

The Sixty-third Annual Dinner

1971

THE Sixty-third Annual Dinner, which also marked the bicentenary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott, was held in the North British Hotel on Friday, 5th March 1971. Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper presided over a company of 314. After the Toast to the Queen had been honoured the Chairman proposed "The City of Edinburgh" which Treasurer Thomas Morgan, representing the Lord Provost, acknowledged. The Toast to "Her Majesty's Forces" was proposed by Professor Michael Swann, LL.D., F.R.S., Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh. The reply was made by Air Vice-Marshal R. G. Wakeford, :M.V.O., O.B.E., A.F.C., Air Officer Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Thereafter, the Chairman rose to propose "The Memory of Sir Walter Scott".

Bicentenaries can be a terrible burden—a double burden: a burden for bicentennial no less than for bicentennialist. How, we may ask, will Sir Walter Scott, your patron saint, survive this bicentennial? Already more praised than read, he is now, for a whole year, through this mere chronometrical accident, to be jerked into life again; and when the year is over, may we not find that he has been finally killed: dead and buried beneath a mound of articles, broadcasts, reappraisals, reprints, lectures, two-volume half-stone biographies, and all that incrustation of relics, pilgrimages, commemorative bonfires, etc., which have obliterated so many other forms of once pure and disinterested worship? As for the true Scriptures, the writings of the Founder, they of course will be less read than ever ... I hope that this will not happen. But let me take no risks. Let me seize and exploit what may be the last opportunity.

Certainly it will be my last opportunity. Whatever may be the fate of our victim, we centennialists enjoy a certain transitory glory. We are not to be confused with common anniversarists who pop up every year. Like the centennialist aloe, which also flowers once in a hundred years, we can afford to look down, somewhat indulgently, on those hardy but inconspicuous leaves which, for the last ninety-nine years, have annually repeated themselves without ever coming to bloom. But this brief efflorescence has its cost. Since we cannot hope to see another bicentennial, we must show ourselves boldly when we can. We must pose suitably centennial questions and give large, grave, portentous answers, fit for the occasion, to show how original we are, how fit for this rare honour.

Admittedly this is very difficult. In these recurring years much has inevitably been said about Sir Walter Scott. He has inspired, just as he has written, some very good, as well as some very bad literature. What a splendid biography is Lockhart's *Life!* In spite of all its faults, which jealous rivals so gleefully emphasize, it is a classic: it brings Scott to life in all his diversity. Then there is that delightful personal sketch by James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, whose publication in 1834 so mortified Lockhart. There have been some very good later biographies too, to correct the bias and discretion of Lockhart: I think particularly of those by Sir Herbert Grierson and John Buchan. And there are some excellent works of criticism, beginning with that splendid essay by Carlyle which was first published as a review of Lockhart's *Life*. I sometimes think that the best thing that could be done for Scott in this bicentennial year would be to reprint some of the best critical essays which have been written about him, beginning with Carlyle's review and ending, perhaps, with those two brilliant lectures which Janet Adam Smith gave eight years ago at Edinburgh University on "Scott and the Idea of Scotland".

However, as a historian, I know my true bicentennial question. It is simply this: why was Scott born in 1771, not (for instance) in 1671 or 1871? Why was it precisely at that time, and no other, that this unpromising northern peninsula produced its only imaginative genius in the world of letters? This may seem an absurd question, but to a historian it is not only legitimate: it is obvious. Voltaire remarked that Oliver Cromwell, if he had been born in the eighteenth century, would have lived and died as a London tradesman, and Lord Keynes once declared that England had Shakespeare when she could afford him. I think there is truth in these remarks—truth of a kind. Every great man, however he transcends the context of his time (for unless he transcends it, he is not great), also belongs to that context and is made by it. And Scott, like anyone else, was a man of his generation: it would have been impossible, I believe, for Scotland to have produced him at any other time.

Consider the Scotland which produced him, the Scotland of 1771. It was the Scotland of the Union, the Union of 1707, so painfully slow in the making, now at last completed and absorbed and yielding its fruit. Before the Union and especially in the last century before it—Scotland had been a backward, inward-looking, cramped, almost fossilized society, jealous of its independence indeed, but of dwindling economy and fierce internal resentments. After the Union, it was no longer independent, but it enjoyed the stimulus of new wealth and new opportunities. It took time to realize those opportunities, and time also to overcome those resentments. But with the events of 1745—with the destruction at once (however rudely) both of Jacobitism and of the old, decayed Highland society which had been its last refuge—the way was clear, and a new generation of Scotsmen was ready and able to transform their country: to transform it out of recognition.

That new generation—the generation before Scott, the generation of 1745—was a historic generation, determined to fulfil a historic task. They were resolved to wipe away the shame and discredit of Scotch backwardness and make "a great leap forward". They set out to discover the secret causes of progress and then, having discovered them, to apply their knowledge. In this way they would drag their arrested country upwards and achieve, in their own time, all that progress which, in more fortunate countries, had been spread over 250 years. So serious a task demanded serious application. It could not be carried out lightly, in a detached or fanciful spirit. It entailed hard work: the study and application of economics, statistics, and the laws of social progress. So it was to these subjects, not to decorative learning or elegant literature, that the pioneers of that generation applied themselves. And by so applying themselves, they succeeded. When they had finished, Scotland had made the great leap forward. The archaisms of its society had been repudiated. New agriculture, new industry was prospering. The new sciences of political economy, practical philosophy, sociology, were being taught to the whole world from Edinburgh and Glasgow; and Thomas Jefferson, the greatest scholar-statesman of the New World, could declare that the universities of Edinburgh and Geneva were the two eyes of the Old.

Such was the achievement, in Scotland, of the generation before Scott, the generation whose work provided the starting-point for his. He, of course, was different from them. For one thing, he was rather more of a Scotsman. In one sense, these precursors were very un-Scotch. Indeed, they were somewhat ashamed of being Scotch, because Scotland, to them, was a synonym for the "barbarism" which they wished to correct. So they tried to disown their origin. They carefully pruned the "Scotticisms" out of their writing; they took lessons in elocution to de-scotticize their speech; and they even tried to drop the name of Scotland, referring to their country as "North Britain". By now, of course, we have changed all that, and it was Sir Walter Scott, more than anyone else, who began the change. But he could do so, largely, because his predecessors had been so successful. It was because Scott, coming after them, inherited their work, because he was born in a Scotland in which progress had already been made, that he no longer needed to imitate their defensive postures. Looking back into Scottish history, he could discover romantic charm where they, in their closer engagement, could only see the relics of barbarism.

Of course we must not overdo the contrast. Scott himself, for all his poses of rough, patriarchal simplicity, was a very complex character. He is Janus-faced, looking both forward and back. He lived always on two levels, in a real world of practical modernity

as well as in an ideal world of romantic imagination. He was the real Hanoverian courtier and the imaginary Jacobite, the busy sheriff of Selkirkshire and the dream-laird of Abbotsford, the last minstrel and the first chairman of the Edinburgh gas board. And always we have to ask, which is the real Scott? For Scott himself, with his irresistible love of make-believe, chose to conceal the contradictions of his own personality, just as he concealed his own identity as the author of *Waverley*. Viewed from this end of the bicentenary telescope, he is the authentic Scotsman, the author of all that is most romantic, and much that is ridiculous, in modern Scotch literary and historical fashion. But in real life he was a "modern" too. He would have found most of his later imitators, as he found his contemporary imitators, as ridiculous as we do.

Look at his early literary tastes. Who are the writers of his own century whom the young Walter Scott most admired? Not Ossian, that thin and tawdry distillation of Scotch proto-romanticism. He had the sense to despise Ossian. Not the English pre-romantics. It comes as a surprise to learn that, for English poetry, he awarded the palm to that least romantic, least Scotophil of writers, Dr Johnson. He had more pleasure, he once said, in reading *London* and *The Vanity of Human Wishes* than in any other poetical composition. And what were the works of literature to which, in his early years, he devoted his enormous, if somewhat slapdash, editorial energy? Before he founded the Bannatyne Club or edited the miscellaneous records of Scotland, he had edited the whole works of those two great "Augustan" writers, Dryden and Swift. And I may add that his edition of Dryden, thrown off casually in his spare time, is so good that it would be reprinted *in toto*, all twenty volumes, a hundred years later.

If Scott was basically an "Augustan" in literature, he was also basically a rationalist in thought. The religious revival, even the Roman Catholic revival, of the nineteenth century found inspiration in his work. Pugin was nourished on *Ivanhoe*. But Scott himself was lukewarm in religion and positively disliked both Roman Catholicism and Presbyterianism. He seldom or never went to church. Indeed, he once said that the only pleasure in going into a Presbyterian church was the anticipated pleasure of coming out of it again. He remembered with horror the hours spent in his father's pew in the Tron Church in Edinburgh, and in 1824, when he watched that old church go up in flames, his only recorded comment does not express regret: "Eh, sirs! mony a weary, weary sermon hae I heard beneath that steeple!" He would have disfranchised Irish Catholics for ever in order to extirpate popery in that island. If he was more friendly towards the episcopalian church, that was not, I fear, through a greater appreciation of its doctrinal truth but simply because it was more comfortable, less theocratic, than Presbyterianism, which he regarded (like Charles I) as a threat to hierarchical society, and also (like Charles II) as no religion for a gentleman.

I have seen it written, recently, that Scott had a superstitious side to him that he believed in ghosts, fairies, second sight, etc. It is true, such belief was part of the apparatus of romanticism. It is true, also, that towards the end of his life, Scott wrote some *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*. He wrote them for money: it was a task, he said, "to which my poverty and not my will consents". Anyone who reads them can see that the spirit which inspires them is the spirit of pure eighteenth-century Reason. Indeed, Scott was far more rational than many Scotsmen in our own enlightened age. When he bought the loch of Cauldshiels near Abbotsford, he recorded an ancient tradition that this loch-like many others-harboured a monster. This of course is a well-known belief among primitive peoples. But Scott showed what he thought of it when he came to describe an old Highland laird who tried to set a trap for the monster in his loch. In the year 1827, he wrote, it was "something too late in the day to set baits for water-cows".

While clearing Scott of the mental attitudes which have since been ascribed to him, perhaps I may touch upon the myth that he was, in some way, a Scottish Nationalist. Need I say that this is pure fantasy? There was very little Scottish nationalism in his time, and what there was was largely confined to his eccentric neighbour Lord Buchan. Lord Buchan lived at Dryburgh, and Scott dreaded him as "the Prince of Bores". It is thanks to Lord Buchan, incidentally, that Scott is buried in Dryburgh Abbey. Lord Buchan collected distinguished men and liked to see them, in coffin or in stone, in his domestic abbey. You can see some of his grotesque stone effigies there still. In order to include Scott in his collection, he pointed out to him that he had the right of burial there by his descent from the Haliburtons. In his eagerness, he even tried to collect him too soon. In 1819, when Scott was very ill, Lord Buchan, then aged seventy-seven, forced his way into his bedroom in order to tell him what splendid arrangements he had made for his funeral. Actually Scott survived Buchan and attended his funeral at Dryburgh. But I am going too far forward. I mention Lord Buchan because he was a real Scotch nationalist. He believed in an independent Scotch republic-an aristocratic republic, of course-and looked back to that most class-bound of Scotch republicans, Fletcher of Saltoun. In 1789 he even went to Paris to show his sympathy with the French Revolution, then in its aristocratic phase. This was not what Scott liked at all. He liked neither the French, nor revolution, nor republics. He was a British patriot, a conservative and a monarchist; and he believed intensely in the Union with England: the Union which had enabled that great generation of Scotsmen to build the solid basis upon which he could enjoy the luxury of nostalgic historical romanticism.

To Scott the Union of 1707 was essential, and his practical aim, even in literature, was to make it permanent. By his historical imagination and literary skill he would lovingly lay out, embalm, and entomb the dead past of independent Scotland. The point is most clearly made in his General Introduction to the *Waverley* Novels. There he remarked that he owed the idea of writing such novels to the example of Maria Edgeworth. Her novels of Irish life, he wrote, had done more than any mere legislation "to cement the Union"-that is, the Anglo-Irish Union of 1800. His own novels, similarly, were designed to cement that earlier Union, the Anglo-Scottish Union of 1707. To the end of his life, any attempt to undermine the Union horrified Scott. Rather than cut adrift from England, it would be infinitely better for Scotland, he once wrote, to become "an inferior sort of Northumberland". As a Northumbrian, I confess that even "an inferior sort of Northumberland" seems to me quite a good thing to be.

Here, then, is the basic Scott: the realist, the sceptic, the Augustan man of letters, the British patriot of the Age of Reason. He was a man of his own time, the heir, the conscious heir, of that great generation of practical, progressive men who had created the wealth and self-assurance of their country. But of course that was not all. The base is not everything. If it were, we should not be celebrating Scott today. We celebrate him because he rose above his base, building upon it that superstructure of fantasy and myth which distinguishes him from those worthy but, in the end, after zoo years, rather dull precursors.

Of course, he had the advantage of them in time. He grew up in the days of the romantic movement. In his undergraduate days in Edinburgh he may have learned little from his professors but he was captivated by the new German literature of *Sturm and Drang*. For the sake of Goethe and Schiller and Burger he learned German. He translated their works. He never lost his veneration for Goethe. But far more important, in the long run, than this literary discovery was a greater, more lasting experience which began with his childhood in the Border country and continued to repeat itself all his life: the discovery, which afterwards merged into the invention, of Scotland.

It is a great and enriching experience to discover our own country and identify ourselves consciously with it: to feel it physically, to see it in depth, to become part of its history. Englishmen experienced this excitement in the sixteenth century: historians write of "the Elizabethan discovery of England" which heralded a great age of wider discovery in literature and thought. To Scotsmen the same experience came two centuries later, and it was Scott, above all, who showed them the way. His predecessors had looked at it differently. They studied the facts of Scotch life in order to change them. Their ultimate achievement was a great statistical

record, Sir John Sinclair's *First Statistical Account of Scotland*, which began to appear in 1791. But statistics, however necessary to progress, are the dry bones of history. Scott made those dry bones live. He discovered the life of Scotland, and set out to portray it, even to reanimate it: to breathe it, before it should be extinguished by progress, into the new Scotland which he had inherited, and took for granted, and in which he also believed.

For soon, it seemed, that old life would be gone. The changes of that last generation had been incredibly quick. Since 1745 a whole world had dissolved. First in the Lowlands, by the economic solvent of trade, then in the Highlands, by the breaking of the tribal system, the old structure of Scotch society, which had been so artificially preserved-which the Union itself had formally preserved-had been undermined. A new mobility of men and wealth was transforming those two static societies. Old peel-towers had new furniture put into them. Trees-hitherto unknown-were growing up around them. In the Highlands the fragile clan system was in disintegration. In 1773, only two years after the birth of Scott, Johnson and Boswell made their famous tour of the Highlands and Hebrides, and yet already, they found, they were too late. "There was perhaps never any change of national manners so quick, so great, and so general", Johnson afterwards wrote, "as that which has operated in the Highlands by the last conquest and the subsequent laws. We came hither too late to see what we expected to see-a people of peculiar appearance and a system of antiquated life".

And yet, as Johnson observed, the relics were still visible, and it was not too late for an imaginative Scottish antiquary to recover them from living memory. From his earliest days, Scott studied with fascination the old character of Scotland which the new progress was leaving behind. He saw it first in his childhood at Sandyknowe by Smailholm Tower. It was there, he afterwards wrote, that his mind was first captivated by the relics of the ancient Border society around him. Then, as a young lawyer in Edinburgh, he would extend his field. Year after year, in the 1790s, he would ride up those deserted valleys of Liddesdale collecting the old ballads which he would afterwards publish as the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. James Ho-g's mother complained that, by printing those ballads, Scott had stopped the oral tradition: "they were made for singin' an' no' for readin'; but ye hae broken the charm noo, an' they'll never be sung mair"; but perhaps, like the life of which they were a part, they were dying anyway. At all events, for Scott, that publication was the beginning of his lasting work. The *Minstrelsy*, as Carlyle would write, proved to be "a well from which flowed one of the broadest of rivers. Metrical romances (which in due time pass into prose romances); the old life of men resuscitated for us; it is a mighty word: not as dead tradition but as palpable presence the past stood before us". The poems, the *Waverley Novels*, the whole historical philosophy of Scott, lay in embryo in that work.

Meanwhile Scott was penetrating the other old society of Scotland too. He was exploring the Highlands and gently blowing upon the embers of ancient life. In the churchyard of Dunnottar he would discover the original "Old Mortality", Peter Paterson, cleaning the epitaphs of the Cameronian martyrs. He would visit old Jacobite warriors who had been out in '45. And all these episodes he would record, vividly, in his diary or his talk, so that we recall them still. How can any reader of Lockhart forget that account of Scott's arrival at an old Highland tower, to find the laird and his sons and ghillies somnolent in the heather among their dogs and guns, while their wives and daughters carted dung in the courtyard below; or the scene at dinner when a giant haggis was carried into the hall in a wicker basket by "two half-naked Celts, while a piper strutted fiercely behind them, blowing a tempest of dissonance"? Finally, having discovered the Lowlands and the Highlands, Scott discovered the islands. In 1800 he made his first visit to the Hebrides; and in 1814 he went, in the Lighthouse Yacht, on his tour of Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides, and left that precious account of it which Lockhart printed in full.

1814: the year of the Lighthouse tour, was a great year for Scott. It was also a great year for Europe. For Scott, it was the year of *Waverley*, the beginning of that new venture which was to secure his lasting fame. For Europe it was the year after Leipzig, "the Battle of the Nations", victorious at last over Napoleon. And these two events are accidentally connected. In *Waverley*, and in the novels which followed it, Scott revealed his philosophy, the result of that union of Augustan rationality with the discovery of Scotland. At Leipzig the new era began in which that philosophy would find its echo in all Europe.

For Europe, after Napoleon, also had second thoughts about the great eighteenth-century doctrine of progress. The idea of planned, rational progress, cutting its clean way through the relics of barbarism and superstition, had excited men before 1789; but since then it wore a less attractive look. After years of revolution, Jacobin terror, and Napoleonic conquest, men began to think that those ancient, irrational systems of life, with their indefensible hierarchies and unquestioned traditions, so long ridiculed by *avant garde* philosophers and historians, might perhaps have some merit after all-might even be a better guarantee of real liberty than the uniform despotism of rational *liberte, egalite, fraternite*, imposed by French bayonets. And now that, in the end, they had shown their greater vitality, new philosophers, new historians rose to justify them. The philosopher of the new era was Burke, the champion of "organic" against artificial liberty. The historian, who gave back to the past its ancient right-the right to be different, not to be judged by the complacent tribunal of modernity-had revealed himself in Scott.

So, from 1814, Scott enjoyed his apotheosis, not only in Britain but in Europe. His great novels-those written between 1814 and 1820-made his name. His worse novels-most of those written after 1820-exploited it. He inspired other novelists, historians, composers. He was imitated, lionized, parodied. In the end, he parodied himself. Having begun by looking objectively at the history of his own country, seeing past the fashionable myth of the eighteenth century, he ended by creating another myth: a myth in which all Scotsmen were Jacobite, tartaned Highlanders. He even, at times, himself believed the myth, or at least acted it. Witness that famous scene in 1822, when King George IV appeared in Edinburgh, wearing a kilt, and drank the toast to "the Chieftains and Clans of Scotland", as if Scotland consisted exclusively of those chieftains and those clans. Even the devoted Lockhart was shaken by that episode. Witness also the absurd, make-believe life of "the Duke of Darnick", sitting in his bogus castle on the Tweed, within sight of civilization, in historic Saxon Northumbria, surrounded by the contrived paraphernalia of an imaginary Celtic life, with his tartan trews, and a piper at his dinner table, serving sheep's head and haggis, and whisky in a quaich.

How much Scott has to answer for, if we look at his legacy today! He wrote some of the greatest novels of his time, and inspired the worst of the next age: what Robert Louis Stevenson called the "tushery" novels. He created a new historical philosophy, immediately fertile, quickly perverted: it led to what the French called *histoire Walter Scottie*, the last infirmity of that noble Muse. Everything that is most absurd in Scotch life today can trace its pedigree, if it wants (and it generally does want) to him. No great man, perhaps, has been so buried behind the distortions of his own ideas. If we were to judge him by his secondary fruits, we might well condemn him beyond appeal.

But why should we judge him, or any man, by his secondary fruits? Men should be judged by what they are, or what they do, in their own time, not by what their imitators do in theirs. Himself, in his own time, Scott was the creator of a new literary form and a new historical philosophy. Even the myth which he made, however fanciful, served its purpose. He set out, by his novels, to reconcile Scotsmen to the Union by providing them with a new historic identity within Great Britain; and in that he succeeded. The synthetic Scotsman of today, with his Lowland head and Highland kilt and English income, is his ideal creation; he is inspired not by historical reality but by Sir Walter's myth.

One man who saw this very clearly, in the next generation, was Lord Macaulay. Both as a historian and as a poet-a good

historian and a bad poet-Macaulay was deeply influenced by Scott, of whom he also, both morally and politically, strongly disapproved. Perhaps this ambivalent relationship sharpened his perception. At all events, as a Whig who hated Jacobitism and as a Highlander who did not romanticize the Highlands, Macaulay would have none of the romantic Celtic nonsense : he knew perfectly well that, historically, the Lowlander had regarded the Highlander not as the ideal type of Scotsman but as "an abject savage, a slave, a papist, a cutthroat and a thief". He therefore ridiculed the new fashion, which he ascribed, correctly enough, to Scott: why did his contemporaries not realize that "at no remote period, a Macdonald or a Macgregor in his tartan was to a citizen of Edinburgh or Glasgow what an Indian hunter in his war-paint is to an inhabitant of Philadelphia or Boston"? And yet, thanks to Scott, "artists and actors represented Bruce and Douglas in striped petticoats. They might as well have represented Washington brandishing a tomahawk and girt with a string of scalps. At length this fashion reached a point beyond which it was not easy to proceed. The last British king who held a court in Holyrood thought that he could not give a more striking proof of his respect for the usages which had prevailed in Scotland before the Union than by disguising himself in what, before the Union, was considered by nine Scotsmen out of ten as the dress of a thief".

So much for Scott's great ceremonial triumph of 1822. But let us turn to another passage of Macaulay - a passage in which he describes the struggle between Celt and Saxon in Scotland and Ireland and compares the almost simultaneous battles of Killiecrankie and Newton Butler. Why was it, he asks, that the former is remembered and the latter forgotten? And he replies, because the hostility of the races is still unabated in Ireland while in Scotland it is stilled. The victory of the Ulstermen at Newton Butler is therefore buried in diplomatic silence, while all Scotsmen regard Killiecrankie as their victory. Historically this may be absurd, but emotionally it is true : "so completely has the old antipathy [between Saxon and Celt in Scotland] been extinguished that nothing is more usual than to hear a Lowlander talk with complacency and even with pride of the most humiliating defeat that his ancestors ever underwent. It would be difficult to name any eminent man in whom national feeling and clannish feeling were stronger than in Sir Walter Scott. Yet when Sir Walter Scott mentioned Killiecrankie, he seemed utterly to forget that he was a Saxon ... His heart swelled with triumph when he related how his own kindred had fled like hares before a smaller number of warriors of a different breed and of a different tongue."

"The Anglo-Saxon and the Celt", says Macaulay, "have been reconciled in Scotland and have never been reconciled in Ireland. In Scotland all the great actions of both races are thrown into a common stock and are considered as making up the glory which belongs to the whole country". That indeed is part of Scott's achievement. Historically it rests on a myth, but the myth is very useful. Those who deride it may think better if they look at Ireland today. The *Waverley Novels* achieved their political purpose better than Miss Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*.

Such, I believe, was Scott's function in his own time and his own context. He lived at a time when Scotland had given up its independence and overcome its resentment against its own past by means of new material progress. By rediscovering and romanticizing the past, he not only created a new form of literature and inspired a new kind of history: he also gave to his country a new unity and a new identity. Such an achievement was possible only in his time. Before that, it was impossible to interest Scotsmen in their country's past: it seemed too squalid. After that, it proved impossible to maintain that delicate balance between modernity and romanticism. Even Scott, in his own life, hardly preserved it, and we have seen its degeneration. What he left to us, the legacy by which he transcends his own context, is his novels : those wonderful books which do not need to be mediated to us through any intervening tradition but which, historical though they are, embedded in the context of their time, and fully explicable only by it, can nevertheless, like the novels of Cervantes or Jane Austin or Gogol, which are also documents of past society, be read direct, for immediate pleasure.

Finally, of course, Scott survives, divorced entirely from his work as a local divinity, a cult hero, a totem of "the Scott country". Living as I do in that country, I hope to be forgiven if I illustrate that essential ambivalence of his character to which I have referred by two local episodes. The first concerns a project, in 1828, to desecrate the Border country by driving a road through his village of Darnick. Scott was in London at the time. He recorded his reaction in his diary: "24 April 1828. Spent the day in rectifying a road bill which drew a turnpike road through all the Darnickers' cottages and a good field of my own. I got it put to rights". That was the end of the Darnick Scheme of 1828.

'Ah', you may say, "that just shows his conservatism. But we live in an age of movement, of action: radical action in the cause of progress, even in the Borders." Well, let me show that Scott too could be radical-in a sense. At the end of his life he lived in fear of revolution and he regarded the Reform Bill agitation as the beginning of the end. Indeed, Hogg tells us that it was the whig victory which finished him off: from that moment Britain, he thought, was doomed-to be democracy. However, even here he saw one area of hope, one slender shred of silver in that dark, clouded sky. It concerned one of the ornamental statues which his eccentric neighbour Lord Buchan had set up in the grounds of Dryburgh.

The statue was of William Wallace. It had been set on a bluff high above the Tweed, huge and hideous, glowering fiercely towards England. It stands there still: indeed, I understand that Miss Trendy Wood recently held a Scottish nationalist rally under its protective shade. Hogg tells us that he himself "rather liked and admired" this dreadful object, but that Scott "perfectly abhorred" it, and that "he used these very words: 'If I live to see the day when the men of Scotland, like the children of Israel, shall every one do that which is right in his own eyes (which I am certain either I or my immediate successors will see), I have settled in my mind long ago what I shall do first. I will go down and blow up the statue of Wallace with gunpowder. Yes, I will blow it up in such a style that there will be not one fragment of it left: the horrible monster'."

To active Borderers, therefore, who wish, in this bicentenary year, to signalize their devotion by fulfilling the wishes of their local hero, I can recommend two courses. Either they can follow his example and put the new Darnick scheme "to rights", or they can carry out his last, almost testamentary hint and blow up that other "horrible monster" on Tweedside, the statue of Wallace. But to those whose faith is of the more contemplative kind, what better advice can I give than to read, or rather (I am sure) read again, those great neglected works of literature, the *Waverley Novels*-and particularly those published in the as yet uncorrupted years 1814-20: *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Bride of Lammermoor* ... And remembering that roll-call of marvellous works, I ask you to rise and drink the toast to the memory of Sir Walter Scott.

The toast to "The Chairman" was proposed by R. R. Taylor, Q.C

The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club www.walterscottclub.org.uk