his fill,
Roast hissing crabs, or flagons swill:
Last night, to Norham there came one,
Will better guide Lord Marmion.’-
‘Nephew,’ quoth Heron, ‘by my fay,
Well hast thou spoke; say forth thy say,’-

XXIII

‘Here is a holy Palmer come,
From Salem first, and last from Rome;
One, that hath kiss’d the blessed tomb,
And visited each holy shrine,
In Araby and Palestine;
On hills of Armenie hath been,
Where Noah’s ark may yet be seen;
By that Red Sea, too, hath he trod,
Which parted at the Prophet’s rod;
In Sinai’s wilderness he saw
The Mount, where Israel heard the law,
‘Mid thunder-dint and flashing levin,
And shadows, mists, and darkness, given.
He shows Saint James’s cockle-shell,
Of fair Montserrat, too, can tell;
And of that Grot where Olives nod,
Where, darling of each heart and eye,
From all the youth of Sicily,
Saint Rosalie retired to God.

XXIV

‘To stout Saint George of Norwich merry,
Saint Thomas, too, of Canterbury,
Cuthbert of Durham and Saint Bede,
For his sins’ pardon hath he pray’d.
He knows the passes of the North,
And seeks far shrines beyond the Forth;
Little he eats, and long will wake,
And drinks but of the stream or lake.
This were a guide o’er moor and dale;
But, when our John hath quaff’d his ale,
As little as the wind that blows,
And warms itself against his nose,
Kens he, or cares, which way he goes.’–

XXV

‘Gramercy!’ quoth Lord Marmion,
‘Full loth were I, that Friar John,
That venerable man, for me,
Were placed in fear or jeopardy.
If this same Palmer will me lead
From hence to Holy-Rood,
Like his good saint, I’ll pay his meed,
Instead of cockle-shell, or bead,
With angels fair and good.
I love such holy ramblers; still
They know to charm a weary hill,
With song, romance, or lay:
Some jovial tale, or glee, or jest,
Some lying legend, at the least,
They bring to cheer the way.’–

XXVI

‘Ah! noble sir,’ young Selby said,
And finger on his lip he laid,
‘This man knows much, perchance e’en more
Than he could learn by holy lore.
Still to himself he’s muttering,
And shrinks as at some unseen thing.

Last night we listen'd at his cell;
Strange sounds we heard, and, sooth to tell,
He murmur'd on till morn, howe'er
No living mortal could be near.
Sometimes I thought I heard it plain,
As other voices spoke again.
I cannot tell-I like it not-
Friar John hath told us it is wrote,
No conscience clear, and void of wrong,
Can rest awake, and pray so long.
Himself still sleeps before his beads
Have mark'd ten aves, and two creeds.'-

XXVII

-'Let pass,' quoth Marmion; 'by my fay,
This man shall guide me on my way,
Although the great arch-fiend and he
Had sworn themselves of company.
So please you, gentle youth, to call
This Palmer to the Castle-hall.'
The summon'd Palmer came in place;
His sable cowl o'erhung his face;
In his black mantle was he clad,
With Peter's keys, in cloth of red,
On his broad shoulders wrought;
The scallop shell his cap did deck;
The crucifix around his neck
Was from Loretto brought;
His sandals were with travel tore,
Staff, budget, bottle, scrip, he wore;
The faded palm-branch in his hand
Show'd pilgrim from the Holy Land.

XXVIII

When as the Palmer came in hall,
Nor lord, nor knight, was there more tall,
Or had a statelier step withal,
Or look'd more high and keen;
For no saluting did he wait,
But strode across the hall of state,
And fronted Marmion where he sate,
As he his peer had been.
But his gaunt frame was worn with toil;

His cheek was sunk, alas the while!
And when he struggled at a smile,
  His eye look ‘d haggard wild:
Poor wretch! the mother that him bare,
If she had been in presence there,
In his wan face, and sun-burn’d hair,
  She had not known her child.
Danger, long travel, want, or woe,
Soon change the form that best we know-
For deadly fear can time outgo,
  And blanch at once the hair;
Hard toil can roughen form and face,
And want can quench the eye’s bright grace,
Nor does old age a wrinkle trace
  More deeply than despair.
Happy whom none of these befall,
But this poor Palmer knew them all.

XXIX

Lord Marmion then his boon did ask;
The Palmer took on him the task,
So he would march with morning tide,
To Scottish court to be his guide.
‘But I have solemn vows to pay,
And may not linger by the way,
  To fair St. Andrews bound,
Within the ocean-cave to pray,
Where good Saint Rule his holy lay,
From midnight to the dawn of day,
  Sung to the billows’ sound;
Thence to Saint Fillan’s blessed well,
Whose spring can frenzied dreams dispel,
  And the crazed brain restore:
Saint Mary grant, that cave or spring
Could back to peace my bosom bring,
  Or bid it throb no more!’

XXX

And now the midnight draught of sleep,
Where wine and spices richly steep,
In massive bowl of silver deep,
  The page presents on knee.
Lord Marmion drank a fair good rest,

The Captain pledged his noble guest,
The cup went through among the rest,
  Who drain'd it merrily;
Alone the Palmer pass'd it by,
Though Selby press'd him courteously.
This was a sign the feast was o'er;
It hush'd the merry wassel roar,
  The minstrels ceased to sound.
Soon in the castle nought was heard,
But the slow footstep of the guard,
  Pacing his sober round.

XXXI

With early dawn Lord Marmion rose:
And first the chapel doors unclose;
Then, after morning rites were done,
(A hasty mass from Friar John,)
And knight and squire had broke their fast,
On rich substantial repast,
Lord Marmion's bugles blew to horse:
Then came the stirrup-cup in course:
Between the Baron and his host,
No point of courtesy was lost;
High thanks were by Lord Marmion paid,
Solemn excuse the Captain made,
Till, filing from the gate, had pass'd
That noble train, their Lord the last.
Then loudly rung the trumpet call;
Thunder'd the cannon from the wall,
  And shook the Scottish shore;
Around the castle eddied slow,
Volumes of smoke as white as snow,
  And hid its turrets hoar;
Till they roli'd forth upon the air,
And met the river breezes there,
Which gave again the prospect fair.

INTRODUCTION TO CANTO SECOND

TO THE REV JOHN MARRIOTT, A. M

Ashestiel, Ettrick Forest

The scenes are desert now, and bare
Where flourish'd once a forest fair,
When these waste glens with copse were lined,
And peopled with the hart and hind.
Yon Thorn-perchance whose prickly spears
Have fenced him for three hundred years,
While fell around his green compeers-
Yon lonely Thorn, would he could tell
The changes of his parent dell,
Since he, so grey and stubborn now,
Waved in each breeze a sapling bough;
Would he could tell how deep the shade
A thousand mingled branches made;
How broad the shadows of the oak,
How clung the rowan to the rock,
And through the foliage show'd his head,
With narrow leaves and berries red;
What pines on every mountain sprung,
O'er every dell what birches hung,
In every breeze what aspens shook,
What alders shaded every brook!

'Here, in my shade,' methinks he'd say,
'The mighty stag at noon-tide lay:
The wolf I've seen, a fiercer game,
(The neighbouring dingle bears his name,)
With lurching step around me prowl,
And stop, against the moon to howl;
The mountain-boar, on battle set,
His tusks upon my stem would whet;
While doe, and roe, and red-deer good,
Have bounded by, through gay green-wood.
Then oft, from Newark's riven tower,
Sallied a Scottish monarch's power:
A thousand vassals muster'd round,
With horse, and hawk, and horn, and hound;
And I might see the youth intent,
Guard every pass with crossbow bent;

And through the brake the rangers stalk,
And falc'ners hold the ready hawk,
And foresters, in green-wood trim,
Lead in the leash the gazehounds grim,
Attentive, as the bratchet's bay
From the dark covert drove the prey,
To slip them as he broke away.
The startled quarry bounds amain,
As fast the gallant greyhounds strain;
Whistles the arrow from the bow,
Answers the harquebuss below;
While all the rocking hills reply,
To hoof-clang, hound, and hunters' cry,
And bugles ringing lightsomely.'

Of such proud huntings, many tales
Yet linger in our lonely dales,
Up pathless Ettrick and on Yarrow,
Where erst the outlaw drew his arrow.
But not more blithe that silvan court,
Than we have been at humbler sport;
Though small our pomp, and mean our game,
Our mirth, dear Marriott, was the same.
Remember'st thou my greyhounds true?
O'er holt or hill there never flew,
From slip or leash there never sprang,
More fleet of foot, or sure of fang.
Nor dull, between each merry chase,
Pass'd by the intermitted space;
For we had fair resource in store,
In Classic and in Gothic lore:
We mark'd each memorable scene,
And held poetic talk between;
Nor hill, nor brook, we paced along,
But had its legend or its song.
All silent now-for now are still
Thy bowers, untenanted Bowhill!
No longer, from thy mountains dun,
The yeoman hears the well-known gun,
And while his honest heart glows warm,
At thought of his paternal farm,
Round to his mates a brimmer fills,
And drinks, 'The Chieftain of the Hills!'
No fairy forms, in Yarrow's bowers,
Trip o'er the walks, or tend the flowers,
Fair as the elves whom Janet saw
By moonlight dance on Carterhaugh;
No youthful Baron's left to grace
The Forest-Sheriff's lonely chase,

And ape, in manly step and tone,
The majesty of Oberon:
And she is gone, whose lovely face
Is but her least and lowest grace;
Though if to Sylphid Queen ‘twere given,
To show our earth the charms of Heaven,
She could not glide along the air,
With form more light, or face more fair.
No more the widow’s deafen’d ear
Grows quick that lady’s step to hear:
At noontide she expects her not,
Nor busies her to trim the cot;
Pensive she turns her humming wheel,
Or pensive cooks her orphans’ meal,
Yet blesses, ere she deals their bread,
The gentle hand by which they’re fed.

From Yair, – which hills so closely bind,
Scarce can the Tweed his passage find,
Though much he fret, and chafe, and toil,
Till all his eddying currents boil, –
Her long descended lord is gone,
And left us by the stream alone.
And much I miss those sportive boys,
Companions of my mountain joys,
Just at the age ‘twixt boy and youth,
When thought is speech, and speech is truth.
Close to my side, with what delight
They press’d to hear of Wallace wight,
When, pointing to his airy mound,
I call’d his ramparts holy ground!
Kindled their brows to hear me speak;
And I have smiled, to feel my cheek,
Despite the difference of our years,
Return again the glow of theirs.
Ah, happy boys! such feelings pure,
They will not, cannot long endure;
Condemn’d to stem the world’s rude tide,
You may not linger by the side;
For Fate shall thrust you from the shore,
And passion ply the sail and oar.
Yet cherish the remembrance still,
Of the lone mountain, and the rill;
For trust, dear boys, the time will come,
When fiercer transport shall be dumb,
And you will think right frequently,
But, well I hope, without a sigh,
On the free hours that we have spent,
Together, on the brown hill’s bent.

When, musing on companions gone,
We doubly feel ourselves alone,
Something, my friend, we yet may gain,
There is a pleasure in this pain:
It soothes the love of lonely rest,
Deep in each gentler heart impress'd.
'Tis silent amid worldly toils,
And stifled soon by mental broils;
But, in a bosom thus prepared,
Its still small voice is often heard,
Whispering a mingled sentiment,
'Twixt resignation and content.
Oft in my mind such thoughts awake,
By lone Saint Mary's silent lake;
Thou know'st it well, – nor fen, nor sedge,
Pollute the pure lake's crystal edge;
Abrupt and sheer, the mountains sink
At once upon the level brink;
And just a trace of silver sand
Marks where the water meets the land.
Far in the mirror, bright and blue,
Each hill's huge outline you may view;
Shaggy with heath, but lonely bare,
Nor tree, nor bush, nor brake, is there,
Save where, of land, yon slender line
Bears thwart the lake the scatter'd pine.
Yet even this nakedness has power,
And aids the feeling of the hour:
Nor thicket, dell, nor copse you spy,
Where living thing conceal'd might lie;
Nor point, retiring, hides a dell,
Where swain, or woodman lone, might dwell;
There's nothing left to fancy's guess,
You see that all is loneliness:
And silence aids-though the steep hills
Send to the lake a thousand rills;
In summer tide, so soft they weep,
The sound but lulls the ear asleep;
Your horse's hoof-tread sounds too rude,
So stilly is the solitude.

Nought living meets the eye or ear,
But well I ween the dead are near;
For though, in feudal strife, a foe
Hath laid Our Lady's chapel low,
Yet still, beneath the hallow'd soil,
The peasant rests him from his toil,
And, dying, bids his bones be laid,

Where erst his simple fathers pray'd.

If age had tamed the passions' strife,
And fate had cut my ties to life,
Here have I thought, 'twere sweet to dwell,
And rear again the chaplain's cell,
Like that same peaceful hermitage,
Where Milton long'd to spend his age.
'Twere sweet to mark the setting day,
On Bourhope's lonely top decay;
And, as it faint and feeble died
On the broad lake, and mountain's side,
To say, 'Thus pleasures fade away;
Youth, talents, beauty thus decay,
And leave us dark, forlorn, and grey;'
Then gaze on Dryhope's ruin'd tower,
And think on Yarrow's faded Flower:
And when that mountain-sound I heard,
Which bids us be for storm prepared,
The distant rustling of his wings,
As up his force the Tempest brings,
'Twere sweet, ere yet his terrors rave,
To sit upon the Wizard's grave;
That Wizard Priest's, whose bones are thrust,
From company of holy dust;
On which no sunbeam ever shines-
(So superstition's creed divines) -
Thence view the lake, with sullen roar,
Heave her broad billows to the shore;
And mark the wild-swans mount the gale,
Spread wide through mist their snowy sail,
And ever stoop again, to lave
Their bosoms on the surging wave;
Then, when against the driving hail
No longer might my plaid avail,
Back to my lonely home retire,
And light my lamp, and trim my fire;
There ponder o'er some mystic lay,
Till the wild tale had all its sway,
And, in the bittern's distant shriek,
I heard unearthly voices speak,
And thought the Wizard Priest was come,
To claim again his ancient home!
And bade my busy fancy range,
To frame him fitting shape and strange,
Till from the task my brow I clear'd,
And smiled to think that I had fear'd.

But chief, 'twere sweet to think such life,

(Though but escape from fortune's strife,)
Something most matchless good and wise,
A great and grateful sacrifice;
And deem each hour, to musing given,
A step upon the road to heaven.
  Yet him, whose heart is ill at ease,
Such peaceful solitudes displease;
He loves to drown his bosom's jar
Amid the elemental war:
And my black Palmer's choice had been
Some ruder and more savage scene,
Like that which frowns round dark Loch-skene.
There eagles scream from isle to shore;
Down all the rocks the torrents roar;
O'er the black waves incessant driven,
Dark mists infect the summer heaven;
Through the rude barriers of the lake,
Away its hurrying waters break,
Faster and whiter dash and curl,
Till down yon dark abyss they hurl.
Rises the fog-smoke white as snow,
Thunders the viewless stream below,
Diving, as if condemn'd to lave
Some demon's subterranean cave,
Who, prison'd by enchanter's spell,
Shakes the dark rock with groan and yell.
And well that Palmer's form and mien
Had suited with the stormy scene,
Just on the edge, straining his ken
To view the bottom of the den,
Where, deep deep down, and far within,
Toils with the rocks the roaring linn;
Then, issuing forth one foamy wave,
And wheeling round the Giant's Grave,
White as the snowy charger's tail,
Drives down the pass of Moffatdale.

  Marriott, thy harp, on Isis strung,
To many a Border theme has rung:
Then list to me, and thou shalt know
Of this mysterious Man of Woe.

CANTO SECOND.
THE CONVENT

1

THE breeze, which swept away the smoke
  Round Norham Castle roll'd,
When all the loud artillery spoke,
With lightning-flash, and thunder-stroke,
As Marmion left the Hold, –
It curl'd not Tweed alone, that breeze,
For, far upon Northumbrian seas,
  It freshly blew, and strong,
Where, from high Whitby's cloister'd pile,
Bound to Saint Cuthbert's Holy Isle,
  It bore a bark along.
Upon the gale she stoop'd her side,
And bounded o'er the swelling tide,
  As she were dancing home;
The merry seamen laugh'd, to see
Their gallant ship so lustily
Furrow the green sea-foam.
Much joy'd they in their honour'd freight;
For, on the deck, in chair of state,
The Abbess of Saint Hilda placed,
With five fair nuns, the galley graced.

II

'Twas sweet, to see these holy maids,
Like birds escaped to green-wood shades,
  Their first flight from the cage,
How timid, and how curious too,
For all to them was strange and new,
And all the common sights they view,
  Their wonderment engage.
One eyed the shrouds and swelling sail,
  With many a benedicite;
One at the rippling surge grew pale,
  And would for terror pray;
Then shriek'd, because the seadog, nigh,
His round black head, and sparkling eye,
  Rear'd o'er the foaming spray;

And one would still adjust her veil,
Disorder'd by the summer gale,
Perchance lest some more worldly eye
Her dedicated charms might spy;
Perchance, because such action graced
Her fair-turn'd arm and slender waist.
Light was each simple bosom there,
Save two, who ill might pleasure share, -
The Abbess, and the Novice Clare.

III

The Abbess was of noble blood,
But early took the veil and hood,
Ere upon life she cast a look,
Or knew the world that she forsook.
Fair too she was, and kind had been
As she was fair, but ne'er had seen
For her a timid lover sigh,
Nor knew the influence of her eye.
Love, to her ear, was but a name,
Combined with vanity and shame;
Her hopes, her fears, her joys, were all
Bounded within the cloister wall:
The deadliest sin her mind could reach
Was of monastic rule the breach;
And her ambition's highest aim
To emulate Saint Hilda's fame.
For this she gave her ample dower,
To raise the convent's eastern tower;
For this, with carving rare and quaint,
She deck'd the chapel of the saint,
And gave the relic-shrine of cost,
With ivory and gems emboss'd.
The poor her Convent's bounty blest,
The pilgrim in its halls found rest.

IV

Black was her garb, her rigid rule
Reform'd on Benedictine school;
Her cheek was pale, her form was spare:
Vigils, and penitence austere,
Had early quench'd the light of youth,
But gentle was the dame, in sooth;

Though, vain of her religious sway,
She loved to see her maids obey,
Yet nothing stern was she in cell,
And the nuns loved their Abbess well.
Sad was this voyage to the dame;
Summon'd to Lindisfame, she came,
There, with Saint Cuthbert's Abbot old,
And Tynemouth's Prioress, to hold
A chapter of Saint Benedict,
For inquisition stern and strict,
On two apostates from the faith,
And, if need were, to doom to death.

V

Nought say I here of Sister Clare,
Save this, that she was young and fair;
As yet a novice unprofess'd,
Lovely and gentle, but distress'd.
She was betroth'd to one now dead,
Or worse, who had dishonour'd fled.
Her kinsmen bade her give her hand
To one, who loved her for her land:
Herself, almost broken-hearted now,
Was bent to take the vestal vow,
And shroud, within Saint Hilda's gloom,
Her blasted hopes and wither'd bloom.

VI

She sate upon the galley's prow,
And seem'd to mark the waves below;
Nay, seem'd, so fix'd her look and eye,
To count them as they glided by.
She saw them not-'twas seeming all-
Far other scene her thoughts recall, -
A sun-scorch'd desert, waste and bare,
Nor waves, nor breezes, murmur'd there;
There saw she, where some careless hand
O'er a dead corpse had heap'd the sand,
To hide it till the jackals come,
To tear it from the scanty tomb. –
See what a woful look was given,
As she raised up her eyes to heaven!

VII

Lovely, and gentle, and distress'd-
These charms might tame the fiercest breast:
Harpers have sung, and poets told,
That he, in fury uncontroll'd,
The shaggy monarch of the wood,
Before a virgin, fair and good,
Hath pacified his savage mood.
But passions in the human frame,
Oft put the lion's rage to shame:
And jealousy, by dark intrigue,
With sordid avarice in league,
Had practised with their bowl and knife,
Against the mourner's harmless life.
This crime was charged 'gainst those who lay
Prison'd in Cuthbert's islet grey.

VIII

And now the vessel skirts the strand
Of mountainous Northumberland;
Towns, towers, and halls, successive rise,
And catch the nuns' delighted eyes.
Monk-Wearmouth soon behind them lay,
And Tynemouth's priory and bay;
They mark'd, amid her trees, the hall
Of lofty Seaton-Delaval;
They saw the Blythe and Wansbeck floods
Rush to the sea through sounding woods;
They pass'd the tower of Widderington,
Mother of many a valiant son;
At Coquet-isle their beads they tell
To the good Saint who own'd the cell;
Then did the Alne attention claim,
And Warkworth, proud of Percy's name;
And next, they cross'd themselves, to hear
The whitening breakers sound so near,
There, boiling through the rocks, they roar,
On Dunstanborough's cavern'd shore;
Thy tower, proud Bamborough, mark'd they there,
King Ida's castle, huge and square,
From its tall rock look grimly down,
And on the swelling ocean frown;
Then from the coast they bore away,

And reach'd the Holy Island's bay.

IX

The tide did now its flood-mark gain,
And girdled in the Saint's domain:
For, with the flow and ebb, its style
Varies from continent to isle;
Dry-shod, o'er sands, twice every day,
The pilgrims to the shrine find way;
Twice every day, the waves efface
Of staves and sandall'd feet the trace.
As to the port the galley flew,
Higher and higher rose to view
The Castle with its battled walls,
The ancient Monastery's halls,
A solemn, huge, and dark-red pile,
Placed on the margin of the isle.

X

In Saxon strength that Abbey frown'd,
With massive arches broad and round,
That rose alternate, row and row,
On ponderous columns, short and low,
Built ere the art was known,
By pointed aisle, and shafted stalk,
The arcades of an alley'd walk
To emulate in stone.
On the deep walls, the heathen Dane
Had pour'd his impious rage in vain;
And needful was such strength to these,
Exposed to the tempestuous seas,
Scourged by the winds' eternal sway,
Open to rovers fierce as they,
Which could twelve hundred years withstand
Winds, waves, and northern pirates' hand.
Not but that portions of the pile,
Rebuilded in a later style,
Show'd where the spoiler's hand had been;
Not but the wasting sea-breeze keen
Had worn the pillar's carving quaint,
And moulder'd in his niche the saint,
And rounded, with consuming power,
The pointed angles of each tower;

Yet still entire the Abbey stood,
Like veteran, worn, but unsubdued.

XI

Soon as they near'd his turrets strong,
The maidens raised Saint Hilda's song,
And with the sea-wave and the wind,
Their voices, sweetly shrill, combined,
And made harmonious close;
Then, answering from the sandy shore,
Half-drown'd amid the breakers' roar,
According chorus rose:
Down to the haven of the Isle,
The monks and nuns in order file,
From Cuthbert's cloisters grim;
Banner, and cross, and relics there,
To meet Saint Hilda's maids, they bare;
And, as they caught the sounds on air,
They echoed back the hymn.
The islanders, in joyous mood,
Rush'd emulously through the flood,
To hale the bark to land;
Conspicuous by her veil and hood,
Signing the cross, the Abbess stood,
And bless'd them with her hand.

XII

Suppose we now the welcome said,
Suppose the Convent banquet made:
All through the holy dome,
Through cloister, aisle, and gallery,
Wherever vestal maid might pry,
No risk to meet unhallow'd eye,
The stranger sisters roam:
Till fell the evening damp with dew,
And the sharp sea-breeze coldly blew,
For there, even summer night is chill.
Then, having stray'd and gazed their fill,
They closed around the fire;
And all, in turn, essay'd to paint
The rival merits of their saint,
A theme that ne'er can tire
A holy maid; for, be it known,

That their saint's honour is their own.

XIII

Then Whitby's nuns exulting told,
How to their house three Barons bold
  Must menial service do;
While horns blow out a note of shame,
And monks cry 'Fye upon your name!
In wrath, for loss of silvan game,
  Saint Hilda's priest ye slew.'-
'This, on Ascension-day, each year,
While labouring on our harbour-pier,
Must Herbert, Bruce, and Percy hear.'-
They told how in their convent-cell
A Saxon princess once did dwell,
  The lovely Edelfled;
And how, of thousand snakes, each one
Was changed into a coil of stone,
  When holy Hilda pray'd;
Themselves, within their holy bound,
Their stony folds had often found.
They told, how sea-fowls' pinions fail,
As over Whitby's towers they sail,
And, sinking down, with flutterings faint,
They do their homage to the saint.

XIV

Nor did Saint Cuthbert's daughters fail,
To vie with these in holy tale;
His body's resting-place, of old,
How oft their patron changed, they told;
How, when the rude Dane burn'd their pile,
The monks fled forth from Holy Isle;
O'er northern mountain, marsh, and moor,
From sea to sea, from shore to shore,
Seven years Saint Cuthbert's corpse they bore.
  They rested them in fair Melrose;
    But though, alive, he loved it well,
  Not there his relics might repose;
    For, wondrous tale to tell!
  In his stone-coffin forth he rides,
  A ponderous bark for river tides,
  Yet light as gossamer it glides,

Downward to Tilmouth cell.
Nor long was his abiding there,
Far southward did the saint repair;
Chester-le-Street, and Rippon, saw
His holy corpse, ere Wardilaw
Hail'd him with joy and fear;
And, after many wanderings past,
He chose his lordly seat at last,
Where his cathedral, huge and vast,
Looks down upon the Wear;
There, deep in Durham's Gothic shade,
His relics are in secret laid;
But none may know the place,
Save of his holiest servants three,
Deep sworn to solemn secrecy,
Who share that wondrous grace.

XV

Who may his miracles declare!
Even Scotland's dauntless king, and heir,
(Although with them they led
Galwegians, wild as ocean's gale,
And Lodon's knights, all sheathed in mail,
And the bold men of Teviotdale,)
Before his standard fled.
'Twas he, to vindicate his reign,
Edged Alfred's falchion on the Dane,
And turn'd the Conqueror back again,
When, with his Norman bowyer band,
He came to waste Northumberland.

XVI

But fain Saint Hilda's nuns would learn
If, on a rock, by Lindisfarne,
Saint Cuthbert sits, and toils to frame
The sea-born beads that bear his name:
Such tales had Whitby's fishers told,
And said they might his shape behold,
And hear his anvil sound;
A deaden'd clang, – a huge dim form,
Seen but, and heard, when gathering storm
And night were closing round.
But this, as tale of idle fame,

The nuns of Lindisfarne disclaim.

XVII

While round the fire such legends go,
Far different was the scene of woe,
Where, in a secret aisle beneath,
Council was held of life and death.
It was more dark and lone that vault,
Than the worst dungeon cell:
Old Colwulf built it, for his fault,
In penitence to dwell,
When he, for cowl and beads, laid down
The Saxon battle-axe and crown.
This den, which, chilling every sense
Of feeling, hearing, sight,
Was call'd the Vault of Penitence,
Excluding air and light,
Was, by the prelate Sexhelm, made
A place of burial for such dead,
As, having died in mortal sin,
Might not be laid the church within.
'Twas now a place of punishment;
Whence if so loud a shriek were sent,
As reach'd the upper air,
The hearers bless'd themselves, and said,
The spirits of the sinful dead
Bemoan'd their torments there.

XVIII

But though, in the monastic pile,
Did of this penitential aisle
Some vague tradition go,
Few only, save the Abbot, knew
Where the place lay; and still more few
Were those, who had from him the clew
To that dread vault to go.
Victim and executioner
Were blindfold when transported there.
In low dark rounds the arches hung,
From the rude rock the side-walls sprung;
The grave-stones, rudely sculptured o'er,
Half sunk in earth, by time half wore,
Were all the pavement of the floor;

The mildew-drops fell one by one,
With tinkling plash, upon the stone.
A cresset, in an iron chain,
Which served to light this drear domain,
With damp and darkness seem'd to strive,
As if it scarce might keep alive;
And yet it dimly served to show
The awful conclave met below.

XIX

There, met to doom in secrecy,
Were placed the heads of convents three:
All servants of Saint Benedict,
The statutes of whose order strict
On iron table lay;
In long black dress, on seats of stone,
Behind were these three judges shown
By the pale cresset's ray:
The Abbess of Saint Hilda's, there,
Sat for a space with visage bare,
Until, to hide her bosom's swell,
And tear-drops that for pity fell,
She closely drew her veil:
Yon shrouded figure, as I guess,
By her proud mien and flowing dress,
Is Tynemouth's haughty Prioress,
And she with awe looks pale:
And he, that Ancient Man, whose sight
Has long been quench'd by age's night,
Upon whose wrinkled brow alone,
Nor ruth, nor mercy's trace, is shown,
Whose look is hard and stern, -
Saint Cuthbert's Abbot is his style;
For sanctity call'd, through the isle,
The Saint of Lindisfarne.

XX

Before them stood a guilty pair;
But, though an equal fate they share,
Yet one alone deserves our care.
Her sex a page's dress belied;
The cloak and doublet, loosely tied,
Obscured her charms, but could not hide.

Her cap down o'er her face she drew;
And, on her doublet breast,
She tried to hide the badge of blue,
Lord Marmion's falcon crest.
But, at the Prioress' command,
A Monk undid the silken band
That tied her tresses fair,
And raised the bonnet from her head,
And down her slender form they spread,
In ringlets rich and rare.
Constance de Beverley they know,
Sister profess'd of Fontevraud,
Whom the Church number'd with the dead,
For broken vows, and convent fled.

XXI

When thus her face was given to view,
(Although so pallid was her hue,
It did a ghastly contrast bear
To those bright ringlets glistering fair),
Her look composed, and steady eye,
Bespoke a matchless constancy;
And there she stood so calm and pale,
That, bur her breathing did not fail,
And motion slight of eye and head,
And of her bosom, warranted
That neither sense nor pulse she lacks,
You might have thought a form of wax,
Wrought to the very life, was there;
So still she was, so pale, so fair.

XXII

Her comrade was a sordid soul,
Such as does murder for a meed;
Who, but of fear, knows no control,
Because his conscience, sear'd and foul,
Feels not the import of his deed;
One, whose brute-feeling ne'er aspires
Beyond his own more brute desires.
Such tools the Tempter ever needs,
To do the savagest of deeds;
For them no vision'd terrors daunt,
Their nights no fancied spectres haunt,

One fear with them, of all most base,
The fear of death, – alone finds place.
This wretch was clad in frock and cowl,
And ‘shamed not loud to moan and howl,
His body on the floor to dash,
And crouch, like hound beneath the lash;
While his mute partner, standing near,
Waited her doom without a tear.

XXIII

Yet well the luckless wretch might shriek,
Well might her paleness terror speak!
For there were seen in that dark wall,
Two niches, narrow, deep, and tall; -
Who enters at such grisly door,
Shall ne’er, I ween, find exit more.
In each a slender meal was laid,
Of roots, of water, and of bread:
By each, in Benedictine dress,
Two haggard monks stood motionless;
Who, holding high a blazing torch,
Show’d the grim entrance of the porch:
Reflecting back the smoky beam,
The dark-red walls and arches gleam.
Hewn stones and cement were display’d,
And building tools in order laid.

XXIV

These executioners were chose,
As men who were with mankind foes,
And with despite and envy fired,
Into the cloister had retired;
  Or who, in desperate doubt of grace,
  Strove, by deep penance, to efface
    Of some foul crime the stain;
  For, as the vassals of her will,
  Such men the Church selected still,
  As either joy’d in doing ill,
    Or thought more grace to gain,
If, in her cause, they wrestled down
Feelings their nature strove to own.
By strange device were they brought there,
They knew not how, and knew not where.

XXV

And now that blind old Abbot rose,
  To speak the Chapter's doom,
On those the wall was to enclose,
  Alive, within the tomb;
But stopp'd, because that woful Maid,
Gathering her powers, to speak essay'd.
Twice she essay'd, and twice in vain;
Her accents might no utterance gain;
Nought but imperfect murmurs slip
From her convulsed and quivering lip;
  Twixt each attempt all was so still,
  You seem'd to hear a distant rill-
   'Twas ocean's swells and falls;
  For though this vault of sin and fear
  Was to the sounding surge so near,
  A tempest there you scarce could hear,
   So massive were the walls.

XXVI

At length, an effort sent apart
The blood that curdled to her heart,
  And light came to her eye,
And colour dawn'd upon her cheek,
A hectic and a flutter'd streak,
Like that left on the Cheviot peak,
  By Autumn's stormy sky;
And when her silence broke at length,
Still as she spoke she gather'd strength,
  And arm'd herself to bear.
It was a fearful sight to see
Such high resolve and constancy,
  In form so soft and fair.

XXVII

'I speak not to implore your grace,
Well know I, for one minute's space
  Successless might I sue:

Nor do I speak your prayers to gain;
For if a death of lingering pain,
To cleanse my sins, be penance vain,
  Vain are your masses too. -
I listen'd to a traitor's tale,
I left the convent and the veil;
For three long years I bow'd my pride,
A horse-boy in his train to ride;
And well my folly's meed he gave,
Who forfeited, to be his slave,
All here, and all beyond the grave. -
He saw young Clara's face more fair,
He knew her of broad lands the heir,
Forgot his vows, his faith forswore,
And Constance was beloved no more. -
  'Tis an old tale, and often told;
    But did my fate and wish agree,
  Ne'er had been read, in story old,
  Of maiden true betray'd for gold,
    That loved, or was avenged, like me!

XXVIII

'The King approved his favourite's aim;
In vain a rival barr'd his claim,
  Whose fate with Clare's was plight,
For he attaints that rival's fame
With treason's charge-and on they came,
  In mortal lists to fight.
    Their oaths are said,
    Their prayers are pray'd,
    Their lances in the rest are laid,
  They meet in mortal shock;
And hark! the throng, with thundering cry,
Shout "Marmion, Marmion I to the sky,
  De Wilton to the block!"
Say ye, who preach Heaven shall decide
When in the lists two champions ride,
  Say, was Heaven's justice here?
When, loyal in his love and faith,
Wilton found overthrow or death,
  Beneath a traitor's spear?
How false the charge, how true he fell,
This guilty packet best can tell.'-
Then drew a packet from her breast,
Paused, gather'd voice, and spoke the rest.

XXIX

‘Still was false Marmion’s bridal staid;
To Whitby’s convent fled the maid,
  The hated match to shun.
“Ho! shifts she thus?” King Henry cried,
“Sir Marmion, she shall be thy bride,
  If she were sworn a nun.”
One way remain’d-the King’s command
Sent Marmion to the Scottish land!
I linger’d here, and rescue plann’d
  For Clara and for me:
This caitiff Monk, for gold, did swear,
He would to Whitby’s shrine repair,
And, by his drugs, my rival fair
  A saint in heaven should be.
But ill the dastard kept his oath,
Whose cowardice has undone us both.

XXX

‘And now my tongue the secret tells,
Not that remorse my bosom swells,
But to assure my soul that none
Shall ever wed with Marmion.
Had fortune my last hope betray’d,
This packet, to the King convey’d,
Had given him to the headsman’s stroke,
Although my heart that instant broke. -
Now, men of death, work forth your will,
For I can suffer, and be still;
And come he slow, or come he fast,
It is but Death who comes at last.

XXXI

‘Yet dread me, from my living tomb,
Ye vassal slaves of bloody Rome!
If Marmion’s late remorse should wake,
Full soon such vengeance will he take,
That you shall wish the fiery Dane
Had rather been your guest again.

Behind, a darker hour ascends!
The altars quake, the crosier bends,
The ire of a despotic King
Rides forth upon destruction's wing;
Then shall these vaults, so strong and deep,
Burst open to the sea-winds' sweep;
Some traveller then shall find my bones
Whitening amid disjointed stones,
And, ignorant of priests' cruelty,
Marvel such relics here should be.'

XXXII

Fix'd was her look, and stern her air:
Back from her shoulders stream'd her hair;
The locks, that wont her brow to shade,
Stared up erectly from her head;
Her figure seem'd to rise more high;
Her voice, despair's wild energy
Had given a tone of prophecy.
Appall'd the astonish'd conclave sate;
With stupid eyes, the men of fate
Gazed on the light inspired form,
And listen'd for the avenging storm;
The judges felt the victim's dread;
No hand was moved, no word was said,
Till thus the Abbot's doom was given,
Raising his sightless balls to heaven: -
'Sister, let thy sorrows cease;
Sinful brother, part in peace!'
From that dire dungeon, place of doom,
Of execution too, and tomb,
Paced forth the judges three;
Sorrow it were, and shame, to tell
The butcher-work that there befell,
When they had glided from the cell
Of sin and misery.

XXXIII

An hundred winding steps convey
That conclave to the upper day;
But, ere they breathed the fresher air,
They heard the shriekings of despair,
And many a stifled groan:

With speed their upward way they take,
(Such speed as age and fear can make,)
And cross'd themselves for terror's sake,
As hurrying, tottering on,
Even in the vesper's heavenly tone,
They seem'd to hear a dying groan,
And bade the passing knell to toll
For welfare of a parting soul.
Slow o'er the midnight wave it swung,
Northumbrian rocks in answer rung;
To Warkworth cell the echoes roll'd,
His beads the wakeful hermit told,
The Bamborough peasant raised his head,
But slept ere half a prayer he said;
So far was heard the mighty knell,
The stag sprung up on Cheviot Fell,
Spread his broad nostril to the wind,
Listed before, aside, behind,
Then couch'd him down beside the hind,
And quaked among the mountain fern,
To hear that sound, so dull and stern.

INTRODUCTION TO CANTO THIRD

TO WILLIAM ERSKINE, ESQ

Ashestiel, Ettrick Forest

Like April morning clouds, that pass,
With varying shadow, o'er the grass,
And imitate, on field and furrow,
Life's chequer'd scene of joy and sorrow;
Like streamlet of the mountain north,
Now in a torrent racing forth,
Now winding slow its silver train,
And almost slumbering on the plain;
Like breezes of the autumn day,
Whose voice inconstant dies away,
And ever swells again as fast,
When the ear deems its murmur past;
Thus various, my romantic theme
Flits, winds, or sinks, a morning dream.
Yet pleased, our eye pursues the trace
Of Light and Shade's inconstant race;
Pleased, views the rivulet afar,
Weaving its maze irregular;
And pleased, we listen as the breeze
Heaves its wild sigh through Autumn trees;
Then, wild as cloud, or stream, or gale,
Flow on, flow unconfined, my Tale!

Need I to thee, dear Erskine, tell
I love the license all too well,
In sounds now lowly, and now strong,
To raise the desultory song?
Oft, when 'mid such capricious chime,
Some transient fit of lofty rhyme
To thy kind judgment seem'd excuse
For many an error of the muse,
Oft hast thou said, 'If, still misspent,
Thine hours to poetry are lent,
Go, and to tame thy wandering course,
Quaff from the fountain at the source;
Approach those masters, o'er whose tomb
Immortal laurels ever bloom:
Instructive of the feebler bard,

Still from the grave their voice is heard;
From them, and from the paths they show'd,
Choose honour'd guide and practised road;
Nor ramble on through brake and maze,
With harpers rude of barbarous days.

'Or deem'st thou not our later time
Yields topic meet for classic rhyme?
Hast thou no elegiac verse
For Brunswick's venerable hearse?
What! not a line, a tear, a sigh,
When valour bleeds for liberty? -
Oh, hero of that glorious time,
When, with unrivall'd light sublime, –
Though martial Austria, and though all
The might of Russia, and the Gaul,
Though banded Europe stood her foes-
The star of Brandenburgh arose!
Thou couldst not live to see her beam
For ever quench'd in Jena's stream.
Lamented Chief! – it was not given
To thee to change the doom of Heaven,
And crush that dragon in its birth,
Predestined scourge of guilty earth.
Lamented Chief! – not thine the power,
To save in that presumptuous hour,
When Prussia hurried to the field,
And snatch'd the spear, but left the shield!
Valour and skill 'twas thine to try,
And, tried in vain, 'twas thine to die.
Ill had it seem'd thy silver hair
The last, the bitterest pang to share,
For princedoms reft, and scutcheons riven,
And birthrights to usurpers given;
Thy land's, thy children's wrongs to feel,
And witness woes thou could'st not heal!
On thee relenting Heaven bestows
For honour'd life an honour'd close;
And when revolves, in time's sure change,
The hour of Germany's revenge,
When, breathing fury for her sake,
Some new Arminius shall awake,
Her champion, ere he strike, shall come
To whet his sword on BRUNSWICK'S tomb,

'Or of the Red-Cross hero teach
Dauntless in dungeon as on breach:
Alike to him the sea, the shore,
The brand, the bridle, or the oar:

Alike to him the war that calls
Its votaries to the shatter'd walls,
Which the grim Turk, besmear'd with blood,
Against the Invincible made good;
Or that, whose thundering voice could wake
The silence of the polar lake,
When stubborn Russ, and metal'd Swede,
On the warp'd wave their death-game play'd;
Or that, where Vengeance and Affright
Howl'd round the father of the fight,
Who snatch'd, on Alexandria's sand,
The conqueror's wreath with dying hand.

'Or, if to touch such chord be thine,
Restore the ancient tragic line,
And emulate the notes that rung
From the wild harp, which silent hung
By silver Avon's holy shore,
Till twice an hundred years roll'd o'er;
When she, the bold Enchantress, came,
With fearless hand and heart on flame!
From the pale willow snatch'd the treasure,
And swept it with a kindred measure,
Till Avon's swans, while rung the grove
With Montfort's hate and Basil's love,
Awakening at the inspired strain,
Deem'd their own Shakspeare lived again.'

Thy friendship thus thy judgment wronging,
With praises not to me belonging,
In task more meet for mightiest powers,
Wouldst thou engage my thriftless hours.
But say, my Erskine, hast thou weigh'd
That secret power by all obey'd,
Which warps not less the passive mind,
Its source conceal'd or undefined;
Whether an impulse, that has birth
Soon as the infant wakes on earth,
One with our feelings and our powers,
And rather part of us than ours;
Or whether fitlier term'd the sway
Of habit, form'd in early day?
Howe'er derived, its force confest
Rules with despotic sway the breast,
And drags us on by viewless chain,
While taste and reason plead in vain.
Look east, and ask the Belgian why,
Beneath Batavia's sultry sky,
He seeks not eager to inhale

The freshness of the mountain gale,
Content to rear his whiten'd wall
Beside the dank and dull canal?
He'll say, from youth he loved to see
The white sail gliding by the tree.
Or see yon weatherbeaten hind,
Whose sluggish herds before him wind,
Whose tatter'd plaid and rugged cheek
His northern clime and kindred speak;
Through England's laughing meads he goes,
And England's wealth around him flows;
Ask, if it would content him well,
At ease in those gay plains to dwell,
Where hedge-rows spread a verdant screen,
And spires and forests intervene,
And the neat cottage peeps between?
No! not for these will he exchange
His dark Lochaber's boundless range;
Not for fair Devon's meads forsake
Bennevis grey, and Carry's lake.

Thus while I ape the measure wild
Of tales that charm'd me yet a child,
Rude though they be, still with the chime
Return the thoughts of early time;
And feelings, roused in life's first day,
Glow in the line, and prompt the lay.
Then rise those crags, that mountain tower
Which charm'd my fancy's wakening hour.
Though no broad river swept along,
To claim, perchance, heroic song;
Though sigh'd no groves in summer gale,
To prompt of love a softer tale;
Though scarce a puny streamlet's speed
Claim'd homage from a shepherd's reed;
Yet was poetic impulse given,
By the green hill and clear blue heaven.
It was a barren scene, and wild,
Where naked cliff's were rudely piled;
But ever and anon between
Lay velvet tufts of loveliest green;
And well the lonely infant knew
Recesses where the wall-flower grew,
And honey-suckle loved to crawl
Up the low crag and ruin'd wall.
I deem'd such nooks the sweetest shade
The sun in all its round survey'd;
And still I thought that shatter'd tower
The mightiest work of human power;

And marvell'd as the aged hind
With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,
Of forayers, who, with headlong force,
Down from that strength had spurr'd their horse,
Their southern rapine to renew,
Far in the distant Cheviots blue,
And, home returning, fill'd the hall
With revel, wassel-rout, and brawl.
Methought that still with trump and clang,
The gateway's broken arches rang;
Methought grim features, seam'd with scars,
Glared through the window's rusty bars,
And ever, by the winter hearth,
Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,
Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms;
Of patriot battles, won of old
By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold;
Of later fields of feud and fight,
When, pouring from their Highland height,
The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,
Had swept the scarlet ranks away.
While stretch'd at length upon the floor,
Again I fought each combat o'er,
Pebbles and shells, in order laid,
The mimic ranks of war display'd;
And onward still the Scottish Lion bore,
And still the scattered Southron fled before.

Still, with vain fondness, could I trace,
Anew, each kind familiar face,
That brighten'd at our evening fire!
From the thatch'd mansion's grey-hair'd Sire,
Wise without learning, plain and good,
And sprung of Scotland's gentler blood;
Whose eye, in age, quick, clear, and keen,
Show'd what in youth its glance had been;
Whose doom discording neighbours sought,
Content with equity unbought;
To him the venerable Priest,
Our frequent and familiar guest,
Whose life and manners well could paint
Alike the student and the saint;
Alas! whose speech too oft I broke
With gambol rude and timeless joke:
For I was wayward, bold, and wild,
A self-will'd imp, a grandame's child;
But half a plague, and half a jest,
Was still endured, beloved, caress'd.

From me, thus nurtured, dost thou ask
The classic poet's well-conn'd task?
Nay, Erskine, nay-On the wild hill
Let the wild heath-bell flourish still;
Cherish the tulip, prune the vine,
But freely let the woodbine twine,
And leave untrimm'd the eglantine:
Nay, my friend, nay-Since oft thy praise
Hath given fresh vigour to my lays;
Since oft thy judgment could refine
My flatten'd thought, or cumbrous line;
Still kind, as is thy wont, attend,
And in the minstrel spare the friend.
Though wild as cloud, as stream, as gale,
Flow forth, flow unrestrain'd, my Tale!

CANTO THIRD.
THE HOSTEL, OR INN

I

The livelong day Lord Marmion rode:
The mountain path the Palmer show'd
By glen and streamlet winded still,
Where stunted birches hid the rill.
They might not choose the lowland road,
For the Merse forayers were abroad,
Who, fired with hate and thirst of prey,
Had scarcely fail'd to bar their way.
Oft on the trampling band, from crown
Of some tall cliff, the deer look'd down;
On wing of jet, from his repose
In the deep heath, the black-cock rose;
Sprung from the gorse the timid roe,
Nor waited for the bending bow;
And when the stony path began,
By which the naked peak they wan,
Up flew the snowy ptarmigan.
The noon had long been pass'd before
They gain'd the height of Lammermoor;
Thence winding down the northern way,
Before them, at the close of day,
Old Gifford's towers and hamlet lay.

II

No summons calls them to the tower,
To spend the hospitable hour.
To Scotland's camp the Lord was gone;
His cautious dame, in bower alone,
Dreaded her castle to unclose,
So late, to unknown friends or foes.
On through the hamlet as they paced,
Before a porch, whose front was graced
With bush and flagon trimly placed,
Lord Marmion drew his rein:
The village inn seem'd large, though rude;
Its cheerful fire and hearty food
Might well relieve his train.

Down from their seats the horsemen sprung,
With jingling spurs the court-yard rung;
They bind their horses to the stall,
For forage, food, and firing call,
And various clamour fills the hall:
Weighing the labour with the cost,
Toils everywhere the bustling host.

III

Soon, by the chimney's merry blaze,
Through the rude hostel might you gaze;
Might see, where, in dark nook aloof,
The rafters of the sooty roof
Bore wealth of winter cheer;
Of sea-fowl dried, and solands store,
And gammons of the tusky boar,
And savoury haunch of deer.
The chimney arch projected wide;
Above, around it, and beside,
Were tools for housewives' hand;
Nor wanted, in that martial day,
The implements of Scottish fray,
The buckler, lance, and brand.
Beneath its shade, the place of state,
On oaken settle Marmion sate,
And view'd around the blazing hearth.
His followers mix in noisy mirth;
Whom with brown ale, in jolly tide,
From ancient vessels ranged aside,
Full actively their host supplied.

IV

Theirs was the glee of martial breast,
And laughter theirs at little jest;
And oft Lord Marmion deign'd to aid,
And mingle in the mirth they made;
For though, with men of high degree,
The proudest of the proud was he,
Yet, train'd in camps, he knew the art
To win the soldier's hardy heart.
They love a captain to obey,
Boisterous as March, yet fresh as May;
With open hand, and brow as free,

Lover of wine and minstrelsy;
Ever the first to scale a tower,
As venturous in a lady's bower: -
Such buxom chief shall lead his host
From India's fires to Zembla's frost.

V

Resting upon his pilgrim staff,
  Right opposite the Palmer stood;
His thin dark visage seen but half,
  Half hidden by his hood.
Still fix'd on Marmion was his look,
Which he, who ill such gaze could brook,
  Strove by a frown to quell;
But not for that, though more than once
Full met their stern encountering glance,
The Palmer's visage fell.

VI

By fits less frequent from the crowd
Was heard the burst of laughter loud;
For still, as squire and archer stared
On that dark face and matted beard,
  Their glee and game declined.
All gazed at length in silence drear,
Unbroke, save when in comrade's ear
Some yeoman, wondering in his fear,
  Thus whispered forth his mind: -
'Saint Mary! saw'st thou e'er such sight?
How pale his cheek, his eye how bright,
Whene'er the firebrand's fickle light
  Glances beneath his cowl!
Full on our Lord he sets his eye;
For his best palfrey, would not I
  Endure that sullen scowl.'

VII

But Marmion, as to chase the awe
Which thus had quell'd their hearts, who saw

The ever-varying fire-light show
That figure stern and face of woe,
  Now call'd upon a squire: –
'Fitz-Eustace, know'st thou not some lay,
To speed the lingering night away?
  We slumber by the fire.'-

VIII

'So please you,' thus the youth rejoin'd,
'Our choicest minstrel's left behind.
Ill may we hope to please your ear,
Accustom'd Constant's strains to hear.
The harp full deftly can he strike,
And wake the lover's lute alike;
To dear Saint Valentine, no thrush
Sings livelier from a spring-tide bush,
No nightingale her love-lorn tune
More sweetly warbles to the moon.
Woe to the cause, whate'er it be,
Detains from us his melody,
Lavish'd on rocks, and billows stern,
Or duller monks of Lindisfarne.
Now must I venture as I may,
To sing his favourite roundelay.'

IX

A mellow voice Fitz-Eustace had,
The air he chose was wild and sad;
Such have I heard, in Scottish land,
Rise from the busy harvest band,
When falls before the mountaineer,
On Lowland plains, the ripen'd ear.
Now one shrill voice the notes prolong,
Now a wild chorus swells the song:
Oft have I listen'd, and stood still,
As it came soften'd up the hill,
And deem'd it the lament of men
Who languish'd for their native glen;
And thought how sad would be such sound,
On Susquehanna's swampy ground,
Kentucky's wood-encumber'd brake,
Or wild Ontario's boundless lake,
Where heart-sick exiles, in the strain,

Recall'd fair Scotland's hills again!

X

Song

Where shall the lover rest,
  Whom the fates sever
From his true maiden's breast,
  Parted for ever?
Where, through groves deep and high,
  Sounds the far billow,
Where early violets die,
  Under the willow.

CHORUS.
Eleu loro, &c. Soft shall be his pillow.

There, through the summer day,
  Cool streams are laving;
There, while the tempests sway,
  Scarce are boughs waving;
There, thy rest shalt thou take,
  Parted for ever,
Never again to wake,
  Never, O never!

CHORUS.
Eleu loro, &c. Never, O never!

XI

Where shall the traitor rest,
  He, the deceiver,
Who could win maiden's breast,
  Ruin, and leave her?
In the lost battle,
  Borne down by the flying,
Where mingles war's rattle
  With groans of the dying.

CHORUS.
Eleu loro, &c. There shall he be lying.

Her wing shall the eagle flap

O'er the false-hearted;
His warm blood the wolf shall lap,
Ere life be parted.
Shame and dishonour sit
By his grave ever;
Blessing shall hallow it, -
Never, O never.

CHORUS.
Eleu loro, &c. Never, O never!

XII

It ceased, the melancholy sound;
And silence sunk on all around.
The air was sad; but sadder still
It fell on Marmion's ear,
And plain'd as if disgrace and ill,
And shameful death, were near.
He drew his mantle past his face,
Between it and the band,
And rested with his head a space,
Reclining on his hand.
His thoughts I scan not; but I ween,
That, could their import have been seen,
The meanest groom in all the hall,
That e'er tied courser to a stall,
Would scarce have wished to be their prey,
For Lutterward and Fontenaye.

XIII

High minds, of native pride and force,
Most deeply feel thy pangs, Remorse!
Fear, for their scourge, mean villains have,
Thou art the torturer of the brave!
Yet fatal strength they boast to steel
Their minds to bear the wounds they feel,
Even while they writhe beneath the smart
Of civil conflict in the heart.
For soon Lord Marmion raised his head,
And, smiling, to Fitz-Eustace said,
'Is it not strange, that, as ye sung,
Seem'd in mine ear a death-peal rung,
Such as in nunneries they toll

For some departing sister's soul?
Say, what may this portend?'-
Then first the Palmer silence broke,
(The livelong day he had not spoke)
'The death of a dear friend.'

XIV

Marmion, whose steady heart and eye
Ne'er changed in worst extremity;
Marmion, whose soul could scantly brook,
Even from his King, a haughty look;
Whose accents of command controll'd,
In camps, the boldest of the bold-
Thought, look, and utterance fail'd him now,
Fall'n was his glance, and flush'd his brow:
For either in the tone,
Or something in the Palmer's look,
So full upon his conscience strook,
That answer he found none.
Thus oft it haps, that when within
They shrink at sense of secret sin,
A feather daunts the brave;
A fool's wild speech confounds the wise,
And proudest princes vail their eyes
Before their meanest slave.

XV

Well might he falter! – By his aid
Was Constance Beverley betray'd.
Not that he augur'd of the doom,
Which on the living closed the tomb:
But, tired to hear the desperate maid
Threaten by turns, beseech, upbraid;
And wroth, because, in wild despair,
She practised on the life of Clare;
Its fugitive the Church he gave,
Though not a victim, but a slave;
And deem'd restraint in convent strange
Would hide her wrongs, and her revenge,
Himself, proud Henry's favourite peer,
Held Romish thunders idle fear,
Secure his pardon he might hold,
For some slight mulct of penance-gold.

Thus judging, he gave secret way,
When the stern priests surprised their prey.
His train but deem'd the favourite page
Was left behind, to spare his age;
Or other if they deem'd, none dared
To mutter what he thought and heard:
Woe to the vassal, who durst pry
Into Lord Marmion's privacy!

XVI

His conscience slept-he deem'd her well,
And safe secured in yonder cell;
But, waken'd by her favourite lay,
And that strange Palmer's boding say,
That fell so ominous and drear,
Full on the object of his fear,
To aid remorse's venom'd throes,
Dark tales of convent-vengeance rose;
And Constance, late betray'd and scorn'd,
All lovely on his soul return'd;
Lovely as when, at treacherous call,
She left her convent's peaceful wall,
Crimson'd with shame, with terror mute,
Dreading alike escape, pursuit,
Till love, victorious o'er alarms,
Hid fears and blushes in his arms.

XVII

'Alas!' he thought, 'how changed that mien!
How changed these timid looks have been,
Since years of guilt, and of disguise,
Have steel'd her brow, and arm'd her eyes!
No more of virgin terror speaks
The blood that mantles in her cheeks;
Fierce, and unfeminine, are there,
Frenzy for joy, for grief despair;
And I the cause-for whom were given
Her peace on earth, her hopes in heaven! –
Would,' thought he, as the picture grows,
'I on its stalk had left the rose!
Oh, why should man's success remove
The very charms that wake his love! -
Her convent's peaceful solitude

Is now a prison harsh and rude;
And, pent within the narrow cell,
How will her spirit chafe and swell!
How brook the stern monastic laws!
The penance how-and I the cause! –
Vigil, and scourge-perchance even worse!'-
And twice he rose to cry, 'To horse!'
And twice his Sovereign's mandate came,
Like damp upon a kindling flame;
And twice he thought, 'Gave I not charge
She should be safe, though not at large?
They durst not, for their island, shred
One golden ringlet from her head.'

XVIII

While thus in Marmion's bosom strove
Repentance and reviving love,
Like whirlwinds, whose contending sway
I've seen Loch Vennachar obey,
Their Host the Palmer's speech had heard,
And, talkative, took up the word:
'Ay, reverend Pilgrim, you, who stray
From Scotland's simple land away,
To visit realms afar,
Full often learn the art to know
Of future weal, or future woe,
By word, or sign, or star;
Yet might a knight his fortune hear,
If, knight-like, he despises fear,
Not far from hence; – if fathers old
Aright our hamlet legend told.'-
These broken words the menials move,
(For marvels still the vulgar love,)
And, Marmion giving license cold,
His tale the host thus gladly told: -

XIX

The Host's Tale
'A Clerk could tell what years have flown
Since Alexander fill'd our throne,
(Third monarch of that warlike name,)
And eke the time when here he came
To seek Sir Hugo, then our lord:

A braver never drew a sword;
A wiser never, at the hour
Of midnight, spoke the word of power:
The same, whom ancient records call
The founder of the Goblin-Hall.
I would, Sir Knight, your longer stay
Gave you that cavern to survey.
Of lofty roof, and ample size,
Beneath the castle deep it lies:
To hew the living rock profound,
The floor to pave, the arch to round,
There never toil'd a mortal arm,
It all was wrought by word and charm;
And I have heard my grandsire say,
That the wild clamour and affray
Of those dread artisans of hell,
Who labour'd under Hugo's spell,
Sounded as loud as ocean's war,
Among the caverns of Dunbar.

XX

'The King Lord Gifford's castle sought,
Deep labouring with uncertain thought;
Even then he mustered all his host,
To meet upon the western coast;
For Norse and Danish galleys plied
Their oars within the Frith of Clyde.
There floated Haco's banner trim,
Above Norweyan warriors grim,
Savage of heart, and large of limb;
Threatening both continent and isle,
Bute, Arran, Cunninghame, and Kyle.
Lord Gifford, deep beneath the ground,
Heard Alexander's bugle sound,
And tarried not his garb to change,
But, in his wizard habit strange,
Came forth, – a quaint and fearful sight;
His mantle lined with fox-skins white;
His high and wrinkled forehead bore
A pointed cap, such as of yore
Clerks say that Pharaoh's Magi wore:
His shoes were mark'd with cross and spell,
Upon his breast a pentacle;
His zone, of virgin parchment thin,
Or, as some tell, of dead man's skin,
Bore many a planetary sign,

Combust, and retrograde, and trine;
And in his hand he held prepared,
A naked sword without a guard.

XXI

‘Dire dealings with the fiendish race
Had mark’d strange lines upon his face;
Vigil and fast had worn him grim,
His eyesight dazzled seem’d and dim,
As one unused to upper day;
Even his own menials with dismay
Beheld, Sir Knight, the grisly Sire,
In his unwonted wild attire;
Unwonted, for traditions run,
He seldom thus beheld the sun. –
“I know,” he said, – his voice was hoarse,
And broken seem’d its hollow force, -
“I know the cause, although untold,
Why the King seeks his vassal’s hold:
Vainly from me my liege would know
His kingdom’s future weal or woe;
But yet, if strong his arm and heart,
His courage may do more than art.

XXII

“‘Of middle air the demons proud,
Who ride upon the racking cloud,
Can read, in fix’d or wandering star,
The issue of events afar;
But still their sullen aid withhold,
Save when by mightier force controll’d.
Such late I summon’d to my hall;
And though so potent was the call,
That scarce the deepest nook of hell
I deem’d a refuge from the spell,
Yet, obstinate in silence still,
The haughty demon mocks my skill.
But thou, – who little know’st thy might,
As born upon that blessed night
When yawning graves, and dying groan,
Proclaim’d hell’s empire overthrown, -
With untaught valour shalt compel
Response denied to magic spell.”-

“Gramercy,” quoth our Monarch free,
“Place him but front to front with me,
And, by this good and honour’d brand,
The gift of Coeur-de-Lion’s hand,
Soothly I swear, that, tide what tide,
The demon shall a buffet bide.”-
His bearing bold the wizard view’d,
And thus, well pleased, his speech renew’d: -
“There spoke the blood of Malcolm! – mark:
Forth pacing hence, at midnight dark,
The rampart seek, whose circling crown
Crests the ascent of yonder down:
A southern entrance shalt thou find;
There halt, and there thy bugle wind,
And trust thine elfin foe to see,
In guise of thy worst enemy:
Couch then thy lance, and spur thy steed-
Upon him! and Saint George to speed!
If he go down, thou soon shalt know
Whate’er these airy sprites can show: -

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.