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THE LIFE AND WORK OF WILLIAM BELL SCOTT, 1811 - 1890

A Thesis presented to the University of Durham
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Vera Walker,

February, 1951.

P R E F A C E

In terms of outward circumstance Scott's life was uneventful, and in the absence of any major crises it seemed best to adopt the natural divisions made by his movements from place to place. This gives five sections, each surprisingly self-contained, for Scott had the gift of living happily enough in his immediate environment and did not, on the whole, try to keep up friends and associations once he had moved from the place where he made them. The exception to this is Newcastle: while Scott lived in the North he kept up close ties with London, so that it seemed natural enough for him to return there on his retirement. Indeed one comes to regard him as belonging to London in a way that he never belonged to his birthplace, Edinburgh.

I have opened with an account of Scott's childhood and youth in Edinburgh. The next section is concerned with the period of exploration and development when he first came to London. After that comes a group of four chapters concerned with his work and residence in Newcastle. This is the central period. Scott was working hard in the cause of art-education and at the same time his own talents were maturing and bearing fruit. His official retirement and removal to London closes this section. The next deals with his later and more personal achievements now that he was able to devote time to his own work in literature and art. Scott was living half the year in London; the other half at Penkill, the home of Miss Alice Boyd. The London chapters should therefore be read with

the one about his 'holiday-half' of the year in Scotland, which covers the same period of time. The final section covers the years of his complete retirement to Penkill, when he lived as an invalid under Miss Boyd's care.

In addition to the Life, I have given two separate chapters to the two most important relationships of Scott's life, with his brother David, and with the Rossetti family. The last section of the thesis, which is divided into three parts, covers Scott's contribution to art, poetry and the work of criticism. I have attempted to write of these activities not only as they appear to the outsider, but according as Scott valued and enjoyed them.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- Autobiographical Notes of the Life of William Bell Scott,
ed. by William Minto, 2 Volumes, London, 1891. A.N.
- Memoir of David Scott, R.S.A. ed. by William B. Scott,
Edinburgh, 1850. Memoir
- Hades; or, The Transit: and The Progress of Mind,
Two Poems by W. B. Scott, London, 1838. Hades
- The Year of the World; A Philosophical Poem on
"Redemption from the Fall", by William B. Scott,
Edinburgh: London, 1846. Year of the World.
- Poems, by William Bell Scott, London, 1854. Poems: 1854.
- Half-Hour Lectures on the History and Practice of
the Fine and Ornamental Arts, by William B. Scott,
London, 1861. Half-Hour Lectures.
- Poems by William Bell Scott, London, 1875. Poems, 1875.
- A Poet's Harvest Home, by William Bell Scott, H.R.S.A.,
L.L.D., London, 1893. P.H.H., 1893.

Letters to and from William Bell Scott, William Michael Rossetti and Lady Trevelyan are very frequently quoted. In the footnotes these abbreviated forms of their names are used: W.B.S., W.M.R., and Lady T. Many of Scott's letters are addressed from Newcastle-upon-Tyne and for this the abbreviation N. is used. Other addresses are given in full.

CHAPTER I

The Scott Household

William Bell Scott was born in Edinburgh on 12 September 1811, the seventh child of Robert Scott and Ross Bell. His father was an engraver and his mother the niece of a sculptor, Alexander Gowan, but there is no record of any artistic talent among his other forebears. The family were of Scottish yeoman stock and for many generations had been skimmers, glovers and saddlers. George Scott, burgess of Lanark, the great-grandfather of William, worked at the traditional family craft; but the trade ceased to prosper during the life-time of William's grandfather, Robert Scott, and the family property was sold shortly after the birth of his son Robert, William's father, in 1777. The elder Robert took employment in the Excise and thereafter the family lived "a somewhat nomadic life, like the sons of Ishmael".¹ They must have settled for a time in Musselburgh, staying long enough for their sons to attend the Grammar School there.

This breakdown in the tradition of a family trade was a fortunate chance for Robert Scott the son, who was able to look about for a new craft with less opposition than he might otherwise have encountered. Accordingly in 1787 he was articled for five years to Alexander Robertson of Edinburgh to learn engraving. He had shown talent as an artist already; it was considered in the family that he was

1. Memoir, p.11.

clever with his pen, and copied finely the engravings of Hogarth. He must be an artist of some kind, - a landscape painter if possible; but scarcely were there any professional artists in Edinburgh at the time, and his talent was not genius to fight its own way.¹

In consequence of such conditions, his apprenticeship was chosen as the only suitable opening which was likely to provide training and offer a livelihood.²

Robertson excelled in the engraving of trees and plants, a mastery which he seems to have been able to teach his pupil, judging by the fact that plates were sent down to Scott from the publishing firm of Cooks in London so that he might engrave the landscape background. Robert seems to have received only scant attention from his master, who was generally too busy ringing the bells at St. Giles' Cathedral and going to the tavern to recover from his exertions.

So the pupil did pretty much as he liked till the evening came, when he set out with his paper and the red chalk then in use, to the Trustees' Academy, that earliest of British Schools of Design, or of Fine Art either.³

The foundation of this art school dated from 1760. It was first taught by a Frenchman, M. Delacour, and was under the direction of a Board of Trustees for Manufacture; but, growing away from its original purpose, it had later become a class for young artists in drawing from the antique, for which study it eventually gathered a very good gallery of casts.

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1. Ibid, p.12.
 2. In this connection it is interesting to notice the varied professions which offered some prospect to men who were seeking training in art at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, when there was scarcely any regular instruction to be had, particularly in the provinces. Richard Welford, in his book 'Men of Mark 'Twixt Tyne and Tweed', tells us that John Martin was apprenticed to a coach-builder in Newcastle, and T. M. Richardson to a firm of joiners and cabinet-makers.
 3. Memoir, p.13.

Following his apprenticeship, Robert Scott established an engraving business in 1799 and in his turn took pupils into his atelier. The quality of his work has earned him some notice, even amongst more celebrated engravers.

In sundry original engravings, studies of architecture with landscape settings, Robert Scott (1777-1841) captured the poetic air. His quota thereof is no doubt infinitesimal, just enough, however, to give Scott an honourable little place in the annals of pictorial art.¹

A dictionary of art and artists published during his lifetime spoke of him quite simply as "The best Scottish engraver of his time".²

Robert Scott had first known his future wife in Musselburgh, where her parents lived before their death. They were married in 1800 and made their home in Parliament Square, in one of the enormous "lands" which were a feature of the old city. These were vast blocks of flats, high and wide, with a central stone staircase and landings giving access to four sets of rooms on each floor. Peculiar to Edinburgh, they did not fail to impress a distinguished American visitor, Nathaniel Hawthorne, who wrote:

Being now in the old town of Edinburgh, we saw these immensely tall houses, seven stories high, where the people live in tiers all the way from earth to middle air.³

Five children were born to Robert and his wife during the early years of their marriage; David, the fifth, in 1806. Then, with tragic swiftness, four of them died within a few days and David remained, the only

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1. Murdoch, Art Treasures of Edinburgh, p.clxxxviii
 2. Bryan's Dictionary of Painters and Engravers, New Edition, London, 1934, Vol. V, pp.57-58.
 3. v. The English Notebooks, ed. by Randall Stewart, New York: London, 1941, p.337.

survivor of what the father and mother always looked upon as their 'first' family. Perhaps the distinction was scarcely conscious and certainly it was not intended to be unkind, but the later family, Robert, William and Helen, were never as dear as the dead children. William writes with sadness of his own sense of inadequacy:

The name she often called me was not William but Lockhart, that having been the name of a favourite now in heaven. With an expression of sadness that puzzled and somewhat humiliated me, she used to correct herself, but I wished I could be Lockhart to her.

That however could not be, and elsewhere William stresses the impossibility of her living family replacing the dead, so deep was the sense of loss.

We were in her presence, but they were in her heart -- We were a second family to her. David, being all that remained of the first, his name she never forgot, while his father cared more for him than for all the others.²

This tragedy, and other family deaths about the same time, served to deepen the gravity which was already inherent in both parents, and for the rest of their lives they lived with their grief and kept it ever-present before their growing family. One cannot suppose that the children allowed the sorrow and gravity of their parents to damp their spirits for long together, but because of it the family lived a secluded life and there were rarely any visitors. William could however speak with very real pleasure of the happiness of his home when the family gathered round the fire in the evening. Then, he tells us;

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1. A.N. I. P.26.
 2. Memoir, p.16.

While the mother --- sat at her needlework, with the little daughter by her side, on the other side of the fire old Uncle George might be seen mending his dog whips, or making with much care pop-guns and whistles for the boys out of the young stems of the elder-tree, by extracting the pith from their hollow tubes.¹

As an old man Scott recalled his childhood happiness and said of it:

These winter evenings, lighted by candles and warmed by the tiled fire-place, appear in memory to have lasted for ages, like the period of the Plantagenets or Tudors; yet they must only have continued a very few seasons in perfection.²

One particular consequence of the tragedy which had befallen the parents was to have a profound effect on the upbringing of their young sons. With renewed intensity William's father and mother turned to religious observances and finally found the kind of worship which appealed to them in the Baptist Church. The young boy remembered vividly these years when "a depression and melancholy settled down upon them, darkening to religious gloom at times, and scarcely ever clearing off." He wrote:

Misfortune has a profound effect on the Scottish character. A grief is nursed, and its memory kept alive as a duty.³

His parents' membership of the Baptist Church included the training of their sons in the faith, and meant that William received a thorough grounding in dogma, a fact in which he took a contrary sort of pride all his life. The less happy result was that this particular form of religion, and the circumstances of its adoption, stirred him to genuine

1. Ibid, p.30.
2. A.N.I. 31.
3. Memoir, p.15.

rebellion, both against its narrow unimaginative attitude, when his whole speculative nature told him that there ought to be an element of the "unknowable" about religion, and against his father, who imposed it from above in such an unthinking way and without any explanation. Only when he was an old man was Scott able to write with understanding of his father's opinions and their result for himself in his own life.

In Scotland, every good man is a religious man; it may almost be said every conscientious man has a theological bias. Religion is not a mystery; of necessity beyond, as well as within nature, it is considered as a legitimate subject for the understanding; and the man who is clearest and narrowest on the subject, is he who is supposed to be most spiritual.¹

Obedience and conformity is of course demanded from the young; the shoe must fit all the feet beneath the roof tree, which is not easily accomplished, seeing the father has chosen it by his own measure. The domestic evils entailed by peculiarities of dogma, are nearly the only ones that time does not cure; they increase as old age creeps upon the elders, while the young are arriving at freedom and maturity. Nor are they confined to the present; but stretching beyond the grave, make a dreaded eternity of separation.²

The unattractive worldly quality of what he saw offered as religion, impressed Scott deeply and he records two instances of his childish dissatisfaction with it. He was still quite young when he noticed the clumsiness and inadequacy of the addresses given by the lay brethren at the Chapel.³ Some time later when his cousin, a minister in the

1. Ibid, pp. 16-17.

2. Ibid, p.17.

3. The Diary of the Late John Epps, ed. by Mrs. Epps, contains a description of the meetings of the Scottish Baptist Church attended by Mr. Scott, v. pp. 120-121. "Instead of one minister they had two or three chief men, one of whom presided at the meeting and generally took part in the service. One and another of the number proposed a hymn, offered up a prayer, read a portion of Scripture, delivered a short address; and this, though understood to be spontaneous, took place with great order, and without creating any confusion."

church, showed him the altar plate for the first time, thinking to touch his imagination, he experienced a similar failure to be awed or moved.

[The Minister's] expression told me that he thought the young nature was struck with some touch of superstition, but it was otherwise; the boy was recovering himself and saying inwardly 'Eating and drinking, what can these have to do with the soul.'¹

Scott describes his father :

-- over six feet in height, thin in face and figure, still older than our mother to me, as I never remembered him without spectacles and a brown wig. He was very straight and spoke² with some refinement of pronounciation and selection of words.

To a young medical student John Epps, a friend of David, Mr. Scott appeared kindly and ready to help.

It is an impression of the writer of this, that John spoke of how, to encourage the young English student, and in a delicate way to help him, Mr. Scott bought of him one of his intellectual productions, 'A Tour in the Picturesque Scenery of Scotland'. He felt for the youth far away from his friends and struggling against bad health to keep himself independent during the time of his graduation.³

For William, his father aroused a feeling closer to fear and awe than affection, largely by reason of a certain remoteness. Robert Scott was always too occupied with his health and his business worries to take particular interest in the children, and, in any case, David was the first favourite to claim attention. William records in detail an incident which several critics have quoted to show the early presence of certain qualities in the boy's character, but which might equally well, and more fairly, be used to show the relationship of father and son. The two

1. A.N.I. 55.

2. Ibid., p.28.

3. v. The Diary of the Late John Epps, ed. by Mrs. Epps, London, 1875, pp. 120-121.

were out for a walk together and met with some friends of his father. On the way, they passed a garden, where an old gentleman grew herbs, from which he distilled perfumes and dispensed medicines. Robert Scott asked his son to translate the latin sign on the gate, 'Hinc Sanitas', and the boy faltered over the simple phrase and could give no answer. His father did not offer to show him how he might have arrived at the right translation, but instead laughed with his friends at William's failure. When they came home William crept off alone, and, taking the family Bible swore an oath that when he was older and stronger he would be the death of his father. It seems interesting from every point of view that the grown man should have remembered the incident and felt it worth setting down. William Sharp¹ quotes the story as illustrating an inborn streak of vindictiveness, fundamentally the same as that which prompted Scott's 'consolatory stabs' at Ruskin and Swinburne, and other of his acquaintances, in his autobiography. Sensitiveness to criticism and hatred of ridicule were most certainly qualities which were retained in Scott's mature character but the story seems to have more significance if it is considered as an expression of his resentment of unsympathetic criticism, surely an important distinction. With this in mind it is plain that his youthful attitude is paralleled in later years by the response of the man who would accept any criticism from his two dear friends Lady Trevelyan and Alice Boyd, even opinions which would have been received in a very short temper from other men and women.

1. Review of A.N. in the Academy, 3 December 1892.

After the death of the children, the family moved to a house at St. Leonards, on the outskirts of the city, called in its lease by the curious name 'Hermits and Termits'. A pencil sketch preserved at Penkill shows it to have been a pleasant place, in keeping with its country setting.

The dwelling stood alone among hedges of holly and high trees of alder --- So lonely was the place then, that more than once in the dark winter nights, when the wind was in the trees and the men of the family not yet returned home it was visited by sturdy beggars.¹

Scott's early recollections of his mother are bound up with her place in this old house, from which one imagines she rarely stirred, for he says:

Once she had been in Paradise when young and happy, before the white rooms of her old-fashioned house had enclosed her.

He tells us that "she had left off the style of youth with its ways, wearing a white cap frilled with lace and a shawl even within the house, and from morning to night", and he describes her as "short and stout, slow and quiet."² Years later, when his mother died, Scott wrote a sonnet which attempted to record these early years and his mother's sad life:

St. Leonards, Edinburgh, 1826.

A pebbled pathway led up to the door
Where I was born, with holly hedge confined,
Whose leaves the winter snows oft interlined,
Oft, now it seems, because the year before
My sister died we were together more,
And from the parlour window every morn
Snow lay there, while our mother's face, so worn
With fear of coming ill, bent sweetly o'er

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1. Memoir, p.28.
 2. A.N.I. 25-26.

And when she saw us watching, smile would she
And turn away with many things distraught:
Thus was it manhood took me by surprise,
The sadness of her heart came into me,
And everything I ever yet have thought
I learned then from her anxious loving eyes.¹

Scott does not speak a great deal of his schooldays, except to say that he found learning a slow and laborious process. He went first to a small day-school nearby kept by an elderly Quaker, and later, when he had acquired the rudiments of Latin, to the High School. In his own account Scott dwells on his leisure time and personal development, as if he held them to be of greater importance. The children seem to have been happy with family activities and content to make their own amusements, so long as David was unchallenged in his leadership.

In the long winter evenings, his father sat at one table arranging his affairs of business, and the children at another incessantly occupied in drawing, David having set the example. Here the light and the box of water colours was at his command alone, not to be touched under instant and grievous penalties. A small windowless room was set apart for the library. Of this he kept the key, and admitted the others as candle-bearers only.²

The children had a constant source of interest and delight in their Uncle George, their father's brother, who lived with them. He had retired from business and amused himself by keeping pointers and setters in the stables and pigeons in the hay-loft. In circumstances and character he was a second 'Will Wimble', courteous to all and a favourite with the young. In the season he went up to Lanark for the shooting, staying with

1. Ibid, p. 275.

2. Memoir, p.30.

the laird of Waygateshaw, his distant relative. The rest of the year was spent in happy "pottering" amongst his various pets. No doubt he knew how to entertain his nephews with stories and an occasional share in his exciting activities.

For many years summer holidays were spent with their mother's cousin at Kippen, a village half-way between Stirling and the Grampians, amid scenery which delighted William. There, in the house of "the good minister and his worthy brothers",¹ the boy enjoyed the quiet country life, walked on the hills and painted landscapes in water-colour. These sketches, and all he wrote, reflect his love for the old house, its ample gardens and the surrounding country-side.

Their relative was one of three brothers, all ministers of the church, and was himself a bachelor, looked after by his mother. Apart from the religious observances which were as strict and in the same spirit as those at home, all the children seem to have enjoyed these holidays and especially the opportunity of the out-of-door life and walking on the moors.

During winter evenings at home the children were never at a loss for amusement, a joy which they owed to their father's trade. He daily carried home in his pocket bundles of old prints and the house was full of books of poetry and novels with engraved plates, books of views, antiquities, battles and travel. These the children looked through at their leisure and so came to a natural and unforced interest in literature, approaching it in a very different way from school pedantry. The book which took the central place,

1. Ibid, p.36. Kippen is spoken of at length in A.N., as well as in the Memoir.

and made an impression which was to last for life, was the edition of Blair's Grave with the Blake designs engraved by Schiavonetti. The fascination of this remarkable book was confirmed by their father's judgement of it. He seems to have believed the Blake inventions to be no less than a revelation of what life after death would be.

There were countless attractions in a visit to the workshops in Parliament Square, for they housed the accumulation of many years of business.

There were portraits, landscapes, and Bible prints, hanging in long lines overhead to dry; presses constantly going round and round, manufacturing more; and engravers sitting etching, cutting, and drawing.¹

But the thing which caught the children's fancy there was not so much the engravings, and the activity of the workshop, as the fact that the upper rooms had once belonged to a firm of lawyers and there was all the old lumber of charters and legal documents left on dusty shelves. The children, as often as they were allowed, hunted through these treasures in search of the old seals and clippings of gold leaf which adorned them, and which they eagerly collected. William has left a sketch² of the workroom and a description of the peculiar arrangement of the benches which was designed to take full advantage of the light from the tall windows. One ran along on the level of the bottom of the windows and another above it at the centre of the casement. The men who worked on the upper bench sat on high chairs to which they ascended by means of steps.

1. Ibid, p.23.

2. The original is now at Penkill, in one of the bound volumes in which Scott gathered those that remained of his rough studies, sketches and designs, dating from all periods of his life.

Robert Scott took apprentices; and besides the practical training they received in the workshop, he sent them to study at the Trustees Academy. He seems to have trained them well, or at least given them opportunities for developing their talent, judging by the after-success of a goodly number of them. His son explains:

Engraving was at that time looked upon as one of the fine arts to a much greater extent than it now is, and only young men of talent were considered fitted for it, while the education gained in the establishment we speak of, was of a much more general and liberal kind than, in these days of hurry and division of labour, is likely to be found in similar quarters.¹

As if in comment, however, Scott insistently makes the point that his father was interested in engraving for its commercial possibilities and was not in love with art for its own sake. This outlook he attributes to the amount of engraving carried out in Edinburgh at that period, adding that subjects for plates were chosen for their popularity rather than their artistic merit.

The general produce of this manufactory, it may be readily admitted, was not of a very high order; nor was there anything done in Edinburgh of any consequence in the art of engraving till the present day. As a trade only it was followed, and in that way even it was by no means very extensive.²

William, speaking of his father's constant preoccupation with himself, traced his worry to three sources; the loss of his young family; his health, in which he took a morbid interest; and failure in his business concerns. Robert Scott, having experimented with various fantastic and

1. Memoir, p.25.
2. Ibid, p.24.

unsound methods of improving engraving, was finally faced with near-bankruptcy through no real fault of his own. He had pledged money as security for some bills and was called upon to make good his pledge. William gives a vivid account of the shame and bewilderment he felt, first in the face of the hints of his schoolfellows that something was wrong, and later when he was sent for at school and accompanied his father to Kippen for family discussions. The fire in 1824, when the whole 'land' of Parliament stairs went up in flames, must have been an equally severe blow.

CHAPTER II

Youth in Edinburgh.

As Scott grew from childhood to adolescence he planned and wrote several vast and unshapely poems with a freedom of composition which gave scope for his flights of 'sublime philosophy'. He gives the theme of one in his autobiography. It is the story of an angel who was possessed by an overpowering necessity to see the person of God; yet search where he might, God was nowhere to be found. The poem grew to unmanageable lengths and was finally destroyed, but its programme remains as an indication of the reach of the boy's mind and the strange material of his speculations.

It seems likely that at this age he had ideas of poetry as his life-work; and although his father would never have consented to his employing all his energies in work which offered such hazardous material prospects, the boy was never discouraged from his writing. Indeed when he was no more than 16, his uncle George gave him a note to Professor John Wilson, and Scott visited this brilliant vigorous man to ask his opinion of a "blank verse didactic affair"¹. John Wilson was kindly in his criticism, though he did advise Scott that he should write more tersely and pointedly on subjects within his own experience. This sound comment was quite unacceptable to the boy and he determined to seek another judgement on his work. Next time he went to his father, for an introduction to Sir Walter Scott. Though Robert Scott had slight business connections with the great man, William tells us:

1. A.N.I., 71.

--- he either would not or could not give me a letter to him, but he procured one, with a grim smile of contempt, keeping, however, my secret from my brothers, whose satire I was afraid of.¹

Sir Walter was equally precise in his recommendations, advising rhyme instead of blank verse; and equally disappointing because he completely and cheerfully overlooked the quality in which William took pride, the grand inventive power of his work. To complete the disillusionment he seemed to think he was being most friendly in repeating little scraps of gossip about writers, thereby enclosing them in their worldly circumstances, the very matters from which the aspiring boy sought to dissociate those who wrote poetry.

When he left school, William did not gravitate into his father's business in a quite mechanical way. He looked around him and tells us himself that the only other profession which he considered was that of medicine; but a brief experience of its horrors quickly ended that ambition. An interest in art was, however, native to him and he had made attempts at sketching from an early age; moreover he had a practical knowledge of what was being done in engraving, and of its requirements as a profession. So he went into his father's business as David had done before him, in part because he was allowed to include in his training a study of painting, and in part because his father's ailing health demanded that one of the sons should be trained to assist in the extensive business. Scott implies a

1. Ibid, p.72.

mixture of pleasure and weariness in those early Edinburgh days. While he could not help but admit that David had dutifully learnt engraving and played his part in supporting the family when their father's health broke down in 1825, William was jealous that his brother had now managed to emancipate himself and leave for Rome, free to pursue his painting.

He writes:

David Scott went abroad for one year, and remained nearly two, painting, as we have seen, a colossal picture. During nearly the half of this time, his father was confined to bed, his brother Robert had just returned unsuccessful from Demerara, and his youngest brother has yet a lively remembrance of the requirements of that time.¹

William found the actual engraving just so much uninspired grind, as indeed it had appeared to David; and he writes feelingly of the tedium and disappointment attached to work in which the original artist is never satisfied and the engraver can show no originality. However this may be, his complaints should not be allowed to usurp more than their proper share of the picture. His father would never have allowed Scott to study painting exclusively;

He had seen too many poor painters: he knew none other indeed, except Raeburn and the portrait painters ..;²

and it seems he was wise in his theory that training which will earn a livelihood should take precedence. Scott admits that he did not find the technique of engraving difficult though it was not congenial to him. Impressions of two early landscapes preserved at Penkill are engraved in his father's manner, and very dark. Finally, to confirm his mastery he

1. Memoir, p.189.

2. A.N.I., 82.

embarked on a large landscape. Scott recalled the history of this plate some fifty years later, when a Newcastle friend reminded him that he possessed a print from it:

It is called in full 'The Martyrs' Tombs in the Bog of Loch in Kett, Galloway', and should have under it engraved in the centre the inscription on the gravestone within the enclosure. It was engraved by me from a large picture by Revd. J. Thomson of Duddingston, in or about 1831, when I was 20 years of age.

The history of it is this. When my brother David first and myself after determined on being painters, our father insisted on our learning his art of engraving, which he thought a much safer profession. I did that print and published it with a dedication to Professor Wilson, who at the same time very kindly used to read over the MS. of my poetry.¹

While he worked in his father's business Scott proceeded with his studies in the Antique class of The Trustees Academy where his master was Sir William Allan. Scott kept some of the work he was doing at this period bound in a sketch book², a miscellaneous collection of pencil sketches of old houses in Edinburgh, landscape studies done at Kippen, some dated as early as 1826, and water-colour studies in tone values. It includes one item of particular interest; the two drawings sent as specimens for his admission to the Trustees Academy in January 1827. They are landscapes executed in water-colour in tones of sepia, one most vigorously painted, but both conventional in, for instance, their treatment of foliage. A study of 1831, 'My Father Asleep', is a fine little pencil portrait, but the most striking composition in point of imaginative quality is perhaps a rough water-colour called 'The Expulsion Naturalized', painted

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1. W.B.S. to Joseph Wright, 92, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, 16 May 1883. Wright was Keeper of the Natural History Museum in Newcastle during Scott's time there and for many years after.
 2. This was Volume I of Studies, Sketches, Designs, etc. Collected and Bound in Four Volumes, October 1861, now kept at Penkill Castle, Ayrshire.

in 1828. It shows Adam and Eve in a forest. Behind them a radiant light shines and the branches are closing together in a tangled mass on their path. Scott's work in the antique class is represented by a nude study of 1827 which is certainly not timid in drawing. The drapery of his studies is delicate but stiff and he seems to have learnt to draw figures with very careful attention to the shading to give roundness and form to the limbs. In June and July 1832 he visited London and drew in the British Museum. Many sketches of vases and ornaments, drawn with careful detail, remain as a record of his work, and there are a number of coloured drawings of costume figures from pictures and tapestries at Hampton Court and the British Museum.

Apart from this brief visit to draw at the British Museum, Scott's acquaintance was limited to Edinburgh society until he was twenty-five. He was fortunate that the city could boast such a brilliant gathering of intellectual leaders. B. R. Haydon, who visited Edinburgh in 1820 pictured them:

First you would see limping Sir Walter, talking as he walked with Lord Meadowbank; then tripped Jeffrey, keen, restless, and fidgety; you next met Wilson, or Lockhart, or Allan, or Thompson or Raeburn, as if all had agreed to make their appearance at once. It was a striking scene - foreigners were impressed like myself.

It was with all seriousness and a certain right that Edinburgh considered herself the 'Modern Athens', and prided herself that her writers were above all gentlemen. This traditional ordering of society was most strenuously preserved.

1. B. R. Haydon, Autobiography and Memoirs, ed. by Aldous Huxley, London, 1926, I, 291.

It is true at the same time that all these men (the early contributors to the Edinburgh Review) had other employments in life besides writing: their reviews were composed in hours of leisure.

In this respect, however, they conformed to the Scottish tradition of their time. Professor Masson remarked that, of the writers who lived in Scotland in the eighteenth century, hardly one was by profession a man of letters. Scots who wished in those days to make authorship their sole vocation tended, he pointed out - to drift to London - - - 'The literary circle of London', Mackenzie wrote, 'was a sort of sect, a caste separate from the ordinary professions and habits of common life. They were traders in talent and learning, and brought, like other traders, samples of their goods into company, with a jealousy of competition which prevented their enjoying, as much as otherwise they might, any excellence in their competitors'.

In spite of the brilliance of Edinburgh society it may well be that it endowed Scott with an attitude which proved a handicap and made him feel uncomfortable when he went to London and entered this other hard, competitive literary society. He was well aware of the antithesis between Edinburgh and London and even felt it necessary to attempt an explanation of the Edinburgh attitude towards London and the 'Cockney' school. The interesting point is that this very explanation strengthens one's conviction that Scott himself shared the exclusive patronising Edinburgh outlook when he could write:

He (Sir Walter Scott) was not the literary man by profession, but a gentleman. His interests sprang not from books but from life. It was the same with all the Scotch literati; they were Lords of Session, professors, men of fortune. The ball had been at their feet from boyhood.

How different it was in London! None of the literary men and few of the poets were in a similar position. They were all living hand to mouth, working in a groove, or in a comparatively obscure public office, like dear Charles Lamb,

1. James A. Greig, Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review, Edinburgh, 1948, p.81.

whose writing, like himself, was essentially middle-class. Hazlitt was a noble fellow in his way, but altogether uncertain in habits and position, and with John Scott, Peacock, Reynolds, Leigh Hunt, Keats, we ascend to the pure air of genius, but get no higher in the social scale. This ought to be kept in mind when we sit in judgement on the brutality of Lockhart's Edinburgh articles on the 'Cockney' school.¹

It is important to note that Scott was not forced to content himself with being on the verge of Edinburgh literary life. Young men of intellect, whatever their connections, were welcomed by the leading writers and given opportunities of writing and speaking; though, in point of fact, Scott's entrance into Edinburgh intellectual circles was not quite an unaided matter. He was helped in a slight way by his father's business connections, and to a much greater extent by the standing of his brother David, who had already gained a sound reputation, exhibiting at the Scottish Academy in 1828 and becoming an Academician in 1829 under the terms of the Hope and Cockburn award. Where David had made acquaintances, William was free to take up the opportunities offered. Moreover he must have been building up some standard of values based on the things he saw his brother strive for. A clear example is concerned with David's attempts to institute a Life Class in Edinburgh in 1827, when the Trustees Academy did not offer one. A room was taken in Infirmary Street and the venture only came to an end in 1832 when the Royal Institution began a similar class. William was, of course, still young, but it seems probable that he adopted his brother's point of view and that the opinions he formed then are the driving force of his own strong stand for the value of drawing from the

1. A.N.I., 75.

life when he became a master in a Government School of Design. Quite possibly too, the same influence accounts for the enthusiasm with which Scott, Sibson and Wornum met regularly to draw from the life every Saturday for eighteen months while they were fellow students in London.

Scott tells us the names of some acquaintances at the Trustees' Academy, and adds a word about their subsequent fortunes. His only particular friend amongst the group was James Ballantine. This young man, who had been a house-painter, went on to make a name for himself as artist and man of letters, specialising in a study of stained glass and its use in architecture. His first intimate friendship was formed in a different sphere: The St. Luke's Club. This had been established in recent years by a group of Edinburgh men, and was a club for purely social purposes named after the patron saint of painters. Scott was invited to join somewhere about 1832, possibly on the recommendation of Professor Wilson, who was nearly always in the chair. In that year he went to the club dinner and describes his first sight of William Shand:

On the opposite side of the table sat a youth of my own age, whose eyes I found bent on me more than once, as indeed I was so fascinated by him I could not forbear observing him.

The friendship was swiftly established and they continued to be very close companions for nearly four years.

Every day nearly, from that evening till I left Edinburgh for London, we met and very frequently sat far into the night, indulging in the habits of the time and place, with endless bitter beer and whisky toddy.¹

1. Ibid, p.88.

Shand was training to enter the ministry, but when Scott knew him he had already decided that he could not affirm belief in any creed. His present friends were mainly a group of fellow-theological students, associated by literary tastes as well as their common course of study, and to this group he introduced Scott. They were an exclusive circle, indulging in noisy evenings quite divorced from their theological studies, and one of the diversions they planned was the publication of a Christmas book, following the lead of the then fashionable annuals. It involved a great deal of hard work, mainly on the part of Shand and Scott, for the others fought shy to a great extent. It was finally published in October 1834, under the title of The Edinburgh University Souvenir.¹

It is interesting to note that its production, and the consequent noisy meetings, seem to have made the University authorities watchful, the more so because at that particular time they were finding the students somewhat unmanageable.

Scott himself contributed two poems 'The Incantation of Hervor' and 'The Dance of Death'. In point of fact this was not his first appearance in print. In 1831 Tait's Edinburgh Magazine had accepted his poem to the memory of Shelley: nor were these pieces more than a hint of the bulk of

1. Edinburgh University Library has a copy of the Souvenir with a dedication composed by the editor, to Scott and a fellow contributor John Steell. The engraved cover design is by Scott, but none of the poems or articles is signed. Fortunately Scott has left an account of the part he played in its publication: v. W. B. Scott to Sidney Colvin, Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 24 June 1887. "Towards the end of my time of visiting him / Professor John Wilson / with MS. I had taken my partly enforced line of life as an artist, but my set of friends were still the set of literary youths, chiefly Theological Students, and these produced for the Xmas of 1834-5, a volume called The Edinburgh University Souvenir, in the manner of the Annuals then in vogue, (barring the prints) and I was the author of the largest portion of it only second to the editor. One of my contributions was the poem 'To the Memory of Keats', which I afterwards printed in my Illustrated Volume.

MSS already in existence at this early period. 'Anthony' did not appear until 1868, when it was printed by the Fortnightly Review,¹ though this poem and 'Rosabell', which was published in The Monthly Repository by Leigh Hunt in 1838,² are compositions of about the same date. The incident which inspired the latter poem was indeed the first personal experience which Scott had attempted to use, and it was considered in a way most characteristic of his particular stage of development, when:

To all my theological friends, and to myself above them all, the most sacred thing in nature was woman; virginity was the ideal, not in one sex only, but in both; without purity was there no love of a noble kind. This sentiment, which Christianity has developed in history, is, I fancy, natural to all of us at a certain age: to me it was a wall of adamant, invisible, but of absolute power of moral defence. I say this that there may be no question about my relation to a girl I met on the street one night.

Shand and Scott not only worked together on the Edinburgh University Souvenir, but talked of plans to live together, plans which, Scott confesses, were often more fitting for boys than men. One of these embodied a suggestion that they should leave for a Norwegian fiord, where solitude and cheap living were to be found, and there make translations of the sagas and Northern stories in preparation for bringing them to public notice. This particular scheme is worth noting because it argues that Scott had an interest in such material long before he met William Morris.

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1. The Fortnightly Review, No. XIX New Series, 1 July 1868.
 2. Hunt's editorship was from July 1837 to April 1838. Rosabelle appeared in The Monthly Repository II, (1838), pp. 112-117 and pp. 189-196.

It was while he still lived in Edinburgh that Scott had an opportunity of meeting two notable men of the period. In 1820 Benjamin Robert Haydon visited Edinburgh and met David Scott. We have no statement of William's opinion of Haydon until he met him again in London about the time of The Westminster Cartoon Competition in 1842. The account in William's autobiography is a mixture of youthful impression and the more tempered judgement of the older man:

Of all men - I do not limit myself to artists - I have had any means of studying, Haydon was the most self-sufficient. There are various tempers or habits of egotism; his was simple vanity, intellectual and personal, which made it impossible for him to regard any other man as of the same species with himself, and must have endangered his reason.¹

At this Westminster Hall exhibition I saw all my acquaintances, and among them one to whom it carried the warrant of death. I mean Haydon ... the inflation was gone; he was suddenly changed into an aged man. Every competition has its dark side; dark with a red light as of the nether pit shining through it. Youth can stand much, it takes a great deal to kill at twenty-five; but this veteran on that day was one of the most melancholy of spectacles.²

No matter to what extent more intimate knowledge of a person modifies one's judgement it is rarely that one quite supersedes a first impression and it seems probable that much of what Scott says here must be derived from his opinion of Haydon formed at their meeting in 1820. It is interesting to conjecture how far Haydon and David Scott agreed. They had a good deal in common; the unwavering pursuit of 'high art'; ambitions which outstripped their powers of execution; unpopularity with the general public and stubborn individuality; but it may well have been

1. A.N.I. 167.

2. Ibid, p.171-172.

that the like characters clashed. If we assume that William in some measure echoed David's quarrel with Haydon this argues a strong kinship between the brothers, and strengthens the suggestion that they held common ideas about art education. We have noticed that Scott chose a subject from the painter Thomson of Duddingston to prove his mastery as an engraver. Thomson himself on occasions sketched for Provincial Antiquities to which Turner was an important contributor. When the famous artist passed through Edinburgh somewhere about 1832, on a sketching tour for this publication, he was invited by Thomson to dine at the Manse. Scott had become quite friendly with the minister over the engraving of 'The Martyrs' Tombs', and so he was included in the invitation to meet Turner. As an old man he remembered this, and wrote of Turner in a slighting manner. But this account may be influenced by the fact that Scott did not particularly admire Turner's manner and disliked Ruskin's championship of him. A paragraph in an earlier book attempts to set down his impression as it was at the time of meeting Turner, with greater honesty and more essential fairness. For instance, it admits the fashionable Edinburgh attitude to the 'Cockney' School to have put Turner to immediate disadvantage, while still retaining the point that personally Scott was very disappointed with his appearance and bearing. He writes:

Turner appeared in fact, among the people there assembled as a cockney, a character then in the 'Modern Athens' visited with supreme contempt ... It is said children have an

instinctive penetration into the worth and habits of their elders; I do not think boys of nineteen have; for they are prejudiced and led away by manner and belongings. Even the black coat and metal buttons and the large cuffs that nearly covered the fingers (the black dress coat having already appeared in general evening use), made him forget the infinite skilfulness of those hands, the red unhealthiness of the eyes made him unable to observe the rigid penetration within them. Still I think the impression, which 1 was vivid, is worth putting on record and not impertinent.

Scott was right in thinking that his personal impression of Turner had a particular importance, for many years later a letter of his gave evidence that similar feelings of repugnance caused his unhappy association with the artists he was so soon to meet in London.

Turner gave the first shock to my ideals and high-strung expectations of life and, the appearance of the creature and his habits, and mental vacuity manifest in his conversation, gave me the first painful intimation that success in art has little to do with intellectual culture or the nature of a gentleman, and on living years with the set of men in my time, Frith, O'Neil, Johnstone and Calder Marshall, I found them all of the same Turneresque personality; such of the older men too of the Academy as I met I found to be the same only more maturely developed, all of them men whose practical jokes were to be accepted for wit, ... and before whom any mention of noble things was resented as an affectation or an insult, Turner being the antitype, the God. I am not sure that you will believe how much the horror and surprize of all this hurt and crippled me, a painfully sensitive morbid, self-conscious, man.²

It is true that in his native city he had met and associated with some of the most brilliant men of his time, and no doubt he had experienced a

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1. W. B. Scott, Our British Landscape Painters, From Samuel Scott to David Cox, London, p.65.
 2. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N, 8 March 1862. The comment was provoked by the appearance of The Life of J. M. W. Turner by Walter Thornbury in 1862.

certain humility before them, but he was saved from any acute sense of desolation by the fact that this was his home. He had the right connections in Edinburgh; he was introduced to its literary and artistic society with sound recommendations; he was familiar with its traditions and knew when to give respect and assent: therefore it was fair to say that he never felt awkward or embarrassed. The tale was very different when he came to London.

CHAPTER III

London, and the Prospect Before the Artist.

Scott left Edinburgh for London in 1836. He made the first part of the journey by steamer because of its cheapness, but found it so weary and uncomfortable that he came ashore at Hull and travelled the remaining distance by mail coach. He does not tell us that he carried any introductions to friends in London, and certainly he arrived there with few apparent assets except his youth and his ability as an engraver. He confesses himself that he was not sure what to expect from his move. He had the MSS. of several poems in his luggage and the sense to know that they were not likely to earn him his bread and butter. We have no extensive knowledge of the way in which Scott did in fact make a living during this period. His first lodgings sound unpretentious. They were in Panton Square, off Coventry Street, and are associated with an early experience which must have seemed proof positive of all he had heard of the hardships of a literary life, but which he describes with acquiescence and good humour:

I was awakened at a very early hour by an altercation close to my bedroom door. It slowly opened, while a female voice outside still remonstrated; then a gruff male voice replied he must see for himself, and forthwith an unmistakable executioner of the law entered, took a good look at me, apologised, and retired again.¹

1. A.N.I., 124.

Scott mentions various failures to attract notice by his etchings and engravings, but leaves no information, beyond odd remarks, of how he actually did support himself or in what circumstances.

He was able to afford a short visit to Paris with David in 1838, a fact proved by the sketches and studies preserved in the sketch books at Penkill, and before long he was able to pay his addresses to a young lady and propose marriage; all of which seems to presuppose a steady income. Scott himself says that it was the day of the Annuals, those pretty products of the Victorian era with names which evoke their character and their charm. They were 'gift-books'; collections of articles, verse and illustrations, bound in expensive and elaborate fashion. If Samuel Carter Hall is to be believed, Scott was rather unlucky in beginning his London career just as these books were going out of fashion. It seems likely that they might have proved a rich source of income, for they did indeed pay handsomely for their engraved plates after famous pictures of the day, and for their other illustrations. Scott sought to introduce a new method which he called 'the painter's etching'; less troublesome than engraving and more rapidly produced. To prove his powers he etched a series of eight illustrations to William Anderson's volume Landscape Lyrics, of 1839, which, he records, excited extraordinary attention but brought no material success. Scott gives no particular reason for choosing this book, but it is interesting to note that Anderson was himself an Edinburgh man. One can merely hazard a guess based on the

slightest evidence, but it seems possible that one occupation which Scott engaged in was the engraving of plates from pictures in the exhibitions of the British Institution and Royal Academy.¹

Scott's second experiment was again a bid to popularize his 'Painter's etching'. He chose to employ it in designing a carol of foolscap size for sale at the Christmas season. He had great difficulty in getting a publisher to accept it, and when at last one did, he received no return from sales. His next venture involved considerable labour and outlay, for it was a series of water-colour drawings illustrating the Civil War, later to be etched most carefully on steel.² The failure to find a publisher was complete, and at this point Scott turned his energies to painting, a medium in which he had, as yet, done very little. In the winter of 1833-4, he had exhibited for the first time at the Scottish Academy, sending a landscape representing a hermit at prayer in a forest, a subject suggested by Coleridge's lines in The Ancient Mariner. His first considerable picture

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1. The Athenaeum of 8 February 1840 makes mention of two engravings by a Mr. Scott; 'The Prince Albert' after Meijen Hohenberg, and 'The Prodigal Son' after Prentis. This second plate is described as being a highly finished mezzotint, free from the vice of blackness and definitely a reproduction which helps the painter. We know that Scott did obtain a commission to illustrate a collection of Nursery Rhymes of England made by James Halliwell.
 2. v. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, His Family Letters with a Memoir, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1895, II, 104, for Rossetti's opinion of this work and its subsequent fate. "I have heard several of Scott's poems, some very fine, and am going to do the etching for his Rosabell, as I proposed. By the bye, I mentioned to him that affair of The Artist, and that they would have etchings; that Brown was doing one, etc.; and he asked me yesterday whether I thought it could be managed to get them to buy some of those Commonwealth etchings of his. They are really very good ... "

painted in London was 'The Old English Ballad-Singer', which appeared at the British Institution in 1838 and was followed, at the same gallery in 1841, by 'Bell Ringers and Cavaliers celebrating the entrance of Charles II into London'. The Society of British Artists accepted three of his early pictures for exhibition at their Suffolk Street Gallery; 'The Jester' (1840); 'The Wild Huntsman'; and 'King Alfred disguised as a Harper'; while in 1842 he made his debut at the Royal Academy with a picture called 'Chaucer, John of Gaunt and their wives'.

The decision to paint was a fortunate one, celebrated almost immediately by the sale of 'The Old-English Ballad Singer'. This found a purchaser after its Exhibition at the British Institution. More important, it was the means of Scott's introduction to Samuel Carter Hall, who sought to use it for the frontispiece of his Book of British Ballads. In his autobiography Scott indulged in a hit against Hall, whom he considered to be making a shrewd bargain over the pictures and sketches he received from using young artists in return for fair praise. However that might have been, Hall was in a position to introduce a young man to a valuable circle of acquaintances, publishers, writers and artists. Scott seems to have arrived at a just estimate of Hall in his brief recollection, for the man himself, in his own autobiography, betrays his vanity and his firm belief that he gave an unrivalled start to the artists who gathered at his house. He it was who played the benefactor, and as such he

innocently enough looked for their thanks.

It is hardly necessary to say that I strove to make the evening gatherings agreeable to the artists. They met there on several occasions the authors who were heading the epoch, as well as those who have since become famous; I cannot doubt that these 'Evenings' have prominent places in the recollections of some who may, perhaps associate with them the earliest draughts they drank of the Pierian Spring, of which they have since quaffed so liberally.¹

In addition to using the 'Old English Ballad Singer' for a frontispiece, Hall engaged Scott to illustrate two or three of the ballads in his collection. One wonders if the work was particularly congenial, for Hall himself gives a vivid description of the manner in which the work was carried out under his eye. But at least it was a beginning, giving the young man some roots in London and a growing circle of friends.

Scott's success with his pictures was unfortunately not long continued, and when 'The Burgher Watch on the City Wall' and 'James VI, the Scottish Solomon, examining the Witches of North Berwick' were rejected by the Academy and the British Institution, he decided that his total achievement had not been satisfactory. This, whether with reason or not, inspired him to analyse the difficulties in the way of establishing a reputation as an artist, and first in importance he set down the exclusive exhibiting conditions which then prevailed in London. He says a word or two about them from his own point of view in his autobiography but we can read a general and less biased account in the leading periodicals of the late 1830s and 1840s. Scott argued that London offered

1. Samuel Carter Hall, Retrospect of a Long Life, London, 1883, I, 332.

very little exhibition space and listed the few galleries; the Royal Academy; the British Institution; the Suffolk Street Society of British Artists; the Old and New Water-Colour Societies. Besides remarking on the inadequacy of their space he insisted that they exercised an unfair selection and were hostile to young unestablished competitors who had thus no way of bringing their work before the public. The Academy openly asserted the privileged position of its members by restricting to them the right to see their works after they were hung and before the public were admitted. The Athenaeum allows some vigorous criticism of corrupt practices in the Academy and points to their far-reaching effects. In particular it singles out one abuse:

--- repainting, by certain members, of their works hung up for exhibition, so as to kill all other pictures round them. This privilege is not only disgraceful and dishonourable, but is sure to induce a strumpet style of colouring, as well as a hasty-fisted botchwork, no more to be called sound painting than the tarring a boat-bottom.¹

A more amusing, though equally serious, allegation brought against the British Institution was that it selected its exhibitors according to their patronage of the frame-maker's shop kept by the son of the keeper of their gallery.

Scott's personal experience, backed by the fact that 1836 saw a challenge to the position of the Royal Academy in the form of a public enquiry, seems to point to the justness of the now widespread opinion that something was sadly amiss in the relationship of artist to public,

1. v. The Athenaeum, No. 560, 21 July 1838, in a review of Painting and the Fine Arts, B. R. Haydon and W. Hazlitt.

particularly in so far as that relationship was affected by the ways in which an artist might bring his work before the public. Scott looks for the fault in the exhibiting societies which were the link between artist and public, but his account of what he found there may readily give a wrong impression. The position could not be described in terms of black and white, as Scott would have it. The established exhibiting societies were not without variation unhelpful and restrictive in their dealings with newcomers. If that had been so, the British Institution would never have won praise for its sincere attempts to promote the fine arts from a leading periodical, which said:

--- we believe the modern artists have there found patrons and that thence the public have acquired an accession of good feeling in art.¹

In 1832 the Society of Painters in Water-Colour received due praise from the art-critic of the Athenaeum, together with a comment on its vigorous condition "under the management of men of genius and enthusiasm".²

Scott comes nearer to the root of the trouble when he goes on to say that there were too many aspiring artists competing for a few small rewards and ill-paid commissions. There existed, in fact, a society of rivals, and this situation bred further trouble because the rivalry killed discussion and exchange of ideas amongst young artists. As Blackwood's Magazine significantly remarked:

Talent is even afraid of imitation.³

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1. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCLII, Vol. XL, October 1836, in a review of the British Institution Exhibition for that year.
 2. The Athenaeum, No. 238, 19 May 1832.
 3. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCLII, Vol. XL, October 1836, in its review of the Art Exhibitions of that year.

There is no doubt that Scott was fully aware of this cautious attitude amongst his fellow artists. He lamented:

---- in professional questions reticence was rather too visible - conversation could scarcely be said to exist¹,

but at the same time it seems possible that the years in London taught him to be wary in guarding his own ideas; a characteristic which was apt to seem unpleasant when it became unnecessary.

If young artists were rivals in one respect they were simultaneously drawn together to talk over their grievances and try for some redress by attempting to establish exhibitions of their own. Scott himself joined forces with such a group and says of it:

If I remember right, my first introduction to some of the ablest amongst them was a summons to a meeting for the purpose of establishing an exhibition, or some other new plan of enabling us to come before the public. At the first meeting Richard Dadd was in the chair, and Frith, Egg, Lucas, with a number of landscape painters, were assembled, and I find still existing a circular in a pretty feminine hand, dated mysteriously from the British Coffee House, Cockspur Street, 26th October, 1841, to this effect: 'The Committee beg to remind Mr. Scott that the meeting for the consideration of their Report respecting a new Exhibition is fixed for Saturday next, 30th instant, when Mr. Scott's attendance is earnestly requested. The chair will be taken at 7 o'clock precisely'.²

The exclusiveness of the major exhibiting societies, together with an acute scarcity of commissions, combined to create a situation in which it was necessary for an artist to attract attention to his work, generally at the expense of sound qualities. A relationship of supply and demand had arisen in which economic necessity had elevated the buyer to a position

1. A.N. I, 110.

2. Ibid, 110-111.

in which he could dictate the manner and subjects of art. This situation was already a reality, not a threat; and it followed that because of it, the public and their standards became a factor of real importance. Had they appreciated meaning, subtle colour and sound composition, all would have been well. It was disastrous that they were singularly un-discerning and preferred sentiment and crudity. As it was, the real quality of a picture ceased to bear any relation to the reception it was accorded.

Scott seems to have made some attempts to analyse the situation and to appeal to the public taste with his own productions, at least in subject. He distinguished a new school of painting, broadly historical, inventive and illustrative, of which Maclise was the leader. This he averred was growing steadily in popularity while Haydon, Howard, Etty and Eastlake, the artists generally associated with historic and poetic subjects, were unaware of its existence. Landscape was at a low ebb, hardly required by the public.

It was not, however, to be landscape any longer. That branch of art was at that time below zero in London. The greatest landscape painter in the world was painting 'The Casting of the Iron Duke', and 'The Jew of Venice' shaking a pair of scales out of the window of a gamboge house, and was the joke of the public.¹

Scott, writing from the artist's point of view now and not the seller's, did not hold much brief for the public who were to judge his work, and in this at least the professional critics bore him out and prophesied further deterioration.

1. A.N.I., 100. "The greatest landscape painter in the world" was J.M.W. Turner.

Public patronage and too many exhibitions tend to "fritter artistic power and lower artistic aim",¹ said the Athenaeum; and Blackwood's agreed.

He (the artist) finds that he gets his two or three hundred guineas, provided only that his pictures are like, equally whether they are good or bad; and thus, between the prestige of fashion, the intoxication of flattery, the love of money, and the seductions of ease, the artist, surrounded by an ignorant, wealthy and indiscriminating body of admirers, is gradually led down from all his youthful aspirations of excellence and talents.²

A later article in the Athenaeum is more precise in its comments. To begin with it narrows the field to the 'middle-class', the present patrons of art, and goes on:

What follows? Why, that the vast majority of works are made to suit medium taste, and wealth, and tenements; pretty, pretty things, which display domestic scenes, 'bits' of nature, or colour, or effect, portraits of dear nonentities ...³

In this opinion it has most definite points of agreement with a passage in Blackwood's of a rather earlier date, which reads:

We have left the poetry for the drudgery or mere mechanism of the art, feeling for display, and exhibit and admire our glittering gaudy wares like a nation of shopkeepers, whose glory is in the workshop and manufactory.⁴

This paragraph is interesting because it not only stigmatises public taste, but follows it through to its effects on art, and describes those qualities which were to have popular appeal. The ideas expressed in it are amplified in almost every other account of an art exhibition in

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1. The Athenaeum, No. 560, 21 July 1838, in a review of 'Painting and the Fine Arts'; B. R. Haydon and W. Hazlitt.
 2. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCXLIX, Vol. XL, July 1836.
 3. The Athenaeum, No. 560, 21 July 1838.
 4. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCLII, Vol. XL, October 1836.

Blackwood's or the Athenaeum. It is possible to analyse three main faults in the art of the mid-nineteenth century which were related to the insensitive quality of public appreciation. Blackwood's makes no uncertain thrust:

Those who think that bright blues, bright reds, and bright yellows, as little mixed as may be, will give them power, greatly err; for as they have a limited, so have they a poor palette.¹

Alongside his general criticisms it is interesting to find an independent writer touching on the same fault in an individual artist.

Samuel Carter Hall, speaking of Maclise says :

It is said he was no colourist; in one sense that may be true, for his pictures, although brilliant with colour, are often deficient in the harmony that satisfies the eye; hence a certain harshness far from agreeable, and a want of that repose which even amidst a blaze of splendour is not beyond the reach of the painter's art.²

It seemed, however, as if the pictures which were not distinguished by this over-bold colouring were open to another and more fundamental criticism.

Mere vulgarity is certainly disappearing. Insipidity, however, not works of sentiment and thought, fill too large a space --- It surely argues no good public taste when the eye seeks a gratification unconnected with intellectual and moral feeling.³

In the face of this and many similar comments, it can only be concluded, when a picture had no intellectual content, it relied on sentimentality and mechanical efficiency. A review in the Athenaeum attempted, among its general remarks, to point the balance which should exist between technical excellence and poetic spirit in a work of art:

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1. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCCXXIII, Vol. LII, September 1842, in its review of the current art exhibitions.
 2. v. Retrospect of a Long Life, II, 214.
 3. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCCXI, vol. L, September 1841, in its review of the exhibitions of the British Institution and Royal Academy.

Where its mechanism ends, its real glory begins. Not that we despise mechanism; quite the reverse --- Mechanism, when a means to accomplish great intellectual results, as fine pictures or statues, deserves the highest subordinate honour. But art were altogether beneath the level of discussion as materialized poetry, if its poetic excellence did not much predominate over its mechanical.¹

The writers of the periodicals were not entirely destructive in their criticism. They pointed to several remedies of which the most sweeping was the actual reduction of exhibition space, in the hope that this would cut out the quantity of mediocre work then accepted and encourage artists to assert their individuality and stand up for their own sense of values.

Now we are indeed making hotbeds for the growth of artists. They will be thick as peas and not so palatable - youths of large hope and little promise - some aiming beyond their reach, others striving and straining at a low Art-Union prize. Patronage can never keep pace with this 'painting' for the million system'. The world will be inundated with mediocrity -- Now let us propose a plan. Let the members of the Academy come to this resolution, that instead of exhibiting some 1300 pictures annually they will not admit into their rooms more than the 300 - and so cut off the 1000 - that the said 300 shall all have good places, and shall be the choicest works of British talent.²

In comment, one can but agree with Kenny Meadows, the artist and illustrator, whose pun was retailed by Scott.

The talk about fresco and the palette proper to it, a palette of earths, tired him out: 'You talk of ochres, but the worst of all you have not named though it is the commonest - that's the mediocre!'

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1. The Athenaeum, No. 612, 20 July 1839, in a review of The Art of Painting, by J. F. L. Meninee, and On Painting, by T. H. Fielding.
 2. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCCXXXIV, Vol. LIV, August 1843.
 3. A.N. I, 114.

Action by the exhibiting societies was in the nature of an immediate remedy. Any more far-reaching reform involved the need to create a discerning public, which was necessarily a slow process. This is worth noting as one of the problems the Government set out to tackle by the formation of a national system of Schools of Design. Haydon may well have been right in his opinion that state patronage of fine art was the only solution. Most certainly the state was the only body with sufficient money and space at its command to commission historical painting and 'high art'.

We have seen how individual critics aired their views and suggested their remedies, but it seems certain that the official bodies did not truly know how to escape from the situation; witness the muddled thinking which characterised the establishment of schools of design. The exhibiting societies maintained that the fault did not lie with them. They queried the quality of the work offered to them, and found it on the whole, to be poor. At the same time they considered that the artists constantly needed the most obvious flaws to be pointed out to them; which function they claimed to perform. The artists seem to have created their own difficulty by their numbers, and the situation might be fairly summarised as one in which it was not so much discouragement from outside which kept down aspiring men, as the very conditions of rivalry and lack of definite standards within their ranks.

It seems, in fact, as if the early years of the century did not offer

happy prospects for Scott. He was as yet unused to making a song about himself. His choice, had he been free, would have been for landscape painting, and the wisdom of this is borne out by the quality of his early studies and sketches. Unfortunately it was not wanted by the public. Engraving offered a certain security, but it is unlikely that Scott would have had any great success in engraving his own designs, when the requirement of the time was for men to render the quality of other artists' work. For, as it was said:

engraving does not profess to be in itself a perfect work,
but to give some idea of another,¹

not the ideal task for a man of strong and unusual ideas.

1. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCIX, Vol. XXXIII, June 1833,
in The Sketcher II.

CHAPTER IV

The Establishment of Schools of Design

The need for a School of Design was first brought to public notice in a year when the Government were already quite fully occupied with preparations for their grandiose scheme of decorating the new Houses of Parliament. Lack of visible results should not blind anyone to the value of this venture, for it stimulated the interest of the country in 'high art' and promoted much discussion both technical and aesthetic. Undoubtedly it helped to produce the necessary climate of opinion for the prospering of a reform in matters of art and particularly applied art. Fortunately the Government were not too engrossed in enhancing their new quarters to neglect making a full inquiry when in 1835 a question about the condition of British industrial designing was asked in Parliament by the Radical leader Joseph Hume. In response to his query a Select Committee was at once appointed. This body, under the chairmanship of William Ewart, M.P. for Liverpool, commenced meeting in June 1836 to inquire into the best means of extending a knowledge of the arts and of the principles of design among the people of the country, and especially among the manufacturing population. Because of recent comments about the administration of the Royal Academy, it also looked into the constitution, management and results obtained by these institutions connected with the arts which already existed. It will be clear that the subjects to be studied by the Committee did not represent a capricious or untimely

departure from the practical work of decorating the Houses of Parliament which the Government already had in hand; nor were they unrelated to that general concern for the future of the British school of painting which we have witnessed in the 1830s and 1840s.

Two entirely new ideas distinguished the final Report of the Select Committee.⁽¹⁸³⁾ Previous inquiries had always been limited to the field of fine art, but here particular attention was paid to problems of design in manufacture, and this branch of art was treated with a new respect. Equally new and welcome were the precise recommendations made in the Report about education in art.. These were a step forward from former hazy discussions about means of fostering good taste among the general public.

The crux of the Report was its assumption, made both in the title and in the body of the text, that there is a close connection between fine art and applied art, and that both should command equal respect. This was the point destined to be taken up and made the centre of most fierce debate. In fact feeling ran so high that the quarrel threatened to impede what was valuable in the early Schools of Design. Haydon, whose authority cannot be discounted, agreed with the conclusion of the Select Committee and expressed his opinions before public debate had invited prejudice. As early as 1832 he wrote:

There is a committee on the silk trade, and their talk of 'design' had no reference to 'High Art'. I said 'That was the mistake. There could be no design if there was no connection with the foundation of all design'.¹

In 1834 he repeated his belief:

Design is the basis of Art, and a basis of such breadth that manufactures, as well as Art, rest in its excellence.²

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1. B. R. Haydon, Autobiography and Memoirs, ed. by Aldous Huxley, London, 1926, II, 529-530.
 2. Ibid, p.564.

The opposition, however, replied with equal decision, basing their argument on two main theses. First they contended that applied art aims at a different effect from fine art, for:

--- manufacturers are employed upon that sort of ornament which shall please the eye, by easy, and, if you please, graceful lines, and harmony of colours; nothing being to be represented, either in exact similitude of anything in nature, or of such a character as to affect the mind through the passions or intellectual research. This wide prohibition to the one is the proper field of the other - the marked out province of art.¹

It is true that the case for the opposition was strengthened by the fact that applied art of every kind, whether china, ornaments, carpets or patterned material, was of a very low standard. In England the designing of commercial products had until now been treated as the ugly duckling amongst its sister arts. While in the field of fine art many attempts had been made to offer artists an opening, and to promote the education of public taste by better exhibiting conditions, exhibitions of contemporary art alongside old masters and the establishment of 'art unions' for purchasing pictures by moderate subscriptions, no one concerned himself with the taste the public showed when they purchased the products of the many new factories. Applied art was in a serious plight because it did not attract that interest and discussion which at least made artists aware of their problems. George Darley was the exception when he deplored the utilitarian taste of the period, blaming middle-class patronage of which he said that it was satisfied with artistic products "undertaken by contract, executed per order, put forth in the gross and paid for in the lump, showy and perishable --".²

1. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCCVII, Vol. XLIX, May 1841.
2. C. C. Abbott, The Life and Letters of George Darley, 1928, p.167.

In a problem of this kind one must remember that reform cannot come from one direction only. There are three groups concerned; the manufacturer, the working designer and the public, and much of the difficulty in improving the quality of industrial products is caused because the interests of the three are by no means identical. In assessing the conditions which faced the Ewart Select Committee it would be well to look briefly at the contribution made by each of these groups.

The manufacturers, with some justice, claimed that for economic reasons they must supply what the public liked, very much as we have seen the artists claim that economic reasons forced them to paint the kind of pictures which would sell. In truth however the British manufacturer would have been hard pressed to produce a higher standard of goods because he had neglected the native talent for industrial designing which could have no way of expression or development except through employment in the new factories. This neglect was closely connected with a tradition amongst manufacturers that the French were the pre-eminent pattern designers and that the British could not compete. At root it was economics rather than aesthetics which brought the manufacturers to this opinion, for it was cheaper to import patterns from France or even to copy them and to combine fragments from various borrowed patterns than to encourage the talent of British designers and employ resident artists who might study the manufacture of one particular product and adapt pattern and form to material and process.

This state of affairs was a serious challenge to the life and vigour of British industrial design and was all the more grievous because the country

could outmatch any in the quality of her machinery and manufacturing processes. Yet all this technical skill was wasted so long as her craftsmen were a dying class and her artists were indifferent to problems of industrial art because they had no opportunity to study the materials for which they were asked to design. The situation was admirably summed up by Sir Henry Cole, one of the men who worked most tirelessly to improve the quality of applied art. He wrote:

Manufacturing skill is pre-eminent and abounds; but artistic skill has to be wedded with it --- It is the purpose of this collection* --- to revive the good old practice of connecting the best art with familiar objects in daily use. In doing this, art-manufacturers will aim to produce in each article superior utility, which is not to be sacrificed to ornament; to select pure forms; to decorate each article with appropriate details relating to its use, and to obtain these details as directly as possible from nature.¹

The manufacturers themselves laid the blame for the low artistic standard of their products with the public, and they did not lack support for their opinion. Scott agreed with their censure when he wrote that the most vulgar and gaudy kinds of decoration proved profitable because they were going to 'uncultivated buyers'² but he condemned the manufacturers in their turn for continuing to exploit this lack of taste. He earnestly desired to see reform,

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1. Sir Henry Cole, Fifty Years of Public Work, London, 1884, I, 108.
* The collection referred to is Summerly's Art Manufactures, an illustrated book of suggested designs for pottery etc. which was published by Cole, under the nom de plume of Felix Summerly, in 1847.
 2. The Fortnightly Review, No. XLVI New Series, 1 October 1870, W. B. Scott 'Ornamental Art in England'. The danger of manufacturers being quick to suit their products to the public taste is emphasised by a remark Sir Henry Cole made about Minton, of the famous firm of china manufacturers, that 'he dreaded the retailers of London, who at that time ruled manufacturers with a rod of iron--'.

both by the training and employing of better designers in the factories, and by the slower method of educating public taste. Scott pinned great faith on this second method and looked for the time when it would succeed in raising the standard of the products which manufacturers might hope to sell. He wrote:

It is in directing the public mind, in cultivating the selecting taste, and making it more difficult to please, that the work lies for the public teacher; not by any means in increasing the amount of decoration ---. There has indeed been of late years a multifarious competition in splendour and novelty current in art workmanship and it is this wants direction. The love of the gorgeous - is the appetite that affects us in England, and has hitherto overdone everything in decoration.¹

The final report of the Ewart Committee deprecated the want of means for instruction in design in the principal seats of manufacturing industry and added to this conclusion three recommendations of a thoroughly practical nature; the establishment of a central School of Design supplemented by grants to local schools; the formation of museums and art galleries; and the establishment of a cheap and accessible tribunal to protect inventions and designs. On the whole the complaints levelled against the Royal Academy were dismissed as jealous and ill-founded, though the difficulties of its semi-public, semi-private nature were remarked.

The Committee had amassed a great deal of evidence by examining manufacturers, connoisseurs, picture-cleaners and dealers, Royal Academicians and artists of every rank. It seems certain that at first the gain in theoretical knowledge and the mass of evidence collected by the committee

1. Ibid.

was more valuable to the country than the School of Design itself. Public interest centred not so much on the progress of the School and the conduct of its classes as upon the debate between fine art and applied art outlined in this chapter. It is only fair to insist that this was not a purely local or a petty quarrel. Neither side seem to have realised that fine art and industrial art has this in common, that, whether it please them or not, they are joint heirs to the ills caused by lack of discrimination in public taste, and would therefore be wise to join forces in the matter of educating the public. There was no room for a breach between branches of art at this particular period. It is interesting to note that the very substance of the debate had a long history in European art-education, a history too lightly overlooked by those who planned the British Schools of Design. The quarrel had its origin in the time of Leonardo da Vinci, who endeavoured to introduce a new attitude to painting, regarding it as a science rather than a manual skill. This brought about the first break with the medieval tradition which had always held that painting and sculpture were crafts in no way superior to any others, and introduced a new emphasis on art education in which knowledge superseded skill. Leonardo's new attitude to fine art meant in its turn a different social position for the artist, for, if he was no longer a craftsman then he forfeited his place in the ordered medieval social pattern. It was respect for craftsmanship of every kind which the Schools of Design most needed to restore.

The Government, troubled now by the urgency of the need, sought to give

immediate help and to bring encouragement to British designers. There was no delay in settling administrative details and actually setting up a School of Design. As early as August 1836 the Government had made a grant of £1500 "towards the establishment of a School of Design for the improvement of our national manufactures", a measure which, The Athenaeum declared in dramatic fashion "comes not a day too soon".¹ It was settled that the school itself should occupy the apartments at Somerset House lately vacated by the Royal Academy, which had moved to the National Gallery. Its beginnings were modest, unblest by any notable public response, and not even favoured by thorough understanding on the part of the artists who were consulted. The first minutes were dated from the Board of Trade, 19 December 1836, when Paulett Thomson, President of the Board explained to seven gentlemen who had been called upon to form a council what the Government sought to accomplish. None of the gentlemen was however able to advise on how it might be effected. The council consisted of four Royal Academicians, A. W. Calcott, Sir F. Chantrey, C. R. Cockerell and C. L. Eastlake; together with four Members of Parliament; three experts in their particular branch of industrial art, Alderman Copeland as a consultant for china, Apsley Pellatt for glass and Thomson for calico-printing; and H. Bellenden Kerr, the ardent advocate of popular education.

At the next meeting John Papworth, the architect and designer, was appointed director. He had previously given evidence before the Ewart Select Committee and had been consulted by the government respecting the formation of

1. The Athenaeum, 20 August 1836.

the School of Design. The details of the organisation and arrangements were in his hands, and he was assisted by his son John as secretary. A headmaster was also appointed at a salary of £150 a year, and an assistant master in modelling who was to receive £70 a year for a six day week. The school opened in June 1837 without attracting great attention. Advertisements had appeared in several newspapers and by July 8 applicants had been admitted. It seems that the numbers did not increase with any rapidity, for in March 1838 Haydon noted in his diary:

Called in at the School of Design, Somerset House. My Heavens - what a scene! Eight or nine poor boys drawing paltry patterns; no figures, no beautiful forms.¹

The existing arrangements continued for a year and then a more economical arrangement appeared to the council to be necessary, so Papworth and his son retired.

The Government certainly seem to have endeavoured to make the fullest inquiries, and to establish the School of Design on a sound theoretical basis. Confidence in their wisdom is strengthened by their decision to consult William Dyce^{*}, a most well-informed if not a highly original artist. He was living in Edinburgh and had already been appointed as an advisor to the Trustees' Academy there. This long-established institute had originally been formed by subscriptions from a number of manufacturers in order to train designers for their products, but it was in advance of its time and very quickly became a conventional art-school teaching pupils to draw from a

1. B. R. Haydon, Autobiography and Memoirs, ed. by Aldous Huxley, London, 1926, II, 632.

* Dyce had studied and painted for a considerable time in Rome. He worked in the Pre-Raphaelite manner before the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. His own preference was for large historical and religious subjects but he found that portraits were the only things likely to sell and he painted many fine ones, simple and vigorous. He was a learned student of art and his pictures were always in the most refined taste.

collection of casts from life. At the same time as the Government were considering the establishment of a School of Design in London the Board of Trustees made an independent move to get back to their original connection with manufacturing and industrial design. The Council of the School of Design heard of Dyce's commission to advise on the best means of carrying out this purpose, joined in the scheme and sent Dyce abroad to visit and report on continental schools with a similar function. On his return in 1838 he was appointed director of the Somerset House school and made a report of his findings. Scott singled him out as the first person really to distinguish the purpose and plan the administration of these schools. He wrote:

This Report by Dyce --- was in fact the first step towards bringing about an understanding of the work in hand, and the book of progressive lessons afterwards prepared by him was the first practical measure for the curriculum to be enforced; the casts and a few other objects purchased by him abroad being also materials for the more advanced instruction.¹

In spite of their very commendable care to have expert advice the Council of the School of Design failed to realise that theirs was a special case and that the European Schools which they took as a model had grown out of a different tradition and needs. It was impractical to look to France, Germany and Bavaria for specific guidance unless there was a close analogy between the conditions and purpose of schools of design in these countries and in England. Nicolaus Pevsner^{*} has traced the continuity of development of art institutions in Europe from the time when artists emancipated themselves from the guilds only to fall bound in an even closer service to the Court in the France of

1. The Fortnightly Review, 'Ornamental Art in England'.
* v. Academies of Art, Past and Present, C.U.P., 1940.

Louis XIV. After the breakdown of the guilds, the artists maintained their social position and dignity by Academies, and finally asserted their absolute independence by denying that they owed any service to the public. Pevsner makes the point that the problem of the guilds in relation to art was absent from England. Yet the Government thought to adopt with sudden legislation a type of education which depended upon a complete relationship of artist and public absent from the history of English art. It was such lack of understanding combined with indecision over questions of basic policy which made the early years of the school such a laborious struggle. I have tried to show that the Government freely adopted the opinion of the 1836 Select Committee that there was a close connection between arts and manufacturers, and braved the opposition on this score. Strangely enough, when it came to planning the curriculum of the Somerset House School they seemed to retreat from this definite stand. In its early career, the school was attacked by manufacturers who said that the classes were encouraging workmen to rise above their station:

Why all must draw, I cannot conceive; and why it should not be left to those who have a talent and fancy for it, without our hot-bedding these manufacture sprouts, and petting them till they grew up, the greater part of them, rank things, all stalk and no head.¹

The attack was seconded by the teachers of fine art who said that the schools were taking the bread out of their mouths. Instead of being sufficiently decisive in their answer the Council evaded the issue by endeavouring to teach design without trespassing in the realm of fine art. Moreover they acquiesced in the fear voiced by the Ewart Committee :

1. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, No. CCCVII, Vol. XLIX, May 1841.

--- that the unsuccessful aspirants after the higher branches of the arts will be infinitely multiplied, and the deficiency in manufacturing articles will not be supplied.¹

So that they might not be accused of specifically training artists, they banned figure drawing from the curriculum. Early in 1837 Haydon learnt by hearsay of this omission in the classes planned under Paulett Thomson. He threw himself heart and soul into the opposition, going to the lengths of assisting Ewart, Wyse and others to establish an opposition school with a model, at Savile House. This was not closed until 1839, when it had forced the Somerset House school to introduce drawing from the living figure; though as late as 1843, when Scott went to the Branch Government School at Newcastle, drawing from the figure was forbidden and he found occasion to remark on the folly of such a restriction.

The Council attempted to answer the criticism of the private teachers of art by a regulation which said that "Fine Art students were strictly excluded, and all who did not profess to be or intend being pattern drawers."² This was not however the end of their difficulties. The manufacturers, realising that the school had come to stay, now expected quite wrong results from it. There was one great difficulty:

--- the impatience of the public and the students, an impatience founded on ignorance and supported by the mistake of calling them 'Schools of Design', whose great work must ever be elementary, and was so at first exclusively. At the end of the very first year of the existence of these establishments, new and improved designs for the local trades were expected.³

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1. The Athenaeum, 29 October 1836, quoted this extract from the evidence laid before the Ewart Committee.
 2. The Fortnightly Review, 'Ornamental Art in England'.
 3. Ibid.

Dyce remained as Director of the school until 1843, and during this period the first Branch schools were established. This was a development which had been anticipated in the original outline of the scheme. A grant of £10,000 was made to meet the needs of expansion and in 1841 Birmingham, Sheffield and York had teachers and furniture sent down to them. Nottingham, Coventry and Newcastle made applications for aid from the central fund and in one after another of the big manufacturing centres, schools were set up. Over the same period the numbers at the Somerset House School increased to 178; Charles Heath Wilson succeeded Dyce as Director; and the organisation remained basically unaltered but not unchallenged until 1851. Heath-Wilson, for example, attracted a considerable amount of personal dislike and was finally displaced at the instance of a faction led by J. R. Herbert, R.A. A younger contemporary wrote of him:

On the 31st of August, 1845, Punch had a caricature of Wilson headed 'A Night Scene at the School of Bad Designs'. The boy who is trying to copy a colossal female bust, but is shadowed by the podgy standing figure of the head master, C. H. Wilson - 'a capital portrait', in shepherd's plaid and with a Glengarry cap on his foxy hair - says to him: 'If you please, sir, you are standing in our light'.¹

We hear very little officially about results during the years before the Great Exhibition. In 1843 Samuel Carter Hall made a tour of the various manufacturing towns and found conditions which caused him deep concern. He commented on what he saw in his memoirs, but was pleased to add that the situation was substantially altered by the 1870s. His description is at once amusing and depressing:

1. John Collins Francis, Notes by the Way, London, 1909, p.294.

The carpets of Kidderminster were disfigured by roses in size a foot square, temples, rock work, and so forth. At the Staffordshire Potteries bad taste was the rule. The public preferred ugliness, and ugliness had to be provided for them.¹

Scott had evidently found similar 'horrors', for he says:

Ormolu stems and leaves bear porcelain flowers painted to imitate nature, and candles are made to rise out of tulips and china asters, while gas-jets gush forth from opal arums.²

There seems no doubt that Hall made vigorous personal efforts to counter the deplorable taste which he found to be typical of the country. He had a powerful and influential weapon to hand in the Art Journal, of which he was proprietor and editor. This magazine, under the name of the Art Union, issued its first part in 1839, and for nine years struggled to build up a public interested in a periodical devoted exclusively to fine art. In its pages Hall began his reform by publishing engravings of the products of manufacturers, while all the while urging that the next step should be a vast Exhibition of manufactured goods. He, in fact, claimed that his comment on the 1844 Exposition of Art Industry held at Paris, in which he recommended a similar experiment in England, was the stimulus which led to the Great Exhibition of 1851. But before this, the lack of results had inspired two prominent men to query the value of the schools as they were then organised. In 1846, Richard Redgrave wrote a letter to Lord John Russell on the necessity of re-constituting the schools. An inquiry before the Committee of the Board of Trade followed, and was succeeded by a Select Committee of the House of

1. Samuel Carter Hall, Retrospect of a Long Life, London, 1883, p.370.
2. The Fortnightly Review, 'Ornamental Art in England'.

Commons in 1849. Henry Cole, who was known for his long study of the technical arts, drew up a series of reports for this committee and in the third commented:

Looking to the want of sympathy and cordial co-operation everywhere; to the neglect of the provincial schools, and their gradual decline, to instances of improvident expenditure; to the daily growing dissatisfaction of manufacturers; and, in short, to the absence of any palpable satisfactory results about which there could be no disputes, I find my opinion of the unsatisfactory working of the school so confirmed, that I am impelled to express my belief, that by no means short of a complete change of system can the School fulfil its object, and its duty to the public.¹

Cole himself felt that the Great Exhibition postponed the re-organisation of the School of Design, though he had to admit that it made plain the low standards of artistic products and in this way gave point to his argument. Scott, on the other hand, held that the Great Exhibition was the turning-point in the history of the Schools of Design, for by gathering together representative products of British manufacture and showing them alongside foreign products, the country was forced to see demonstrated the poverty-stricken quality of her own applied art.

Although it had been proved that Schools of Design, as they were then organised, had achieved very little practical improvement, they were evidently acknowledged to be fundamentally sound and therefore capable of reorganisation and development. Sir Henry Cole gives a quotation taken originally from The Times of 7 October 1876 which is a fair summing up:

1. Appendix to the Report from the Select Committee on the School of Design, 1849, quoted by Sir Henry Cole in Fifty Years of Public Work, I, 114. The school is that at Somerset House.

The mode of training the country to improve itself and its trades by a cultivation of the arts, was misunderstood, and the key-note of the work to be done was not really struck until after the Exhibition of 1851. For about eleven years the Schools of Design had been leading a precarious existence. They had cost the country an average of about £10,000 a year for eleven years, and the Government really had no option but to take the work seriously in hand, and to relieve the irresponsible and unsuccessful Council of the Schools of Design of the burden of further operations.¹

When the Surplus Exhibition Fund of £170,000 was appropriated to their use, the Council was called upon to give a much clearer definition of its future policy. In 1852, when J. W. Henley was President of the Committee of Council for Trade, the reorganisation began in earnest. In 1852, Henry Cole, who had lately played a leading part in preparations for the Great Exhibition, proposed changing the name of the School of Design. It then became known as the Department of Practical Art and the President of the Board of Trade suggested that, since it was now so greatly enlarged, its management should be given to two men, one an artist and one a layman. Redgrave and Cole were therefore appointed to these posts. A most discerning Report by Redgrave was made the basis of the changes. The curriculum became more liberal and freely embraced figure-drawing, perspective and mechanical drawing. The most significant introduction was that of a training-class for certificated masters. Cole was a strong supporter of this measure for he felt that the old system of employing masters not specifically trained in ornamental art had been the cause of much misdirected effort in the schools.

1. Ibid, p. 281.

Candidates for masterships in the Schools for Design, he wrote:

--- sought their appointments by the usual means. An unsuccessful artist or drawing master submitted testimonials from persons having parliamentary or other interest with the Government; no proof was required that the candidate could teach a class or possessed the special requisites for conducting a school. The specimens of his work which the candidate submitted often proved that he was unable to execute the standard examples used in the Schools of Design, and that he was scarcely acquainted with the system of instruction.¹

The orthodoxy of this new scheme made the old method of staffing the schools seem like a symbol of the experimental and unorganised character of the first fourteen years of their history. Although Scott considered that the schools had now reached an admirable stage of organisation he did not hesitate to point out what might prove a danger:

The men certificated were not artists, and knew little beyond what they had gained in training, whereas the Schools of Art were intended to embrace the highest branches of design, and none but an artist can be expected to teach the human figure with effect.²

In the following years the main changes were those symptomatic of growing strength and expansion. In 1852 the premises at Somerset House were exchanged, by Royal permission, for accommodation at Marlborough House, and it was there that the nucleus of the great Museum was formed which was later transferred to South Kensington. This move was made in 1855, and two years later a long-awaited change of attitude was given expression in the transfer of the Science and Art Department from the jurisdiction of the Board of Trade to the Committee of Council on Education.

1. Ibid, p.298.

2. The Fortnightly Review, 'Ornamental Art in England'.

The Second Great Exhibition was held in 1862 and at last the time had come when the quality of the decorative art exhibited by Britain could bear comparison with that of any other country and even excited continental visitors to praise and fear of worthy rivalry. English critics, strangely enough, were more grudging, and chose this moment to question the management of the Department of Science and Art.

In response to their allegations, a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to inquire into the conditions and working of the Schools of Art, and made its report in July 1864. It began by reviewing the whole scheme and agreed that the period 1837-52 had been experimental and, in a sense, unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the Committee made it plain that it believed that elementary art education and the study of industrial design were matters which would never again be neglected in this country.

CHAPTER V

London: Friends and Activities.

Scott arrived in London with some sort of programme in his mind. He no doubt felt the need for getting right away from his family responsibilities and from any parental control. In fairness one must add that he was neither thoughtless nor selfish when he left his home, but realised that if he was to develop his poetic and artistic powers he must go out into a less sheltered, and at the same time less restricted, society than that of Edinburgh. He used these years in London to look about him; to make friends in the artistic, literary and publishing worlds and to assess the commercial prospects of art. From the beginning Scott readily accepted the fact that his proposal to keep himself by the proceeds of his writing and painting would result in a certain loss of personal choice in the kind of work he produced, while paradoxically it was his bid for economic independence. He lamented:

The difference between what one can do best and what one likes to do, and what one must do, is too dreadful.¹

His ambition was to make a name as an artist, and even book-illustration seems to have been a concession to economic necessity. Poetry cannot have occupied him very seriously, for Rosabell, published in 1837, belonged to the Edinburgh days, and his only other publication between 1836 and 1844, was Hades; or The Transit: and The Progress of Mind, two poems which appeared in book form in 1839.

1. A.N.I. 103.

It seems fair to emphasise that Scott's work for S. C. Hall afforded an excellent means of introduction to the kind of men he needed to know. While engaged on the illustrations for The Book of British Ballads he worked with rising young artists such as E. M. Ward, Dadd, Frith, Fenniel, Noel Paton, John Gilbert and Richard Redgrave. Many writers have made the point that London artistic and literary society was hard competitive ground, where sociability counted for a great deal. Scott confesses that he never felt altogether at ease with these artist friends he made and adds that he found them unwilling to share ideas or discuss their work. We have no real indication of the young man's temperament during this important period when he was broadening his horizons. It is only possible to guess from odd remarks that he was fairly quiet, perhaps a little awkward and more than ever conscious of the narrow and gloomy nature of his home background. At Penkill there is a striking youthful portrait of William, painted in oils by David Scott, which shows him to have had dark hair and a satanic but remarkably handsome face.¹

At all events he took a thorough-going dislike to the bohemianism and easy gaiety he found in London. Kenny Meadows the illustrator, friend of Laman Blanchard and Douglas Jerrold, introduced him to the Garrick Club where he felt embarrassed because the society there "seemed all preternaturally shrewd and sharp, and initiated in some mental freemasonry I could not enter".²

1. There is the original portrait by David Scott and a copy by W. B. Scott.
2. A.N.I. 113.

The Athenaeum reviewer of Autobiographical Notes finds sufficient explanation for Scott's attitude in his native lack of a sense of humour, and maintains that this group of men really were genial and jocund had Scott had the wits to appreciate them. He writes:

When Bell Scott first came to London the set in which he moved was amazingly unlike the Pre-Raphaelite group with which his name is associated; it was the Covent Garden group of poets, painters, and wits of whom Douglas Jerrold was the centre.

One can already judge what type of person Scott was by the company in which he was happy. He found literary friends more welcoming than artists, and turned to an older writer for one of his pleasantest friendships. This was Leigh Hunt; strange choice for a man of Edinburgh upbringing. Scott does not tell us how he obtained an introduction to Hunt, though it may have been that he submitted to him the poem Rosabell. This, along with a paper on "Hints towards a Right Appreciation of Pictures" eventually appeared in the Monthly Repository, then, for a short while from 1837-8, under Hunt's editorship. Scott may of course have dared to seek him out because of his connections with Keats and Shelley, for Scott's juvenile verses to these two poets declare his admiration for them, but, however it was, the gracious old gentleman living in straightened circumstances became a firm friend.

Scott has left a most sympathetic account of Hunt, marred by no attempts to moralise about Hunt's lack of initiative and incurable but disastrous optimism.

1. The Athenaeum, No. 3405, 28 January 1893.

At the moment I was contented with Hunt, who had shared the fate of all men who have been connected even in an accidental way with others of greater genius as unpopular as themselves. The malignity with which he had been treated made me hold him in greater esteem, and I was amused to find the man and his conversation identical with his literary style, both of thought and expression. This left no room to doubt that the optimism, geniality and mild wisdom we find in his works was entirely natural to him, ... His changes of mood and expression all belonged to one class, that of thoughtful amiability; to expect him to be troubled by many things other men feel of paramount importance one very soon saw to be out of the question. The limitations of his nature were, I fancy, just as obvious as the excellences --- I have often thought over Dickens's attack, but without understanding why a man of his temperament should, so late in the day, renew the old misrepresentations of so mild and even natured and unfortunate a man as Leigh Hunt.¹

A contemporary sketch by Scott shows Hunt, G. H. Lewes, Vincent Hunt and the artist himself in conversation round the fire and suggests pleasant evenings spent in this fashion.² It also introduces G. H. Lewes, a friend made at Hunt's introduction. He was then a young man of about twenty, but already possessed of the exuberance and confidence which distinguished his character and prompted Scott to feel in his company something of the same sort of awkwardness as he did in the Jerrold circle. Lewes was a man to feel thoroughly at home amongst the conversations and arguments of a club. Somewhere about 1836 he was attending meetings of a group of working-class men in the parlour of a tavern in Holborn, where Spinoza was discussed with great earnestness if not equal insight.³ In 1844 he took David Masson to a more select club in Northumberland Street where literary men gathered informally. Masson's description of it is interesting because there seems

1. A.N.I. 126-127.

2. The etching is reproduced in A.N.I. 130.

3. V. G. H. Lewes on his Club in The Fortnightly Review, 1 April 1866.

little doubt that it was the kind of gathering into which Lewes tried, without happy results, to introduce Scott. He writes:

In an upper room of this house I found a number of men seated, some on chairs, some on wooden benches, talking and smoking - not more than twenty, perhaps, altogether. Lewes pointed out some of them to me. One was Douglas Jerrold, whom I had not seen before. There was a good deal of talk going on among them, but nothing of any special interest to me. I do not know what may have been the case on other occasions, but that evening was rather dull, though I had an impression that Douglas Jerrold was the talker most in request.

In spite of an unfavourable opinion, Masson does not omit to mention the value of frequenting such a club for the influential people, editors and publishers, one met there. This was a recommendation, one feels, which must have had force with Scott.

However the young man felt, he must have fallen in with Lewes' way of life to some extent. They were soon on intimate terms, meeting at Hunt's or talking far into the night in Scott's first studio at 31 Edward Street, London. This kind of friendship did not outlast their bachelor days, but Lewes was one of the men Scott looked out when he returned to London after his retirement. It was not an unruffled friendship even in the early days. Lewes had an irritating habit, which Scott very soon noticed, of acquiring his friends' ideas and subsequently treating them as his own. They had a slight disagreement over a set of designs, called Chorea Sancti Viti, which Scott was then evolving. There were twelve of these, which sought to represent stages in the life of the self-seeking man, but they were more remarkable

1. David Masson, Memories of London in the 'Forties, Edinburgh: London, 1908, pp. 211 - 212.

for invention and thought than for artistic merit. Lewes took up their idea with enthusiasm and proposed to write a commentary to the designs, but Scott concluded that he was to be relegated to the position of an illustrator and declined the offer. The series of designs was not published until 1851 and in 1863 it was republished with a poetical commentary by W. H. Budden, a Newcastle friend. When the book appeared in 1851, Lewes, then writing opera criticisms in The Leader, wove into one of these a rhetorical description of the young Scott, and added that for himself merely to look at the volume recalled "The days of hope, of labour, of intense ambition." He went on:

Some thirteen years were pushed aside, and once more I was sitting beside the grave and high-minded Scott, in his low-roofed study, crammed with books, casts, wood blocks, sketches and papers. There we spent so many elevating hours,

'Talking of lovely things that conquer Death'

striving to assist the struggling new birth of thought - to become clearer to each other and to ourselves. He was at that period a wood-engraver by profession; but a poet, a philosopher, and artist by ambition. The wood-blocks gave him bread; art gave occupation to his soul; reverie sweetened life; hope beautified it. He led a lonely life, but he led it like a noble soul. To see him, to know him, was an influence not to be forgotten. Sad he was; or should I not say, grave? Nature had given him a melancholy soul, which made him incline to the mystic thinkers;¹

This is in some senses an astonishing description, at once romantic and patronising, and Scott's sense of humour was evidently not sufficient for him to take it kindly. He quotes it incorrectly in Autobiographical Notes, with a cold distaste, though it seems probable that the emphasis on gravity and high-mindedness is true enough.

1. The Leader, 5 July 1851.

How lonely Scott was in London we cannot know, but after he had to some extent lost sight of Lewes, he made a very dear friend in Tom Sibson, an artist. Sibson's was a nature to appeal to Scott; candid, serious and determined to succeed by personal discipline and effort. He had already had considerable success in book illustrating, but his life was overshadowed by the presence of consumption and he died at Malta in 1844 before he could enjoy the training in art which he longed to have. While he still lived in London he studied on his own in an effort to improve his drawing and found an equally keen companion in Scott. Their common friend at this time was Ralph Nicholson Wornum, later Secretary of the National Gallery, and the three young men met every Saturday morning to draw from the life for an hour and a half.¹

Scott gives the impression that he made a considerable number of friends and acquaintances in London, but there is no way of knowing how far this is a symptom of egotism, implying his own pleasantness and social success. He admits the necessity of sympathy and companionship to a man of his temperament and tells us that he has been favoured by a succession of friendships, all absorbing at the time, but unreluctantly replaced in the face of altered circumstances. It is interesting to note that he mentions William Shand, Thomas Sibson and Dante Gabriel Rossetti as his most valued friends.

The book illustrating world had proved a happy one for Scott. It was in this connection that he met W. J. Linton, of whom he wrote:

1. A few of Scott's nude studies made at this time are preserved in Vol. I of Studies, Sketches, Designs, etc., which he collected and bound in four volumes October 1861.

He was a believer in me; one of the friends and lovers I have never been without, who have persisted in the belief that I would sooner or later do something surprising.¹

This was a different quality of friendship, not so intense as that with Lewes and Sibson, but certainly enduring. Linton left London in 1844, about the same time as Scott. He bought Brantwood on the east side of Coniston Lake and there he married his second wife, Miss Eliza Lynn, the novelist. She attempted to bring some order into his unruly household and insisted that the family should move to London. They lived in Leinster Square from 1856 - 1862, when Mrs. Lynn-Linton records that Scott was a visitor. He also saw Linton on the latter's occasional visits to Joseph Cowen, a political friend in Newcastle. Linton and his wife did not find their marriage harmonious and eventually they separated, remaining friendly and corresponding, but never seeing each other again. Linton went to America but Scott kept in touch with him, and in his will there is a bequest to his old friend.

Although Scott tells us a great deal about his friends and acquaintances he does not insist upon the most interesting personal relationship of these years, that with his future wife, Letitia Margery Norquoy. He met her at the house of Dr. John Epps the homoeopath who had studied medicine at Edinburgh and was a family friend of the Scotts. Miss Norquoy had gone to school with Miss Elliott, later Mrs. Epps, and they remained life-long friends, Letitia accompanying them on pleasure outings and holidays. Violet Hunt tells us

1. A.N.I., 121.

that Miss Norquoy was "the daughter of a rich Ceylonese tea-planter",¹ but in all probability William Michael Rossetti is more accurate when he says that Miss Norquoy's father was a sea-faring man.² She certainly came from a respectable and comfortably situated family for her Aunt, Mrs. Barry, left her a life annuity. Before her marriage with Scott she had a severe illness, so desperate that she is said to have offered to release him from the engagement. There is a delicate sketch of her in the Penkill Sketch-books, showing a slight, pretty girl with a wilful expression. This is dated July, 1838, and has a note in pencil: "Letitia recovering from a long illness".³ Eventually they were married about 1840 and made their first home at 4 Brecknock Crescent, Camden Town.

Scott's work was now bringing him the business connections he wanted, but it seems likely that the young man, troubled by his reserved nature, turned to people with Edinburgh connections. A friend of Edinburgh days, Patric Park the sculptor, introduced him to a new circle; but once again they were a group who lived pleasantly unorganised lives unacceptable to Scott. B. R. Haydon was the notable figure in this circle and Scott shows no kindly disposition towards him. He condemns his overweening vanity and shows no surprise at his poverty in the face of such ill-considered behaviour.

1. Violet Hunt, The Wife of Rossetti, London, 1932, p.XV.

2. William Michael Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, London, 1906, I, 133.

3. v. Studies, Sketches, Designs, etc., October, 1861, Vol. II.

This dislike for Haydon may well date from their meeting in Edinburgh in 1820 when he called on David Scott. Haydon's tragic death was no doubt the inevitable outcome of his whole life-time of disappointment and poverty, but he was brought to his end by one particularly bitter failure. For years he had urged the cause of state patronage for large scale historical painting and had pleaded for the decoration of public buildings. He had been tireless in his advocacy, writing letters to prominent men and persisting even when he was snubbed. He fought a hard battle from the beginning because the Royal Academy denied the need for state patronage, but he went on writing, speaking and even drawing up specific schemes such as that for the decoration of the House of Lords long before the Houses of Parliament were burnt down in 1834. Immediately the new building was under consideration Haydon opened his attack. In March 1835 he sent a petition to the Commons' and Lords' Building Committee urging that although England did not lack artists of genius to paint large historical pictures, work on such a noble scale requires patronage more magnificent than the most willing private person can afford. Haydon insisted that this was no personal application, but he had a series of designs prepared for the guidance of the Committee. At this point the Government turned aside to consider a problem which was not directly concerned with the Houses of Parliament, but had related interest, in that it was a sign that the authorities were wakening to all that was amiss in the relationship of artist to public and in the conduct of the Royal Academy as the seat of patronage. In June 1836 a Select Committee met to

examine artists and manufacturers and its recommendations were of the first importance in the history of Schools of Design. This side of the matter proceeded apace, but it was not until 1841 that there was appointed a Fine Arts Committee for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament, followed in 1842 by a Royal Fine Arts Commission. Haydon was not called before it and he felt then that he would not be invited to contribute to this scheme for which he had so admirably prepared the way. In April 1842 the Committee gave notice of the conditions for the first Cartoon Competition. Less biased critics than Haydon have agreed that when it came to the actual work, the scheme was a disastrous affair from first to last; its endless delays calculated to disillusion even those who were chosen to contribute. Furthermore the finished decorations were not destined to have any effect on public taste. Although Haydon was possessed by a premonition that he would be overlooked, he applied himself to a study of fresco and sent in two cartoons to the first competition: 'The Curse pronounced against Adam and Eve' and 'The Black Prince entering London in triumph'. This was the occasion on which Scott submitted a large drawing 11 feet by 9 feet, with life-size figures, representing 'The Northern Britons surprising the Roman Wall'. A small pen and ink study of the cartoon is in existence at Penkill and shows it to have been a vigorous composition, strong in its grouping.

Tremendous enthusiasm was aroused at the discussion stage. A fierce battle of styles developed, fresco versus oil, and it seemed as if this scheme of decoration was to mark the rebirth of artistic spirit in England. The

importance of the building, the Government support and Royal Patronage helped to swell the interest. Artists of every rank and calibre contributed and the public enthusiastically supported the exhibitions.

Scott says without rancour that his design was nowhere in the competition. It seemed to trouble him more deeply that David's cartoons were not noticed, though he confesses that they so wilfully disregarded the requirements of the competition that this was no marvel. David himself professed no particular surprise, but this was the culmination of a series of disappointments and he retired to Edinburgh more aloof and unyielding than ever. Although William's cartoon did not win for him a commission it brought him to the notice of those concerned in the establishment of schools of design. He already had contacts in this group dating from the days of his book-illustration for S. C. Hall and now he was offered the headmastership of the School of Design at Newcastle upon Tyne. This he accepted; not, he insists, because he felt that he could not win livelihood and repute in London, but because he disliked the necessity of painting for an undiscerning public.

CHAPTER VI

Newcastle: The History of the Local School of Design.

The branch School of Design at Newcastle opened in December 1842. Scott took up his duties there with a heavy heart, because he had made a decisive break with London and the centre of the artistic world. To add to his difficulties he was not in whole-hearted agreement with the teaching policy of the Somerset House School and must have felt something of an imposter when he joined its provincial staff. In fact he was singularly fortunate in being appointed to Newcastle, for this school did not owe absolute allegiance to the central authority at Somerset House and therefore offered the opportunity for some independence in aims and method of teaching. One wonders how much of its history Scott knew when he went there in the winter of 1842. His account in Autobiographical Notes suggests that it was not a great deal, for he judged it as he found it then, a poverty-stricken Fine Art Society which had been forced to seek Government aid to keep its doors open. In actual fact it already had a creditable history, for some kind of Fine Art Society had been in existence in Newcastle since 1822 and, although they had been chequered years, a series of flourishing art exhibitions held by these Societies had proved the city's interest and energy. The story opens with The Northumberland Institution for the Promotion of the Fine Arts in the North of England, a society of artists and amateurs formed in Newcastle upon Tyne on 29 July 1822. They held exhibitions in each year from 1822-1827, a lengthy series for a provincial town. There was then a break until 1832, when the work was taken

up by The Newcastle upon Tyne Institution for the General Promotion of the Fine Arts. This Society did not gain a great deal of support, but at least the prospect was at no time too black to deter the core of enthusiasts who were never lacking in this northern city. The Newcastle upon Tyne Institution held Exhibitions in 1832, 1833 and 1834, and when it ceased to function it was promptly succeeded by The Newcastle Society of Artists. Such a determined move did not go unremarked in the local press. There it was said:

The Newcastle Institution for the Promotion of The Fine Arts having found their exhibitions invariably unprofitable, it became doubtful whether an annual exhibition was politic where the arts were so indifferently supported --- In the meantime, however, a number of artists belonging to the town formed themselves into a society with a view of continuing exhibitions of works of art ---¹

The Newcastle Society of Artists advertised their formation in the belief that they would always find intelligent appreciation in Newcastle and went on:

-- should the Arts continue to be fostered by the generosity of the public as they have been during this, the first, Exhibition of the Society, it will soon, I trust, be the boast of Newcastle, that she stands pre-eminent amongst the provincial towns of England for Arts and Artists.²

The Local newspapers give ample evidence that the task of the Newcastle Society was not always easy, but that, on the whole, it had a right to pride in what was accomplished; the organisation of really large scale exhibitions in a provincial city:

The Annual Exhibition ... consists of about two hundred and fifty pictures, miniature portraits, and pieces of sculpture, the greater portion of which have been got up for the occasion

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1. The Tyne Mercury, 7 July 1835.
 2. The Dedication to the Mayor, taken from Remarks on the Paintings and Sculpture in the First Exhibition of the Newcastle Society of Artists, 29 June 1835.

by artists residing in Newcastle - an event highly creditable to their talent and industry, and which no other town in England, London excepted, we believe, has the power of accomplishing.¹

The Tyne Mercury, while tacitly agreeing with this verdict, pointed out one danger, that of insularity and provincialism. This, it seems plain, was an advance warning of that same quality of sturdy independence which caused trouble when Newcastle tried to work within the Government scheme of schools of Design.

The Exhibitions, held in the Northern Academy of Arts, Blakett Street, continued in 1835, 1836, and 1837, when they ceased for lack of support, but, as before, this was not felt to be serious enough to discourage a new society from taking up the work. The formation of the North of England Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts was not just another venture on the level of those which had gone before, but a key event. From the first the new Society had a definite connection with The Literary and Philosophical Society. In fact the official history of this body says:

The next off-shoot from the parent society was to be one for the promotion of the Fine Arts.²

Meetings were held in 1837 to consider its formation, and shortly afterwards the society began its work in a suite of rooms at 27 Market Street, those rooms which the Central Council for the School of Design later commented on as most satisfactory and where William Bell Scott began his work.

The Prefatory Notice to the First Exhibition, August 1838, stands as a most interesting document setting out the nature and objects of the society.

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1. The Newcastle Journal, 4 July 1835.
 2. Robert Spence Watson, The History of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1793-1896, London 1897, p.314.

For the first time a local organisation had shown a clear understanding of its connection with the rest of the country and had determined on its particular sphere of work in the light of this knowledge.

The originators of the Society had, in common with many other persons, felt deeply the reproach that in England the taste of the public generally was inferior to that of our continental neighbours, even with respect to high art, but more especially with regard to its application to manufactures. If any doubt existed of the general truth of this remark, it has since been entirely removed by the late Parliamentary enquiry. From this enquiry it appeared that the great cause of our inferiority arises, as regards the taste of the public generally, from the want of easily accessible collections of works of art; and with regard to the application of the principles of art to manufactures, to the want of Schools of Design. To supply, in a measure, these two desiderata, the North of England Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts was established.¹

The Society evidently had a nice sense of independence, for the preface goes on to show how they proposed to support their work by voluntary effort:

On the Continent, the collections and the schools are supported immediately by government, and are entirely under its control - in this country, on the contrary, no provision has been made by the government, except in the grant to the recently established London School of Design for the above purposes. It therefore became necessary to find other means of providing adequate funds - the Society consists of members who subscribe one guinea each.²

Although they expected no financial help to be forthcoming from the government it certainly seemed, from the tenor of this notice, as if the Society had read and approved the 1836 Report of Ewart's Committee on Arts and their Connexion with Manufactures, and were in agreement with the policy of the London School of Design. They put faith in the same measures; the

1. Catalogue of The Works of Art in the First Exhibition of the North of England Society for the Promotion of the Fine Arts, opened 20 August 1838.

2. Ibid.

exhibition of works of art, models and specimens of manufacture; good libraries and collections of casts; lectures and discussions; all of which agreement is most interesting in the light of subsequent relations with this central authority. Their most important recommendation was however the plan for a School of Design:

To form a School of Design for the instruction of Students in all that relates to the applications of art to manufactures. In short, to endeavour to provide means for the diffusion of a love for the beautiful in art as well as to provide the student with ample means of instruction.¹

There are Catalogues of independent exhibitions by the Society in 1838, 1839 and 1841. That of 1839 is particularly interesting because it gives a report of the progress of the society's classes, already established, under Peter Nicholson for architectural drawing, geometry and perspective, and W. Oliphant for drawing and designing for useful and ornamental manufactures. ✓

In spite of such a vigorous beginning, by 1842 it was apparent that the society was facing a crisis of much the same kind as those which had ended its forerunners. This year saw a bold decision, which must be regarded as a mark of development even though it was a direct result of the declining state of the North of England Society. In November 1842 a deputation from the society came to London to confer with the Council of the School of Design and

--- requested that the Council would aid the Society with their advice, and with a portion of the grant voted by Parliament.²

1. Ibid.

2. Report of the Council of the School of Design, 1842-3, London, H.M.S.O., 1843, p.12., para.21.

The Council regarded the request favourably because they felt that Newcastle was the centre of a large and populous district with manufactures in glass and metals likely to benefit from the proximity of a School of Design. Moreover, with singular shrewdness, they believed that the Newcastle School would not be a heavy charge on them because it was fairly stable financially, could rely on the continuance of present voluntary subscriptions to the value of £200, and already possessed a good deal of equipment and suitable rooms.

It is worth noting that at this time the Council had complete trust that the North of England Society was in sympathy with its aims. Their report notes the strong disposition of the society, already evidenced, "to carry out the objects contemplated by Parliament with reference to the improvement of the Arts of Design, as applied to manufactures - a disposition evidenced by the actual establishment and maintenance of a similar Institution ... ", and goes on to say:

The main object of the Society was the same as that of the School of Design at Somerset House; and there was no reason to doubt that the Society and its Committee would consent to place itself in the same relation with the Council as the other provincial Schools established originally by the Council.

The agreement which was finally reached did not involve loss of identity for the Society. The school continued to have strong local peculiarities and connections. On the other hand it would never have come about had the Council thought there was any hint of rebellion.

1. Ibid.

The conditions finally set down were these:

The council

- offered to the North of England Society to assist it to the amount of £150 per annum for three years, and to supply it with such casts and books as the Council might deem necessary, upon the like conditions as to local constitution, management, etc., as were required from the other Provincial Schools.

The only particular conditions inserted were:

- that the Society make the School of Design their principal, and, if required by the Council, their sole object.¹

The North of England Society retained its interest in the School and the Council exercised its right in the choice of a Master.

There seems no doubt that the Council felt they had made a safe choice in Scott. Their first report after his appointment as Headmaster expressed confidence in his ability:

The recent date of the opening of this School renders it impossible to speak of results; but it is due to the Master, to state that the intelligent and efficient manner in which he has commenced the duties of his office, affords every reason to anticipate results of a most satisfactory character; and a recent communication from the local Committee states that the School is rapidly increasing in numbers and importance.²

This confidence was seconded by local opinion:

Mr. Scott was appointed Master of the School of Design in Newcastle by the Board in London, established for improving the Arts in their application to Design for manufactures. The improvement in drawing, visible of late years among the young men employed in our ornamental manufactures, strikingly exemplify the soundness and excellence of the choice made by the central body in their selection of Mr. William Bell Scott.³

In fact the 1843-44 Report of the Council of the School of Design expressed itself with assurance - not only that Scott would prove to be the

1. Ibid.

2. Third Report of the Council of the School of Design, for the Year 1843-4, p.34, para. 92.

3. Sketches of Public Men of the North, London: Newcastle, 1855, p.68.
This consists of material drawn from the columns of The Northern Examiner.

right man and work happily with the central authorities, but that the school would find a welcome among the manufacturers of Newcastle, who "appear to appreciate highly the benefits derivable from the general extension of instruction in ornamental drawing with relation to Design, and decorative work of every description".¹

It is ironic, almost pathetic, to read the Reports which followed from 1844-1850, and to see the note of discord creeping in between the North of England Society and Somerset House. By 1844-45 there was a note of dissatisfaction, not as yet personal to Scott, but directed against the general progress of the school and the discouraging attitude of the local manufacturers:

The Master appears to have performed the duties of his office with intelligence and assiduity...

but, it goes on:

-- very little has been accomplished beyond the elementary stage of drawing, and, at the present time, it appears that not more than two students are engaged in the practice of design.

On the part of the local authorities and manufacturers, more zealous interest in the practical objects of the School might probably render its means of improvement more directly applicable to industrial art, and more available in promoting the commercial welfare of the community for whose benefit the establishment was undertaken.²

There is a querulous note in this, the justice of which one can in some measure appreciate, but it is more difficult to accept the Government's attitude over the point that the school was providing education for the wrong kind of student. It is distressing to read just how narrow the Council were in their interpretation of the function of a School of Design:

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1. Third Report of the Council of the School of Design, for the Year 1843-4, p.34, para. 92.
 2. Fourth Report of the Council of the School of Design, for the Year 1844-45, p.30.

In opening national Schools of Design for the almost gratuitous instruction of the industrial classes, it being by no means intended to afford accommodation to such as seek only to acquire a little knowledge of fine art as a mere educational accomplishment.¹

In truth it is very difficult to know where to lay the blame, amongst the three elements concerned; Scott himself; the original North of England Fine Art Society; and the Central Council for the School of Design.

The 1844-45 Report of the Council must have put into words the narrowness and unintelligence which Scott felt to be surrounding him in his work at Newcastle. First and foremost he had to contend with difficult local conditions and personalities which included "the Hon. Sec., an attorney who wished to bring himself before the public, who believed in agitation, hocus-pocus, and public speaking"; and the Chairman, who was "a worthy Peninsular major who had retired to his native town, amiable, benevolent, punctilious, and ready to occupy any easy arm-chair people voted him into".²

Moreover from the very beginning Scott stood opposed to the attitude that the facilities of the school were not for those who enjoyed art only as a hobby. Years later he wrote an account of his headmastership in which he said that his defiance took the form of hanging up the Somerset House rules and breaking them by his own practice.

According to Scott's testimony the North of England Society were in the wrong in so far as they had appealed to the Central Council for financial help only to tide them over a difficult time, and to obtain it had knowingly

1. Ibid.

2. The Fortnightly Review, "Ornamental Art in England". There is a similar account in A.N.I, 179.

given a false impression that they agreed with the Government policy. But this is a serious charge and one difficult to substantiate.¹ The truth was that Scott himself must have been in an unhappy position owing allegiance to both local men and to the central authority and all the while trying to run the school of design in a more liberal spirit than either of these would admit to be practicable. He maintained the balance successfully enough to earn a renewal of the grant in 1846, but after this there was open quarrel. The 1849 Report from headquarters was more acrimonious and more precise in its displeasure than ever before and summed up:

Two dexterous pieces of tempera painting and one indifferent, copies of flowers, alone represent the advanced classes in this school, which does not even shew a tendency in the direction of that teaching which ought to be a preliminary to the commencement of inventive design.²

The 1850 Report, submitted by the Government Inspector, made much the same point that the school was not progressing well in the light of the Government requirements:

The classes remain in much the same loose and ineffective state as will be found specified in former reports, beginning with Mr. Dyce's first inspection of the school in 1845.³

This kind of general dissatisfaction might have continued for long enough, but the storm broke over financial difficulties and the question of the amalgamation of a previously established class for the study of geometry. There is much conflicting evidence, but it seems that the North of England Society became involved in debt, Scott says to the extent of £700,

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1. The charge is brought by Scott in A.N.I, 178.
 2. Reports and Documents Relative to the Head and Provincial Schools of Design, 1849, p.10. The report of the drawings submitted by the Newcastle School.
 3. Reports on the Branch Schools, for the Year ending July 1850, by Mr. Poynter, Inspector of The Branch Schools, to the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade.

largely because of the failure of local subscriptions.¹ In 1849 it attempted to cut down expenses by moving from Market Street to rooms owned by its parent society - the Literary and Philosophical. These were below the Natural History Society's Museum and became vacant when the Society of Antiquaries moved into the Castle. 1849-1850 was an anxious year, for the Government made their dissatisfaction plain by withdrawing the grant from the Newcastle school. The 1849 Report of the Literary and Philosophical Society speaks of this serious measure and gives considerable credit to Scott in the negotiations which followed:

The Fine Arts Society of this town had, as most of you are aware, an annual allowance of £150, made to it from the Government, for the maintenance of a teacher, which grant was also attended with other privileges. This allowance, from some misunderstanding, was lately withdrawn. Mr. Scott, the able master, and one of his pupils Mr. Maling, proceeding to London with a view to accomplish the restoration of the Government assistance, requested leave to take some of the specimens with him, which being placed before the board at Somerset House, amongst other articles of the same description, were much admired, and there is every reason to believe contributed not a little to the restoration of the grant.²

The move to less expensive and less suitable quarters seems to have been regarded by the central council as inevitable:

The School at Newcastle has been removed to a new situation. The premises are greatly inferior to those formerly occupied, but the rooms contain sufficient accommodation, and are well adapted for the evening class, and there is good drawing light for as many as the morning class is likely to amount to. The object of this removal has been to decrease expenditure, the present rooms being held at a rent of £40, whereas the former premises cost £120.³

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1. From a Newspaper cutting reporting a speech made by Scott on his retirement from the headmastership of the School of Design.
 2. The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Literary and Philosophic Society, for the Year 1849, p.7.
 3. Reports on the Branch Schools for the Year ending July 1850.

The council restored the grant, but they showed no inclination to go beyond the limits of strict prudence in their help, so that it is no surprise to find that in 1850 the local Fine Arts Society, aided by its parent organisation, the Literary & Philosophic, held a Fancy Fair or Bazaar to raise funds. In the words of their circular, the Societies lacked money partly as a result of "old-standing obligations, partly by the pressure of recent local occurrences to which it is merely necessary to allude".¹

Financial difficulties were gradually overcome, but another outstanding problem remained to prevent satisfactory relations with the authorities. So diverse are the reports of what actually happened in the question of amalgamating an independent mechanical drawing-class to the Government School, that it is easy to see that the problem would not be one for straightforward settlement. Scott claims in more than one place that he first introduced such a class into the curriculum while it was still forbidden by the Central Council. At the time of his retirement he looked back on the fortunes of this class and recalled the early Government attitude towards it:

So narrow and precise were the views of the Committee at Somerset House, and so little did they look to the requirements of the locality, that we were forbidden to amalgamate the mechanical drawing class, then, as now, under the excellent management of Mr. Harrison.²

Whether Scott's recollections are accurate or not, only a short while afterwards the Government expressed strong condemnation of the Newcastle attitude to the amalgamation. Failure to carry it out was, they considered, typical

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1. A Circular concerning a Fancy Fair and Bazaar, to be held in the Autumn of 1850, Newcastle upon Tyne, June 1850.
 2. From a Newspaper Cutting reporting a speech made by Scott on his retirement from the headmastership of the School of Design.

of the "inefficient manner in which this school has always been conducted".¹

Wherever the truth lay it is certain that the next year's Report had a much pleasanter tone now that it was able to announce that it had gained its point:

The effect (of the amalgamation) is to give to the school of design another master, and to provide for the instruction of all the pupils in those branches of drawing which it is in his department to teach, without diverting any portion of Mr. Scott's time from the free-hand drawing and advanced classes.²

There seems to have been some definite change of status about this time,³ whereby the North of England Society lost much of its power to the Government, but the important point is that the Newcastle School of Design remained open and connected with the central school, then undergoing a crisis in its affairs from which it emerged a more intelligent and clear-headed organisation. Scott, speaking just before his retirement made it plain that he personally found it a much happier proposition to work for Mr. Henry Cole, under whose liberal direction "mechanical drawing, geometry, and perspective were made essential parts of the course, and drawing from the antique especially encouraged".⁴

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1. Reports on the Branch Schools, for the Year ending July 1850.
 2. Reports and Documents exhibiting the State and Progress of the Head and Branch Schools of Design, in the Year 1850-51, London, 1851.
 3. This change is made evident by the title of the catalogue for the exhibition of the Society in 1850. In that year the Government School of Design is announced as joint organiser of the exhibition with the North of England Society, and the catalogue bears the royal coat of arms as a symbol of its new authority.
 4. From a Newspaper Cutting reporting a speech made by Scott on his retirement from the Headmastership of the School of Design. He said substantially the same in A.N.I., 181.

When Scott retired in 1864 the school was quietly and effectively doing its job. It was still housed in the same three rooms under the Museum of the Natural History Society, but had confidence that these might soon be exchanged for more suitable premises. In fact the School was still there when in 1884 the Railway encroached on the Natural History Society buildings and they moved to the Hancock Museum. The Fine Arts Society was also driven out and became the Art Department of the College of Science.

Scott resigned from the headmastership on 30 September 1863, in the face of "some new regulations of the Committee of Council on Education, applicable to the Government of the Schools of Design",¹ the most important of which was a measure to employ only such men as had gained certificates in the Government training-class. He explained the situation himself in greater detail to his friend, W. M. Rossetti:

My connection with the Dept., and with this School of Art in particular, I almost think will terminate finally on the 31 September. There is impending a measure to do away with appointments of Head Masters under the Board of Trade, giving them pensions. They can remain in the Department thereafter irrespective of their pensions under the new conditions, but this is out of the question with me.²

With Scott's departure the period of experiment and individuality of liberal ideas and general culture had come to an end, and we may fittingly view his departure in the words of the Newcastle Daily Chronicle reporter - words which apply not only to Scott himself, but to the whole spirit of his headmastership:

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1. The Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 12 November 1863, in its report of a Farewell Supper given to Mr. Scott by the Art School pupils.
 2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 7 April [1863].

We admire him as an artist and a teacher, a biographer and a poet, and we love him as a man. Modest and unobtrusive, genial, and intelligent, he has quietly won his way to wide affection.¹

1. The Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 2 October 1863.

CHAPTER VII

Scott the Head Master

The evidence of both private letter and published statement leaves little room for doubt that Scott regarded the twenty years of his head-mastership in Newcastle as a personal sacrifice. His main grievance was that he had not been rewarded by preferment within the executive of the School of Design, though he had forfeited his prospects of making a name as an original artist by accepting employment in that organisation. It is true that, apart from his own case, Scott had ample reason for considering advancement under the Department of Science and Art to be attended by unfairness and irregularity. He said this in so many words when Henry Cole was appointed to the Directorship of the Department of Practical Art over the heads of many competent men who had worked for the School since its beginnings:

Cole's coronation, I know, has been a most disagreeable affair to Wornum and old Deverell, and some of the provincial men look out for squalls. That Felix should dominate must be humiliating to any good man who has staked everything on the school. For my part it has only been a stepmother to me, and under the new king I may improve but can scarcely degenerate. One can at the worst give it up ---¹

But most often when Scott thought of his position it was with a sense of deep personal resentment. In a letter written five years after his retirement he offered proof that his attitude was not entirely based on his experiences after his appointment to Newcastle, nor indeed on any external

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 28 March 1852.

cause, but was bound up with a strain of wilful discontent deriving from earlier years and family troubles. The letter was to W. M. Rossetti:

In your advanced life you will not have to fight against the feeling that your brother died with his hand against the world, and that you had to sacrifice the twenty best years of your life in provincial obscurity.¹

That was written to an intimate friend, and was heartfelt. When Scott found a place for a similar comment in his published writing he was more restrained; but with a nice concession to personal pride he suggested that from the first he had known himself to be taking up one of the less enviable posts in the School of Design, for he wrote:

While Herbert, Townsend, and others gathered round Dyce in London, several very good artists took appointment in the country.²

Scott foresaw correctly that his work in Newcastle would give him little time to develop his talents as an artist. At the same time he had fears of getting 'out of touch' when he was so far removed from the centre of the artistic world; but the disadvantage of isolation is a more debatable point than that of lack of time, and is dependent on the power of the man to work without the stimulation of companionship. On his last evening in London Scott dined with Kenny Meadows and left with this cheerless prophecy ringing in his ears and echoing his own doubts:

Well, well --- everyone in London becomes shapen into his place, becomes a sort of wedge; that's what they mean by the right man in the right place; but in the country one may preserve one's natural form. But you will cease to do your best; you won't be always stunning, trying to do your damn'dest, as one may say.³

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1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill, 8 August 1869.
 2. The Fortnightly Review, "Ornamental Art in England".
 3. A.N.I., 175.

This had about it the nature of a challenge and Scott met it bravely with the quality of the original work he did manage to produce during those twenty years; but he was also to know long periods when the disadvantages stood clear before him, and the idea of working on his own became a trial rather than an opportunity. In such a mood he wrote:

Brown's note and his (Gabriel's) make me wish I had some artist to look in upon me, but here I show nobody what I am about till the work in hand is about done. Perhaps however my isolation from art atmosphere may tell in my favour too.¹

The proviso of the last sentence is important for of course the sense of loneliness and depression was not constant and on many occasions Scott's letters bear every mark of an alert and happily occupied mind; then will come a black mood, when he complains bitterly of the intellectual paralysis which besets him and longs for the inspiration of Italy or the bustle of London:

--- it is months since anything like a tangible, presentable idea passed through my brain, which I fear is becoming very soft. Month after month in fact I am conscious of the gradual process of becoming 'fat in the head', and correspondingly quiet, decent and respectable. Thank God your brother has not written me for a long time, if his enmity was presented in addition to my own, it were difficult to prognosticate the results.²

One may sympathise with Scott when he writes of the intellectual apathy which came upon him during his headmastership, but even in the midst of sympathy one cannot fail to notice the sheer perversity of the man, as when, for instance, in the course of some advice to Walter Deverell, he set at

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 14 February 1857.

2. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 3 May 1855.

* Walter Deverell was the artist who first found Elizabeth Siddal working in a milliner's shop and persuaded her to sit as a model to him.

nought even the value he placed on being a practising artist:

-- if he keeps in the School the man may grow and will, but the artist scarcely. However I am far from thinking it worthwhile to sacrifice to become a successful artist at the present day.¹

In this letter it is as if one can read the very temperament of the man determined to cry 'sour grapes' about everything.

After one has pieced together the history of his headmastership, the question which arises and must be faced is this: Was the much-talked of ambition to make a name as an artist really something which Scott knew himself to be incapable of attaining, while, though he did not like to own it true, he found satisfaction and success in the work he affected to despise? His letters of these twenty years to Lady Trevelyan, and to W. M. Rossetti, seem to prove this so by a hundred and one involuntary expressions of interest in School of Design and local artistic affairs. In a sense Scott's discontent with his work was justified, because he had to face difficult conditions both local and central, and must have felt, as the history of the Newcastle School has shown, that he wasted time and energy on needless quarrelling when he might well have applied it to the job in hand. The uncertain policy of the School of Design executive from 1842-52 in large measure accounts for the rebellious attitude of Scott, who seems to have understood very well what was wanted in Newcastle, what it was in his power to give, and how he might set about organising practical details. In fact the highly experimental nature of the central organisation goes a long way towards legitimising

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 28 March 1852.

Scott's departure from what they recommended. In all the Reports of the Central Council, even those which adopted a complimentary tone towards Scott, there is no real appreciation of all those qualities of more general culture which he possessed in addition to the narrow requirements for an instructor in design. In 1859 Scott was presented with an inkstand and gold pen and pencil case by the art-school pupils. In his reply he summed up the years of his headmastership saying:

--- if I were to enter into an account of the vicissitudes it (the N. School) has undergone --- I believe I could make it evident that the management has neither been a sinecure nor a paradise ---¹

It is a judgement which suggests the man who understood the difficulties of his position but was certainly not yet too weary or too disinterested to battle with them.

When Scott came to the newly established School of Design it was to the sound of dismal prophecies by his friends, and it was well that he possessed a sufficient sense of humour to see a pleasant quality in his reception at Newcastle:

It had been prophesied that one man in wooden clogs presenting himself to learn painting there and then, without preliminaries and with the hope of immediately making money by it, would be my encouragement on the opening night. It was not quite so, though something like this: --- ---

I found two old women scrubbing the limbs of the Laocoon and the Apollo and other gods dearly beloved by me, and the fussy little fat keeper received me in a consequential manner, informing me with infinite candour that the place had been locked up for half a year, that the rent had not

1. The Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 24 February 1859.

been paid for many seasons, that the half of the subscribers of the Fine Arts Society had dropped off since no exhibition of modern pictures had been held, and that I had better advertise the opening of the new classes, because the secretary was apt to forget. This candour I found to be a characteristic of the Northumbrians, and a very pleasant one.¹

To Scott belongs the credit for building the school from the very foundations; not only by reviving enthusiasm, but by organising classes and by teaching. He was young then, and as he grew older he did not hide the fact that he had his ideals in the early years. Then he believed that "everyone might attain to artistic ability".²

The qualities which made Scott a fine headmaster were not always those which would make a fair showing in an official report. To begin with, he held his own views, carefully considered and founded on experience, and had little faith in the Inspectors who came from London to question and report. This letter humorously suggests his reaction to them:

And the good Ambrose Poynter! never more shall we see him wagging his head at our honoured board! Never more shall the honest old Captain, our chairman, express the heretical doubt 'whether these visits of Mr. Poynter are really of much use'!³

The purpose of art education was a key point on which Scott did not subscribe to the Government theory. This asserted that the teaching in Schools of Design should be narrowly confined to industrial needs. Unfortunately the system under which he was obliged to work did not allow for any great measure of individuality:

The operations were superintended by a director, whom they considered simply as the head of an executive, whose business it was to see that nothing but their ideas was allowed to flourish.⁴

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1. A.N.I., 177-178.
 2. The Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 24 February 1859.
 3. W. B. Scott to W. M. Rossetti, N., 28 March 1852.
 4. From a newspaper cutting reporting a speech made by Mr. Scott on the occasion of his retirement from the Headmastership of the School of Design.

That this was to their loss is plain, for Scott was a man of ideas, experienced in actual local requirements, and interested enough to discuss his work with those who could give him intelligent response. This interest emerges clearly in his personal letters. To Lady Trevelyan he voices an opinion which the Central Council would most certainly not have appreciated:

Everything seems to have gone smoothly enough in the School of Art affairs. You would be interested in our little exhibition of pictures for the gold medal and poppy designs. There are 12 pictures and 4 sets of poppy designs. The Designs very good I assure you. People always ask can these students turn their acquirement to any practical end? A question which puts me very much out. In Newcastle to no end at all. I can only say whether they be young ladies at the forenoon class or young men in trades they are made every way abler by this development of powers and resources within themselves. To the most of people however this seems a metaphysical subtilty really.¹

An earlier letter to the same correspondent contained a more technical discussion of teaching problems, rising out of a conversation Scott had recently had with Mr. Woodward, the Oxford Union architect. This showed that his theories really were the result of careful thought and did not represent wilful opposition to the Government:

Mr. W. and I got in very comfortably and he came into the School of Design. After leaving it we walked here, talking on that endless subject - teaching Design and the difficulties in the way of art education. He goes the whole length of Ruskin against teaching principles and acquainting the student with styles. At the same time he himself would not like to be unable to assign a very nearly correct date to any piece of ornament, and doubtless would do nothing without reference to some principle, while Ruskin himself is a professed analyst. How a public institution for art education is to move without teaching the so called laws in colour, perspective, construction, etc. I can't see. For my own part, the Department system

1. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 1 February, 1857.

appears to repress originality and make patient hands only, and I would willingly see many alterations, but yet on the whole I am certain that the masses must be guided and taught by all the ordinary means of furnishing the mind.¹

It is no wonder that Scott, in actual touch with the problems of art teaching, interested in particular pupils and individual sets of results, should have found the didactic pronouncements from headquarters particularly irritating and should have expressed himself so forcibly to William Michael Rossetti:

It is not surprising that you and others should view favourably the document in question,^{*} but one who has travelled the ground twenty times is absolutely sick of new men repeating the old thing with all the briskness of originality, writing it with crudeness like that I point out in my letter to the Spectator.²

One of Scott's outstanding qualifications for being a headmaster was this understanding of the people with whom he had to work. He recognised his unpromising material, but he was interested in his pupils as people; interested in their character and their fortunes.

In 1856, when the scheme for decorating the central hall of Wallington, the Northumberland mansion of Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan, with a series of historical pictures was under discussion, he considered giving up his Newcastle appointment 'although, it is considerably lucrative', but his school responsibilities decided him against doing so. For as he put it:

--- there is a certain manly feeling in helping forward so many young men although by drudgery, and if I gave up the school, the endowment will certainly be withdrawn and the new system carried out. Whether this would be a real misfortune to the locality is by no means certain, but it would be so viewed by the Committee and others here.³

1. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 8 October 1856.

2. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Newcastle, 21 April 1852.

* The document is the Report on the 1851 Exhibition made by Sir Henry Cole to a Select Committee of the House of Commons.

3. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 27 March 1850.

The letters to Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan record many instances of Scott's genuine interest in his students, which extended beyond the days when they actually attended classes. It gave him pleasure to note that he was sending the work of a pupil to the Scottish Academy Exhibition in Edinburgh, or that a former pupil had obtained a situation in London. The most striking illustration of Scott's lifelong friendship with his pupils was that with Miss Mary Rowell, first mentioned in a letter of May 1857 to Lady Trevelyan:

Will you allow me to ask if you can assist me in getting a situation for a former pupil of the school -- she is near 30, has been living with her father in Shields not very well off till she is getting into a state of bad health for want of some interest in life. She draws and paints in a sort of way but without the least ability, but she plays and sings very well, indeed has some faculty of a vocal kind remarkable, and knows French fairly, Letitia says. She is perhaps too old to begin as a governess, but if a situation as companion could be got for her, it would be a great kindness.¹

This in itself speaks of no more than common interest, until the conclusion of the story reveals the extent of Scott's kindness to this young lady. His will, made in 1885, bequeathed £100 to Miss Rowell of 15 Eldon Place, Newcastle.

Nor was Scott's interest confined to his pupils, but extended to any young people whom he was able to help forward. Just such a case was that of the young schoolmaster at Cambo. Scott went to endless trouble in the way of letter-writing and making arrangements so that he might take the Government external art certificates and so be better qualified and better paid.

1. W. B. S. to Lady T., [May 1857?]

The Department have issued a circular regarding gratuities to School Masters who pass Examinations in drawing with a view to teaching it in inspected or other schools for the poor,

he wrote to Sir Walter Trevelyan.

Your new Cambo master, I think, had a recommendation of some kind for Drawing and may perhaps benefit by this measure --- Our Departmental Inspector will be here in a few weeks and I can communicate with your Cambo master if he wishes to try his powers.¹

We have no evidence of Scott's teaching, as opposed to his administrative abilities, though a local newspaper, writing of the School, mentions his quiet manner. What we do know is that he brought originality to the stereotyped government methods. In addition to the examples for instruction authorised by The Art Department the Newcastle school used additional figure outlines and so on adopted by Mr. Scott: the kind of thing which witnesses to his concern for his teaching.

His most outstanding direct contribution to art education was a text book, Half-Hour lectures in the History and Practice of the Fine and Ornamental Arts, the published version of lectures originally delivered to his Newcastle students. Scott's subject matter in this book was very wide and his problem was to give a vast amount of pure information in a concise but still readable form. He tackled the difficulty so well that reviewers said of his book that it was

succinct, vivid and cheerful in style.²

Generally the writing is straightforward and interesting to the layman and

1. W. B. S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, N., 16 May 1857.
2. The Athenaeum, 10 August 1861.

maintains the "popular, though not necessarily superficial character promised in the Preface".¹ The fault of the book was that Scott never quite decided between a historical and a technical treatment of his subject. Individually some of the lectures are very interesting, particularly those on china, which follow out their subject with remarkable thoroughness. The last three chapters, on Terms in Art, seem to be outside the scope of the book, but are the most remarkable, dealing as they do with subtle and debatable abstract questions in a clear precise way. His reviewer was just when he praised them for their "unsophisticated good sense".²

Half-Hour Lectures have an interest not purely intrinsic, for a remark in the Preface to the section, Terms in Art, was destined to become a battleground; and by way of the comments it aroused, Scott's position with regard to the Government policy in Schools of Design was made clear. We see at once how his views appeared to other people and not simply to Scott himself. Scott had prefaced these three chapters by a warning about the danger of teaching principles:

The inculcation of principles binds the student and causes men to work under the finger of authority.³

The reviewer of the Literary Gazette comments:

That Mr. Scott should so far differ from his official superior and head, (Mr. Redgrave who had just sent out a pamphlet on the Necessity of Teaching Principles in Design) is an act of moral courage, which at least should be commended, however it may be regretted that the independence had not been displayed in a better cause.⁴

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1. v. p. ii.
 2. The Globe, 13 May 1861.
 3. Half-Hour Lectures, p.1, Part 3.
 4. The Literary Gazette, 20 April 1861.

In an assessment of Scott as a headmaster it is encouraging to find his moral courage praised; and most pleasant to read those reviews which comment on the book as an indication of the qualities of the man, as for example:

It is a book which none but a thoughtful, cultivated, and original man could have written.¹

This opinion is of particular moment because it was one of Scott's most valuable qualities as a headmaster that he was a man of wide general culture, and, moreover, was able to communicate it to others. It is worthy of note that it was Scott who guided James Leathart to make a collection of Pre-Raphaelite work and so inspired Thomas Dixon of Sunderland that a local writer has said of the relationship:

What was still more noticeable than his [Dixon's] love for books was his enthusiasm for pictorial art, and that of the very best. This was, I think, mainly owing to the well-known painter, Mr. William Bell Scott, --- through whom he was introduced to the fine collections of pictures (collected with Scott's assistance) of Mr. Leathart, of Gateshead, and Alex. Stevenson of Tynemouth.²

Not only this, but Dixon became a great personal admirer of Scott, and named a son after him, in tribute to their friendship. His letters give abundant indication of a lively mind; he discusses his reading and shows that he kept well abreast of contemporary literature and magazine articles; he talks of new techniques in painting, of religious and social questions. In his own particular sphere he proved that he was more than a mere teacher of correct design by the quality and scale of his original work, work done during the

1. The Critic, 30 March 1861.

2. Transactions of the Sunderland Antiquarian Society, Vol. XII, 1911, ed. by Robert Hyslop. A paper on Thomas Dixon and his Correspondents, read by James Patterson, 14 March 1911.

very brief leisure that his duties in Newcastle allowed him. The way in which his own painting was granted a beggarly portion of time makes pathetic reading:

My summer recess is generally the time when I paint the few pictures I accomplish, or lay up sketches for so doing, if you and Lady Trevelyan will allow me I shall bring some sketching materials.¹

In the knowledge that Scott frequently found his own work crowded out it is comforting to think that there were reviewers and critics who admired his efforts to go on painting, saying of him:

He is perhaps the very best artist still connected with the departments of Art in the position of a teacher.²

Such writers saw, in the importance Scott attached to original work, an additional qualification as a teacher. Never did he neglect to work in the cause of the art school, and do so in a far wider sense than simply by taking his classes efficiently. When he first came to Newcastle he made it his business to visit local factories; an ecclesiastical glass-painting establishment; potteries; brass and iron foundries; but although the desire to understand local industry seemed vital to Scott he was not able to report any signs of co-operation from the manufacturers. Indeed he said of the most important local craftsman, William Wailes, the master of the stained-glass workshops:

As to my object in visiting him, he wanted no more education among his workmen than they had. He had got his artists, and did not find workmen with art knowledge or proclivities desirable.³

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1. W.B.S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, N., 18 June 1855.
 2. The Literary Gazette, 20 April 1861.
 3. A.N.I., 189.

Scott worked tirelessly in the cause of art exhibitions; contributing faithfully to those organised by the North of England Society; organising others to display his pupils' work; and co-operating without stint when the Government Travelling Exhibition from Marlborough House visited Newcastle in 1856. He contrived to make the core of exhibits more effective and to give it a local flavour by extensive borrowing of pictures and objets d'art, a proceeding which caused him a great deal of anxiety lest anything should be damaged while he was responsible for its safety. Visits to art-exhibitions in other places were undoubtedly a pleasant duty.¹ From February to July of 1857 there are scattered references to one of the most interesting, the Manchester Exhibition, summed up in this most generous comment:

It is an exhibition beyond all praise. England is a great country, - and Manchester is its capital - one might say in exhibition ability.²

Moreover in the midst of his busy life Scott found time to keep in touch with all that was happening in general School of Design affairs; with the policy of the Central Council; with changes in the executive, so that an event such as 'Cole's coronation' could provoke him to some pertinent remarks on the man's inconsistency.

The more one reads of Scott the more one feels that he became 'a Newcastle man' during those twenty years. He made friends there; he joined the Literary and Philosophic Society in 1849 and served on its Committee for two periods in 1857 and 1861, so that it is no surprise to find him writing in old age to Ford Madox Brown:

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1. The Report from the Select Committee on Schools of Art, made in 1864, records that Scott visited London every year, and Paris in 1855; while his letters to Lady Trevelyan record with pleasure his visit to the Manchester Exhibition of 1857.
 2. W. B. S. to Lady T., Manchester, 1 July 1857.

For myself, I have retired from the blessed atmosphere which the Arts generally have the knack of generating about themselves but still have a weak side for the old place and its interests, and the Berwick Club have made me an Hon. Member.¹

Scott speaks very little of his personal feelings on his retirement, but they seem to have mingled a sense of freedom with regret at the cessation of his daily routine.

I can leave Newcastle now on any day ---²

he wrote; but was it adequate compensation?

The years at Newcastle began for Scott in a spirit of doubt, but when he wrote Autobiographical Notes he was able to see their place in his life and to set a true value on them:

This is all I need to say about one of the apparent mistakes of any career, which was after all perhaps not a mistake at all. We often say in the battle of life as in the game of chess - Had I only played this, and not that! but had this and not that been really played, every succeeding move would have been different, and who can affirm the result would have been altogether happier?³

To my mind they were years of achievement and proved the truth of the observation in his advice to Deverell written eleven years before:

If he keeps in the School the man may grow and will ---⁴

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1. W. B. S. to Ford Madox Brown, 92 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, 1 December 1884.
 2. W. B. S. to Lady T., [1863?]
 3. A.N.I., 330-331.
 4. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 28 March 1852.

CHAPTER VIII

Newcastle: The Trevelyans and Wallington.

In 1859 the art school pupils presented their headmaster with an ink-stand and pen and pencil case. Scott, in his speech of thanks, disclosed that, although he had always been glad of the opportunity for private work, he had sometimes been anxious about its effect on the right fulfilment of his duties as a headmaster. This presentation, bringing as it did the assurance that he had in no wise failed his pupils, was therefore doubly welcome. Scott wrote:

A man can only overcome a certain amount of work, and as I have had several important and onerous private labours under my hands these two years past, I was afraid that pre-occupation might have caused remissness in some respect without my being aware of it.¹

Scott's affection for his pupils and his pride and pleasure in the work accomplished at the art school was quite unfeigned, but, at the same time, such an opportunity as the proposal that he should decorate the central hall at Wallington with a series of large canvases and wall-paintings, must have rejoiced his heart in a peculiar and potent way. Scott remembered it as coming like a breath of life in the unvarying routine of Newcastle days, bringing back the vigour, the enthusiasm, the rush of ideas which he was afraid he had lost. He saw at once that the suggestion made by the Trevelyans had limitless possibilities. The architectural peculiarity of the hall

1. The Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 24 February 1859, in a report of a presentation to Mr. Scott by the Art School pupils.

was a challenge to his skill as a decorator, yet at the same time its size and character gave him scope to execute the boldest designs. Moreover, as the Trevelyans had done no more than outline what they had in mind, and that a treatment of historical subjects which Scott approved, the commission seemed likely to offer him freedom in the working out; freedom of subject, colour, style.

The Trevelyans first heard of William Bell Scott through a common friend, Dr. Samuel Brown, an Edinburgh man and the author of some wildly speculative theories of chemistry. He it was who asked Lady Trevelyan to write for The Scotsman a review of the newly published Memoir of David Scott.¹ What she had to say was mainly concerned with David as the book portrayed him, and not with its author. At once penetrating and sympathetic, Lady Trevelyan did not yield in her conviction that David had brought unhappiness upon himself by his wilful and stubborn nature. She followed this review with an article on the Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy for 1852, which appeared in the same paper. It included some trenchant writing on two pictures by W. B. Scott; 'The Trial of William Wallace', and 'The Fatal Sisters selecting the doomed in battle'. Her criticism is not directed at Scott's power of realising his subject; in fact she remarks on "a certain fine and poetic feeling which attracts and interests", but she seizes upon his lack of power in technique and deprecates, "the mistaken system on which they are painted".²

1. The Scotsman, 6 April 1850.

2. Selections from the Literary and Artistic Remains of Paulina Jermyan Trevelyan, ed. by David Wooster, 1879, p.157. This article also appeared in The Scotsman.

Out of courtesy, and possibly because he had met Sir Walter at meetings of the Literary and Philosophic Society, in 1854 Scott sent to Wallington a copy of his recently published poems. It was not until 1855 that he received an invitation to visit the Trevelyan's, when he met Lady Pauline for the first time. He wrote the barest account to W. M. Rossetti, and its conventional expressions in no way foreshadow the future intimacy of his friendship with this lady:

I write this from Sir W. Trevelyan's where I have been a few days and shall be till Saturday. It is a delightful place and Lady Trevelyan is the most charming woman within my experiences. They knew all about everybody I knew too; both the Edinburgh and London circles.¹

Sir Walter was not the sort of person with whom it is easy to become acquainted:

a man of few words and many unacknowledged peculiarities²

Therefore it was perhaps with some feelings of relief, though no doubt a measure of apprehension, that, on his arrival, Scott learnt that Sir Walter had been called away from home. The first person he met was his hostess, who, in her charming and direct manner, whisked him off to her garden, engaged him in conversation and succeeded in making him feel thoroughly at home. Scott tells us that he knew at once he would find delight in her company, for she was a woman of wit, intelligence and charm; an intellectual companion who would provoke him to thought and force him to precision, never flattering him or deferring to him. This is his own description of their first meeting:

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Wallington, 5 July 1855.
2. A.N.II, 5.

About midday, as I approached the house, the door was opened, and there stepped out a little woman as light as a feather and as quick as a kitten, habited for gardening - the face was one that would be charming to some and distasteful to others, and might in the same way be called rather plain or rather handsome, as the observer was sympathetic, or otherwise. In a very few minutes the verdict would be understood and confirmed by the Lady, whose penetration made her a little feared --- .

Lady Trevelyan said she was going to look at her own garden - I went with her and in half an hour we were old friends; she had asked many questions, and received the directest and truest answers. In each case she showed that she liked my plain speech and recognised it to be genuine and unconventional, and in her own way felt grateful and pleased.¹

When Scott returned to Newcastle he wrote a letter of thanks to Lady Trevelyan; the beginning of a ten years' correspondence. His second letter makes quite plain the regard he already had for her. Naturally he does not speak of this in so many words, but the tone of the letter shows deference to her judgement and her opinions. One recognises immediately that Scott dare not write anything superficial or ill-considered to this woman of penetrating mind and sharp wit; and that he was obliged to give sound reasons where he disagreed. His whole attitude, compounded of a new awareness and a new respect, shows best in two topics discussed in this letter. We have from Scott a most discerning analysis of Ruskin, a man whom he essentially disliked, but found he could understand when constrained to judge him fairly:

--- truth to say he is not a person to be quickly understood or lightly characterized, and I cannot help fearing that I have not attractions - or at all events our first interview did not give me opportunity of coming near enough to him, - and bring out his nature in a spontaneous and confiding manner --- He is himself a man of so fine an organisation, so subtle a taste, that one fears to wound him or shock him when one is only hearty and free. But how loveable a soul he is! The most so perhaps of all the men in England, and yet may he not be cruelly cold, indifferent

1. Ibid, pp. 3-5.

and oblivious to all things but what his taste selects? I have thought many times of him, and have come to the conclusion that he is very good and amiable, possessed by instincts, perceiving much that other people do not dream of, pained by what he dislikes and loving pictures or people rather for negative than positive qualities, because his own imagination can evolve and build up more beautiful things than he can find in more complete works or characters.¹

Moreover in this early letter Scott accepted without a murmur Lady Trevelyan's criticism of two of his works "The Year of the World" and "Chorea Sancti Viti"; accepted it without elaborate self explanation and admitted that perhaps he had been mistaken in what he was trying to do:

As to my Lyremmos and Prince Legion, your remarks are surely correct, metaphysics do not naturally unite with poetry and the unhappy Prince Legion is a godless man.²

In the temper of this reply, more than anywhere else, there is a promise that the correspondence will be stimulating and revelatory.

The Trevelyans knew something by report and first-hand knowledge of Scott's calibre as writer and artist before their acquaintance with him. Now Lady Trevelyan saw him at work during his first visit to Wallington, laying up material in the way of sketches, and in the autumn he completed for them a small oil-painting 'The Harvest Moon'. They had therefore a certain opportunity for judging his suitability to undertake the work they proposed at Wallington, though it is doubtful if they had ever seen any large painting by him. The scheme of decorating the central hall was first talked of during a visit in March 1856 and Scott was so taken by surprise and so delighted that it was not until he returned home and was able to think the idea over quietly, that he realised either the full possibilities or the immensity of the work.

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., 3 St. Thomas Street, N., 25 August 1855.
2. Ibid.

I have begun to realise the full meaning of our conversation at Wallington since returning to the cool regularity of Newcastle, and to feel more and more delighted with the idea of the great histories and decorations you have proposed --- The scheme of the whole Saloon is¹ arrangement of colour and intention of pictures must be cleared up first then the particulars will be arranging themselves in my mind, and compositions taking shape on canvas while the actual decoration is partially proceeding.¹

It is a compliment to Scott's capabilities that he was able to show such a grasp of the work at once, and as the formidable task proceeded it became plain that he knew a great deal about the principles underlying decorative work. The enthusiasm with which he wrote to W. M. Rossetti never faded until the last great series of Chevy Chase pictures was placed round the upper spandrils:

Have you heard of the splendid commission that has fallen to my lot --? I am to paint the Hall at Wallington. There are 8 panels to be filled by canvas pictures, rather more than 6 feet square besides all the decoration, to be done partly on the stone and partly put into the wall on canvas -- The pictures are to illuminate the history and worthies of Northumberland. Is it not capital?²

On this occasion Scott discussed with the Trevelyans the kind of subject needed for the large canvases and found that ideas came rapidly:

I see in vision Cuthbert teaching the good folk from the window of his hermitage on Farne as recorded and Bede in his old chair, worthy inky-fingered soul.³

Later subjects remained undiscussed and no particular arrangement of the series was decided upon at first, though of course the broad outlines of the whole scheme were planned so that it should have the necessary unity.

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1. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 27 March 1856.
 2. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 22 May 1856.
 3. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 27 March 1856.

From these preliminary talks Scott must have formed the impression that he would be given the freedom of invention befitting his position as the artist, or it is certain that he would never have contemplated accepting the commission, and still less have written of it with such delight. The Trevelyans do not seem to have brought forward any fixed ideas of what they would like; they rather turned to Scott to make actual their very nebulous scheme. Nevertheless, it is to Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan that the honour of first realising the possibilities of such decorative work belongs, and Sir Walter was rightly congratulated both on the idea and the liberal spirit in which he set about putting it into effect. An article by Tom Taylor in the Quarterly Review, gave due honour to both artist and patron:

The Commission given by Sir Walter Trevelyan to Mr. W. B. Scott - - for the decoration of the Hall of his Northumbrian Mansion of Wallington, is the best example we know in this country of a Commission, the giving and executing of which show thorough intelligence of one of the worthiest functions of Art at this Day, in both patron and painter ---¹

Other periodicals were prompt to draw attention to the commission and emphasised the courage and originality of artist and patron by reminding their readers that the work gains in importance if it is realized that for a century or so painting applied to architecture had not been practised and the earlier kind had, in any case, been of a totally different style from that in which Scott worked.²

The central hall had originally been the worst architectural feature of Wallington. The house had been built on a most unsuitable plan for the bleak Northumbrian climate, with the principal entrance in the centre front,

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1. The British Quarterly Review, May 1862.
 2. The series of oils gained notice in many North-Eastern and Scottish newspapers when they were exhibited, one by one in Newcastle, and in many national periodicals when they were exhibited together in London.

opening straight into the drawing-room, and the other rooms in a hollow square. The inner quadrangle thus formed was damp and inaccessible, with blank, high walls, which must have made the whole house cold and uncomfortable in the extreme. On three sides both floors were lighted by windows giving on to the quadrangle, though this arrangement can hardly have afforded anything but a cheerless prospect, for the centre court was not spacious enough to allow much light to enter and was very badly proportioned, being too high for its area. A short time before, this centre court had been roofed and the corridors running round the three sides made to open into it, an alteration which made the whole house at once lighter and warmer. Instead of using an all-glass roof, the architect obtained a more pleasing effect by building into the ceiling twelve circular globes of slightly obscured glass which gave an equable and shadow-less light, ideal for seeing decorations and pictures. The completed room had arcaded corridors on three sides and a fourth wall faced to correspond.

The completed scheme of decoration is elaborate and because the room was not very large, and at the best curiously proportioned, it had to be carefully planned so that one part would not detract from another, nor the whole be too overbearing. Moreover Scott, working in accordance with very definite theories of decoration, strove to ensure that it would not only blend with, but enhance the architecture of the hall. His work may be divided into four main sections: the flower groups on the lower pilasters; the eight large canvases; the foliage and heads of famous Northumbrians on the lower spandrils; the story of Chevy Chase on the upper spandrils. With so many subjects and colours to be balanced it is plain to see that no detail could be left to chance, for every part would

have a place of its own and a relation to the whole. It was only Scott's sound knowledge of fundamental principles which made it possible for him to realise the decorations as a unity; and an equally sound knowledge of technical problems such as materials, painting surfaces, and so on, which enabled him to carry it into effect. All this is implicit in the finished work but is only rarely expressed in his letters: when it is we gain a glimpse of the background of knowledge which governs every step of the decorations. One notable occasion was when Lady Trevelyan objected to the green background of the lower spandrils and Scott replied, pained but sure:

I see from your notes that you incline to agree in the idea of the green being too strong a color. I am certain it is right as it is, I have studied the question, and know that it is right - Here are some of my reasons for putting the thing on this footing.

1. The decorations ought to be more splendid in colour than the pictures and pilasters. Flat painting is brighter than shaded. Decoration has no other function than brightness and splendor.
2. The strength of the colour in the decorations rather enhances the beauty of the shaded and limited colour of the pilasters.
3. If you think to compete with decorative surfaces, you can't succeed, because they are large and flat, and it is a mistake to try.

----- There must be a scheme followed in painting the entire hall, the lower story must be stronger in colour than the upper, if the spandrils have a faint green what am I to do above?¹

In the first instance it was necessary to decide between the use of natural as against strictly ornamental forms in the decoration. At the desire of Lady Trevelyan, Ruskin was consulted, though Scott had already decided that there were great possibilities in using natural forms on the pilasters. "Lady Trevelyan," he wrote, "prevailed on me to consult Mr. Ruskin which I did with strong misgiving."

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., September 1857.

Ruskin's reply came thus:

I am as much in a fix as you are about interior decoration, but incline to the 'All Nature' in the present case, if but for an experiment. The worst of nature is that when she is chipped or dirty she looks so very uncomfortable, which Arabesque don't. Mind you must make her uncommonly stiff.¹

How far the Trevelyans appreciated what Scott was doing it is difficult to say, or how far he cared for their understanding; but in a letter of 1869/17 to Lady Trevelyan we learn that he is astonished that she should question either the forethought or the originality of his work:

Next, you think the tendencies of ornamentation is at present to extreme naturalism. Quite the contrary, it is absolutely interdicted --- I can assure you I would not win much for the School collections in the Design stage if I taught extreme naturalism. In the Hall the pictorial treatment prevails certainly, but even Mr. Ruskin, when I wrote him at the first start if you remember, telling him I proposed the pilasters and spandrils to be natural foliage so that you would take a part in it, said, 'You must make nature very stiff then' and Rossetti and others said very strongly don't do such a thing. It has been done and successfully, and you turn round and tell me it is the tendency of the age.²

The lower pilasters are, as Scott claims, most effective; each decorated with a bold spray of flowers painted directly on to the stonework of the columns. He painted only three of these himself, though he directed the work done on them by Lady Pauline and her great friend Laura Capel Lofft, afterwards the second Lady Trevelyan. These pilasters were the most simple part of the decorations and were used as an unusual sort of autograph album, various friends being invited to paint one when they visited Wallington. Arthur Hughes did a column of wild roses and John Ruskin one of cornflowers and grasses. Lady Trevelyan,

1. A.N.II, 6-7.

2. W.B.S. to Lady T., [1861] ?

who admired Ruskin wished to pay him a particular compliment and therefore saved 'the great white lily of the Annunciation' for him. It was a long time before he visited Wallington to fulfil her request and when at last he did begin work he would not for modesty attempt the flower she had chosen but protested that he preferred the humbler cornflowers. His painting is thin and sketchy in comparison with the others, so that it seems likely that it was never finished. Most of the flower sprays are bold in arrangement, though the colours are not obtrusive, being muted by the natural background of the stone. The pilasters were not all decorated at this time, but in 1905 Mrs. Collingwood, the friend of Ruskin, painted two designs of sweet peas and dahlias and probably finished two other unsigned ones. The ladies seem to have enjoyed being allowed to share in the work, though the stone was not the easiest of materials on which to paint. Letters between Scott and Lady Trevelyan discuss the arrangement of the sprays, advise on mediums and encourage the artists to hard work. There was great consternation when a pot of paint was spilt down Lady Pauline's design of the campanulas, and on another occasion Scott, with considerable shrewdness, confessed to Lady Trevelyan that she must not reveal to Miss Loftt how pleasant it was to paint on canvas again after the dusty-surfaced stone, "or she may repudiate the pilasters altogether".¹

In relation to the whole scheme, the pilasters, besides being purely attractive to the eye, were designed to show that the figures in Scott's pictures were not life-size. The Woolner marble, in the centre of the hall, served in exactly the same way to make the paintings effective by contrast, and was therefore welcomed generously:

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 4 November 1856.

The size of life will have no effect on my pictures, indeed I wish something large to show that the figures in my pictures are not life-size, and have often thought over the pilasters with their great leaves in this point of view.¹

The lower spandrils are decorated by panels painted on canvas, some of which were the work of Lady Trevelyan and Miss Capel Lofft. These spandrils were painted in the intervals of work on the historical pictures and consist of stylised foliage of various trees, holly, may, ash, beech, yew, sycamore, against a background of light green and gold trellis. In the centre of each is a medallion with the portrait of some person prominent in Northumbrian history, from Hadrian to George Stephenson. The painting of these was a simple task, but the Trevelyan letters record that Scott had considerable difficulty in satisfying Sir Walter that he had authority for the likeness of the earlier portraits. "A portrait of Alcuin", he wrote, "is most decidedly necessary for the spandrils, and Sir Walter won't stand any heads coined without some authority²." Whenever possible Scott did paint from an original portrait or engraving but in the case of some of the earlier figures it was impossible to do more than evolve a typical head.

There is no doubt that the decorations are dominated by the eight large oil-paintings which were placed in the arches on two sides of the ground floor. They were the keynote to which everything else must be related in colour and scale, and they were pictorial in intention rather than strictly decorative.

"The pictures happily are not strictly mural or architectural", said their creator, "although some of the critics have chosen to represent them so."³

Although preliminary sketches of each were submitted to Sir Walter, these eight pictures were Scott's finest opportunity to work unhampered. For, as he

1. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 22 December 1856.

2. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 31 October 1857.

3. W. B. S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, Penkill Castle, by Girvan, Ayrshire [1861?]

took occasion to point out, if his conception of a subject did not please it must be totally destroyed and the thing begun again. There could be no tampering with parts:

And now about the last one of the series. Will you please send me in the rejected sketch, and let me do another entirely, which you and Sir Walter will see finished when you return? This is the only way: I shall then be responsible for it.¹

This way of working gave him a measure of control and made him able to impose his rights as a creative artist.

The subjects finally decided upon illustrated Northumbrian history from Roman times to Scott's own day. The general plan was that the illustration of a period of history should alternate with a picture about some notable person, and the final arrangement was as follows:

The Romans cause a wall to be built for the Protection of the South;

King Egfrid and Bishop Trumwine persuade Cuthbert to be made Bishop, DCLXXIV;

The Danes descend upon the Coast and at last possess Northumberland;

Bede finishes his Works and his life at Jarrow, DCCXXV;

The Spur in the Dish warns the Border-chief that the Larder needs replenishing;

Bernard Gilpin making peace along the Borders, takes down ye Glove in Rothbury Church, circa 1570;

Grace Darling and her Father save the Survivors from the wreck of the steamer Forfarshire on the Farne rocks, 7 Sept. 1838;

In the Nineteenth Century the Northumbrians show the World what can be done with Iron and Coal.

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., [1861?]

Scott had a well defined method of working for these historical pictures. He studied the background without figures in a water-colour sketch and if any details, such as the rigging in the Grace Darling picture or the machinery in Iron and Coal, were troublesome or unfamiliar, they were studied separately in pencil.¹ It seems, from the studies for the Wallington pictures kept at Penkill, that Scott could be fairly sure of getting his main composition right almost at once. Later sketches generally show the composition being pulled together, the grouping made stronger and the central figure more dominant. They sometimes show too the addition of symbolic detail giving point to the subject. He had most difficulty with the later pictures, but it was in a sense only comparative difficulty because the earlier ones had been realized so speedily. The whole series is remarkable for its historical truth, accuracy and authentic detail. People sat for the various heads and when he could not have Swinburne for his red-haired Northumbrian he was most anxious until he found another model of the right type. Clothing, jewellery, furniture, ~~was~~ *were* all studied from originals borrowed and sought after by Scott and Sir Walter, though this surely represents the ultimate effort to achieve authenticity.

Mr. Clayton was at the Committee meeting of the Literary Society last night and is to send me a piece of the Wall by rail to the school on Monday, so that I shall have a portrait of a veritable individual stone in my foreground, much to Dr. Bruce's delight.²

'The building of the Roman Wall' painted between January and June 1857, shows work in progress on a wild stretch of the moors at Craigloch. A small group of barbarians is attacking the working-party who are safely entrenched on the heights. Two of the men, unconcerned, are slyly playing dice, but the

1. Much of this preliminary work is preserved in Vol. IV of Studies, Sketches, Designs, etc., October 1861.

2. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 12 March 1857.

Roman centurion in charge has seen and stands threateningly over them. It is a sharp vivid painting of great detail and full colour. The centurion dominates the picture and sets the keynote of vigour and strength. The landscape is most impressive with the completed wall stretching away into the distance over the top of the crags, and a storm gathering over the moorlands. Each panel of the series has a motto, which in this case is a simple statement: 'Adrianus murum duxit qui barbaros romanosque divideret'.

Scott made some preliminary studies for this picture, including one of the background alone. This was in water-colour and emphasised the striking nature of the setting even without the figures. The progressive forms of the picture show that he got the main composition down at once but later drew it together so that the centurion, who was the central figure, was brought further into the foreground and assumed a more threatening stance.

The St. Cuthbert picture, an early inspiration, and the first to be painted during June to December 1856, exists in two distinct versions. One of these shows St. Cuthbert looking from the window of his hermitage as Scott had described the scene in a letter to Lady Trevelyan. This was never developed; instead Scott chose to show the saint working in his garden when King Egfrid and Bishop Trumwine come with the request that he will leave his hermitage for a bishoprick. This picture has the same quality of painting as 'The Roman Wall': a sharpness and detail which make it stand out. Scott made water-colour sketches of the stones, the moss and plants, and debated the right background in letters to Lady Trevelyan. He finally decided that the unbroken line of sea was more impressive than a view of Bamborough in the

distance, though with characteristic thoroughness a study of this exists. In early sketches the group of figures is most uncertain; in fact not until the fourth attempt does it take the final form in which the Bishop comes between the King and the Saint. Cuthbert begins to find his pose in the third study and Scott at last achieved the right portrayal of his troubled expression and attitude. A passage in a letter written at the time witnesses that he had felt considerable anxiety about this picture:

Enclosed is a note from Mr. F. M. Brown, to whom I sent a photograph of the St. Cuthbert picture in return for his 'Prisoner of Chillon'. It is not sent believe me on the ground of his favourable estimate of it, -- but because of certain suggestions he makes -- will you kindly look at the hood of the saint and let me know if you find any resemblance to a bird's beak in a ludicrous way.¹

The next picture should have been that of the Danes, but Scott, delighted with his freedom to work as he chose, wrote to W. M. Rossetti:

By the way, will you tell Gabriel that I shan't need the armour for an infinite time to come as I have skipped the Danes and taken to the 'Death of Bede' which is the next again. In this picture I shall have adopted this subject because I like the personal subjects more than those illustrating periods, and don't wish to have two to do without interval.²

The Danes therefore occupied him from January to June 1858, and he made a most attractive picture with the same broad lines of composition as the 'Roman Wall': the foreground on the heights and background far below. The Danes, who have evidently come as settlers, clamber to the cliff top with their bundles of goods and chattels and even the family cat. In the distance there are signs of fighting and pillage but here the women are coming ashore

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 1 February 1857.
2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 9 August 1857.

unhindered. Scott paints with rich colour and immensely painstaking detail, getting some very good effects of texture.

'Bede', with its splendid motto 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God', was generally hailed by the critics as the finest of the series. As befits its subject it is subdued in tones and seems to mark an appropriate pause in the surrounding colour. Bede is lying full length on the floor of his cell. One monk supports him and another holds the saint's head with both his hands. The sunken eyes and pallor of the dying Bede are very fine and were realized with the help of a good model. The composition altered to a certain extent during the preliminary work and some symbolic details such as the dove flying from the window only appeared in the final picture. It is a sorry thing that the heavy dark paint has cracked badly.

'The Spur in the Dish' is a picture of essential vigour. There is a fine gaiety and spirit about the scene and characters and the composition is good for the skill with which the eye is carried to the central incident. It is interesting that Scott made two colour studies for this picture, a preliminary he did not usually find essential. One of these is very close to the finished work. The main figure, the woman, is in red, and the rest of the picture in subdued yellows, browns and blues, all blending and pulling the composition together. The second colour study is very poor. The woman is dressed in red and blue and there is no one group of tones, but isolated patches of sharp colour are scattered over the rest of the picture and serve no purpose of composition. Scott seems to have had some difficulty with this subject for his rough pencil studies show various arrangements of the figures

and are, in fact, all much weaker than the final form. Although this picture is light it has none of the glow of the first paintings; that particular effect which Scott never seemed to get again.

Enthusiastic as ever, he wrote eagerly to Lady Trevelyan of the idea for the Bernard Gilpin picture:

Meeting at Church or fair seemed the perils in these times of feud, and one anecdote related of Bernard is that he interposed between two violent men with their following threatening to come to sword blows in the little Rothbury church. Don't you think this idea a good one?¹

But not long afterwards we hear that the picture was causing trouble and he was working simultaneously on 'the Spur', so that the time would not be entirely lost.

I am now struggling with my new picture, and getting on immensely. But for a fortnight it seemed as if every idea had been driven out of my head by those 6 weeks in Italy - I could not imagine or draw either, and after floundering about had to tear up what I had done about Bernard Gilpin and take to the Spur.²

The finished picture has for its motto the beatitude 'Blessed are the peacemakers'. It is notable for some very fine heads and the faces and attitudes altogether are very expressive. The main lines of composition were there in the first study, although it was not until later that Gilpin, 'The Apostle of the North', became sufficiently separated from the other figures to dominate the picture. In style and colour it is very like the previous picture; not brilliant, but light and expressive of life and vigour. Scott evidently intended there to be some correspondence, for he said that he would have liked the same characters to recur - thus pointing the relation in scene and time.

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., [1858?]
2. W.B.S. to Lady T., [1858?]

'Grace Darling', last of the pictures depicting an individual, proved a stubborn subject. Scott had difficulty with the background, which he studied most painstakingly from the life. In August 1859 W. M. Rossetti received an invitation:

When are you likely to come? I have to go down to Bamborough and take a boat to Longstone Lighthouse to see the spot where Grace Darling saved the sailors. Would you like to go?

Parts of the ship, especially the rigging, needed careful study, but the main thing which held him up was the grouping of the figures, and for long enough this refused to come right. However the final achievement was worth the effort and 'Grace Darling' is a striking picture with the figures concentrated in one corner and a fearful background of wind-lashed sea and stormy sky with the broken spar pointing the composition. All interest is concentrated on the survivors, the rescuing boat being painted very small and curiously enough as if it were being rowed strongly away from the wreck, a technical error never pointed out to Scott. The heads are very fine, particularly that of the woman, and the whole has a compelling quality which marks it out amongst the four pictures on this side of the hall.

The last subject, 'Iron and Coal', is interesting for its theme rather than praiseworthy as a picture. Scott seems determined to try and express in it the whole spirit of Tyneside industrialism, which results in a composition of the most amazing complexity. The central group of figures is that of three men working round an anvil against a detailed background of the Tyne Bridge, the river, and shipping; detail which is all intended to show something of local conditions and trade. This picture expressed a social truth

1. W.B.S. to W. M. Rossetti, N., [21 August 1859?]

in Scott's eyes; and one which his patreess did not readily understand or appreciate, as this letter shows:

But the coins! you don't mean I hope to say you won't have them. Of course I mean that there was no time like the present for L.S.D., no age and no country in which so much and so long labour daily all the year was ever required to gain the amount of money necessary to live as at the present time --- Do you think these men strike from six to six (gates shut at the quarter) just for the game or as roustering borderers took to the heath? You can't mean that the same motives are exactly to the same extent active in all times? As to the sentimentalism of my supposition, I should call it anti-sentimentalism. But besides the amount of money now necessary to be gained and the difficulty of gaining it, that particular form of materialism that makes current coin the first thing is characteristic of the day.¹ *

These eight great pictures, begun in June 1856 were painted without long interruption, roughly one every six months, and finished in June 1861. They were exhibited separately in Newcastle as they were finished, and in June 1861 the whole series was transported to London for exhibition in Gambart's French Gallery in Pall Mall. This was undertaken as a commercial venture and Scott wrote detailed letters to Sir Walter explaining the expenses of the Exhibition, the price of admission, 1s, and the length of time it was to remain open. The pictures excited a good deal of notice in the papers and reviews. Tom Taylor, of The Times spoke of this as "the sort of commission that vitalises art".² But Scott was unfortunate in the time he chose for exhibition and the reviewer of The Critic commiserated with him:

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., [1861?]

* It will be noticed that the subjects of Scott's pictures are all taken from the history of the Trevelyan family or that of the immediate neighbourhood. When his friend Ford Madox Brown embarked on a similar series of pictures in Manchester Town Hall Scott wrote to him in some indignation: "But pray don't say yours is the first series of illustrations of local history done in this country. Indeed, how can the baptism of a King at York, the building of the Roman Wall, or Wickliffe at Westminster, be illustrations of the history of Manchester." v. Ferd M. Hueffer, Ford Madox Brown, London, 1896, p.332.

2. The Times, 29 June 1861.

It is to be regretted that so important and interesting a series should have been set before the London public at a late period of the season, when it must inevitably fail of becoming as widely known and appreciated as it merits to be.¹

Broadly speaking those who saw Scott's pictures were agreed that while he must be praised for his invention, and the intellectual quality to body forth such ideas, he showed many faults in execution. Scott was generally counted amongst the Pre-Raphaelites by his reviewers and was therefore carefully watched for faults of perspective and peculiarities of drawing. Most critics realised that the pictures had a decorative function and that their placing in the hall would help them. Their fidelity to history and their feeling were widely noticed and on the whole the note was one of praise and intelligent appreciation. There is one reviewer who, without being malicious, is the only one to write of that quality which is not exactly a fault but a failing in the series, and which is so hard to define :-

-- the general vividness of effect, the absence of tone and the quantity of detail²

Scott doubtless found a certain satisfaction in the favourable reviews of his exhibition, but probably set greater store by the opinions of his friends who saw his pictures in their correct setting and were discriminating in their taste:

William Rossetti was very much satisfied with the aspect of the pictures in the Hall, thinking they never looked so well, in which I quite agree. The last he considers the best. Miss Boyd begs to send her compliments and to say she enjoyed the visit and the day altogether. She too found the pictures look better than in London, in spite of the splendid painting on the pilasters.³

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1. The Critic, 3 August 1861.
 2. The Daily News, date unknown.
 3. W.B.S. to Lady T., [1861?]

So far so good, but the question which persists is: what of Sir Walter? What was his opinion of these decorations begun at his instance and completed under his patronage? In fact we are never told. We must be content to learn from occasional comments in the letters, which at best give only a reflection, for we do not possess Sir Walter's letters but only Scott's replies. His attitude is not, in truth, very clear; was he enthusiastic or simply acquiescent; was he well-informed or simply a layman; did he query what Scott did because he thoroughly understood it, or because he thought it proper that the patron should "keep the artist on his toes". We do not know who first urged the scheme of decorations, though Lady Trevelyan took the most active part when it was being translated into actuality. Whatever her husband's opinion he seems to have agreed without protest.

The commission was fairly generous and Scott was paid promptly as he carried out the work, nearly £1,000 in all, which included about £100 for each large canvas. There is never any suggestion that he was dissatisfied with the financial arrangements; that he incurred the displeasure of his patron by over-running his original estimate; or conversely that he was ever hampered by lack of funds. The relationship between patron and artist was, in this much at least, quite happy. The admirable quality about Scott's part in it was that he did not carry out the work simply as a commission, he rather entered into it heart and soul and made it a labour of love. Wallington is a long journey from Newcastle on a bleak morning, and Scott made it frequently in the worst weather and in the intervals of hard and exacting work at the school.

Before the opening of the railway he travelled by mail-gig, and the letters have some telling descriptions of the discomforts of both methods; of Morpeth Station with its thorough system of draughts and 'the equipage the Queen does not know she possesses'. As the true master-craftsman Scott superintended the work constantly, A good deal of the minor decoration and ground colour washes were done by a firm of contractors who worked under Scott's eye and to his carefully prepared designs. Lady Trevelyan and Miss Lofft did a large amount of painting on the pilasters and spandrils under Scott's direction: no doubt it was considered a pleasant and suitable occupation for ladies. Even the amiable Mr. Wooster, Sir Walter's secretary, meddled a little, but probably this kind of help brought with it peculiar trials. Scott gave freely of his time and energy to the two ladies, directing, encouraging, bringing paints, brushes and canvases for them, from town.

The original commission seems to have been for the lower part of the hall only. Scott commented at the time that the upper walls and ceiling must be considered together. It must have been gratifying to him when soon after the completion of this work he received a commission for the upper spandrils which he elected to paint with scenes from the ballad of Chevy Chase:

I find it difficult to give an estimate of the decoration of the upper part of the Hall, Thomson or whoever does it requiring the measurements and the design for the colours to be picked out before counting up the time and other expenditure in doing the work. I should think the amount of work would not be greater than that required by the Drawing room and the expense of materials less, as the drawing-room is oil up to the cover. To make up for this we must have more gilding. On the whole the house-painters work will not come to so much as the cost of the drawing-room, as far as I can now calculate, so that the great expense will be my work. I think about £125 or less, for each of the four sides of the hall would be my charge for the spandrils. For the pilasters I would be regulated by the time and expense of the gilded ground on which the saints and angels are to be painted. With regard to time the whole could scarcely be done in less than three years.

1. W.B.S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, N., 18 May 1862.

This work was not done in quite the same close relationship with Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan; for one thing Scott had left Newcastle and had many new friends and interests of his own, particularly Miss Boyd and his painting at Penkill. The canvases were begun early in 1864 and completed, after Lady Pauline's death, in 1868. Their story is that of the English bowmen going out deer-stalking in the early morning and before night falling in battle to the Scottish spearmen like the animals they had so gaily killed. Sir Walter had evidently made some objection to the scenes of violence which must be included and Scott answered to Lady Trevelyan:

In the entire first half of the spandrels there are the incidents of going out and deer-stalking, so that it does not matter just at present, but some day will you please give me a chance of showing you the designs for the second half. There are very few indeed occupied with actual fighting, - two are filled by the combatants, the English bowmen and the Scottish spearmen rushing together, each having a spandril, then one shows the deaths of the two chiefs and one corner spandril is a mellee. Then comes the shrift, the widows, the pall. I hope the series will be a true tragedy with the award of punishment sufficiently pronounced. But there must be some fierce passion seen, otherwise the whole would be an empty nut, and I am afraid Sir Walter will, at the last moment, fix his attention and isolate the one or two showing the fight, so as to stop me even after they are up.

How Sir Walter was reconciled to the scenes of fighting we do not know, but the spandrils are most striking. The story begins above the panel of the 'Roman Wall' and the sky is painted in a very effective way to show the passing time. Scott received £500 for the 18 spandrils and in 1868 he came to Wallington to see them put into place and his work completed, writing to Sir Walter:

I hope to have the great satisfaction of seeing the hall again and adding the Chevy Chase series to its walls.²

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., 33 Elgin Road, [1864?]

2. W.B.S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, 33 Elgin Road, 5 February 1868.

Scott might have foreseen a certain difficulty in working directly under the eye of his patron, but no doubt if it occurred to him at all he believed it to be compensated by Sir Walter's ready interest in his work and the co-operation of Lady Trevelyan. All would probably have gone well had the Trevelyans expressed their interest only by suggesting subjects, by stimulating Scott's imagination and offering him ideas which he could take up and use. Unfortunately however Sir Walter's attitude expressed itself in continual questioning; demands to see the work in the rough; challenging of every detail and colour. Scott bore with this for long enough, though he realised that such a complex scheme of decoration must show the master-touch of the artist in order to have any unity. At last in 1862 he turned sharply upon Sir Walter and exposed the folly of such a way of working. It is a short passage, but it has implicit in it all Scott's disappointment with the actual conditions of the commission, a disappointment which had been gradually borne in upon him over the years:

About the label. You know every little bit of pattern or colour put on the Hall has been discussed in the rough and in an isolated manner. Quite a wrong system. Far more expense and subversive of all unity and in fact of design. Now on the other hand I have observed Sir Walter has always approved of what I have done when finished in its place - whether he saw it before or not, but never when put into his hand in the shape of a piece of paper. If the pictures had been designed and painted piecemeal and by discussion where would they have been at this moment? When the upper part of the hall is done (if it is to be done) the whole must be designed and drawn out at once and submitted to Sir Walter and yourself, but for such a detached piece as this label to submit a sketch is simply paralytic.¹

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 16 October 1862.

There were enough problems inherent in the work, from technical to creative difficulties, without Scott being bound to wait upon the approval of one who, however interested he was, remained a layman in art. The mind which could plan as boldly, and comment as intelligently on the work as Scott had done, was not likely to work best while being questioned on every detail and dogged by continual awareness that his patron must be pleased.¹

Poor Scott did not like 'dancing hornpipes in fetters', but the fairness of all he wrote in the matter and the way in which he maintained the balance of loyalties to his patron and his work, speak volumes in his praise. Whenever he could Scott gave consideration to the wishes of Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan, but this was often a gracious rather than a wise attitude:

However, after all, you and Sir Walter must decide, and according to that decision I shall act and endeavour to carry out your views, knowing that as a question of taste simply, you are nearly certain to be right, and the alteration will simply require the decoration to be pitched on a different key.²

In the whole length of the commission Scott displayed no ill-temper, though he must at times have been sorely tried; nor, to his particular credit, did he show any jealousy when told that the work of another artist had been commissioned to take a place in the hall. Scott welcomed the Woolner marble, which expresses the blessings of civilisation by a woman teaching her child to pray, as "a grand completion of our labours"³, and recognised that as a grand and noble work of art it could have no detrimental effect. Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan seem to have had little tact or they would scarcely have quoted

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1. "The last interview with Sir Walter left a vague impression that I had not done all right somehow". v. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 4 November 1856.
 2. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 8 September 1857.
 3. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., 22 December 1856.

Ruskin's opinions to Scott with such regularity when they were aware of the hostility between the two. Scott forbore to speak his feelings about Ruskin, though he did express the hope that the Wallington decorations would be judged without the artist in mind and he reserved the right to add his own rider when passing on to Lady Trevelyan Ruskin's opinion of the eight oil-paintings:

At first he questioned me as if I had necessarily run my head blindfold against the canvas! This was not exactly my mode of procedure, but you know one can't dare to point out the meanings in a picture to a man who in many cases has shown the finest discrimination in pictures of any mortal.¹

Scott met each and every intrusion with fairness and control. Once only was he really roused to fury in defence of his work, and that over such a ludicrous matter that it makes amusing reading, even though it must have been a painful subject to him. Trivial, symbolic, it must sum up all the trials of this commission.

Will you please thank Lady Trevelyan for her notes. She says I approve of the stuffed birds being set in to the hall instead of the gallery - and I write expressly to say that I don't do so at all - this is entirely wrong. The artistic unity of the hall will be broken and in spite of the finest stuffing it will take a Museum character. John Hancock and I have had disputes on the subject of Stuffed Birds. I do not remember expressing approval of the Hall for his works, but I have felt a desire to keep off the question with him. He has ideas of Bird-stuffing as fine art which make him try always to push his stuffed birds with the painting and sculpture departments of public exhibitions. Wax-works and preserved animals are not and I hope never will be considered equal companions for the simple forms of imitation so decidedly removed from nature as painting and sculpture. I hope you will think over the arrangement again, at the same time I would not have interfered, as it seems as if I were selfish - a dog in a manger - but that Lady Trevelyan expresses herself as if I had favoured the change you seem to have in view.²

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1. W.B.S. to Lady T., [1861?]
 2. W.B.S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, 14 August 1857.

CHAPTER IX

Newcastle: Personal Life and Friends.

Mr. and Mrs. Scott had been married only a short time when they moved to Newcastle. Their first home was 3 St. Thomas Street; not all they would have wished for in the matter of accommodation or surroundings. Despite the regular income attached to Scott's new post, they seem to have lived frugally. W. M. Rossetti, who stayed with them in 1850, says that they were by no means well off, though one cannot help feeling that some of Scott's careful budgeting was dictated not so much by necessity as by his native sense of the value of money. There was a household of three; William, Letitia, and Mrs. Norquoy, Scott's mother-in-law. Although she is never mentioned in his autobiography, it is plain from personal letters that she was the dominating personality in the home, the organiser of domestic affairs. Not only did she run the daily lives of the Scott family, but she took visitors under her wing and advised them from her vast fund of common-sense. It is amusing to read that, after W. M. Rossetti had stayed with them in 1852, Scott was instructed by his mother-in-law to inform his friend that there was a great deal of difference between leaving an adequate gratuity for the servant and one which was mistakenly generous.

At this period of his life Scott was still handsome looking and had great charm of personality. Holman Hunt, meeting him at Gabriel Rossetti's introduction, has described the impression he gained:

The visitor from the North was a man of about thirty-five; in height he must have been fully five feet ten. He had brown hair, flowing, although not long. His regard, when talking to a new friend, was singularly penetrating and deliberate, while his speech was entertainingly syllabic and naive, so that all the mischief that might be imagined in his Mephistophelian expression was dissipated in a breath, and I was at once hail-fellow-well-met with the newcomer. That which contributed to the arch-fiend expression was the angle formed by his eyebrows, which from their parting centre ascended sharply, and ere they deflected shot off a handsome tuft, some of the hairs of which curled downwards like young moustaches.¹

Gabriel also introduced Scott to his friend Madox Brown, who recorded in the privacy of his diary what was surely a genuine feeling:

Gabriel and Scott dined here. Emma (Brown's wife) enchanted with Scott as all women are; a truly nice fellow and an honour to know.²

It is a favourable comment on Scott's manner that the Rossetti family welcomed and liked him at once when he made their acquaintance in 1847. In the words of William Michael, they found him "not only attractive, but even fascinating"³, and this first impression was succeeded by warm friendship with Maria and the retiring Christina, as well as with their two brothers. Newcastle people too seem to have taken to the tall quiet gentleman who came into their midst to re-open the art-school. A local newspaper report emphasised Scott's modest scholarly manner, and noticed that his courtesy and genuine interest in people went with an air of pre-occupation and thoughtfulness.

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1. W. Holman Hunt, Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, London, 1905, I, 230.
 2. Ruskin: Rossetti: Pre-Raphaelitism, Papers from 1854 to 1862, arranged and ed. by W.M. Rossetti, London, 1899, pp. 39-40,
 3. W. M. Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, His Family Letters, with a Memoir, London, 1895, I., 115.

Mrs. Scott was a slightly built, delicate, and sprightly person. She must have been most irritating to live with,¹ unless Scott had the happy faculty of being, as one acquaintance suggested, "unexcited by sublunary matters, vexations and cares"²; for she was the antithesis of her husband, whose mind could ponder over a philosophic subject and explore it to the very edge of thought. Letitia was one of those people with a 'butterfly mind', always seeking for a new interest, playing with it for a short while, and then forgetting it. She dabbled in religion, and the quality of her interest is determined by the fact that she was concerned merely with superficial differences between the sects, with ritual and temporary rules, and could be changed by a word to a new adherence. Her husband, with his tongue in his cheek, said of her:

Mrs. Scott, who has just discovered that I am penning a letter to you, desires me to say, she has given up all the old theology, having been converted by antagonism on W. F. Oliphant's proving the other evening on Salvation by Faith;³

Scott writes in his autobiography that the death of his brother and the failing health of his mother combined with other accidental circumstances to make him ponder, for the first time since boyhood, the question of religious belief. It was a serious and troubling matter to Scott and eventually he must have spoken of it to Letitia, who took up the idea with a great deal of enthusiasm but not a shred of understanding for her husband. We may see her very character in her response:

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1. Scott did not openly complain of Mrs. Scott's failings. He was, on the contrary, patient and discreet. Only once, in his autobiography he compares his situation with that of Lady Pauline Trevelyan, married to the grim and humourless Sir Walter -- "which must have been a grievance, but was only perceptible as a secret amusement. When I knew her first," he goes on, "I was not learned in the female character, my own wife being the most difficult of human creatures to understand." v. A.N.II, p.250.
 2. Sketches of Public Men of the North, material drawn from the columns of the Northern Examiner, London: Newcastle, 1855, p.68.
 3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 1 November 1851.

My wife rushed into the inquiry at once experimentally with all her heart, but it immediately took the form of pastime with her. We were to go to all kinds of churches, and get argumentative with all kinds of believers; the question in her mind became manifestly a simple one, viz. - does an infusion of religion add to the pleasure or interest of the day.¹

One wonders how Mrs. Scott occupied her time when her mother assumed responsibility for the running of the household. She was not an unintelligent person; she knew a good deal of French, had rather a gift for translation, and we know that Christina Rossetti thought quite highly of the occasional original work Mrs. Scott did in the Newcastle days:

Mrs. W. B. Scott was not a poetess or authoress in the ordinary sense; but she had recently shown me some verses of her composition, chiefly on religious topics. Her opinions on such topics were at that time shifting and uncertain -- I am far from blind to the poetry of Mrs. Scott's verses. They are very superior to my preconceived notions of them, and indicate talent and feeling; if such poetry may be trusted for telling a true tale.²

Probably Christina read more of Mrs. Scott's work, for many years later she suggested her as a possible contributor to Mr. John Ingram, editor of a series of biographies of 'Eminent Women'.³

The Scotts entertained a good deal, which doubtless gave Letitia welcome opportunity for conversation, but one has the impression that she did not share many of William's interests; did not particularly care for holidays with him; and was scarcely more than an acquaintance of such close friends of her husband as Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan. Perhaps the only person in Scott's circle likely either to appeal to Mrs. Scott, or appreciate her personality, was Mr. Wooster, who was as talkative and trite as she was. He, it is certain, found

1. A.N.I., 332.

2. The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London. 1908, pp.16-17.

3. Ibid, p.110.

a welcome in the Scott home whenever he was in Newcastle and Scott's letters suggest that he had about him that quality of pleasant fussiness which it is so difficult to dislike. Johannes Ronge¹, the Silesian priest, stayed with them in 1852, and though he was in the first instance an acquaintance of Mrs. Scott's made during her aforementioned inquiries into religion, William took to the man, invited him to Newcastle and arranged for him to lecture; but it was seldom that the interests of husband and wife crossed in this way.

W. M. Rossetti visited Mr. and Mrs. Scott for the first time in 1850, and has left a penetrating description of the atmosphere of their home and the personalities of the two partners:

I found there, he writes, very much the sort of intellectual atmosphere which I best relished, the talk being of art, poetry, and seculative outlooks in religion and policy; the former from the sceptical point of view, the latter from the democratic. Scott was essentially a 'thinking' man; he had a good deal of knowledge on several subjects, with the Caledonian's love for abstract cogitation, and he imparted his thoughts freely and in an interesting way. In his company one was never at a loss for some topic of conversation --- Mrs. Scott was a sprightly little woman, constantly talking in a pattering sort of way; whatever turned up, her tongue turned up. Her fathom-line for intellectual matters was not perhaps deep, but it was always prompt; more especially she had a knack at pirouetting round religious subjects, and she tried her luck in every doctrinal camp, from secularism to Roman Catholicism. At last she seemed to think herself well-based

1. Johannes Ronge denounced as idolatry the showing of the Holy Coat of Treves in 1844. He joined with others of the same mind to form a new sect, the German Catholic Church. This was very different from the Roman Catholic faith in doctrine and ritual and it gradually passed further and further into free-thinking and politics. It was severely handled by the government during 1848, when prompted by fear of revolution, and after this date it gradually decayed. Ronge fled to London and lived there from 1849+1861.

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in Anglicanism of the ritual type. In character she had her whimsies, but was essentially very estimable, a steady friend and always willing to oblige. We prized her in the long run much better than we had done at first sight!¹

It seems only fair to add that W. M. Rossetti was not subject to Mrs. Scott's whimsies for too long at a time. One may believe that the trials of life with her were increased by her delicate health. She was a woman of hysterical temperament, as her vivid, shallow personality might suggest, and her attacks shattered the calm of the household whenever she seemed likely to be crossed or wished to evade responsibility. His letters suggest that Scott had to consider Letitia particularly in all his arrangements; but it was consideration for the sake of keeping the peace, not a sign of any warm affection. In the summer of 1863 he had planned to go abroad, but his suggestions for the holiday provoked endless disagreement, until the upshot of it all was this:

Letitia now, however, since I have assented to go anywhere and as long as she likes, declines to go at all; so we stay at home, most likely.²

Their relationship seems always to have retained some measure of friendship, but of love there was little. In later years the separation between their interests became more plain, but the beginning of that drift apart was here in the years at Newcastle, as Scott's occasional remarks to Lady Trevelyan most clearly show. As early as 1857, he was writing in a tone which, taken with other evidence, suggests that he maintained no more than the expected courtesy of a man towards his wife:

1. W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, London, 1906, I, 131-132.
2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 8 March 1863.

Mrs. Scott has taken the offer of the trip into Scotland, so I can only write this note as my representative at Wallington. You see I must show myself to be a good husband, as a corrective to all those dreadful insinuations whereby you made my life miserable at the end of last week!¹

His life at Newcastle must have been heavy enough for Scott in consideration of the sheer amount of routine work, without any domestic complications to add to his burden. Classes were held morning, afternoon and evening, and Scott ran the school with the assistance of only two masters. The times of classes varied over the period Scott was in charge, but the morning or afternoon class of two hours was generally for ladies and that in the evening, from 7 to 9, was for artisans. In addition to the regular classes the Government gradually saddled the School of Design with responsibility for the art teaching in the national schools.² Holidays were brief; six weeks at Midsummer, two weeks at Christmas, Monday and Tuesday in Easter week and Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun week; and during working time the headmaster knew he might expect frequent visits from Inspectors. These were no brief duty calls, but thorough and strenuous examinations. The local newspapers reported the Inspector's visits in their columns and said of the one in 1858:

It occupied four days, and in addition to the students of the classes of the School of Art selections from the boys of all national and other schools in the town, receiving lessons in drawing from the assistant master, Mr. Lord, were passed in review. The result has been satisfactory.³

Scott's task was made harder because he was frequently not in good health. We come close to sympathy for him when we read in letters to Lady Trevelyan of

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1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., (undated).
 2. Report from the Select Committee on Schools of Art, Appendix No. 16, 1864.
 3. The Daily Chronicle and Northern Counties Advertiser, 10 June 1858.

mornings when he hated to set out for the School because the frost was so sharp,¹ or the evenings when he was forced to leave the pleasant task of letter-writing because it was the time for his class;² and when each holiday was over the return to work was not a pleasant prospect, but a 'return to the grindstone'. His health seems to have become increasingly troublesome during these twenty years in Newcastle, although he was only fifty-three when he retired. The worst attack of illness was in 1852, when Scott came close to a breakdown and was forced to take a period of rest at Tynemouth.³ He then described his complaint to W. M. Rossetti as being chronic rather than acute and said that it had been hanging about him for years. He obeyed the orders of his friend Dr. Embleton to take rest and a change of air, but they did not seem to effect a complete cure, for in April 1853 D. G. Rossetti wrote to Woolner that Scott was ill during his annual visit to London:

Part of this time the poor stunner was laid up, and I hear has continued more or less unwell ever since.⁴

Apart from the exigencies of work, the early years at Newcastle saw more than enough personal sorrows for Scott. In 1849 David died, aged only 46, and Scott was profoundly affected when he looked back on his brother's life and recognised the frustrated powers, and the ultimate failure in the eyes of the world. He travelled to Edinburgh where David lay dying and spent a harrowing period watching over the sick man. During the long nights by David's bedside, he was left with his troubled thoughts and the sighing wind for company. At last death came, the vigil was over and Scott turned to comfort his mother:

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., 21 December 1855.

2. Ibid.

3. A.N.I., 299, records a leave of absence from school and a visit to Paris; during a letter of the same year, to W.M. Rossetti, mentions that he was ill after his summer holiday.

4. Amy Woolner, Thomas Woolner, His Life in Letters, London, 1917, p.57.

That dreadful day! My dear old mother sat by his bedside and at last closed his eyes. Then she said, 'Now take me away; let me go to bed then come and sit with me'. I remained by her bedside till far into the night. For a week past she had scarcely spoken a word, but now she lay, leaning her pillowed head on her open hand, talking incessantly, recounting endless reminiscences of her early married life, of David's infancy, and of the other children.¹

Mrs. Scott was persuaded to move from Edinburgh to a pleasant country cottage at Portobello, which had happy memories of family holidays in long-past years, when her children were young.² But it was not to be for long. In 1852 Scott wrote with quiet sorrow to his friends of his mother's death, which left him alone in the world:

For two days I sat beside her, reading aloud very audibly her favourite chapters from the New Testament; on the third I saw that the shadow of an unknown evening made all things indistinct to her at noonday, and utterly indifferent. A warm afternoon it was, with all the doors open and the sound of the tidal waves breaking and receding again distinctly audible in the stillness, when the dear face was quieted for ever --- In a mysterious trunk she always kept in her bedroom, and which I opened some time after, not without some pious hesitation, the loving maternal nature had preserved relics of each one of all her children; relics added successively as their beloved possessors had been gathered in by death. Here was a humming-top, labelled thus: 'This was the last plaything held by dear little Walter's dear little hand!' It must have lain in this box, as I now found it for about fifty years, and here were along with it, small shoes and caps, gloves, picture-books, and locks of hair. The silver bells and coral we had all used, and which had descended as a nursery tradition, I found among the rest. The last deposit made but lately was David's miniature dressing-case he had carried to Italy and home again.³

There is no doubt that Scott was deeply grieved by the deaths of David and his Mother. He says himself that he was troubled in his mind and turned

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1. A.N.I., 264-265.
 2. Ibid, pp.271-272.
 3. Ibid, pp.273-274.

to consider religion, and it seems probable that his illness in the autumn of that year was in part reaction from the strain.¹ But curiously enough Scott also writes that with their deaths he felt he had entered a new period in his life when he was free from responsibility. Not of course that the years from 1842-52 had been all work and trouble. They were years of pleasant activity too; visits from intimate friends such as W. M. Rossetti, who came to Newcastle first in 1850, and then four or five times until 1862; holidays and trips to London for the art exhibitions. These early holidays were simple; a visit to Wetheral near Carlisle, scene of that lovely poem:

Doubtless now in Wetheral woods
The white lady - garlic spreads -- "2

or a trip in the autumn of 1852 which included a visit to his good friend W. J. Linton at Brantwood on the east side of Coniston Lake. This he described in a letter:

My route home was by Windermere and Coniston, and I was rewarded by as beautiful an evening as ever shone over that beautiful water, on arriving at Bowness. Next day I spent with Linton, who has got a great house gloriously situated amidst a thousand pictures.³

None of these were elaborate holidays, but they were thoroughly enjoyed, and even Letitia seems to have shared in the pleasure of visits to Tynemouth to find refreshment by the sea. In 1853 Scott allowed himself the luxury of a sketching holiday at Hexham, an old market-town in Northumberland. He went alone, and found a deep satisfaction in the six weeks he spent there. Slipping into the quiet country ways of the town, he enjoyed the long hours of sunshine and came to know the familiar figures of the market-place; the bellman, the

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1. The Dumfries Herald of January 1853, in its review of the Memoir of David Scott, spoke of William's 'failing health and onerous duties'.
 2. Poems: 1854, p.158.
 3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 9 November, 1852.

apothecary; the schoolchildren:

At this moment the bellman is calling below the window, 20/-
reward for information who robbed John Dunning's apple-tree
last night --- While I paint the sharp little wrens hop about
like mice and the wood pigeon sets me half-asleep.¹

In that six weeks he painted two pictures, one of Hexham market-place, the
other of the Vicarage garden at the tiny village of St. John's Lea.

It was this same summer that D. G. Rossetti came on a visit to the
Scotts because his health was not good and he felt the need of a change of
air. He was grumpy and ill-natured, and although his impressions are amusing
they are no more than a pendant to that description of the household given by
W. M. Rossetti in 1850:

I do not know exactly what my next move will be, but I do not
think of staying here, as it is rather a dreary place, and Scott's
inertia is so much akin to my own that I am afraid I shall not get
much benefit as long as I am here --- I find the general stagna-
tion too like the spirit of Banquo, except for a strenuous dog,
from whom also I suffer much.²

These central years were in fact lazy ones for Scott, and eventful ones
for Newcastle. Autumn 1853 was made ghastly by an epidemic of cholera which
in its intensity Scott likened to the plague. He described the hot lurid
evening when the first case occurred, and the plague-like devices for disin-
fecting the streets and burying the victims. The next year James Clephan,
a native of Newcastle, published a well documented account of the cholera
scourge and exposed the appalling conditions of overcrowding in Gateshead and
Newcastle which had allowed the disease to gain a hold.³ Rather like the
Plague and the Great Fire of London, this cholera epidemic was followed in

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., White Horse Inn, Hexham, [17 August 1853]
2. W.M.Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, His Family Letters, II, 101-102 & 104.
3. James Clephan, The Three Warnings, Newcastle, 1854.

October 1854 by an explosion on the Gateshead bank of the Tyne which caused a vast amount of damage and killed many people.¹ But for Scott the year was to be remembered not for the explosion, which he dismissed in a few ill-tempered words, but because he obtained an introduction to Sir Walter Trevelyan and was afterwards invited to Wallington, his Northumberland home.

1856 was a decisive year for Scott, although his restlessness and reconsideration of the desirability of staying at Newcastle dated from the sensation of freedom he felt after the deaths of his Mother and David. A bald recital such as this cannot however show the mental disturbance associated with these events. Mrs. Norquoy died in February 1856, and it was only then that Scott confessed to Lady Trevelyan the important part she had played in their lives by relieving both himself and Letitia from the irksome need of attending to household affairs:

The truth is the loss of her mother is more to her than to most women as she has nearly all her life had her mother about her, gladly leaving everything to the old lady's hands that she might trifle or use her own time according to her own tastes, and as Mrs. N. was a worthy and in some respects a noble stoical creature I fell very much into the same habits. Besides they ^{meant} ~~were~~ so much to each other I was much freer than I could otherwise have been.²

In March 1856 the work at Wallington was proposed and it was in the first enthusiasm that Scott contemplated leaving the school to devote his whole time to original work, though all the while he was held back by what he called his secret despondency; the feeling that perhaps such wholesale re-organisation was an unwise move. Lady Trevelyan proposed that the Scotts should take a house in the little village of Cambo, close to Wallington "after a preliminary

1. Archibald Reed, Bruce's School with a Peep at Newcastle in the 'Fifties, 1903.
2. W.B.S. to Lady T., 3 St. Thomas St., 22 February 1856.

'year (or half-year) of consolation' abroad learning German and walking the palaces and galleries of Venice and Rome".¹ Scott gave the scheme serious consideration; it seemed delightful in prospect, and moreover the death of his mother-in-law had already unsettled them.

The death of my mother-in-law has made a revolution in our household which may lead out greater changes. Having long thought of these same changes does not help them much. When I see you at midsummer they may have taken shape, at present my stay in the School of Art seems drawing to a close.²

Although the work proposed by Lady Trevelyan might have seemed additional reason for leaving the school, once again he decided to be circumspect and in the end they contented themselves with moving to a new home in Newcastle; 14 St. Thomas Crescent. This house was more pleasant and more commodious and satisfied their main purpose in moving, which was to leave the house so closely associated with Mrs. Norquoy. The removal was not achieved without some comedy, for Woolner turned up to stay at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 10 on their last night at St. Thomas Street, when the Scotts had only the essentials of furniture and crockery unpacked and nothing left to eat. In spite of all the evils of removing, Scott immediately felt the new house to be a great improvement and delighted in talking of it to his friends. He even took an interest in the garden and begged the assistance of Lady Trevelyan and the Wallington gardener in planting it. In this cause he wrote:

At last we have got all right in our new home, and find it on the whole a considerable improvement. The rooms a little larger, 3 windows in my painting room, and a little bit of garden, which I mean to make a paradise if the smoke will only let things grow. I have got a great cement fountain basin in the centre to be covered with mosses and nasturtiums -- and in imagination the brick walls are covered with ivy.³

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1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 27 March 1856.
 2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 6 April 1856.
 3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 28 September 1856.

Of course all was not right at once, but Scott continued to think of improvements and four years later reported one which made the house almost ideal:

Now I am in my new studio, a jolly place I can tell you. The length from the front window - new dining room windows - to the end of my new studio is about 80 feet, one continuous vista 16 feet being a conservatory passage connecting the new room with the house. The painting-room is lit from above, of course, and could I only get rid of influenza I would be happy.¹

Life went on smoothly and busily after this, the regular pattern broken by pleasures such as the visits of friends and trips to art exhibitions, or by the evils associated with work, such as inspectors' visits. Scott's financial position was evidently comfortable now. He was investing money in railway shares and we notice that his holidays became more and more extravagant and included several trips abroad, one notable one being to Italy in 1858, when he was able to refresh his enthusiasm for art. In the matter of work Scott was happily occupied with his commission at Wallington where he had scope for original work and the pleasure of conversation with Lady Trevelyan, an exercise which kept him alert and free from all pretensions.

One feels that W. M. Rossetti had touched on an essential quality when he said of the Scotts that "the open friendliness of their reception and demeanour never failed".² Their house must always have been open to visitors; the Rossettis, William, Gabriel, and Maria; Thomas Woolner; Mrs. Scott's relatives; and last but not least Swinburne, whom Scott had met at Wallington. The young poet seems to have treated their house as his second home, descending on them when he chose; breaking his journey there when he was on his way to Capheaton to see his grandfather Sir John Swinburne; and even directing parcels to Scott's

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 5 May 1860.

2. W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, London, 1906, I, 133.

to be collected. With so many visitors the house must surely have been lively, and Scott satisfied in his desire for intellectual conversation. Letitia's relatives, to say truth, were not always so eagerly looked for as Scott's own friends, and in a way one cannot help feeling a certain sympathy if his description of her Aunt and Uncle, Mr. & Mrs. Barry, was at all true. Though these two were pleasant they can have done nothing to stimulate Scott to fresh ideas:

Mrs. Barry, Letitia's aunt, is here, - but she has taken apartments, and we now see her only as a very occasional visitor. I don't remember that you met her and her husband on any occasion - Poor old chap last time he was here he used to haunt my painting-room fire yawning, toddle down to the News room, 'What a grand thing that News Room is', being a remark of perennial freshness, saunter back again complaining. There was no positive active harm in him, on the contrary he was an easy gentlemanly-minded old boy, and she is a jaunty juvenile old lady - I have really a rather warm feeling to her.¹

For Scott himself the outstanding event of these twenty years must surely have been his introduction to Miss Alice Boyd in 1859. She became a pupil in the art class, endeavouring to find in painting some relief from the weary time she had spent in watching over the death-bed of her mother. At once she grasped his imagination:

She was somehow or other possessed, to me, of the most interesting face and voice I had ever heard or seen.²

Only two years afterwards he was writing:

I have been to Penkill Castle for three weeks with Miss Boyd - (she and I like each other as preposterously as you called it, as ever) painting in the open air. Her grandfather died within 20 hours of our return here, a fine old man of 91, one of the great Tyne manufacturers.³

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1. W.B.S. to W.M.R. [1 October 1861]
 2. A.N.II, 57.
 3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 11 August 1861.

His friendship with Miss Boyd was to be the joy, indeed the salvation of his later years. As he ceased to spend so much time at Wallington, and particularly after Lady Pauline died, he turned to Alice Boyd for a continuance of the intellectual sympathy which was so vital to him.

It was in April 1863 that Scott first mentioned the idea of retirement to W. M. Rossetti and then it was very hypothetical. However the changes in the Government system of appointing masters forced Scott to his decision and towards the autumn of that year he made his plans for leaving Newcastle, in the full knowledge that, whereas his retirement would give him freedom for his own work, it would bring straitened financial circumstances:

They give me a pension when I drop this. Is it not a lark? Superannuated with a pension! I wonder what it will be, - 60 or 70 I am told. Better than nothing. I have often speculated on the probable amount of luxury and isolation to be got in a workus, and now there is no saying but I end up rather a warm old screw -- We shall look about for houses. There are three courses open. One is to remain here, and shut up two (or) three months in the year, going to London or abroad. Another, to sell off, and go to Florence or Rome and live cheap making one's clothes wear a fabulous length of time. The third, remove to London, where I should have to make some money so that ends might meet. Neither of them unpleasant prospects; but after all, life ain't what it was used to be, nor, in my opinion, what it ought to be.¹

On his retirement Scott moved to Tynemouth and then to London where they finally settled. The first task of his retirement was the painting of a Memorial picture for Newcastle. This commission replaced a subscription gift from the pupils of the art school and the people of Newcastle, who between them contributed about £184. It was Lady Trevelyan who first suggested the idea of a picture, and Ford Madox-Brown put it to the committee. Scott was

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 26 May 1863.

mightily pleased, though he wrote of it with considerable flippancy to W. M.

Rossetti:

I should have the work I like to do, I should rid the presentation scene - and I should get the tin - It is a delightful plan however, this being I suppose the first time a historical secular picture has been commissioned by a town in this country. Its satisfaction will be a little dashed by my having the evil eminence of painting a public picture cheap, but as yet I don't know that the sum to which the subscription may reach is settled.¹

The subject of the picture was not decided upon without a great deal of debate. Scott invited suggestions from Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan and pondered over those of his own ideas, finally deciding on the building of the New Castle in the time of Henry I. This was not one of Scott's own subjects, but he told W. M. Rossetti:

I rather like the suggestion as affording a stirring populous subject, showing life and manners in that time, and allowing a scenic background which suits any invention.²

The subject certainly proved to be right for Scott. The composition of the picture, with the figures on the heights in the foreground and the country in the background far below, was very striking and was a device which Scott had already employed with great success in two of the Wallington pictures, 'The Building of the Wall' and 'The Danes'. It was completed about May 1865, though Scott's concern with it did not end there. In 1882 he wrote to W. C. Way, who had succeeded him as headmaster, about cleaning the picture which had become coated with dust. He suggested employing "a good sponge and a bottle of Fixitive of Haarlem to use with a flatbrush after washing", or alternatively, "rubbing with an old silk handkerchief".³

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1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Balcony House, Tynemouth, 24 November 1863.
 2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Tynemouth, 13 January [1864].
 3. W.B.S. to Joseph Wright, 92 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, 31 December 1882, in which he gives the substance of his letter to W. C. Way.

'The Building of the Castle' now hangs on the staircase of the Literary & Philosophic Society where its dark colouring, together with poor light and a bad position, make it very difficult to judge it fairly.

CHAPTER X

London: Early Retirement.

When Scott retired from his headmastership he was still only in early middle age, with twenty years of reasonably sound health before him. Retirement, with its suggestion of declining faculties, is something of a misnomer for the years 1864-1885, during which Scott lived in London. It was indeed an unusually vigorous and well-filled period of his life, when he determined to give proof of his claim to be considered as poet, artist and man of letters. Individual creative work had been elbowed aside by the press of daily school duties, but now, cheered by the prospect of leisure, Scott, at 54, felt a young man's eagerness for fresh development and experiment. He planned an active retirement for two reasons. In the first place he welcomed the opportunity for his own painting and had in readiness many subjects which had been thought of, sketched out, and regretfully put aside during the busy Newcastle years. This work was to be undertaken, not only for its intrinsic pleasure, but in order to reverse, if that could be, the effect of his decision of twenty years ago when he accepted the security of a Government post and in so doing renounced his immediate hopes of achieving any considerable personal triumph. Although it may appear on the face of things that's Scott's decision had been wise, and his fine achievements as a headmaster speak strongly for it, it brought him no real satisfaction, for his ambition centred on the desire to make a name as an artist, and success in other spheres had no part in assuaging this. It is an indication

of the strength of this ambition that amidst his teaching Scott managed to retain his artistic identity and find some time for his own work. Often it was a struggle, when official duties were already overburdening, but Scott continued with his painting, not only for present relief, but with the idea of a return to London and competitive artistic circles. The period of retirement brought some fine achievement certainly, but it was mixed with disappointment as Scott realised that he had delayed too long in his attempt to come before the public as an artist. In the second place Scott knew that when he left Newcastle he must earn something to supplement his small pension, even if not in a regular way.

Their immediate plans for the winter of 1863-1864 included several months in Italy, a holiday which Scott dearly loved but one which he had seldom been able to take while he had official duties because, apart from the briefness of his holidays, which made a long journey scarcely worthwhile, he found that the excitement distracted him from art-school work for several weeks after his return. Now however, when this consideration no longer had any force, the Scotts were delayed by concern for Miss Boyd who was already a very dear friend. She was to have accompanied them, but was detained in Newcastle by her brother's serious illness. Scott explained the circumstances in a letter to Lady Trevelyan:

Here we remain (at Tynemouth) with our probable movements as uncertain as ever - nearly, although there does seem a break in the sky now. Spencer Boyd has been very nearly at his last, but Lightfoot's last operation has effected a sudden and great internal change, and if this goes on, he is all right. However it remains a question whether Miss Boyd will

leave him even when better, in that case our winter in Italy will be dropt, and we shall instead see after a practicable settlement in London for the spring.¹

As the weeks dragged on he wrote of Miss Boyd's devotion to her brother and made it plain that he felt he had a duty to her as a friend at such a worrying time:

For 4 months she has been, day and night working herself to death nursing, so I don't see that we can go and leave her, otherwise I w'd. be in London now.²

In December 1863 the Scotts were still at Tynemouth expecting Miss Boyd and Spencer to join them there. During the winter business connected with the testimonial from Newcastle had made Scott's presence in the North seem not altogether unnecessary, but as the spring approached he felt that he had wasted time and feared the consequences of his lethargy:

After spending so long in waiting at Tynemouth I fancy I must get to work - my intention in leaving Newcastle at all being to do some picture or two as good as any before my time is up.³

In February the Scotts came to London and took lodgings in Russell Square. Then began the search for a suitable house, a task which Scott found difficult and disagreeable, though he determined to continue it until one was found.

If we don't get the right house at present I shall put up with lodgings for a quarter and try next term but it will be much better to get the matter over.⁴

he wrote in a none too hopeful mood to his sympathetic correspondent, Lady Pauline. He had determined on London as their home because he felt that it was the only place for a practising artist and poet to live, and he was anxious

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1. W.B.S. to Lady T., Tynemouth, [1863?]
 2. W.B.S. to Lady T., Balcony House, Tynemouth, 22 December 1863.
 3. W.B.S. to Lady T., 12 Bernard St., Russell Square, 24 February 1864.
 4. Ibid.

himself to get to work again now that the strange sensation of being idle had lost its delights. Within a month, and more easily than they feared, they had found a home, and Scott sent the news to Wallington, saying that 33 Elgin Road, Kensington Park, Notting Hill, was "a large house in a new locality, no old place being to be got".¹

It seems to have been adequate though with no particular charm, and years afterwards Rossetti referred to it with distaste as being set amidst 'deserts of stucco'. Whatever he thought of its situation Scott found pleasure in the furnishing of their new home, a matter in which he had always taken particular interest. Alice Boyd joined them in London in the spring of 1864 and from that time onwards the household regularly spent the summer months at Penkill and the winter in London.

During his first year of retirement Scott must have wondered whenever his affairs would settle down so that he could begin his plans for work. Somehow everything occurred to distract him. In late 1864, after a summer spent at Penkill, the Scotts and Alice Boyd returned to Elgin Road and prepared to welcome Spencer Boyd for Christmas. He appeared quite well after his long illness of a year ago, but when he had been with them only a few days he died from a heart attack. Scott felt great sorrow at the first return to Penkill after Spencer's death and was deeply concerned for his dear A.B:

Miss Boyd bore it wonderfully well, till we came to the familiar road and she entered the short drive to the old place, every shrub associated with Spencer. The man holding open the gate with a wet face and the women waiting for her. She shrank back into the corner of the carriage and gasped as if she were drowning. I may say for myself it was hard to bear.²

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., 12 Bernard Street, Russell Square, 12 March 1864.
2. W.B.S. to W.M.R. 33 Elgin Road, [18 February 1865]

During 1865 Scott himself had a severe illness which deprived him of all his hair so that he was afterwards compelled to wear a wig, a circumstance which, according to W. M. Rossetti, caused the 'spirit' at one of the seances they attended to be witty at Scott's expense. The summer months of that year were again spent in pleasant occupation at Penkill and the painting of the staircase was begun. This was in itself a considerable piece of work, involving as it did the study and use of an unfamiliar medium of painting, but it was by no means the only product of these first disturbed years of retirement. In spite of the natural strangeness of the change from regular employment to a state of being 'unattached and unemployed', the moving of his household from Newcastle to London, and the disquieting personal troubles of his early retirement, Scott painted the large easel picture 'The Building of the New Castle'; began the Chevy Chase spandrils for Wallington; and amidst his commissions found time to discuss with W. M. Rossetti the treatment of the subject in his latest work in oil, 'The Eve of the Deluge', exhibited at The British Institution in 1865.¹ All this not only kept him busy, too busy to look up friends as he told Swinburne just before leaving London for Scotland in the summer of 1865, but it kept the financial situation in a most satisfactory state.

1. Very wisely, after so many years out of London, Scott also consulted W. M. Rossetti about the most suitable exhibitions to which he could submit his work:

" --- today I went in to see the New Water Colour Ex. You seem to disapprove of my sending to the B(ritish) I(nstitution) and to this new shop. If I saw any other way of doing you may be sure I would not. I feel that I degrade myself and that my pictures haven't the qualities for the British for example, but having painted them, and having no other means of showing them they must go."

W.B.S. to W.M.R., 33 Elgin Road, [18 February 1865]

Scott's acquaintance with Henry Cole and the School of Design readily obtained him notice and he was soon engaged on part of the decorations for the new South Kensington Museum, the building which was to house the collection of the Science and Art Department. This seemed to hold possibilities and to be quite the sort of work he wanted, though he might have suspected that like all the Government-inspired schemes for art it would be subject to endless delays and changes of policy. The decoration of the Houses of Parliament was a case in point and this work proved to be scarcely more satisfactory. No one seemed to know quite what was wanted or, more important, what would be allowed. Evidently at the beginning Scott understood he was to be engaged on mural-painting, in which he had of course considerable experience, but eventually his commission was whittled down to the designing of the windows for the Ceramic Gallery. In 1867 he wrote of the way things were going:

I think I did not tell you anything of my South Kensington job since I last saw Cole. To have a large wall space with liberty to do what I could best and faith on the part of my governors, was to o much to come to my share. Now, my commission resolves itself into estimates and small sketches for coloured cartoons on cloth or paper for the entire size of walls and windows.¹

Two years later he was still dissatisfied with the terms of his work, though the commission for the windows was now quite clearly defined:

I am glad you and Lady T. liked the windows at S.K. You would see four, two on each staircase. I have now the whole of the Ceramic gallery (10 windows) to do. The subject being the history of the art of earthenware and porcelain. The decoration of the walls of the staircase still remains in suspense."²

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, Girvan, 6 July 1867.

2. W.B.S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, Penkill, (Girvan, Ayrshire, 2 October [1869?])

The windows of the Ceramic gallery, in their finished state, were a notable piece of work, not only for their beauty of design, but because the pictures were fixed in the glass by a new method. Stained glass was considered to dim the light too seriously for a museum, but Scott succeeded in producing something which gave the effect of an etching in the glass and toned down the sunlight without the bright and distracting colours of stained glass. The windows themselves no longer exist, but two etchings by Scott¹ give some idea of the quality of design. The series traced the history of the art of pottery from the earliest to the present times. The first design he reproduced was a straightforward representation of a modern workshop, showing the skilled processes then employed; the second, which represented 'the potter's art as now practised in China', was more interesting for its delightful adaptation of the Chinese style of art. Scott derived from this the formal scenery and background; his grotesque figures; and his way of disregarding the element of distance so as to bring all the stages, from digging the Kaolin to having it ready for the potter, within the limits of one panel. He avoided confusion only by the striking main lines of his composition which, while they separate the various parts of the design, also carry the eye from top to bottom. The second panel which showed the later stages of shaping and baking the vessels was very similar in treatment. The commission for the decorations trailed on until 1872, when it had dwindled to designs for the staircases and two doors of the lecture theatre. Eventually this too was cancelled and only the small first drawings remain.

1. The South Kensington Museum, being examples of the Works of Art in the Museum and of the Decorations of the Building with Brief Descriptions, published by permission of the Science and Art Department, 1862, Plate I and Plate XXV are Scott's work.

After the initial period, when everything seemed unsettled, Scott made very full use of his years of retirement. He was writing a fair amount; most of it not vastly original material, but essays on art which together with etched plates made up the handsome 'table-books' which were a feature of the Victorian period. W. M. Rossetti, who knew Scott's doings better than most was able to add: "Scott also has of late been writing sonnets at a great rate --"¹ In 1868 he was in the midst of his 'Life of Durer', a much more laborious piece of work. He proposed to translate and use a large portion of Dürer's journal, which was spelt phonetically so that the result was rather like a kind of shorthand. Much of the deciphering of this was done at Penkill during the summer of 1868-1869, when Scott had the aid of a near neighbour, a Roman Catholic priest from Girvan who spoke German fluently. Rossetti, writing to Ford Madox-Brown from Penkill in the summer of 1869, put his finger on Scott's "steady though leisurely way of working" and mentioned, besides the Dürer book and the designs for South Kensington:

Three or four Burns illustrations which are really most beautiful in invention and high feeling.²

It is a healthy sign that only once did Scott consider the possibility of taking another official position, and that he dismissed almost immediately as undesirable and evidently unnecessary. The post in question was the keepership of the British Museum Print Room, for which W. M. Rossetti had debated his prospects in a letter to Scott. Scott, in his reply, offered little advice to the undecided W.M.R., but made a revealing statement of his own feelings about such work:

1. Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1903, p.380.
2. Ibid, p.458.

I am certain it would not be the thing for me, even if I could get it, which I could not. It is true that it would give me a position which I have not, and be fresh work of a very delightful kind for an old chap, too old to make a position in London as a painter, having lost the chance of so doing younger. But as I am at present possessed of an independence of about £300 a year, and want to get the Wallington things and this staircase done, work for two years; and above all as I am naturally a loungeur, very unhappy in working with other people, and want to be free to live here a good time of the year, I will prefer just doing what liketh me. I dare say when Chevy Chase is done I may be left high and dry as far as professional income is concerned, but for the last 10 years I have astonished myself by realizing (with my independent tin, not much at the beginning of that time) 7 to 900 a year. If I took a situation under government the first result wd. be the loss of my present little pension. All these things considered, however, a clear and fixed income of £500 a year wd be much in my favour in the remaining chances of life, but I would not accept it with a daily duty and responsibility in connection with other people. That this frame of mind is a right one is by no means certain, but I have acknowledged it to myself at last, and made up my mind to take myself as God has made me and do as little as possible against the grain.¹

I have called Scott's attitude a healthy sign because it means that his own interests brought him sufficient occupation, and because at bottom it expresses a willingness to accept self-discipline in the matter of work. Alongside his rather fine independence there is however that note of disappointment which I anticipated at the beginning of the chapter, and which arises from the sense of missed opportunities. It brings with it an affectation of perversity, so that instead of acknowledging his still buoyant mind, Scott speaks as if retirement spelt welcome inactivity for him. This was far from the truth. What it did in fact mean was freedom to choose his activity; to dabble, picking up one thing and putting it down if any more

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, 2 August [1866].

attractive occupation took his fancy; to work at his own speed, untroubled by school hours or Government inspectors. His letter of this period to Austin Dobson and William Rossetti, to Theodore Watts, and more occasionally to Swinburne or Gabriel Rossetti, show that not only was he busily occupied in painting or writing, but that he contrived to be in touch with everything from mere gossip to the most recent publications of his friends.

Scott and his wife were evidently both hospitable and pleasant company, for in Newcastle they had always taken a delight in having visitors. In fairness it must be said that the Scotts found their own relations, and those of Alice Boyd, rather a bore, but friends who would provide conversation were ever welcome. When they came to London Scott looked up some old friends, and in any case they already knew a large circle of the Pre-Raphaelites and their associates. It does not seem that they parted from anyone in Newcastle whose society they particularly regretted, and they quickly settled down to a pleasant existence in which dinner-and-whist-parties and the conversation of artists and poets gave them the stimulus they had missed in the North. William Michael and Gabriel Rossetti were Scott's most constant company and it is a tribute that Rossetti said he enjoyed the Scotts being so accessible. This letter to Miss Boyd, in an unmistakably good humour, shows the intimate nature of the friendship during these few years before Rossetti's more severe illness:

I believe I am going to dine with Scotus tomorrow and meet Morley the editor of the Fortnightly --- By the bye I forgot to tell you of the reception I met with under the hospitable roof of Scotus a few days after my return to town. The Demon Olaf first greeted me with a selection from some opera of his own, probably "Scotus le Diable" - and when, after an hour or so, he had subsided and appeared at rest, he suddenly sprang up from the hearth and produced an indented pattern in the style of Morris and Co. round the toe of my boot - the

different ornaments composing it being varied in the fanciful style of that firm so as to avoid monotony - some mere depressions of the surface and others complete perforations. I directed W.B's attention to this instance of Olaf's adding decorative art to his musical studies; and the remark I received in reply (uttered with slow complacency) was "Ah! then he has some teeth yet, you see!" I may mention in conclusion that I am not lamed for life, and that is all I can say.¹

Some quite unlooked for expeditions enlivened the days too. It must have been very pleasant to have a cab stop at the door and W. M. Rossetti step out ready to carry one off to a seance, his latest line of enquiry and one much in vogue at the time. This leisure pursuit was regarded as little more than an experiment by both men and afforded them a good deal of amusement, though it was an interest most emphatically not shared by one person whose opinions Scott respected, Miss Alice Boyd. In this knowledge he wrote to Rossetti:

As Miss Boyd has expressed an extreme dislike to have anything to do with spiritualism, please don't mention to any one our experience of Saturday wh. was certainly remarkable enough to be worthy of mentioning. I do not wish she should know of all things in the world.²

Together Scott and Rossetti went to several seances held by Mrs. Marshall, the then fashionable medium who had once been a washerwoman, "a vulgar medium of some vogue at the time, who boasted to have command of the sperrits as she called them". This account of her powers sets the scene:

The meeting was held in a second-floor room in Red Lion Street, Holborn. The only light we had was derived from the reflection of the street lamp on the ceiling. We had a most successful display, table-turning and tilting. Preposterous answers were rapt out to idiotic questions -- We saw the phosphorescent hand, heard the guitars on the floor struck by unseen hands or toes, and other marvels galore.³

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1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Alice Boyd, 16 Cheyne Walk, 17 November 1868.
 2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 27 November 1865.
 3. George Somes Layard, Eliza Lynn Linton, Her Life Letters and Opinions, 1901, p.167.

According to Scott, W. M. Rossetti was the more serious investigator of spirit-rapping; a position which his friend would very probably have disputed. In point of fact neither man could claim to be unimpressed by their experiences at the seances, and equally both of them realised that, whatever they might wish to think, the whole affair was too open to fraud to be worthy of serious investigation. Scott summed up for himself:

I went again to Mrs. Marshall with Mrs. Lynn Linton without good result; but this first interview, instead of giving me any addition to my faith in the table-rapping of spirits had the opposite effect. I saw in the approximation to truth the clever guessing of the practised thought-reader by the expression of the countenance --- It was at best guessing, nearly right while, the first clue guided, and then farther and farther wrong.¹

In 1869 Scott made a move to apply for one of the Slade Professorships in the Fine Arts. In this matter he asked Sir Walter Trevelyan's interest, but after all he let his chances slip by without any great concern. The work Scott was able to do during early retirement must have kept the household in comfortable circumstances, as he had confided to Rossetti that he hoped it might. It was when he came to depend upon the income from his investments that Scott learnt the meaning of financial anxiety, and on one occasion wrote to William Michael:

I have this year spent between 2 and 300 pounds on prints and every morning for the last 4 months week after week, month after month, the papers have informed me I am a few pounds poorer. I have lost in this way half the money I put into railways on leaving Newcastle. The Caledonian wh. was at 125 is now at 70! D---d hard to have one's savings swept away by unprincipled and irresponsible chairmen and directors.²

1. A.N.II, 82.

2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 33 Elgin Road, 28 November [1867]

But the situation must have righted itself, for in 1870 Scott began to look about for a house to buy. He found exactly what he wanted in Bellevue House, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, quite close to D. G. Rossetti. It was a large old house, very attractive architecturally, though it needed a good deal of repair. One of its greatest charms in Scott's eyes was that one could get to it by steamer on the Thames. To Ford Madox Brown he wrote in practical mood:

We are getting into order pretty fast - but find some new conditions very difficult to get over, for example the want of gas.¹

According to Rossetti the house was always inclined to be draughty, though Scott tried hard to overcome this by the use of screens and heavy curtains. He wrote a description of it to Miss Losh in which he said it was "the most inveterately cold place in winter that I was ever in".² For the rest however he admitted its charm and the pleasure of having Scott close at hand:

Of course the house, except in this respect, is a most delightful one - indeed as roomy and picturesque an old mansion as one could meet with even in the country - Of course proximity promotes intercourse between our two houses and we have now established regular evenings for alternate visits and whist --- Of course the luxury of planning and working our arrangements in Bellevue House is still far from over for its inmates, and Scotus exists all day long in that Paradise of pottering which as you know is so sweet to him.³

Furnishing the house and deciding where his fine collection of prints and books might go was a source of delight to Scott. His prints he felt deserved the right surroundings; they had been collected over the years with trouble and expense. Beside this quiet pride it is strange to read the evidence brought together by Mrs. Janet Camp Troxell to show that at least

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1. W.B.S. to Ford Madox Brown, Bellevue, Chelsea, 6 December 1870.
 2. Three Rossettis, Unpublished Letters to and from Dante Gabriel, Christina, William; collected and ed. by Janet Camp Troxell, Haward U.P., 1901, pp.100- 101.
 3. Ibid.

one, needed to complete a set, was dexterously stolen by Scott from an auction room prior to the sale; a deed which he subsequently confessed to D. G. Rossetti, Miss Boyd and Miss Losh, with more amusement than penitence.

The pride of the house, from Scott's point of view was that it contained two very good studios, one in the house and another in a separate building in the garden. D. G. R. wrote to his friend Frederick Shields in 1871 and suggested that Scott might let the one he didn't use "to a quiet congenial inmate like yourself".¹ This scheme came to nothing and Scott afterwards used the separate studio himself. It is this one which James Smetham describes so vividly in a letter to a friend:

Passing out at the back of W. B. S's house, you walk under a winding covered verandah to his studio. The windows are to the north, and their bottom ten feet from the ground. A profound silence reigns, just such as the painter needs. The roof has been raised high with dark oaken rafters, the walls are dark. But what gives the solemn charm is that three of David Scott's ambitious, imperfect, yet grand unsold works (for he sold but little), hang on three of the studio walls.²

Rossetti had spoken of "a Paradise of pottering", and that was exactly what Scott now existed in; doing all those odd things he had longed to do during the twenty years when every minute was busy. He wrote magazine articles, such as that for Fraser's on the Art Season of 1871;³ he sent letters to Notes and Queries;⁴ he prepared a handsome edition of his poems; he meddled in Rossetti's affairs. Alice Boyd left for Penkill in the early summer of each year and in July the Scotts followed. William never grew weary of returning to Penkill, for Alice Boyd gave him perfect friendship and he came to love her

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1. The Life and Letters of Frederic Shields, ed. by Ernestine Mills, London, 1912, p.147.
 2. The Letters of James Smetham, ed. by Sarah Smetham and William Davies, London, 1891, p.271.
 3. Fraser's Magazine, New Series, Vol. IV, August, 1871.
 4. Notes and Queries, 4th Series, Vol. V, 4 March 1870, has a letter from W.B. Scott concerning the poet Ebenezer Jones, author of Studies of Sensation and Event; 6th Series, Vol. II, 17 July 1880, has a letter on the meaning of Newman's hymn 'Lead Kindly Light'.

home and the surrounding country. The days were quiet, there and a little work alternated with a pleasant idleness. This was a state of life which pleased him only for so long. While he was enjoying it he described it to Ford Madox Brown:

Our party at present is Christina and my wife besides Miss Boyd and myself, and croquet is the nearly daily employment bringing us together. I brought with me some plates prepared for etching; some for Burns, and some for my life of A. Dürer, but excepting working at these I have done nothing, the jollyest of all occupations --- the daily postman in the country is a great character, lotus eating and a daily postman form the diurnal vicissitudes of this outer paradise, where neither muffin bell nor dust cart, organ grinder nor picture-dealer, (alas too rare on my horizon anywhere) bore nor dun are ever seen or heard.

Visitors from the neighbourhood were few; there was no necessity to be energetic, except perhaps during those two autumn visits when Dante Gabriel had to be entertained. Very often Letitia wearied of this country life and returned to London by herself, anxious, as Scott said, about leaving the London house untenanted so long. A.B. welcomed his friends and those who stayed at Penkill found it as delightful as Scott promised. Christina Rossetti came for two visits in 1866 and 1869 and wrote poetry there, sitting in her bedroom at the top of the peel tower. This beautiful old room where one can feel a breeze on the stillest summer day is decorated on one wall with a painted tree bending to the wind and the leaves blown tumbling round the other three walls. She was happy in the quietness and loved the sounds of the country, the burn one hears all night, and the small animals and birds that have no shyness. The rabbits sat on the lawn while she breakfasted and the

1. W. B. S. to Ford Madox Brown, Penkill Castle, Girvan, Ayrshire, 8 July, 1869.

hedgehogs walked across the dewy grass. Scott enjoyed her company, though he did say that the conversation of three ladies together was apt to be limited to "religion and ailments".¹

Miss Boyd was always a most solicitous and kindly friend and, as well as giving Scott intellectual companionship, she watched over his health. This was a precaution more than ever necessary, for he was still working hard and yet his letters to his friends give increasing evidence of illness and old age. In 1879 Scott, writing to Ford Madox Brown, spoke of a 'billious state of health' which had haunted him from February to June of that year:

Yesterday Miss Boyd and I drove along the coast and our picnic was most pleasant with a blazing sun on the rocks, and today is splendid but the wind is in the north wh. a 70 year old is but too conscious of.²

It seems doubtful if Letitia would ever have known when her husband was tired, ill, or dispirited. She herself became more trying than ever as she grew older, unless it was just that Scott's asperity increased and he talked more openly of her tantrums and hysterical fits. In the past she had often made certain, in this fashion, of having her own way. To W. M. Rossetti her husband wrote on one occasion:

I find Letitia was as happy as a sandboy, whatever that is, as soon as all our backs were turned. Hysterical affections are so obscure to me they frighten me, although the more I see of them the more certain I am they mean nothing serious, rather show that no profound affection is to be feared.³

During these years, William and Letitia seem to have openly accepted the fact that they did not get on well together, and the arrangement of living

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1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill Castle, Girvan, Ayrshire, [12 July 1866]
 2. W. B. S. to Ford Madox Brown, Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 30 August 1882.
 3. W. B. S. to W. M. R., 33 Elgin Road, (10 Feb. 1865).

half the year at Penkill and half in London made occasional spells of separation seem quite natural, for Letitia, who was a lively person, preferred London and often remained behind or returned on her own. This Scott accepted with a fairly good grace:

"Letitia will go I think", he wrote to W. M. R., "whenever your advent makes it possible for her to do so without the impropriety of deserting Miss Boyd;"¹ and he was quite amused when he learnt that on one occasion she had waited until he left London for Penkill before she had a party. Their relations were always friendly, but Letitia was content to put her wifely responsibilities on to Miss Boyd's shoulders, while she occupied herself with musical parties, carriage calls, and occasional writing. A month or so at Penkill wearied her, and she was away on her own affairs.

As his retirement advanced Scott seemed to add to his duties rather than lighten them. From 1873-79 he was an Occasional Inspector for South Kensington, which seems clear proof that his interest in the work of the School of Design had been more than mere duty. That year, 1873, was made memorable by a visit to Italy with Letitia, Alice Boyd, Lucy Madox Brown and W. M. Rossetti. The friendship of Lucy Madox Brown and Rossetti developed into courtship and shortly afterwards they married. But at the time Scott was not at all pleased with the prospect of their being of the party and said so in no uncertain terms, causing Dante Gabriel to observe that very little would upset Scotus nowadays.

In 1875 a volume of his poetry appeared, illustrated with etchings by himself and Alma Tadema, a collaboration which caused a good deal of uneasiness and bad feeling, as Rossetti revealed in a letter to Alice Boyd:

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill, Girvan, 6 July 1867.

I have no idea who have been your guests at Penkill this season - perhaps the Gosses. Unless indeed Scotus rescinded his fiat and the Herculean or Antaeon labour of Tadema have been renewed on Scottish ground.¹

About this date too he undertook several editions of English poets for Messrs. Routledge, but the deaths of many old friends and occasional attacks of illness made him feel considerably depressed at times, a state of mind which he communicated to his friends:

For myself happily I have now no bodily ailment I may say, but instead a woeful want of interest in daily life - in fact as a rule I may say I am only howling from the bottom of the unmentionable place.²

Amazingly enough, in November 1879, he had considered applying for the Edinburgh Chair of Fine Art, and it was only the united advice of his friends which persuaded him that he was not well enough to undertake such exacting duties. Gabriel in a letter to Miss Boyd summed up what they all felt:

What a change for the better has come over his health and aspect! and how heartily do I sympathize with the views taken in a letter of yours (parts of which he read me) as to the very tempting but in reality unfeasible candidature for the Edinburgh Chair of Fine Art. You may by this time have seen a most affectionate and admirable letter addressed to him by Burton on the subject, and taking, though with the utmost delicacy quite your own line of argument. I fancy I may have been among the first that W. B. spoke to about it, and my deliberate view coincided with yours; but on this supervened in the course of the same evening old Brown who came in and held forth with expanded waist-coat for about an hour on the sublime duty involved in making the effort and so adding for certain (as he said) 50 years to W. B.'s mortal existence!! I myself think Scotus is tending towards what we think the reasonable view of the subject by this time. Fancy 100 lectures in a Session to be given by a man with an aversion to spouting and subject to uncertain health as we must remember he is, though it is true that just now he never seemed essentially younger in his life.³

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1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Alice Boyd, Aldwick Lodge near Bognor, Sussex, 3 November 1875. A copy of the original from John Purves.
 2. W.B.S. to Ford Madox Brown, 92 Cheyne Walk, 19 May 1881.
 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti to Alice Boyd, 16 Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, 18 November, 1879.

In April 1882 Scott again confessed to feeling ill and tired:

My leg is essentially better, I may say safely well, but it has been 'a thorn in the flesh'. When I get home, and have dinner I am so tired that I can scarcely express myself with clearness, or at least with satisfaction, so I shall close.¹

Even though he had a few years of tolerable health before him this was probably a symptom of the heart disease which kept him an invalid for five years. As yet however he went about his work with something of his old enthusiasm. From 1880-1885 he was an Occasional Examiner for South Kensington, a position which included marking the work sent in by provincial art schools. It was probably not an arduous task, though sometimes the meetings of the examination board kept him in London when he would sooner have been off to Penkill. In 1882 he explained to Austin Dobson:

The School of Art business has made me its slave for a greater amount of time than usual, and it is not yet finished --- We leave this the instant my S.K. work is done -- I have always been able to go to (through?) this spring grind, but have been and am now far from well, so I want to be off.²

At the same time he valued the association with some of his fellow examiners and colleagues there.

At Penkill he still spent his summers in leisurely occupation, though one of his most considerable pieces of work, the designing of the Hall, dates from 1884. The next year, while he was busy with the summer examinations at South Kensington before leaving for Scotland, the disease of the heart attacked him severely. Miss Boyd only moved him to Penkill with difficulty, and in spite of the care she took that the long journey should be made as

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., 92 Cheyne Walk, 25 April 1882.

2. W. B. S. to Austin Dobson, 92 Cheyne Walk, 4 July 1882.

comfortable as possible by engaging a through carriage from Euston to Girvan, it tried him sorely. He had a severe heart-attack on the train, and though he seemed to recover during the first days at Penkill, a recurrence of the symptoms, together with congestion of the lungs, kept him in bed during most of the summer. He described the months of illness to W. M. Rossetti:

Shall I tell you about myself and my health - not an interesting subject. We came down by an "Invalid Saloon", a uselessly expensive plan recommended by the fact of its being our property for the time, and subject to no delays or stoppages between Euston and Girvan, but this length of time on the journey was too much for me, I had another paroxysm about 2 o'clock in the morning, and again another a night or two after, here at Penkill. We had the doctor, happily a sensible and cultivated fellow, all night for 3 nights, in fear of a return. Since that time I have been a great deal in bed trying to recover, and now drive out daily the weather being almost continually splendid, and my walking powers being simply nil. Sad is it not. I am precluded from either mental or bodily work or exercise. I do not even read more than I can help - but am read to. The irregular action of the heart is now my master, and some time may chance to be my executioner. But I do not think of it.¹

Even when he was out again, it was apparent that he would be liable to further attacks of the angina and that he would need quietness and care. The doctor who had attended him, Dr. Valentine, forbade a return to London for the winter, and so began the five years of complete retirement during which Alice Boyd nursed him with untiring devotion.

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 1 September [1885]

C H A P T E R X I

David Scott

Scott's last years at Newcastle and the early ones of his retirement were the time when he was most settled and most happy. He was proving his worth in the field of art-education, achieving recognition as an artist, poet and man of letters, establishing a place for himself in a society of intelligent men and women in London, and he could afford to live in comfort and security. It must appear in fact, as if Scott had come, in a more modest way than he had perhaps once visualised, to the full fruition of his powers. Yet one cannot escape the feeling that it was during this period that he was most troubled by the memory of his brother David. As we have read, David and his mother had died within a year of one another while William was living in Newcastle. The two deaths had a profound effect on him, quite separate from the natural sorrow they might have been expected to cause. Such a signal effect was it that Scott spoke of them as marking the beginning of a distinct second stage in his life. In the first place he rejoiced at his release from all family responsibility, even though he was now left alone in the world. At the same time his gloomy family background, and especially David's apparent failure, seemed to oppress him more deeply than ever before. The ten or fifteen years following David's death were the critical time when it would be proved whether his work was going to achieve a posthumous fame or sink further

into oblivion. William was in a delicate position; loyal, yet not wishing to prejudice his own achievements by associating himself too closely with his strange brother.¹ As he explained to W. M. Rossetti, he felt conflicting claims:

Long ago and often I have formed the determination to do or say no more in the way of taking care of my Brother's fame, but still things turn up to induce me to break that resolve. The gods are against him. Somehow or other the world ignores him, and nothing one can say seems to affect any result or remain audible. The fact is his art does not belong to the day. Following his natural tendencies, he worked on an Ancient Master's basis of education; and the great characteristic of his manner - that power of hand he showed always, and proudly - is not only lost in English art; it is misunderstood and disqualifies a man.²

When Scott wrote for publication about David's work he was, without exception, intensely loyal, though admitting regret for his brother's lost opportunities. In his own mind the issues were perhaps less clear. Sympathy was the first and deepest feeling, but it was complicated by a thorough understanding of David's powers, together with an unthinking recognition of his failings. On this point Scott must have been torn two ways, because he knew that a different style of painting would have been foreign to David's nature.

1. v. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 14 December 1856: "Don't mention me to him [Ruskin], only speak of Wallington and yourself. He will know me, by degrees. I found he had a prejudice against my brother David, as one of those wilful epical giants whom he only recognises as struggling against Jupiter. I did not wish to mention David Scott to him, having a prescience of what Mr. Ruskin would think of him, but G. Rossetti did the day we dined with him."

2. W. M. Rossetti, Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870, London, 1903, p.4.

For himself therefore he accepted the faults as inseparable from the individuality, but at all times he refused to undertake any special pleading for his brother and insisted that to the general public the work must be left to speak for itself.

Thirteen years had passed since David Scott's death, when William wrote the letter I have quoted above, but they had not brought with them any general appreciation of his work. From time to time there came the occasional enthusiasts who claimed to recognise his greatness, and these William met gravely and appreciatively, while retaining his private opinion that David's 'strangeness' and ill-judged ambition had been equal partners with his greatness. One of the most constant, and most effusive, of these admirers was an Edinburgh man, the Rev. J. W. Ebsworth, whose history William gave briefly to W. M. Rossetti:

When my brother was dying the post brought a poem which I mentioned but (I think) did not consider quite worth giving at full length in the Memoir. He was then commencing life as an artist, and has always been and is now (not always judiciously) a true and not unintelligent admirer of my brother's works. He is now a country curate ---¹

Ebsworth however proved the sincerity and constancy of his admiration by a letter to Notes and Queries in 1907, when it might well have been thought that there would be no one to speak of the memory of David Scott:

It is exactly 50 years ago when Scotland lost the greatest artist she ever produced, David Scott -- I am probably the last survivor, and certainly the most grateful and loving student of that dead master, whom I have never ceased to revere, and kept sanctified to his memory the 5th of March 1849, and the 10th of March that followed it hallowed by his funeral.²

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1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill, 10 August 1868. Ebsworth was also a man of letters known particularly for his edition of The Poems and Masques of Thomas Carew in 1893.
 2. Notes and Queries, 10th Series, No. VII, 9 March 1907.

William cannot have found it easy to accept that his brother's failure was due to a kind of constitutional melancholy: an inability to fit into society. We see something of his struggles to resolve the question as we read the Memoir and there is no doubting the eventual effect of his conclusions on his own life and opinions. David's fate was never a subject which he cared to have brought into casual conversation, nor was he able to speak of it easily. This is the more understandable when one considers that the two had grown up together and that William had lately followed his brother to the grave after tending him in his last illness. David's example was many times used to justify his prudence in his own choice of a career. At the same time it could not save him from an uneasy feeling that he had been guilty of faintheartedness when he accepted the Newcastle headmastership. Scott constantly reminded himself that David's life showed the unhappy results of an artist flying in the face of public opinion and proffering his strange fancies to an unappreciative world.

I his brother whose nature in many ways is exactly the opposite -- live on still - thirty years after he David ceased to require the advice he never took - with something like my old ambition of self culture, in which, also he, as an example to be avoided, painfully assisted.¹

Nevertheless he could not withhold admiration for his brother's strength of character in doing as he did. He admitted that he could never have taken the same path himself, accepting David's loneliness of soul and comparatively friendless life, yet it always represented to him the independence he had lost. Of the work he had chosen he wrote:

1. A.N.I., 263.

The man of a limited exact nature, who does nothing but what is required of him, is, in such situations more efficient than a comprehensive, original or penetrating mind - at least the fortunes of the masters of the English Schools of Design seem so to prove.¹

David was almost six years older than William, and apart from a brief spell of schooldays they can never have spent much time together. Perhaps the older boy was impatient of playing with his young brother, for certainly neither the Memoir nor Autobiographical Notes give any indication of a close companionship. David was a sensitive, thoughtful boy from childhood, though this did not prevent him from being fully aware of all that went on around him, or from exercising a decided autocracy over his younger brothers and sister, a situation which William at least seems to have resented. His introspective and already rather morbid nature was deepened by the circumstances of his home; his father's real or imagined illness and business failure; his 'separateness' from the rest of the children, a condition emphasised by his parents who had a particular affection for him because he was the only child who survived from their 'first' family, four of whom died before Robert, William and Helen were born. David was a great favourite with his father who himself very largely educated the boy though he did go to school for a time. Thus he grew up with the idea that he must not only be the leader but must manage the other children, as for instance by controlling the paintbox and allowing it to be used only with his permission when they played in the evenings. Drawing and painting were their favourite occupations, together with looking at books of prints; and almost every critic of David's work has seen the influence

1. Memoir, p.276.

upon his imagination of a book of designs which he must have looked over scores of times during his childhood: William Blake's illustrations for Blair's poem The Grave.¹ Both brothers knew the book well, but the strange designs made a powerful impression on David because his mind was already taken up with problems of time, death and eternity.

His art education does not seem to have been very extensive. He attended Dr. Munro's Anatomy class at the Trustees Academy and in 1832 was in London, sketching in the National Gallery and the British Institution. His father had been morbidly concerned with his own health for years, but somewhere about 1825 or 1826 he was in fact seriously ill. William was a boy at school, Robert showed no aptitude for business, and so David was elected to learn engraving and carry on in his father's trade, in order to support the family. He was acutely miserable and found engraving a thing not to be borne. In 1826 he drew a sketch of himself seated at the engraving table with clenched hands and an expression of despair.²

At this period of his life he was a very fine looking young man, though with a gloomy 'poetic' cast. In spite of his aloof and introspective nature and his discontent with his profession, we have proof that he was an attractive personality and most kindly to a young stranger. John Epps was then a medical student at Edinburgh, and Mrs. Epps records her husband's memories of the time:

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1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, in his supplementary chapter to Alexander Gilchrist's Life of William Blake, made a particular point of that artist's influence on the work of David Scott. He concluded that although Scott perceived Blake's weaknesses this unfortunately did not prevent him from falling into similar defects.
 2. v. The D.N.B. Vol. LI, p.17, and Memoir, p.37.

A valued friendship made in Edinburgh was that of David Scott, a man remarkable, even at that early period of his life, for extraordinary artistic power, and afterwards recognised as a genius. Many a walk they had together, and many a delightful talk on art, and science, and philosophy. John used to tell of how David worked out for him on the sands of the sea, a history of the various schools of art; and how clearly and indelibly he thus impressed the details upon a mind that required helps of this sort to enable it to arrange and store up facts permanently.¹

David's responsibility for the family livelihood cannot have lasted long, for in 1827 we find him with time to be an active, indeed a teaching, partner in the founding of a Life Academy in Edinburgh. At the same time he was in the forefront of a movement to secure more facilities for those artists who were not students of an Academy, including the right to draw from the casts in the Trustees Academy. Yet all the while he was forced to accept, as a background to his efforts, the fact that art could expect little pecuniary help. "In Edinburgh, for instance," he wrote, "the number of individuals interested in art, possessing the power to assist it, is a mere handful" --- and it is necessary for the artist to have "means almost amounting to independence".²

David's style of painting changed little during the twenty-five years or so of his career. An early work, 'Lot and his Daughters fleeing from the Cities of the Plain', was on the same vast scale, and showed the same strange imagination, as his later neglected works. In 1830, whether because of the work he had exhibited, or because he had been actively engaged in the negotiations between the Royal Institution and the Scottish Academy, David was admitted an Associate of the Scottish Academy. So far there were no outward circumstances

1. Diary of the late John Epps, ed. by Mrs. Epps, London, 1875, pp.142-143.
2. Memoir, p.182.

of failure to account for his gloom. He was working well at a fine series of designs entitled The Monograms of Man. These Blake-like inventions pictured Man and his faculties in relation to the world. The efforts he had made on behalf of art had been successful; yet he wrote in his diary:

What constitutes individual happiness? What we seek for changes and becomes the source of our misery.¹

It was plain that a sense of disappointment was already within his nature, to be aggravated very soon by actual failures.

In 1832 he escaped from Edinburgh, where he already had a fine reputation as an artist, and set off for Italy convinced that in the great masters he would find the magnificent scale and emphasis on thought and meaning which he himself admired. He remained there from 1832-34, and although he made some valuable anatomical studies, including a great many in the Hospital for Incurables, his only large picture was 'Discord'. This shows a family torn by rebellion of son against father, with immense figures in tortured positions reminiscent of the Laocoon. It seems that the time David Scott spent in Italy was one of hard financial struggle for the family. Therefore, inevitably, the question, "Is it justified?", rose to William's mind as he was left to bear the brunt of family concerns. This was probably the first occasion on which William openly expressed his feelings about his brother. During these years he wrote to David a letter which showed him rather impatient with his elder brother's troubles; and made it clear that he considered David too keenly alive to frustrations and failures of no greater magnitude than those which come the way of everyone but must be resisted. At the same time William set

1. Ibid, p.45.

out for himself the character which he strenuously maintained during the rest of his life:

Your mind is ever awake to pride or degradation, or some other notion, and takes every opportunity to augment its store of pains. --- I strive only to be contented: whatever intellectual work I may do, will be for its own sake; received or rejected by others, it will remain the same to me.¹

William's feelings were natural enough and were possibly strengthened by the fact that he received little appreciation of his own work from his brother. Although David no doubt introduced him to a valuable circle of friends in Edinburgh it was probably difficult for William to be tolerant in the face of this kind of attitude:

Read William's poem about Shelley; studied, and of a high order, but too eulogistic.²

The turning-point in David's life came when he realised that the paintings he saw in Italy fell far below his expectations. Ill-health dogged him while he was abroad and he came home to further troubles and disappointments. The Scottish Academy seem always to have recognised his powers, for he was elected an Academician shortly after his return in 1834, but he did not fare so well when he sent his work into the more truly competitive field of London exhibitions. The Royal Academy and British Institution rejected his pictures more than once on account of their size, a feature which a less stubborn man would surely have modified. Meantime he exhibited in the North of England Society's exhibition at Newcastle in 1838, and the following years until 1843, when it ceased to exist. He drew a series of illustrations for Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, which the poet himself commended, but which never met with any particular recognition at the time. They are however most striking and have caught

1. Ibid, pp.191-192.

2. Ibid, p.151.

the weird spirit of the poem very successfully.

David returned to Edinburgh in 1834, and for two years he and William must have lived at home together, though there is scant record of any activities or friends the two had in common, except that David contributed a sketch to the Edinburgh University Souvenir, an undergraduate magazine in which his brother took a lively interest. It was now William's chance to try his fortune in less limited spheres. He left Edinburgh for London in 1836, and after that he rarely saw David except for holidays. Two years later they spent some time together in Paris, sketching and drawing from the Antique. Nowhere in his published work does Scott say anything of his pleasure or otherwise in this holiday, but it is perhaps significant that in the same year, 1838, he dedicated a small volume of his poetry, Hades; or the Transit: and The Progress of Mind, to David, "As a Fraternal Testimonial (though a small one) of his Great Love and Esteem."

David visited him in London on at least two occasions, when exhibitions connected with the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament drew him from the seclusion of his Edinburgh studio. The fate of his cartoons in the 1842 Exhibition was a serious blow to any hopes he had that architectural decoration demanded large-scale epic painting such as his. Remembering the rejection of certain of his oils on account of size, it is significant to find that in this case his failure was due not so much to the quality of his designs as to the fact that he would not conform to the requirements of the competition, submitting rapid sketches which no more than indicated his ideas, when a carefully finished cartoon of the whole was expected. Scott summed up very fairly:

I wrote him on the awards being published, having seen several who had not tried, but who had known my brother in Rome, or who had otherwise entertained the highest opinion of his knowledge and powers, and who thought it strange he had not sacrificed to his own interest, and met the requirements of the competition more closely. This is not easily done; I do not know that he could. He replied, 'I must remain strange, as you say, or work against my convictions - be indeed false to myself. My most earnest prayer is that I die not alive'. Here is the egoism I have found in every man of mark I have known.¹

Two years later there was an exhibition for fresco painting, a subject which David had studied in Rome, and about which he had written. William, on one of his brief home visits, saw the designs which David proposed submitting to this second competition. He knew immediately that they could not succeed, and said of them:

He had done a portion of a design, literally a fragment; the upper part of one figure leaning on and looking over a wall, and the lower portion of another, a pair of legs, standing on it. This was indeed admirably painted, one of the very few trials of true fresco that appeared in the exhibition, but it made no impression whatever, except to excite some mirth on account of the two halves of figures represented - mirth which to him was entirely inexplicable.²

After the second fresco competition David returned to Edinburgh and seclusion. He had moved from his birthplace near the city to Easter Dalry, a lonely house standing in its own grounds. William describes his regular visits to look to their well being, and dwells on the quietness and gloom of the household, increased by the visible decline of his old Uncle, his Mother and of David himself, although he was still a comparatively young man. During these years he completed a fine set of illustrations to Pilgrim's Progress and continued to paint his vast canvases in the huge ugly studio he had built, until at last he became too ill to work. All his life he had suffered from the torments of his nerves, but in the last years he was severely afflicted by a nervous

1. A.N.I., 171.

2. Ibid., pp. 215-216.

disease affecting the muscles of the neck. It is small wonder that with his sensitive nature, disappointment in his work and real, not imagined, illness brought him to an early death.

I have spoken of the loneliness and obscurity of his life during these last five years and the picture is not, I think, greatly lightened by the fact that he had a circle of admirers and friends in Edinburgh. For one thing, David's loneliness was a loneliness of soul, something which no friend could help; and for another, his particular friends were people of as strange and troubled mind as himself; Dr. Samuel Brown the eccentric chemist; Dr. John Brown his cousin, the author of Rab and his Friends; Mrs. Catherine Crowe the writer of supernatural stories; and Professor John Nichol, whose book, The Architecture of the Heavens, David illustrated. This is probably his most beautiful set of designs, with none of the distortion or violent emotion of most of his work, but a remarkable sense of the wonder of the heavens and an unusual grace in the drawing.

William writes:

(Samuel Brown) and my brother David represent to me analogous powers in science and art. Yet were they both doomed to failure by the want of certain common everyday qualities -- Neither of them did themselves justice, and both died in mid-career. Mrs. Crowe too, his almost maternally affectionate admirer, broke down under the strain of excitement in a large measure resulting from his Brown's intercourse. Indeed all the set disappeared before their day was properly done: Professor Nichol died not long after Samuel Brown; and Dr. John, as we called the author of 'Rab and his Friends', fell into a mental state not so hopeless as that of Mrs. Crowe, but equally fatal; yet he was, when I knew him, the sanest of all, the adviser of every one.¹

In 1848, Ralph Waldo Emerson visited Edinburgh to give a series of four

1. Ibid, p.219.

lectures to the Edinburgh Philosophical Society on Natural Aristocracy; The Genius of the Age; Shakespeare the Poet; and Eloquence. During his stay he was the guest of this same Dr. Samuel Brown, the experimental scientist and philosopher, and it was at a supper at Brown's home after the first lecture that Emerson met David Scott, "a sincere great man, grave, silent, contemplative and plain".¹ Probably the two men already knew something of each other by reputation for two years earlier Margaret Fuller, the American journalist, critic and social reformer, a friend of Emerson, had visited Scott at his home in Edinburgh. Moreover Emerson came to Edinburgh from Newcastle, where he had already made William's acquaintance. A description of that supper party, and of the impression David Scott made on a fellow-guest, remains in the pages of Blackwood's Magazine:

After the first lecture, Samuel Brown had only a very few friends invited to supper with Emerson; and among them was David Scott, the painter - a man of original genius, whose art was prevented, by his early death, from becoming mature enough to enable him to give clear embodiment to his vast and peculiar conceptions. He was of a gaunt and gigantic frame, and his deeply thoughtful face was shadowed by habitual melancholy.² He was reserved and silent; but Emerson took greatly to him.²

Two days later Emerson dined with De Quincey, David Scott and Dr. Brown at Mrs. Crowe's; a momentous meeting, in that De Quincey and the American visitor had been brought together by deliberate contrivance. Scott must have taken a liking to Emerson, whom he described in his Journal as "severe, and dry, and hard" in appearance. "But," he added, "although he is guarded, and somewhat cold at times, intercourse shows him to be elevated, simple, kind, and truthful."³ The following day, Emerson breakfasted with him, and

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1. The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk, New York, 1939, IV, 18.
 2. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. CLV, April 1894, Emerson's Meeting with De Quincey.
 3. Memoir, p.299.

Scott arranged sittings for a portrait which showed his subject standing erect, young and vigorous. Emerson, in a letter written at the time, shows that he immediately realised the quality of Scott's work, and the impossibility of its pleasing the public:

He is a grave colossal painter, surrounded with huge pictures, in his hall of a studio, in a Michael Angelo style of size and of anatomical science. This man is a noble stoic sitting apart here among his rainbow allegories, very much respected by all superior persons, but far from popular as a painter, though his superiorities are all admitted.¹

David died not long afterwards, in 1849, and the following year William produced a memoir of his brother which by no means went unnoticed. The lengthy reviews it received in many of the leading periodicals suggest that there had been some demand for a full length book. Evidently David Scott had attracted more attention than one would gather from his brother's evidence in Autobiographical Notes. The reviews are generally more concerned with David, the subject of the Memoir, than with its author and his skill in marshalling his material. This fact, taken together with the frequent references to William as "The brother of David Scott", seems to argue that David's failure had earned him more remark than William's rather pedestrian success. It is of particular interest that the family resemblance, which many of their friends noticed between David and William, should have been so strikingly emphasised by this book, though that was a result which William by no means desired. The Spectator seized on the point, remarking in a review which is harsh throughout:

1. The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Ralph L. Rusk, New York, 1939, IV, 20.

The author of the book is peculiarly qualified for his office. William Scott, the brother of the artist, is an engraver, and teacher of the School of Design at Newcastle. From artistic deficiencies which appear to run in the blood, William Scott does not fully estimate the amount of his brother's shortcomings - so little, indeed, that whereas David Scott must be pronounced to have been a bad artist, whose career ended in thorough failure, William supposes him to have achieved some inchoate greatness; but he perceives the nature of the deficiency.¹

Such a public association of his name with David's could not fail to frighten Scott, who had a horror of repeating his brother's fate. Yet he could not escape his kinship or fail to feel the criticism levelled at David as if it were meant for him. A full twenty years after his brother's death he admitted the extent of his concern to W. M. Rossetti, when he wrote: "In your advanced life you will not have to fight against the feeling that your brother died with his heel against the world ---²

The material in the Memoir is undoubtedly valuable as material, though it is very badly arranged. The book is unwieldy and Scott seems to lose control over it after the opening chapters, which describe their family and home life much more vividly than the later Autobiographical Notes. He is no more careful of chronology than he is in the Notes; a fault for which he has been often censured. The journal which David kept in Italy is used at length and reads well without any comments from William, but it seems unnecessary to quote so fully from much of the other material such as writings on art, detached thoughts and speculations, notes for memory and the love poems. The book would have been more readable and would have made its main points with greater sureness if Scott had sifted the bulk of his material, discovered the main themes, and summarized.

1. The Spectator, January, 1850.

2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, 8 August [1869].

I have said that William was reserved in his attempts to advance his brother's reputation. The Memoir was the only occasion on which he entered into any public explanation of David's practice in art. But in 1853 he published The Forty Illustrations for the Pilgrim's Progress and himself completed the set of engravings. The Spectator, not alone in its opinion, ranked David's work highly and commented:

Of all means towards vindicating and extending his fame, none better could have been devised than the publication of his designs to the Pilgrim's Progress.

In spite of the compliment to his brotherly love, 'vindication' was neither Scott's purpose nor his expectation. He did his duty towards David as a literary and artistic executor, but he always moved with caution, rather than enthusiasm. His final and most protracted effort to secure recognition for his brother's work was concerned with the Emerson portrait painted in 1848. Scott felt that in view of its subject, it should find a permanent home in America. Accordingly in May 1869 he sent it to his friend W. J. Linton and at the same time he enlisted the interest of William and Gabriel Rossetti. The latter wrote to his friend Professor Charles Eliot Norton explaining Scott's wish:

I wanted to speak to you on a matter which W. B. Scott was mentioning to me. There is a very fine portrait of Emerson, by his late Brother David Scott (one of the few great painters this country has ever produced), which has been placed in the hands of W. J. Linton the engraver, now in America, with a view to sale. I believe Scott would take 60 or 70 guineas for it, and he asked me whether I thought you might possibly give a hint² of any probable purchaser. It is a life-size half-length.

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1. The Spectator, in a review of the designs for Pilgrim's Progress. Date unknown.
 2. W. M. Rossetti, Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870, London, 1903, pp. 439-440.

Linton did not prove a very efficient intermediary and the portrait was the subject of many letters from both sides of the Atlantic until its sale was finally effected. Indeed he had no easy task, for, although the portrait was greatly admired and David Scott's name known and highly regarded, no private purchaser could be found and a purchase had to be arranged by public subscription, which is always a complicated matter. Linton began negotiations by writing to Emerson for his opinion of the portrait and received a good-humoured reply in which Emerson explained that he was no judge of pictures of himself and had not yet had the opportunity to discover what his family thought of it. He went on:

Tis very certain we shall never buy it as we have no money to spend for our own images --- I had a very high regard for David Scott and deeply regretted his early death. My time in Edinburgh was so short, and so much divided that I could give him little time for sittings. He was a noble companion interesting in conversation and in silence. His brother William too I highly prize, though I know him less, and mainly know by his Poem "Year of the World". I could heartily wish for him a better price than any head of me is likely to bring.¹

Evidently Linton did not bestir himself any further at present, for in January 1870 Scott is writing to him for news in fairly urgent tones:

Time passes on, month after month, and no news from you regarding the matter of the portrait of Emerson, which I asked you to do for me in a friendly way --- Have you nothing to communicate that an old friend would like to hear, or nothing about the portrait of Emerson? If you can make nothing of it tell me so, and let me know what you think.²

This must have pricked his conscience, for in May of that year he enlisted the help of a Boston lady Mrs. Ednah Dow Cheney, authoress and social worker, who

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1. This letter is in Yale University Library.
 2. W.B.S. to William J. Linton, 33 Elgin Road, Kensington Park Road, 15 January 1870.

had helped in forming the Boston School of Design for Women. She came to know Emerson through Margaret Fuller, who had visited David Scott in Edinburgh, hence no doubt her particular interest in his work. Mrs. Cheney made every effort to raise the amount which was asked and so secure the portrait for Boston:

Jamaica Plain, May 15, 1870.

Mr. Linton,

Dear Sir,

'The picture' was removed to our Club rooms for the M. Fuller celebration and as I hoped attracted much attention and won some hearts --- Poor Scott's picture like himself and most prophets doesn't please the rich and influential. But, I should never forgive myself and my descendants ought never to forgive me if I did not make an effort to keep such a picture in Boston. You see how difficult it will be to raise a Subscription for not one of those I have named have much money except the Springs, who do not live here.

If you are willing to leave the picture at the Club Rooms and will name the lowest price for which it can be secured - I will open a subscription paper at the rooms, will try to excite a little feeling in the papers and to enlist the interest of those who do appreciate the picture. I think I would let the subscribers vote whether to give it to the New Art Rooms, or the Public Library or to Mrs. Emerson for her life and then to the Library. ---

Yours very truly,

E. D. Cheney.¹

We hear no more, but the money must somehow have been raised because the picture now hangs in Concord Free Public Library.²

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1. This letter is in Yale University Library.
 2. I have only found record of one other attempt by William to sell any of his brother's work. It occurs in W. M. Rossetti's Diary, v. Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870, p.323: "Gabriel is now in correspondence with Scott who wishes to dispose of his Brother's two pictures lately in the Newcastle Reading-room, to some purchaser of large gallery-pictures; it seems he would take £250 for the two." The pictures were "Achilles over the Body of Patroclus" and "Orestes pursued by the Furies". The negotiations never came to anything and when James Smetham visited Scott's studio at Bellevue House in the 1870s he described these great pictures as giving the room its "solemn charm". Finally 'Orestes' was bequeathed by Scott to Aberdeen Art Gallery, which received it in 1895.

The Rossettis at all times showed a particular interest in David's work and were ready to seek recognition for it. Indeed one of Scott's earliest letters to W. M. Rossetti is a reply to his enquiry as to where David's principal works might be seen. It was to them that Scott generally expressed his honest opinion of the merits of his brother's work and its chance of fortune. Although Dante Gabriel had no illusions about the peculiarities of David's style of art, and shrewdness enough to perceive that this was a subject on which Scott was tender and might be ragged, yet he showed a proper indignation at the National Portrait Gallery's refusal of a self-portrait by David. Scott had asked W. M. Rossetti to offer this picture, explaining that he felt it was not his place to do so:

Do you think a brother is the right man, especially if he is also an artist? I think not, so clearly that I can't do it, and have written Scharf saying so. I have said to him that I make the picture absolutely yours, leaving you to offer it, either now or after the Great Exhibition, when perhaps some of my brother's pictures may have become known there.¹

William Rossetti saw the refusal as "a case of thick-headedness such as our public bodies do occasionally exhibit".² Dante Gabriel advised his brother to write a letter of protest to the Athenaeum, but in this William was dissuaded by Scott, whose attitude throughout his life had not so much changed as deepened. This rather sad letter is a fine summing up:

1. Ruskin, Rossetti, Pre-Raphaelitism, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1899, p.291.

2. Ibid.

Newcastle,

30 Nov^r 1862.

My Dear W.,

The business of the portrait has turned badly. I have a conviction that the preventative individual is Eastlake, who is I believe the most frequently about the place, as indeed is natural. You can easily imagine Eastlake's style of taste and feeling polarizes him against all strong meat of my brother's kind. No doubt some of his best pictures will be exhibited next year, which may (I hope will) make him better known in London. You had better keep the picture. Hang it in your bedroom or anywhere for 10 or 20 years and try again. I think it may some day or other be really received with thanks. ---

Yours vry affec.^{tly}

W. B. Scott.¹

The only book about David to appear from the hand of an outsider during William's lifetime was David Scott and his Works, by John M. Gray, Keeper of the New Scottish National Portrait Gallery. This was a well-produced work, with 28 full-page illustrations, either portraits or engravings from David's pictures and designs. It appeared in a limited edition and was dedicated, with every appearance of respect, to William. He however thought little of it, not least one suspects because he had to pay for all copies he required. He wrote in some indignation to W. M. Rossetti:

I have to pay for all copies so have not had them, but if I can fork out more largely I shall send you one. The selection of illustrations, between 30 and 40, shows the outsider in art I am sorry to say of such a large and expensive publication.²

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1. This MS. is in the possession of Mrs. Helen Rossetti Angeli.
 2. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill, 29 September 1884. Scott is mistaken about the number of illustrations.

The biographical part of Gray's letterpress derives from the Memoir: the critical part, which is original, is fair and comprehensive. Gray's main point is that David believed the proper sphere of painting to be invention and visionary conception. He considers him to have shown a remarkable capacity for such work and indeed feels justified in ranking him with Blake. While he gives every praise to Scott's power and vigour of design he is forced to remark on the defective drawing and this he does strongly but does not dwell on it. The illustrations are chosen with care to show the beauties of Scott, the lovely face of the woman in 'The Vintagers', the delicate yet striking design called 'The Creation of a Star', or the powerful historical picture 'The Traitor's Gate', as well as the strange and violent distortions of 'Discord', The Ancient Mariner Designs, and some of the illustrations to Pilgrim's Progress. In brief the book is a fitting tribute to David and it seems unlikely that he will ever receive sounder appreciation.

CHAPTER XII

London: Friendships with the Younger Poets.

In 1875 Scott prepared and published a volume of his collected poems. It was not without significance that this appeared when it did, the first work of his in poetry for some twenty years. He commented on it himself:

Finding an expectation on the part of my friends, old and new, that I would print my poems old and new, and so give some evidence of my powers little or great, in that now so popular art and mystery, I began to think such a thing reasonable. The younger men knew me only by hearsay as a poet at all, so I began preparing the book ultimately issued in the beginning of 1875, illustrated by Alma Tadema and myself.¹

Although Scott repeatedly insisted that he worked at his own pace and in his own way, caring little for the opinions of others or their expectations of him, and wrote of himself as "a man --- who does not trouble his head much about success, and is in a manner contented with fate",² adding, in another letter to the same correspondent:

For my own part, I have given up writing altogether in the way of casual work, or it has given me up, one or other, at 65 one may take things easy and not mind which it is ---.³

Yet in the 1870s and 1880s, he was enjoying and profiting from the stimulus of many young friends, most of them aspiring poets.

I have spoken of this period, when Scott had retired from school routine, as being, wisely enough, of a less strenuous character, and have hinted at the approach of age and illness behind the self-devised activity. But it becomes

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1. A.N.II, 203.
 2. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Penkill, 15 September 1882.
 3. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Penkill, 9 September 1877.

clear that there was another aspect; that Scott remained young in spirit and consequently took pleasure in the role he was able to assume of critic, mentor, and influential friend to a large group of young men who enjoyed the hospitality of his Chelsea home. There they were privileged to meet many of the great figures of the day: Holman Hunt, William Morris, Ford Madox Brown, W. M. Rossetti and even Dante Gabriel on fortunate occasions; and to be introduced to editors and contributors on the staff of leading reviews and periodicals, men who might be 'useful' to them in much the same way as Scott himself in his younger days had been introduced to the literary and artistic circles of London by Samuel Carter Hall.

Scott at this age was not particularly attractive in appearance. He had lost the fine looks of his youth; his face had become fuller, the expression displeased and even sour. What was it then which attracted men and women to him as surely as in those early days when the Rossetti family found him so charming on quite a brief acquaintance? That his position amongst the young poets of the later nineteenth century was not a figment of his imagination is easily proved. It stands in strong contradiction to the spiteful opinion of Swinburne and the other critics of the Autobiographical Notes controversy, who said that Scott was a mere hanger-on to more famous names. For, in other eyes, he had a decided personality and came out favourably even in company with a man so famous for the reverence he inspired as Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Samuel Butler, who can hardly have been biased, he cared so little for any of the protagonists, wrote of such an occasion:

You ask me about Rossetti. I dislike his face and his manner and his work, and I hate his poetry and his friends. He is wrapped up in self-conceit and lives upon adulation. I spent a whole evening in his company at H[enry] Wallis's, W. B. Scott being the only other except Wallis, Rossetti and myself. I was oppressed by the sultry reticence of Rossetti's manner, which seemed to me assumed in order to conceal that he had nothing worth saying to say. I liked W. B. Scott well enough. The other two were horrid.

It is meagre enough praise, but in the context it counts for a good deal.

Walter Crane remembered Scott as a likeable colleague at South Kensington, and added:

William Bell Scott -- I was particularly interested to meet, as I had been struck some years before by a series of pictures of the history of the Scottish or English border he had painted for the house of Trevelyan, which were exhibited for a short time in London - also as the friend of W. J. Linton, and of the Rossettis and their circle.²

Those who themselves sought Scott's friendship and advice were naturally less reticent and more particular in their appreciation. Two young contemporaries expressed it in a practical way by dedicating their poems to Scott. Cesme Monkhouse inscribed Corn and Poppies to him as 'Poet and Art-Critic', and Gosse dedicated the volume On Viol and Flute, to his friend. Whether they ever wearied of his criticism, or quailed when his advice was given at far greater length than they had anticipated, is now difficult to judge, but certainly Scott considered it within his province to offer detailed criticism of their work, together with demands for its alteration when he did not approve.

And what of Scott himself: was he flattered by this attention and by the position accorded to him by these young poets? In his heart I am sure he was,

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1. Henry Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, A Memoir, London, 1919, I, 164.
 2. Walter Crane, An Artist's Reminiscences, London, 1907, p.208.

for he had always been kindly and helpful in a practical way towards those who were starting out in literature or art. This had been one of his finest qualifications as headmaster of the School of Design, and he was sure to welcome the continued opportunity. At the same time he was cautious, not given to enthusiasm, and he maintained very definite standards. Consequently he did not regard every young poet who came to him with indiscriminate favour in an age in which, as he himself said, every third man was a poet. Together with his general objection to contemporary writers on the score of quality, Scott entertained a particular objection to the strong French influence in the work of so many of them. Yet his attitude was not quite at odds with his unquenchable interest in a new poet and his warm friendship with some of the most outstanding of this period. Here is Scott growling at the young company he was expected to keep:

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New bards are rife, nine of them, reckoning old Brown and Nolly as two, supped together at Fitzroy Square the other night as you may have heard from W. B. He viewed his noisy brethren from afar with sardonic eye but perhaps might have softened its ray if he had heard their reverential views upon his poetry, as I walked home in their company. The youths in question were two - O'Shaughnessy and Payne - both clever, artistic poets, the former especially.¹

But O'Shaughnessy and Payne were spoken of with all fairness in the pages of Autobiographical Notes, where Scott's opinion of them combined kindness and a shrewd judgement. In mentioning their names he also explained that they were assistants at the British Museum and two of a group of young men who were employed there but spent every moment of their free time and some of their working

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1. The Fortnightly Review, No. DCCXXXVII New Series, May 1928, John Purves, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Letters to Miss Alice Boyd".
 - ★ Nolly was Ford Madox Brown's very promising son Oliver, who died in early youth.

time, in writing poetry. Coventry Patmore had combined both occupations before them, and now the number had grown to five or six amongst the Museum Staff: Richard Garnett, Theodore Marzials, O'Shaughnessy, Payne and Edmund Gosse. Scott was acquainted with most of these young men, but he was more particularly friendly with Edmund Gosse, who worked at that time in the cataloguing department.

It is difficult to see how they found or expected the opportunity for any verse-writing during their hours of duty, though Scott suggests that they actually did so, saying:

Now they were impatiently hiding their productions at every desk.¹

We learn from Gosse that the discipline was strict and the routine most exacting, yet it seems that the title given to them of British Museum poets was so far justified in that the Museum was the actual birthplace of a good many of their works.

Gosse spoke feelingly of his own disappointment that the work at the Museum was so dull and laborious, and that the assistants were forbidden to bring to it their individual interests. In this matter he found an unexpectedly in Alice Boyd, who wrote in reply to his revelation of these harsh conditions:

What horrid news this is you have from the Museum. How is it possible that such tyrannical rules can be thought of as to prevent people doing what they please with their time in the evenings at home! This is really most distressing, I have always fancied the dear old Museum to be the one place in London where the troubled spirit might be at rest, at least as far as externals go.

1. A.N.II, 192.

How often W. B. and I have said talking about you, Marzials and others that it was delightful to think of yr. being together in such a place with everything to make life delightful - Oh dear, I am so sorry to be disenchanted.¹

Miss Boyd of course made the acquaintance of Gosse through W. B. S., and the young man's introduction of himself to Scott is worthy of an account in some detail. It came about by way of their common interest in old prints, and not through poetry. Scott had recently published his Life of Dürer, in which he had omitted to mention some pictures in the National Gallery, by Patinier, Dürer's friend. In March 1870 he received a letter from an unknown correspondent who pointed out the relevance and interest of these pictures and spoke as if he had considerable acquaintance with the more obscure early masters. Scott was impressed by the letter and mentally connected the name of the writer with that of an earlier patron. Therefore, in the hope that this gentleman might once again prove a buyer, he wrote and invited him to call and inspect his own fine collection of Dürer prints. When the writer of the letter duly paid his visit Scott was amazed to find, not his imagined patron, a gentleman in middle age, but a young boy of nineteen. Gosse was then eager, lively and good looking, and in spite of his assured way of introducing himself, the Scotts and Miss Boyd took to him at once. He himself was soon sensible of the value of Scott's friendship and the introductions it brought to men who could give him both stimulating conversation and employment in literary work. In the October of the following year Gosse wrote to his father of the delights and advantages of acquaintance with this new circle. It needs to be explained that in the summer he had visited the Lofoden Islands and made his holiday experiences the basis of an article which he had submitted to Fraser's Magazine.

1. Alice Boyd to Edmund Gosse, Bellevue House, 6 May 1873.

Nor is this all that I have heard, (of the fortunes of the article) for dining on Thursday last with the Scotts, Allingham the poet was there also, and it appears that he is sub-editor of Fraser. So Mr. Scott asked him in an off-hand way if he had seen anything of an article on the Lofoden. 'Oh! yes,' said Mr. Allingham, 'it's going in; it is interesting. Do you know anything of the man?' which created a great deal of fun of course, and pleased me very much. I was charmed with Allingham, and still more with another new acquaintance made on Thursday at the Scotts, i.e. Mr. Appleton, Editor of the Academy. We quite took to one another, I think; I rarely like anyone so much on first sight; we went home most of the way together, and I am going to see him soon. The same night I met Dr. Hueffer also, who is a prominent man of letters. It was very kind of Mr. Scott, I think, to ask me to a little party of people who were all sure to be useful to me; the only other people were Miss and Mr. Rossetti. I enjoyed the evening very much.¹

This might have been an expression of momentary enthusiasm, therefore it is interesting to find it confirmed by Gosse's biographer, Evan Charteris, who spoke of Bellevue House as "a meeting place of the artistic world", and pointed out that acquaintance with Scott inevitably led to acquaintance with the Pre-Raphaelite group, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown and, at a further remove, A. C. Swinburne.²

Rather later Scott came to know yet another young poet very well. This was Austin Dobson, who did not belong to the British Museum group, but worked in a government post at the Board of Trade. In 1875 Gosse joined the Board as a translator and the two became firm friends, writing regularly to each other. Indeed, with Cosmo Monkhouse employed there too, the Board of Trade offices had much the same reputation as the British Museum: what an American visitor called "a nest of singing birds".

1. Evan Charteris, The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse, London, 1931, p.36.
2. Ibid, p.24.

During the 1870s and early 1880s, both Dobson and Gosse visited and corresponded with Scott, and there remain a small group of letters to each, showing the nature of their friendship with the elder poet. Those from Scott to Austin Dobson, written mainly between the years 1877-'84, give a picture of a pleasant relationship which included invitations to dine in a quiet way, and friendly visiting between the two families. Dobson was a rather shy self-effacing man, content with his suburban way of life, but with a gift for writing graceful verses, all with the greatest ease. Scott liked him because he had none of the worrying 'bohemianism' affected by so many young artists and writers. It is interesting that to be shown Scott's collection of prints was evidently one of the incidental pleasures of knowing him, for Dobson and his companion John Byrne Leicester Warren, later Baron de Tabley, were invited to look through them at an early stage in Scott's friendship with Dobson. The letters show that Scott very soon exercised the privilege of offering advice to his young friend. In the matter of Dobson's verse, those two letters which have for subject his recently published volume Proverbs in Porcelain are the most important for their combination of a critical attitude, particular advice, and yet a rather wistful admiration of the ease with which Dobson wrote. The first concerned the title:

I see the announcement of your new volume, 'Proverbs in Porcelain'. Will you not think me officious or impertinent if I offer you a bit of old fashioned advice about the name you have chosen? Since your 'Vignettes in Rhyme' appeared there have been such a lot of little books of miscellaneous verse with affected title, alliterative or otherwise, that I can't help thinking it far better to keep out from among them -- But the broken metaphor, if there is one, in your new title is not what makes me write you so much as the adoption of the plan of inventing a title like so many of the lesser lights in poetry and novels. Will you look in here some evening, and let us have a little talk, I shall be glad to see you.¹

1. W. B. S. to Austin Dobson, Bellevue, 11 March 1877.

When Scott had looked at the volume he wrote to Dobson a second time offering more detailed criticism:

Just at the first it seems to me every one of your six little pieces giving name to the book is nearly perfect, yet the necessity to name the interlocutors is a disturbing influence of such magnitude as to make reading aloud next to useless. I suppose you determined on the dialogue form for the best of reasons however.

For my own part I must say, perhaps because unable to do any work of the kind myself or even to conceive the possibility of doing it, that your Vignettes and now this volume touches me with a kind of wonder, it is so elastic and lucid, and at the same time natural - artificially natural - perhaps I may call it. I hope you will not swear at me however, if I say your bias for ballads and other obsolete single rhyming verses try one's patience like the old school gymnastic exercises of lifting weights with the feet tied. Is it because these forms are difficult or supposed to be difficult that you take to them in this most poetical of all ages, when every third man and woman is a poet.

Scott's admiration of ease in writing, and his hope that he might attain to it, is made more obvious by his comparison rather later, of the spontaneity of his own Poet's Harvest Home with Dobson's work. He was evidently interested in Dobson's critical as well as his poetic powers; but it was inherent in Scott's character that, amongst his admiration, he did not fail to comment that he had offered information on the subject in hand which Dobson had not seen fit to use:

I read your paper on Bewick. Very good and genial, but I found not much new, and nothing about buttons or Luke Clennell or anything else I tried to assist in. Are you done with the scrap book? --²

Scott treated these younger poets with something of the older man's air of patronage and gave to their work a commendation which must sometimes have held more annoyance than pleasure. He took the opportunity to introduce

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1. W. B. S. to Austin Dobson, 92 Cheyne Walk, 19 May 1877.
 2. W. B. S. to Austin Dobson, 92 Cheyne Walk, 26 February 1883.

his favourite topics and much-repeated theories, such as the fact that he placed first importance on the motive and thought of a poem. Yet all in all, he showed a mind alert and interested in very various productions and generally ready to give an encouraging word.

The letters to Gosse are a great deal fuller and more expressive of the personality of both correspondents, particularly the livelier nature of Gosse. Beside the fact that the young man's friendliness quickly won him a place among the Scotts intimate circle, they already had connections with the young lady whom Gosse married in 1875. This was Miss Nellie Epps, niece of John Epps the homoepath, a family who were very old friends of Mr. and Mrs. Scott. This relationship with the family of the future Mrs. Gosse was strengthened by the fact that one of her sisters, Laura, was married to Alma-Tadema, the artist who helped Scott to engrave the illustrations of Poems 1875. The letters from Scott to Gosse were all written between the years 1871 and 1882. In 1881 the friendship seems to have been fading, for Scott wrote to Dobson that he now saw nothing of Gosse. Yet, from time to time during their correspondence, he spoke of Austin Dobson to Gosse in a way which implied that Gosse was the more intimate friend. In this strain he confided that he was sometimes afraid of insulting Dobson; obviously trusting himself to Gosse's understanding and discretion in making such a remark, for the two young men were themselves close friends:

I forgot to ask you if you had shown my wicked reply to Dobson's epigram to that gentleman. Some people are hurt or offended at a jeu d'esprit just as much as at an intentional insult. I hope he is not one of these: in fact I want to keep him as a friend.¹

1. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, 92 Cheyne Walk, S.W., 14 November 1879.

It was not that Scott ever minced matters when he wrote to any of these young men, Gosse amongst the rest. His letters contained advice in plenty, relating to work and friends:

I fear you have irritated him [Swinburne]. Your story of his visit with his new book is a sad one. It was very good of him to bring you his book, but I hope he was not intoxicated, and if not and so ill as you describe, was it not a pity to coax him off the premises? Why did you not ask for him next day. He took to you from the first time he met you at Chelsea, and he does not do so to many.¹

Scott made no secret of his obvious pleasure in being able to give information, and enjoyed to the full such an occasion as that when he introduced Gosse's work to Rossetti. One supposes that Gosse was grateful though how much patience he needed in the face of this almost meddling criticism is another matter:

Your sonnet to D. G. R. I took the liberty to show him the other evening; he thought it very good as a sonnet. I had pencilled two verbal alterations - in 9th line 'Not from our own land etc.' to 'in our own land, etc.' and in 11th I made a past tense changing drowns into drowned, which he thought good.²

This letter, and the one which follows, show exactly that quality I have remarked elsewhere, which made Scott take delight in being the sole witness of some of Rossetti's darkest hours:

I shall gladly assist you in writing about D. G. R. and to that effect have already given you the use of my sketch of him in the ancient days, but I can't come before the public in writing of my old and once dear friend. I never wrote on my contemporaries and can't most of all write of him, of whom I could not say a true word that would be pleasant to his admirers. I write you this because from the tenor of your note I fear you accept my aid in a larger sense than intended. Old letters I have indeed, such as scarcely any other man could write, but would not like to produce them at present.³

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1. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Penkill, 19 September 1878.
 2. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Bellevue, Chelsea, 22 May 1872.
 3. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, 92 Cheyne Walk, 18 April 1882.

The withholding of information here was rather a special case. On most occasions Scott was ready to give definite and active help when he was applied to, as this letter about the reviewing of Gosse's new volume On Viol and Flute will show. It is notable for the kindly way in which he answers the young man's natural impatience:

I have just got your note by post. You must not expect instantaneous action on the part of reviewers. As yet no time has passed, but you can't expect for a week or two any printed recognition. Don't be afraid, I have not been out lately, and have had the girls here to occupy attention, so I have only seen Hüffer, Burne Jones and Simcox, the last of whom was here on Wednesday with his sister. We spoke of your book of course, and he seemed to know everything in it, but again repeated his idea that he would rather leave it to somebody else who did not know you in the Academy. I on the contrary said knowing the man was next in importance to knowing the poetry. No more was said. --- If I do hear anything or see I shall write you. Meantime make yourself easy --¹

Scott did not easily express his deeper feelings, but once he made it plain that he found genuine pleasure in this correspondence:

I have just remembered that your last note has never been acknowledged, and your notes are so well filled generally, and indeed are the only ones I get, except Letitia's, with news or gossip of friends, Wallis and Eyre Crowe being both out of town, that they ought to be gratefully acknowledged.²

No doubt this pleasure was strengthened by the fact that Alice Boyd made quite a favourite of the young man, and wrote to him in her kindly and effusive way.

Taken together the letters to Gosse and Dobson show the busy life Scott led; the interests he had; the number of his friends; and, most important, his influence in the literary and artistic circles of London where, nearly forty years before, he had struggled to gain recognition. His friendship

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1. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Bellevue, Chelsea, 1873.
 2. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Penkill, 9 September 1877.

with these men kept him young and gave him not only an opportunity to criticise their work from the pleasant altitude of an established writer, but the delight of being able to talk about his own work. Frequent mention is made of other young poets, Theodore Marzials, O'Shaughnessy, Payne; and Scott gives every indication that he enjoyed their company and forwarded their interests. "Marzials stept in last evening very pleasantly,"¹ he writes to Gosse, and again:

Do you think Marzials wd. like to send him (Rossetti) a copy of his book? If he would I shall give Rossetti a hint to acknowledge it, wh. however he may not need now living quietly in the country.²

So the circle of friends extended and the Scotts had the young stimulating company they enjoyed so well. Though being thus sought after must have been pleasant, it could no doubt be wearying, since all the young poets who applied to Scott cannot have been of the same calibre. Yet his tone is not unwelcoming, even when the young men are far removed in age and enthusiasm from his own condition. In 1882 he wrote to Theodore Watts in terms which suggested that, even when he recognised the faults and shortcomings of youth, he gave attentive hearing to their schemes and enthusiasms:

About Oxford undergrads. Quite right, but mainly because they don't get the strong food prescribed to them. I am to be called upon by 3 of the youths who write the "Waifs & Strays", Beeching⁴ the editor one of them, on Thursday.³

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1. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Bellevue, Chelsea, 21 June 1874.
 2. W. B. S. to Edmund Gosse, Bellevue, 27 February 1871.
 3. W. B. S. to Theodore Watts, 92 Cheyne Walk, 17 January 1882.
 - * H. C. Beeching went up to Balliol in 1878 and became friendly with a circle including J. W. Mackail and Sidney Lee. His enthusiasm for poetry was stimulated and he took a leading part in the production of this periodical Waifs and Strays. In 1879 he published a volume of poems, Primavera, in conjunction with Mackail and J. B. Nichols. He was ordained but continued to make his contribution to literature and later became a friend of Robert Bridges.

Many years later, during his final retirement at Penkill, when one might have thought that age, illness and seclusion would have made him short-tempered with youth, we find instead, in Professor Minto's words, that "young men found his appreciation of their work as fresh as it was in the Pre-Raphaelite days".¹

A youthful visitor, welcomed to Penkill amongst Scott's old friends, was Hubert Horne, editor of the Hobby Horse, the magazine of the Century Guild. There must have been some sympathy between the two writers of different generations, for Scott was persuaded to contribute a poem to the magazine, and after his death Horne published the fullest and most informative obituary notice which appeared. One paragraph of this sums up the impression I wish to leave:

In judging Mr. Scott, we must always remember to what generation he belonged; and what manner of men came after him. They had the advantage of his propositions, and theirs was the profit: for the popular applause is not with the initiative, but with the effective spirits.²

1. A.N.II, 332.

2. Hubert P. Horne, William Bell Scott, Poet, Painter and Critic, reprinted from the Hobby Horse, MDCXCXI, at the Chiswick Press.

CHAPTER XIII

Penkill and Alice Boyd.

Penkill Castle is richly favoured in its situation. It stands in the hills above Girvan on the extreme edge of a narrow point of land where two burns, teeming down the hillside, join to make the Penwhapple stream and plunge through a steep wooded glen to the sea. The view is towards Ailsa Craig, and beyond, when the day is clear, to the hills of Arran and Kintyre. The earliest part of the building, the square peel, dates from about 1400, and was originally intended for defence. The ground floor was a vaulted stable, and the only entrance was at the height of the first floor and must have been reached by a rope ladder. The big square rooms are the full area of the tower and the topmost has two corner turrets with conical roofs of fish-tailed tiles. In 1628, on the occasion of the laird's marriage, an outer stone staircase and three rooms were added at right angles to the old part. The building gradually fell into decay, and when Spencer Boyd, Miss Alice Boyd's brother, succeeded to the property, he devoted himself to saving the fabric and making the house suitable for habitation. One of his additions was a great stone spiral staircase in the angle of the two old parts of the castle which replaced the narrow seventeenth century newel staircase and connected with the rooms on each floor. It was this staircase which Miss Alice Boyd asked Scott to decorate with wall-paintings; and before it was completed in 1868 it came to be a memorial to her brother and his love of Penkill, for Spencer died with tragic suddenness early in 1865 and did not see any of the decorations.

The painting Scott did at Penkill does not seem to have been a definite commission, though there may have been some private financial arrangement between himself and Miss Boyd. He was working on the Chevy Chase Spandrills for Wallington at the same time, and in April 1866 he wrote to W. M. Rossetti saying that he must renounce a holiday abroad for that year because the two tasks were proving all absorbing and must not be prejudiced:

After all I find I must make up my mind not to go with you to Italy. --- You see this is just the time I had proposed to do the work at Penkill, and from past experience, knowing that after a tour on the continent I can't settle effectively for weeks, my going away now would nearly do for my summer's painting altogether -- Then besides my Penkill staircase the time has come for the finish of Wallington, as the upper spandrels with Chevy Chase on them must be placed and the ceiling finished before Woolner's group is placed -- After these two important (to me) undertakings are done or even after this season has 'broken their backs', I shall be in funds and with time on hand, but the present seems essential to their accomplishment. A week ago I had fixed on enjoying the tour with you, but talking over things and finding both Miss Boyd and Lady Trevelyan have notions about not living, I shall remain at home and work.¹

Work on the staircase was begun in the early years of Scott's retirement and was in part an expression of his pleasure in being able to paint at what he pleased. Furthermore it was an expression of affection for Miss Boyd and for Penkill. He enjoyed what he was doing, and, deep in his painting, he was tided over the first difficult years of retirement. Neither is work on the staircase the end of the story; the whole house has very rightly been called "the best memorial of his genius".² It remains very much as it was when he died, and it is true that everywhere about it there is something of Scott; his paintings; a piece of decorative work on a fireplace or above a

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., 33 Elgin Road, 24 April [1866]

2. Hubert P. Horne, William Bell Scott, Poet, Painter and Critic, reprinted in pamphlet form from The Hobby Horse, Magazine of the Century Guild, MDCCCXCI, at the Chiswick Press.

doorway; his books; furniture made to his design; and his one adventure into architecture - the Hall. Indeed it speaks of an egotistic streak in his nature, for the walls are literally covered with his work and it is all carefully signed. As an expression of Scott's personality Penkill is far more revealing than Wallington, undoubtedly because he was now his own master and might work freely. On the other hand there is perhaps less artistic unity in the decorations. At Wallington Scott had, as we have seen, protested that he was hampered by the close scrutiny of Sir Walter. If he went outside his commission it was always with the knowledge that the work would probably have to be painted out:

Iam besides trying to pay for my keep by doing a little moulding in pale colour in the entrance lobby

he wrote to Lady Trevelyan while she was on holiday.

If Sir Walter does not want the little bit of border I have done in the entrance I shall send out a man with a broad brush who will put it out in ten minutes.¹

But at Penkill matters were very different, and he was free to amuse himself by painting absurd little pieces of decoration such as the dragon over the doorway in the hall. Not that Miss Boyd was a less discerning person than Sir Walter, or less certain of her own mind, but she had a warm affection for 'Scotus', and she undoubtedly realised that a creative artist must work to his own satisfaction. She herself was interested in the paintings, and like Lady Trevelyan she assisted with the more purely decorative parts. At the same time she kept Scott up to the mark, for she was a severe critic. She liked accuracy in perspective and sometimes, it is related, got very cross with him for his failure in this respect.

1. W. B. S. to Lady T. Undated.

As early as 1861, when Scott was still painting the series of oils at Wallington, he paid a visit to Penkill and wrote to Lady Trevelyan telling her of the delights of the place. He enjoyed not only its situation, but the fact that there he had been able to paint the window recess in the drawing-room exactly as the humour took him:

I made such a jolly place of the window recess at Penkill - such grotesque gothic plants repudiating botany, thank God, and corbie crows the size of nature. Besides every day was sunshine to me, and it is impossible to say how nice the situation is. The house with rooms having each four little windows, now filled with a single sheet of glass in walls 4 to 8 feet thick looking sheer down into a glen more picturesque than Roslin over which the horizon of the sea extends, out by Ailsa Crag.¹

The subject chosen for the decoration of the staircase was the story of King James the First of Scotland during his imprisonment at Windsor as he told it himself in his lovely poem The King's Quair. Scott made the choice, turning to a book which had delighted him from his boyhood, when, as he tells us, "the first copy I possessed of it was presented to me".² In spite of the promise of the subject all was not plain sailing, for the painting was to be done directly on to the walls and the medium needed careful consideration. Scott already knew a good deal about fresco-painting and had no illusions about just what a miserable failure it could be. I believe he would not have chosen to work in such an uncertain medium, except that there seemed to be no other way and the smooth curves of the staircase invited direct mural painting. He accepted the challenge with its many difficulties and began some preparatory work of investigation into the best methods of wall-painting. At that time Maclise was working on the second of his great pictures

1. W. B. S. to Lady T., N., [1861?]

2. W. B. Scott, Illustrations to the King's Quair of King James I of Scotland, Edinburgh, Privately printed, 1887.

in the House of Commons, 'The Death of Nelson'. He used a water-glass medium, the idea for which was borrowed from the German painter Kaulbach. Scott visited him at his work but received neither specific advice nor encouragement, only an offer from the painter of "all his traps", for he was weary of the whole affair. With Maclise's despondent opinion that the best thing "was not to undertake such work at all", still in his ears, Scott began the painting at Penkill in quite a different medium.¹ He does not reveal whether the method was his own invention or whether it was borrowed, but at first it seemed as if it was to be successful. Scott explains that the colours were used in a solution of wax and turpentine. It was a kind of tempera, not properly encaustic because no heat was used to fuse the colours into the plaster. He liked it because the pigments were not restricted to earths, as with ordinary fresco. The effect was good, the colours light and the surface uniformly dull.

Scott prepared his cartoons and began painting in July 1865. He worked throughout the summer of that year, and in the autumn when Miss Boyd returned with him to London and the house was closed up, he had finished to the first landing on the staircase. When they returned in the spring of 1866 and Scott prepared to begin the second flight he found that during the winter the damp had attacked the first panels and caused some flaking. This must have been a disappointment to him, although he knew that it was the regular thing to expect with wall-painting in the English climate, but he had believed that thick walls would obviate the difficulty of outside damp at Penkill. At first

1. An account of this is given in A.N.II, 83-85.

he expressed a hope to W. M. Rossetti that the cause was not damp from outside but simply part of the drying process, and therefore not necessarily a continued cause of deterioration:

I am getting on with my second staircase, and hope to make it quite as good as the last. But some portion of one side shows sad signs of crumbling. Only here and there in small pieces, but still very discouraging. The wall is so thick and pricked out outside with Portland cement that we are induced to conclude the damp (because damp alone is the cause) is the last remains of drying brought out by the warm weather. If the corresponding space on the 2nd flight is done this year I must cover the wall with a sheet of lead.¹

Rossetti must have replied showing some interest in the problem, for in the following letter Scott explained in greater detail the two possible causes of the trouble:

The great question with me here in the presence of the powdering off in some detached places, of my painting, is, whether the damp in the wall is the yet unescaped damp since building or whether (as it is only on the South, the rainy side) the damp is renewed from without. I am now making enquiry as to the practicability of getting the wall covered by a sheet of lead or zinc, to paint on. This I believe may be done.²

Scott continued to paint the fourth panel during the summer of 1866, but he was dissatisfied with the way in which the work was standing. When he returned to Penkill in the summer of 1867, after the house had again been closed for the winter, it was obvious that there was no certain way of fighting the damp, which continued to attack the painting. He then wrote:

I find the south side of my staircase much injured by the frost - It seems from the account of the old housekeeper, that she saw no flaw, till that warm weather just after the last so-late frost which has nearly killed every plant here, and then all at once the damp struck out of the wall. It is no use struggling against the climate. Italy even will not allow wall-painting to live, it is only in Egypt they continue perfect.³

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1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill Castle, Girvan, Ayrshire, [12 July 1866].
 2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill Castle, Girvan, Ayrshire, 29 July [1866].
 3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill Castle, 10 June 1867.

During the winter of 1867, Scott read two papers to the Institute of British Architects on his mural paintings at Wallington and Penkill. It was small wonder that he spoke with such decision about the disadvantages of fresco, not only because it needs careful preparation of the materials and a practised hand in the artist, but because it is impossible to make it permanent. Scott explained that he had experience of the medium, but doubted its value:

I think the advantage of fresco is pretty much given up. I fancy we shall never take to fresco again in this country, unless it be on carefully prepared interior walls, and after an apprenticeship on the part of the painter it might be tried with success.¹

Evidently this decided opinion caused some discussion amongst the members of the society, for in the next paper, that on the Penkill decorations, Scott returned to the subject and made it clear that his opinion was not a piece of ingenious self-defence because he had preferred canvas fixed to the wall at Wallington. It was, he said, the common experience of all fresco painters. Scott advanced several theories about the way in which the damp attacked his painting, but never arrived at a definite conclusion. For a long time he believed that the flaking was confined to that part of the staircase which was on the South side, where the outer wall was exposed to the damp South wind. This he did attempt to combat by repainting a section on zinc, as he had suggested to Rossetti, but gradually he realised that the whole of the work was subject to flaking to a lesser or greater degree, and he concluded that it

1. W. B. Scott, Mural Decorations at the Mansion of Sir Walter Trevelyan, Bart., at Wallington, a paper read at the meeting of the Royal Institute of British Architects, 2 December 1867.

must be injured by the damp in the new walls or the corrosive quality of the lime in the plaster. Miss Courtney Boyd, the present owner believes that since the powdering off is not confined to the outside walls it may be caused by sea-sand used in the cement, the salt causing the deterioration.

The story of the King's Quair is in the spirit of medieval romance. It tells how the young prince James was a prisoner and in the depths of despair until, one morning looking from his turret window, he saw a lady in the garden below. In the tradition of the courtly poems it was May and the time for love, but the prince was still wretched because he was not free to go to his lady and declare his love. In this plight he fell asleep and dreamt that he was brought to the Court of Venus, who promised aid and sent him to the Goddess Minerva. At last he was brought to Fortune herself, who seemed well disposed to him, and then he wakened. Shortly afterwards a bird flew in at his window bearing a message of love, and the prince gave thanks for his good fortune, for such his captivity seemed, now love had come.

Scott illustrated the poem by seven panels, of which the first shows the prince, unable to sleep, looking from his window as the morning watch marches away and the bell rings for mattins. It has remained in fairly good condition; the colouring is strong and very like that of the early Wallington oils such as the 'Roman Wall', or the 'Landing of the Danes'. The composition is a favourite one, the height of the battlements occupying the foreground and the country below being in the background.

The second large panel shows the Lady Jane walking in the garden, while Cupid, from behind a rose-bush, takes aim at the King. There is a preliminary

study of this panel showing quite a different and more strongly balanced grouping. It is painted in duller tones, soft greens and pinks, and is very badly flaked. The lady is not prepossessing, for she has a thick neck and heavy features, but the mass of flowers and trees make it an attractive panel. Scott finished this year's work by a third small picture showing King James carried to the Court of Love. The yew hedge he painted was studied in a separate sketch, an unusual procedure in the Penkill work.

The story recommences on the second flight of the staircase, where a large panel shows the Court of Love, a most curious and rather muddled picture. Some of the figures in it are initialled and we may there identify heads painted from William Michael and Christina Rossetti. Rossetti wrote in his diary:

Miss B[oyd] proposed that I should sit to S[cott] for a head in his Palace of Venus, which head he had originally begun with some idea of resembling it to me, but afterwards finished it up with little or no such resemblance. I sat accordingly, and he repainted the head; which is now, I think, quite recognisably like me.

Queen Venus herself is singularly unimpressive. The next panel, which carries the story to the Palace of the Goddess Minerva, is delightful because it is unintentionally amusing. Scott himself is looking incredibly smug as the model for Good-Hope, and there are various animals in it hopelessly out of scale, so that the hedgehog appears almost as large as the elephant. This panel and the design of the three Fates over the window were those repainted on the zinc, but they show flaking even after this precaution. The Three Fates, painted in June 1867, are very striking figures. The large panel was

1. Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1903, p.237.

the last painted and was finished on 5 August 1868. One small picture showing the Lady Jane sending the dove, and another of King James receiving it, bring the tale to an end. The lady is prettier here, but the King has not a very pleasing face. The window recess beyond the King's Quair was painted by A.B., during the summer of 1866, with a design of sunflowers and birds very reminiscent of the pilasters at Wallington. She also helped to paint the decorative border below the pictures for the titles. It is a scroll with a dull red background, ornamented by foliage in green, so dark it appears almost black.

The work shows a certain kinship with the painting at Wallington. There is the same delight in flowers and foliage, with details of birds and insects, yet it is decoration conceived in a different spirit. There was none of the careful preliminary study of background, for the imagination was free and there needed to be no historical truth in costume or character. Furthermore with this medium the painting must be done rapidly on to the wall, working only from a rough cartoon. At first the sensation of such freedom seemed to paralyse Scott's inventiveness rather than stimulate it and he wrote to his friend William Michael:

The first picture, about 10 feet space, is done. It is filled with incidents, and has turned out the best thing I have done in some respects, to my surprize. My natural bias in considering history or observing men and things is to ascertain what they really were or are, not to select the pretty or to adorn the selected, but to hold firmly the truth, and to present as a matter of fact an event of a thousand years ago, to represent places and things not as coloured by the poet or the cockney, but as they exist. So I find myself always pulled up in my practice as a painter, by the necessity to be conscientious, and to make my pictures prosaic. Well aware of this peculiarity I had a misgiving as to the result of my work on the wall here, as fancy and beauty are the qualities wanted almost in an exclusive degree.

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill Castle, Girvan, Ayrshire, 8 July 1865.

This hesitancy was however quickly overcome, and within a month Scott was able to report to Lady Pauline:

I make the foundation only of the pictures, and find it really most delightful and exciting to work off hand on this large surface, with free invention on a poetic story.¹

Of technical difficulties the most severe was the sloping line and curve of the wall. This made it particularly hard to keep the ground level right within a picture; a drawback from which the panel showing the Court of Love suffered most noticeably. As a whole the decorations are pleasing because of their very spontaneity and because they give the impression that Scott enjoyed painting them. W. M. Rossetti paying a visit to Penkill in 1867 wrote in his diary:

Scott's pictures on the staircase have a very good effect, decidedly superior even to what the cartoons indicate; they are both lightsome in effect, almost gay, and in invention solid and thoughtful.²

In the next year Gabriel confirmed his brother's judgement that the pictures were 'very fine'.

During the summer months he spent at Penkill, Scott went on painting not only easel pictures and water-colour sketches but smaller pieces of decorative work. In the entrance hall, over one of the doorways, an ornamental, but very subdued, dragon is painted on the wall; but the loveliest design in the whole scheme of decorations is that above the first arch leading from the staircase. One can only describe as Blake-like this poetic and delicate vision of nymphs hand in hand circling round the moon. Scott and Miss Boyd must surely have shared a pleasure in mottoes and texts, for these form part

1. W. B. S. to Lady T., Penkill Castle, Girvan, Ayrshire, 6 August [1865?]
2. Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1903, p.237.

of the decorations in the hall and dining-room, and are the most decided mark of that Victorian character which the whole work possesses.

In 1883 and 1884, Scott devoted his energies to supervising the building of a new hall to be used as a picture gallery and living-room. This extension was designed entirely by him and is his sole claim to be called architect. It is a large single storied room with the curious proportions of a medieval hall, being very high in comparison to its length and breadth. From the outside it has something of the appearance of a chantry chapel with its stepped gables and two lancet windows in the end wall. Inside its spacious proportions tell in its favour and make it a pleasant room in which to work, though it must have been difficult to keep warm. Besides the lancet window, it is lit by another large window with 4 long panes, which looks out on to the drive and the glen. The glass of this was set into the stonework, a method devised by Scott to obviate draughts. The roof is timbered and the woodwork is pitch pine. Scott designed every detail of the work; the hinges on the shutters; the decoration on the stone fireplace and on the doors of the small cupboards at each side. The walls are covered with pictures of his own together with some by Alice Boyd and his brother David. The proportions of the room allow David's huge designs to be seen to advantage, but the general impression, and the room remains almost exactly as it was in Scott's lifetime, is of walls cluttered with pictures. The oil lamps in their ornate wrought iron hangings, the little pieces of decoration, the pictures in their gilt frames, all combine to bring an unmistakeable quality of Victorianism to a room which is, in every particular, of Scott's own devising, and in which he had a creator's pride:

Here we live very much in the new Hall, which is a spacious apartment with open timber roof 30 feet high and all the other proportions of the area in keeping. The wall is 2 feet and a half thick and lined with wood out and out, not any lath and plaster, and no future chance of wallpapers or paint --- The dado etc. are stained various shades, and I assure you I am proud of this specimen of my architectural powers. We had Fergusson the great authority in some styles of architecture here to see it the other day. He was very much interested and pleased. The grate and chimney-piece I have taken a great deal of trouble with, and if we get a photograph of it I shall send it to you.¹

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 23 September 1884.

CHAPTER XIV

Penkill: Final Retirement.

The winter of 1885-6 was the first Scott had spent at Penkill. He had come to love 'the old Scotch house' in the bright summer days, when the sea and the islands beyond were clear from the windows. But in the autumn the thick white mists press round *the house*, '*mists like ghosts from all the glens*'¹ and the burn runs coldly down the hillside. It is a fine situation for a castle, but an exposed and isolated place in which to live. As Scott gradually recovered from the immediate effects of his illness, he, who had been fully occupied all his life, longed for his accustomed round of painting, writing, reading. During the intervals of his heart attacks, so strongly did he rally, that there were times when the doctor allowed him to do some work. Under Miss Boyd's wise restrictions he was even permitted the moderately strenuous occupation of etching. But at other times total rest was so necessary that Miss Boyd had to act as his scribe and reading itself was too great a strain.

As the autumn days drew on, the cold weather kept the invalid indoors. The evenings grew dark early, and then, more than ever, Scott needed some pleasant occupation. He must have recovered his strength quite wonderfully, for the weeks before Christmas found him busy preparing a gift for his friends. This was an etching from a portrait of his beloved Alice Boyd, and it was a gift of particular significance, for by virtue of those who contributed to its creation and those who received it, it seemed a symbol of the many friendships and the varied circumstances of Scott's life. Moreover it was made at

1. Poems: 1875, p.108.

a time when reminiscence was already a sad, as well as a delightful, occupation.

The portrait was one which Dante Gabriel Rossetti, now three years dead, had sketched during a visit to Newcastle in the 1850s. It showed most clearly the noble proportions of A.B.'s countenance and the brave bearing of the head, which one must notice in every representation of her, whether as model or portrait subject. The original is at Penkill and is even finer than Scott's etching, for he has tended to broaden the head too much. On 4 December, A.B. wrote a letter to Swinburne to accompany this gift of her portrait, and in it she recalled the circumstances which the gift itself must inevitably recall; the pleasant days of its first creation, and the weary illness associated with the etching of it.

Penkill [4 December 1885]
Girvan, Ayrshire.

My Dear Mr. Swinburne,

Do you remember a pleasant meeting we had in my grandfather's old house in Newcastle. Our dear friend W. B. Scott, Gabriel Rossetti, you and a few other friends?

Gabriel took my portrait, a very good drawing which dear W.B.S. has just made an etching from, and he has asked me to write a few lines to tell you that by the same post as this, he sends you a copy of it in memory of those old days and our old friendship.

Our dear W.B.S. is not allowed by his doctor to take the long journey to London this winter, so we are to remain here.

He had another attack of congestion of the lungs last Tuesday week, but I rejoice to add it was not nearly so bad as his former attacks and with care I trust he will get over the winter without another relapse.

He sends you his love also to Mr. Watts whom please remember me to very warmly.

Always,

My dear Mr. Swinburne,

Very Sincerely Yrs.

Alice Boyd.¹

1. The MS. of this letter is in the Ashley Library of the British Museum.

The replies of his friends who received this gift show that they valued it as a memorial of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Bell Scott no less than of the lady whose likeness it portrayed; valued it too as an evidence of Scott's courageous fight against the illness which threatened to bring his artistic and literary work to an end. George Valentine, the doctor at Girvan and a more recent friend, spoke in particular of the circumstances which surrounded the making of the etching:

Girvan,
February, 1886.

Dear Miss Boyd,

I thank you very much for the beautiful etching of yourself by Mr. Scott. I will prize it both because of its artistic value; and from associations which though distressful, yet were sanctified by womanly devotion, and by patient, heroic endurance.

Yours sincerely,
George Valentine.¹

Christina Rossetti wrote a letter of warmest thanks which shewed a very real affection for A.B. and Scott, and a deep concern for his health.

On a separate leaf was this short verse:

Hail, noble face of noble friend! -
Hail, honoured master hand and dear!
On you may Christmas good descend
And blessings of the unknown year
So soon to overtake us here
Unknown, yet well known: I portend
Love starts the course, Love seals the end.
Grateful C.G.R. to A.B. and W.B.S.²

Swinburne's letter of thanks added proof to Christina's that the many friends of Scott's younger days continued to think kindly of him while he lived, even if they found reason to change their feelings after the posthumous

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1. This MS. is in a collection of letters at Penkill Castle, now in the possession of Miss Courtney-Boyd. See also Note No. 1 p.219 and Note No. 1 p.220.
 2. Christina Rossetti to Alice Boyd, 30 Torrington Sq., London, W.C., 19 December 1885.

publication of the Notes.

The Pines,
Putney Hill,
S.W.

Dec. 7, '85.

My dear Miss Boyd,

A thousand thanks to W.B.S. and yourself. I shall treasure this beautiful etching of your portrait as a most precious memorial of a day which I remember well. As I look at it, I see poor Gabriel again at work on the drawing and hear his voice almost too vividly. I always thought it one of his finest portraits.¹ ...

Sir Francis W. Burton, Director of the National Gallery, and a friend and colleague, also received the gift of A.B.'s portrait. His reply, which was lengthy and in the warmest terms, seems to sum up the many associations which the etching must have evoked for those who knew its history. He was a friend whose good opinion Scott particularly valued, and the evident sincerity of his letter must have been doubly welcome on that account:

43 Argyll Road,
Kensington, W.

Dec. 31. 1885.

My dear Scott,

.....

Solacing as it is to hear from you, I am saddened more than can be uttered in words to learn that you have been again and again a martyr to relapses of suffering and danger. Your most affectionate remembrance of me satisfies me that you will believe in the deep sincerity of my concern for you - and will want no efforts on my part to give expression to it.

1. See Note 1 on page 218.

I can well understand how Miss Boyd has been your 'guardian angel' in all these renewed trials of yours - trials to her even more than to yourself, as she struggled with an enemy no less hers than yours. I hope most earnestly that this recurrence of severe weather, which I see has been far severer in Scotland than here, will not have thrown you back again.

I am most thankful for the Etching. It is a beautiful one - and it astonishes me that in the midst of your physical suffering, or even in intervals of what must have been only comparative immunity from them, your senses could have been so keen, and your hand so steady and firm, as to execute so delicate and lovely a work. I never saw the original drawing by Rossetti. It must be one of his best, and this etching of it gives me a high idea of his capacity for portraiture, and how he could avoid mingling with it the type that had overmastered him, and that tended to blind him to the real individuality of his immediate model. This charming portrait contains no extraneous element, but gives us back solely the living presentment of our very dear and inestimable friend. I prize your gift therefore for every reason. It is to me as you say, a memorial of three friends - each valued separately for qualities only too rarely found - and all three bound together infaceably in my remembrance. May the two who still remain, yet long remain to me, and to those who love and esteem them even as I do - more none can.

Give my love to your true-hearted friend and hostess - and be sure of the same yourself, my dear Scott,

from yours ever affectionately,

F. W. Burton.¹

In spite of the severity of his illness in the summer of 1885 it was a long time before Scott would accept the fact that he would never again return to London or be anything but a semi-invalid. His whole life had been so filled with work that restrictions on his activities were received with hard favour. Yet the most urgent need in his particular disease was a quiet, ordered life, in which no sudden excitement or exertion would bring on one of the spasms of angina. On occasions Scott would become very distraught,

1. See Note 1 on page 218.

but A.B. was an excellent nurse and with kindness and patience she kept Scott remarkably contented in his quiet routine. For he, who had such deep affection for her, obeyed her dictates when he would not have accepted restrictions imposed by any other. Mrs. Scott came less and less to Penkill, pleading for one thing that somebody must attend to the house in London. In fact she was singularly unfitted to care for her husband in this illness. She was herself subject to hysterical fits, which came upon her more especially when William was ill or in a difficult mood himself, and thus, by her presence at Penkill, she added immeasurably to Miss Boyd's trials. Since the early years of their marriage there had been signs that Letitia and her husband were happiest in their separate ways; a situation which he seems to have accepted without any particular regrets. In all his relations with his wife Scott showed affection and consideration and at all times Letitia was granted her whims. Her husband, writing to his friend Austin Dobson, explained that entirely because his wife liked to live there he had kept on Bellevue House at enormous expense for the past five years, during which he had never left Penkill; though contrarily, in another place, he commended her for being so uncomplaining about living there alone. The arrangement she favoured was to spend most of her time in London, working at translations of French novels and enjoying the society of her friends, and to come to Penkill for a month or so at intervals. In 1889, after the house in Chelsea was sold, A.B. wrote to Ford Madox Brown:

Mrs. Scott will of course come down to us when she has got over the move.¹

1. Alice Boyd to Ford Madox Brown. Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 5 October 1889.

She remained at Penkill the greater part of the time until Scott's death in the mid-winter of 1890, but it must have been common knowledge amongst their friends that she did not care for living in Scotland, for in March 1890 Scott remarked to W. M. Rossetti:

Letitia is here at present, and seemingly happy. I hope she will not get tired of our monotony.

The doctor and Miss Boyd understood very well the importance to Scott's happiness and well-being of allowing him to paint and write, as much as his health would permit; and for many years he was able to do so with something of his old delight, during the intervals of his acute attacks of illness. At first he showed amazing recuperative powers and the decline of his general strength was very gradual, brought about only by repeated spasms of the angina. Moreover his mind remained as alert as ever. A.B. herself wrote of this last period to William Minto:

It was wonderful how the mental powers were unchanged, and how alive he was to everything that before had interested him.²

This was quite naturally, as I have said, a reminiscent period in which Scott drew upon his memories of a full life and turned back in time to many of his subjects of thought and conversation, although he could still welcome and appreciate a new writer. One of its pleasantest features was the continued friendship he enjoyed with his fellow artists and writers; young men whom he had helped and encouraged, older men with whom he had friends and memories in common. Visitors to Penkill during those five years were many, and the number would have been greater had there not been long periods when Scott could not be allowed the fatigue of seeing friends. Miss Boyd gladly

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 30 March 1890.

2. A.N.II, 323.

entertained them to cheer her beloved invalid and after Scott's death it was with a pride and gratitude that she sent a list of their names to William Minto; Franz Hueffer who had married Catherine Madox-Brown; Henry Bowler, a colleague at South Kensington; William Morris, to whom Scott made a bequest of £300; Arthur Hughes, who painted a late portrait of him now at Penkill; Hubert Horne, the young editor of that interesting magazine The Hobby Horse which existed from 1886-1893 and printed a very full obituary notice of Scott; and William J. Linton a friend of his early London days. There were many others and they travelled long distances to see this old man, who, whatever has since been written of him, must somehow have gained their love and respect. This letter from Vernon Lushington must speak for the rest:

Next, this may startle you, - I am not going to Australia, - but I am coming to see you! For to-morrow morning the girls and I all start for Naworth Castle for ten days or so - so I have told Mrs. Howard I must slip over the border and see you. Now write me a line, 'N.C. Brampton, Cumberland,' to tell me the best way of coming to you, as Bradshaw seems a little difficult. It can only be a kind of doctor's visit. I shall look you in the face, reel your pulse, ask a question or two, and be off again, for time is so short. I mean I shall hardly be able to spend more than two nights. I hope kind Miss Boyd will accept me as a visitor on these poor terms.¹

Scott himself was grateful, even anxious, for the sign that old friends remembered him. In 1887 he wrote to thank Theodore Watts for his two articles on Sidney Colvin and added: "I duly noted the kind words you said on the mention of my name 1st column, 2nd page. Many thanks."² But it was to Ford Madox Brown he really opened his heart:

1. Vernon Lushington to W.B.S., 36 Kensington Square, W, 1 January 1886.

2. W.B.S. to Theodore Watts, Penkill, 25 August 1887.

It is very flattering to me and in fact wonderful how many of my London friends have come to see me and how many more have sent me their books and works of art. Among them I was delighted to see Ellis who came the whole way for one day's talk and afterwards sent me a copy of the illustrations to his Cupid and Psyche by Jones and cut by himself - a rare thing. Holman Hunt too has sent me an india-proof of his large print, "The Triumph of the Innocents", which is now hanging opposite my bed, a miracle of handwork

Goodbye,

Dear F.M.B. believe me your old friend,

William Bell Scott.¹

The work Scott accomplished was of course only a pale shadow of his former output, but it gave him pleasure and it was still of a high standard. Miss Boyd wrote of his picture of the landing-place of St. Columba on Iona, painted from a sketch done years ago:

[it] shows how he retained his sense of colour and feeling for the beauties of wild, rugged landscape scenery, and the painting of the sea is as good as at any time of his life and that is not saying a little.²

His most constant and most pleasant occupation during these five years however seems to have been the revision of his MS. of Autobiographical Notes and of his last book of poems, A Poet's Harvest Home. In fact he prepared a short aftermath of new verses for this little book; but the proposed publication of it in the revised form excited him unduly, even though Minto was officially to see it through the press. In the event it was abandoned, to be republished by Minto after Scott's death.

His letters of the last period though they are fewer in number than before, offer the most remarkable evidence of his buoyant spirits, his

1. W.B.S. to Fprd Madox Brown, Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 12 November 1888.

2. A.N.II, 324.

undiminished critical faculties and his continued interest in outside affairs, particularly literature and art. Occasionally, when he writes for the first time after a spell of illness, the writing is shaky and indistinct, but on the whole it remained surprisingly firm. In 1889 he wrote to Minto, with a little pride:

You see I have just been allowed to write by the medico, but I feel no difference after so long a cessation, and suppose you don't see any difference in my scrawl.¹

In content the letters were as vigorous as ever, though their writer was warned against any subjects trying to his nerves. He showed a keen interest in new books and wrote sound criticism of much that he read. From this period dates one of his most strongly worded letters to W. M. Rossetti on the subject of his proposed biography of Dante Gabriel, which I have quoted in the chapter concerned with the publication of Autobiographical Notes. To the same correspondent he sent an appreciative note when he received his Life of Keats published in the Great Writers' Series; a note which was not merely taken up with formal thanks, but which had something interesting of its own to say:

I have just received your Keats, a portly and handsome volume, which I see, though I have not yet got it out open contains a good deal of new criticism and even biographical particulars, which will be new and very interesting to me. His opinions about things and remarks on his own temperament extracted from letters seem to promise much. One of his axioms on poetry I concieve especially good as throwing light on his own poetry, as well as for its absolute truth - it is this:- 'Poetry, unless it comes as naturally as leaves to a tree, had better not come at all'. How much one feels this on reading the mass of sonnets of the day - and how much does it account for the general failure of translations.²

1. Ibid, p.328.

2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 3 October 1887.

In that same year, prompted by his reading of Colvin's new book on Keats, Scott also wrote a long and most discerning letter about the poet to Theodore Watts, who was in fact less interested in Colvin's subject than his development as a critic of poetry. Scott's understanding of Keats, and its expression at such length and with such remarkable vigour at this late period in his life is a most striking example of the way in which he retained, right through his life, the interests of his youth, and built upon them his more mature judgements, bringing in for illustration his memories of diverse people and incidents. In this letter to Watts he recalled vividly the atmosphere of early nineteenth century Edinburgh when Blackwood's Magazine was launching its cruel attack on Keats and the Cockney poets. Scott told how he had had the courage to admire Keats openly, though opinion was so decidedly against him. It is interesting that, although he was on the side of Keats he would not hear criticism of John Wilson, the man so often accused of being the writer of these articles and certainly a leader of opinion against Keats, and censured Watts for making such criticism. Wilson had given Scott advice and encouragement about poetry writing,¹ and it is here

1. Scott's personal debt to Wilson is dwelt on more fully in a letter of the same year to Sidney Colvin, author of the book on Keats which had recalled the whole subject to his mind. After evidence to show that the available evidence does not pin guilt for the notorious articles on Wilson, but points rather to Lockhart, he goes on: 'My thus fighting for Wilson, is simply instigated by my having found him the kindest and best of friends and critics at the time when my work was little worthy of his regard'.

v.W.B.S. to Sidney Colvin, Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 24 June 1887.

that Scott, some fifty-five years afterwards, repays the debt by giving loyal judgement on Him:

A few words more before I wind up on John Wilson. You call him a tipsy vulgarian. I have known very few men who might not by any possibility be guilty of anything vulgar, and John Wilson was one of them

Wilson was such a man as could not be found in the literary circles of London at that time, his father left him some 50,000, he was a man of enormous expenses, an Edinburgh advocate without practising, a professor of Moral Philosophy - he was an athlete, and the author of the series of papers on the Greek anthology, that first made the English reader know anything about it.¹

For the rest the letters are mainly concerned with chit-chat; enquiries after friends in London, accounts of his health, occasional remarks on new or proposed books and the mention of welcome visitors. It has been suggested by several critics, especially with regard to the material of Autobiographical Notes, that Scott grew savage and embittered during these five years of illness and that in this ill-temper he revised the Notes to give them their particular spitefulness. Yet two facts are clearly contrary to this: Scott wrote nothing in his letters to friends during this period which was sharply sarcastic or unjustified as criticism; and the circumstances of his life gave him no cause to feel ill-tempered with the world. It is true that his illness was wearying and painful, and must have made him querulous and hard to manage on occasions; but Miss Boyd herself wrote that he was on the whole good-tempered and patient, and his letters make no great complaint. I have not dwelt on the distressing details of his illness. He rarely mentioned them to his friends, and this letter to Ford Madox Brown must stand for the

1. W.B.S. to Theodore Watts, Penkill, 25 August 1887.

many weeks and months when he felt full of despair:

When I came here, I thought to myself - here now I have a chance of writing, but alas, the cause of my coming north to my native air was the beginning of a period of nearly absolute idleness, and for the last year or more I have not been allowed to take pen in hand at all except to write a business letter if such a thing turns up. The hardship of such an illness is happily unknown to the most of people, and now my doctor tells me my lungs are absolutely cured, the disease having taken another form in expressing its painful period, it does not give me spasms of heart, but attacks of a severe chest pain, (Angina pectoris) a pain that spreads to the very points of the fingers. What the end is to be, and when, providence only knows, but often I have wished for its approach.¹

But to counter the depression of failing health Scott was surrounded by so much comfort and affection that he must surely have had a sense of deep gratitude. Although he lived five years away from London his friends never forgot him, and visited him with kindly regularity. Moreover during these last years less personal friends paid him honours and expressed their respect for his work. In 1887 he was elected an Honorary Member of the Royal Scottish Academy, and two years later Aberdeen University conferred upon him the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws. Scott showed himself sensible of the comfort of his own position, not least by trying to help a fellow writer in less fortunate circumstances.

In the spring of 1890, when close to the end of his life he was kept to his bed, he heard that an old acquaintance of Newcastle days, William Brockie, a friend of Thomas Dixon of Sunderland, was seriously ill with the same heart disease and congestion of the lungs. Moreover he was in difficult financial

1. W.B.S. to Ford Madox Brown, Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 12 November 1888.

circumstances and Scott made a determined effort to aid him, handicapped though he was by his five years seclusion at Penkill. First he wrote to Austin Dobson, who had some connection with the administration of the Literary Fund. In this letter he spoke with unusual emotion of his own lot:

I have not seen him for many years, because, as you know, I am chained to my bedroom like him, only I am not without the means of many indulgencies, and he is now dependent on his friends under many deprivations. ...

and he concluded :

Miss Boyd has proved that there are some human creatures without spot or blemish, possessed of all excellence.¹

Apart from Scott's gratitude to his own friends, which was now brought to expression, these letters to Austin Dobson, and later to W. M. Rossetti on Brockie's behalf, show a very fine sense of values. Scott is not trying to beg for charity for his friend, but a fitting reward for the work he has contributed to scholarship, and he pleads his case with dignity. Furthermore we learn that the generosity which Scott could never conceal when he was approached with a subscription list had been at work already. As he wrote for public aid, he remarked to W. M. Rossetti:

I have aided Wm. Brockie myself, but it is not for private aid that I write now.²

He was greatly relieved when, a short time later, he heard that his friend had been granted £60 by the Literary Fund. Towards the end of May he was well enough to write and thank Austin Dobson for his part in this successful application, but soon after this he grew weaker and once more Miss Boyd became his

1. W.B.S. to Austin Dobson, Penkill Castle, Girvan, Ayrshire, 17 March 1890.
2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 30 March, 1890.

scribe. Her letters to their dear friends read as if he had failed even more than she brought herself to say:

Scotus has asked me to write you a few lines, as alas, he is not at present well enough to do so himself ...

and further on :

Poor dear Scotus is very weak and spends a great part of his time in bed. I hope however he will improve when we can get him out for short drives. He has a great longing for fresh air and out of door sights.

He did not now recover his strength, and in November of that year, when the winter was fully upon them, he died of angina pectoris. Mrs. Scott was at Penkill, a most trying addition to the household. On the night of her husband's death she was in her bedroom in a fit of hysterics and only Alice Boyd and the nurse were with him. It was 3 o'clock on a stormy winter morning when the end came. The old nurse went to tell Letitia and was horrified by the cold realism of her first words, "I wonder what William has left me." Miss Alice Boyd's niece, then quite a young girl, was staying in the house, and afterwards told her step-sister that she was terrified when Mrs. Scott made her read the Burial Service while the wind howled round the old house and lamps flickered.

Scott was buried in Old Dailly churchyard in the Boyd family burial place, just beneath the gable end of the ruined church, as he had requested in his will. It is a quiet spot, for there are hardly any houses near and the newer church is at Dailly, further up the valley. He lies with Spencer Boyd and Alice, who died seven years later. In the wall above is a bronze

1. Alice Boyd to W.M.R., Penkill, Girvan, 3 June 1890.

medallion framed in stone and over his grave a massive slab of sandstone with his name on one slope and A.B.'s on the other.

The only letter speaking of his death, apart from the official intimation, is from Alice Boyd to W. M. Rossetti, a letter of deepest sorrow:

Penkill,

Dec. 3rd, 1890.

My dear Mr. Rossetti,

Warm thanks for your love and sympathy. I know well you must feel deeply the loss of so dear a friend, one whose memory is wound up in so much of your life, and who always felt for you so great a love. All you say of him is sweet to me, and gives me more comfort than I can express. My love to Lucy please with thanks for her kind words.

I cannot write much as yet and the dearer the friends I write to the less power I have to do so.

Always affectionately yours,

Alice Boyd.

P.S. What a wretched notice of him is that by Stephens in the Athenaeum!¹

Mrs. Scott remained at Penkill for a decent interval after her husband's death. She had been in poor health the previous summer and Alice Boyd cared for her as she had done for her husband. There is little record of her life after Scott died, but she returned to London and lived there for several years making translations from French literature, a work for which she always had a fondness. Miss Margaret Courtney-Boyd, A.B.'s niece, went to London to help

1. This MS. is in the possession of Mrs. Helen Rossetti Angeli. Miss Boyd must have considered Stephens' obituary notice wretched because it was short and not purely complimentary. It was however a very sound judgment of Scott, giving space to his talents and his weaknesses. Perhaps its slight inaccuracies annoyed Miss Boyd, or perhaps she would have preferred unalloyed praise.

her find a house, and in August of 1891 she was quite settled, for Christina

Rossetti wrote to Lucy, William Rossetti's wife:

Here is a message to you from Mrs. Scott: 'Will you tell Lucy I should be so happy to see her. I dare say she is not in town, but will be available in some autumn day perhaps'. This dear old friend has been ill and very weak, but is better now, and is I hope comfortably settled in her new home at Lancaster Hall.

133 Lancaster Road,

Notting Hill - W.¹

Mrs. Scott did not die until 1898 and at that time her address was Fulham Road, Middlesex. She was buried in London, a year after Alice Boyd had been laid beside William at the foot of Penkill Hill.

1. The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti, ed. by W.M. Rossetti, London, 1908, p.181.

CHAPTER XV

The Publication of Autobiographical Notes.

The following bequest from Scott's will of February 1888 gave William Minto charge over the highly controversial material of Autobiographical

Notes:

I request and desire that Professor W. Minto, at present of Aberdeen University, shall undertake the office of my Literary Executor - of revising and preserving the MS. entitled the Autobiography of, or some RECORDS OF THE LIFE OF WILLIAM BELL SCOTT, left by me: insuring the Publication of the same, when the proper time arrives. On his undertaking such office, I desire the MS., illustrative steel plates etched by me, for the proposed book, original letters etc. be sent to him with a legacy of £300 ...¹

Minto would seem to have had no hesitancy about accepting the task, and no qualms when it was completed. Though, in his concluding editorial chapter, he mentioned that Scott "had the repute of saying severe things"² he felt able to dismiss this as unthinkable to all who knew his kind and charitable disposition and his integrity as a critic. Only occasionally, by adding an explanatory note to the text, did Minto betray a certain uneasiness that Scott had overstepped the bounds of policy or good manners.³ For anything else he

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1. From the copy of Scott's will at the Sheriff Court of Ayr and Bute.
 2. A.N.II, 332.
 3. An instance occurs in A.N.II, 128. Scott speaks of Rossetti "working the oracle" by persuading his friends to write favourable reviews for the appearance of Poems: 1870. Minto felt that some explanation was needed to make Scott's intention quite clear, so he added, "A reader who should come upon this passage without knowing the strength and constancy of the autobiographer's friendship for Rossetti and admiration of his powers might suspect him here of ill-naturedly disparaging his friend. This would be entirely to mistake the spirit of the record, which is intended only to illustrate that morbid fear of criticism which was so paradoxical and so disastrous an element in Rossetti's character."

evidently considered the material to be valuable both for its revelation of Scott's character and for its honest comments on a notable period of literary and artistic history, and he in no way anticipated the bitterness it was to arouse. Scott had written the Notes between 1877 and 1882, though he embodied in them an earlier version which was finally destroyed. They were substantially completed by the latter date, and the years 1883-1890 saw only incidental revision. Quite how much this revision, made during the long years of Scott's illness, altered the tone of the Notes it is difficult to say. He himself took pleasure in the task and went through the MS. over and over again. In the last chapter he speaks as if his intention in 1882 had been to lay it aside for ever, but this he could not do. His editor writes:

Miss Boyd tells me that she often left him apparently tranquil, quietly reading or disposed to sleep, and returned to find him with the MS. before him, busily revising, re-writing, and interpolating.¹

During the period of Scott's complete retirement at Penkill there seems no doubt that his mind remained alert and he retained the scope and freshness of his interests, welcoming new friends and turning with increasing affection to the old. Professor Minto and Miss Boyd believed him to be kindly disposed towards his many friends; benign in his disposition even during the last trying years when he had sufficient cause to become querulous and out of humour. But if this was so, it did not lead him to modify any of the more

1. A.N.II, 331.

uncharitable references and sharp criticisms he had made in his autobiography. To one critic at least the book seemed so much worse because of its deliberation. He wrote:

Its comments do not come warm with anger, tremulous with acute but short-lived indignation, poignant with the sting of recent affront; each has been wrought to its final shape - each moreover has lain for years under the attentive and indeed almost continual supervision of the artificer.

It is reasonable to suppose that revision would make Scott's judgements more emphatic, his opinions more pronounced, but it is the original intention of the book with which we should be concerned. Was it written from a genuine interest in other people, or was it an expression of vindictiveness and malice? This second opinion is difficult to prove in spite of all the bitter condemnation the book brought upon itself. In the first place Scott held extremely sane and clearly defined views about the function of biography or reminiscence, and it is hard to believe they did not guide him in the preparation of his own autobiography:

All that I propose is to describe with some degree of accuracy some of the scenery of my life, and of the lives of my dear and intimate friends. And to do so as an artist who has his model before him, I must promise that I shall endeavour to present realities, not merely appearances. What degree of truth there may be found on the canvas must be the measure of its value. I propose none other. (I leave elocution to those who like it; to me it seems too closely allied to vacuity and deception.)²

It is clear from this preface to the Notes that Scott did not write in ignorance that his was an unusual attitude, but he claimed to stand by it in his own work and urged it upon others as the only satisfactory rule for biography.

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1. The Academy, No. 1074, Vol. XLII, 3 December 1892, p.499, a review by William Sharp of A.N.
 2. A.N.I., 5.

To Austin Dobson he wrote:

I see your Fielding is about ready. I hope you have not used much white wash.¹ That is to say, not taken the colour out of the personality.

And to W. M. Rossetti, who was then preparing a biography of Gabriel, he said:

What I meant to propose to you was to make a work of art of such a biography. I am perhaps not so highly moral as to believe that the literary or poetic character depends at all on that adjunct ...²

It would seem, from Scott's explanations that his approach to biography was concerned neither with attacking nor defending the subject. What could be observed was to be recorded as faithfully as possible. Further, Scott was of the opinion that too much praise lightly given can be as damaging to a man's reputation as the most severe criticism.*

One may readily point to Scott's qualifications for writing his autobiography. He had some standing as a critic amongst the 'artistic and poetic circle of friends' spoken of in the title to the book. We have the authority of Miss Courtney-Boyd, step-niece of Miss Alice Boyd, that he was highly respected by the group of artists and men of literature who knew him well, and that they looked to him for advice and leadership even when he was confined by illness to Penkill. He was the man who exercised judgement and whose values were honoured: small wonder that having for so long been called upon to give verbal advice to artists and poets he felt that what he had said might with

1. W.B.S. to Austin Dobson, 92 Cheyne Walk, 26 February 1883.

2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, 20 November 1885.

* This should not be forgotten by the reader who would understand why Scott protested so vehemently against the appearance of the many reviews solicited to puff Rossetti's volume Poems: 1870.

profit be repeated in his book. Minto said of the Notes: "They are written so exactly as the man was in the habit of speaking," and this was always with sincerity and directness. Many of the reviewers of Scott's book suggested that he wrote there opinions which he would never have presumed to advance during his lifetime. In judging the Notes it is important to decide how far he took advantage of 'The cover of the grave', and there is evidence to set against that of his critics. In the case of at least two people about whom Scott wrote at length, Rossetti and Swinburne, one can discover from letters that he had been accustomed to offer criticism of their work since first knowing them. Consequently he felt himself to have a sound judgement of their powers, based on first-hand knowledge of their difficulties and uncomplicated by false ideas of admiration. In writing of Scott's relations with Rossetti I have tried to make clear how he exercised this prerogative. The following letter to Swinburne strengthens his case considerably, combining as it does praise with shrewd comment addressed direct to the victim:

I have delayed acknowledging the Blake, received at your bountiful hands, till I had got into it and touched the marrow to some extent. It is a delightful and noble piece of laudatory work. Such is the retributive justice of time. The outsider respectabilities are always at last relegated to the clods and stones, inscribed or other, and the poor devil turns out to have been the son of God. It may be, you know, that the pendulum has swung to the other extreme in your hands, but the guillotine and the Noyades were serving justice in a way, perhaps, in the total sum of history, serving it more than any other act for a century past.¹

Scott rightly considered that his life had taken him amongst many interesting people, and the important thing was that he had gone amongst them practising in the same arts and offering his own work for their comment

1. W.B.S. to Algernon Charles Swinburne, 33 Elgin Road, 29 December 1867.

instead of as a mere observer safe from such criticism as he meted out. This saved his book from being nothing more than a collection of gossip round famous names and made it plain that Scott was no mere hanger-on to the various circles of which he spoke. An artist and poet himself, he was in a position to make intelligent comments about new work and the fact that he was an active member of various coteries, those charmed circles, gave him opportunity to gather new anecdotes, even if he had no opinions of great moment.

Evidently those who were to prove his most severe critics looked forward with pleasure to the appearance of The Notes, for, as William Sharp says, it was generally felt the book must be interesting if only because it had for its subject such a vigorous and well-filled period of literary and artistic history. Few would gainsay the possibilities of Scott's material, rich as it was in letters from the famous, personal reminiscence and first-hand knowledge of one of the foremost educational experiments of the time. Even when the book appeared and the critics turned to the attack, Sharp, for one, could not withhold praise for the subject-matter. He wrote of The Notes:

They are a fascinating addition to autobiographical literature, even if their chief allurements, as certainly their chief worth, lies in the letters of these great men of our time who honoured William Bell Scott with their friendship.¹

In spite of the warmth and friendliness of the anticipatory notices, when the book came out reviewers and 'victims' alike joined in a storm of abuse and accused Scott of falsehood, vindictiveness, presumption and a lack

1. The Academy, No. 1074, Vol. XLIII, 3 December 1892, p.501.

of a sense of humour. Miss Boyd did not die until 1897, and as W. M. Rossetti points out, this controversy must have grieved her bitterly. Yet, it was a great deal of noise over very little, for, apart from some justifiable charges of inaccuracy, the reviewers found only one positive fault to bring against Scott. They claimed that there was too much of his personality in the book, and though they never said it in so many words, they implied that this was not what they had expected. Sharp was the only critic who came near to putting this down clearly, and what he wrote is scarcely surprising when we know he had made it plain that for him the delight of the book lay in what it had to tell of the famous. But it reads as strange criticism of an autobiography:

From first to last Scott's pre-occupation about how he was treated and how he was ignored - how people acted or should have acted towards him, and how his opinions, and doings and writings, were of paramount value, tends to alienate a reader's sympathies.¹

The fact is that Scott's intention was to give a flattering portrait of himself. Other characters were introduced into his autobiography as a means to this end and the light in which he portrayed them depended not upon their personal merit or demerit, but upon their value as foils to the glory of William Bell Scott. Moreover it is this fact which explains why Scott gave his own particular twist to all his material; surely a much more discerning explanation than the bare charge of mendacity and spite as made by Swinburne. In the chapter concerned with Scott's relations with the Rossettis I have tried to show that his purpose sometimes had disastrous

1. Ibid.

results. But I should be more wary than Scott's contemporaries in labelling this as a sin in an autobiography. Admittedly it does show a curious flaw of character which drove Scott to seek friendship and at the same time to alienate his friends by his ungraciousness if they surpassed him in any particular. It was no doubt this quality which caused him to find alternate pleasure and distaste in writing The Notes, so that he spoke to Sharp of "a strange sense of relief in having finished a long task, sometimes trying, oftener difficult or perplexing, but generally delightful". The Notes are, without doubt, valuable just because they are a truthful if unconscious reflection of Scott's character, a quality which one can hardly overlook in an autobiography even if one feels, along with Swinburne, that in this case the book shames Scott by an exposure of his spiritual and intellectual poverty.

Autobiographical Notes was published in November 1892 and the first blow in what I have called the immediate controversy was struck by Swinburne with his article "The New Terror" in the pages of The Fortnightly Review. It was a piece of magnificent scorn, but unfortunately, as in so much he wrote, the force of the words does not seem to be warranted by the sense. There is a quality of sham about it, as if this were an exercise in invective rather than a protest at injury:

Here for example is a man whose name would never have been heard, whose verse would never have been read, whose daubs would never have been seen, outside some aesthetic Lilliput of the North, but for his casual and parasitical association with the Trevellyans, the Rossettis and myself.

1. Ibid.

And his literary executors insist on stripping and gibbeting him by the publication of a book in which we find, among other precious discoveries, that William Bell Scott, born for a sign-painter in Cambo or in Thrums, had but a poor opinion of Joseph Mallard William Turner.¹

Under all the vituperation it is difficult to see the reason for Swinburne's complaint, though he talks at length of the duty of exploring Scott's inaccuracy. Finally he gives three reasons for writing as he does; first, that he finds in the book falsehoods which should be exposed; second, that he believes Scott's name to be the one which is damaged and the recollection of their friendship makes him protest at this; third, that the editor should have had the sense to repress the material and preserve Scott from the consequences of his own folly.

William Sharp, a friend of the Penkill days, seconded this original attack by his review in The Academy of 3 December 1892. Sharp's article carries much more weight because, although he shares Swinburne's attitude, he does not condemn the book out of hand. He begins instead with an 'apologia' for Scott and leads his reader to the text of The Notes, "pleasantly biased" in its author's favour. In the text however he finds much the same faults as Swinburne; misstatements which force one to doubt all Scott's testimony; presumption and bad taste in recording his opinions of people greater than himself; and specific outrages against the Rossetti family. Sharp and Swinburne both trace the attitude of the book back to a deficiency in Scott, most unfortunately emphasised by the publication. Sharp seems to have joined in the prevailing criticism rather than to have contributed anything

1. The Fortnightly Review, No. CCCCXII, Vol. 58, New Series, 1 December 1892, A. C. Swinburne, "The New Terror", p.832.

original. His notice of inaccuracies is more comprehensive than Swinburne's, but in the same tradition. Most of the passages quoted by the two critics are taken out of their context and in this way are given a different intention from their original one, either because of omission within the quotation itself or omission of the surrounding material.

Minto's letter of December 10 in The Academy is a reply at once to Sharp and Swinburne.¹ His main defence is that the bitterness aroused by The Notes cannot be justified by anything in the text, but is a result of reading covert meanings into the narrative. He takes Sharp up on one or two points of detail and wonders at Swinburne's energy over such trivial matters, but on the whole he writes as if he felt himself under no obligation to make detailed replies to the two articles in question. Sharp wrote a letter to the same periodical the following week, in a tone which suggested that he would be thankful to let the matter drop, but he did make one important point which strikes at the root of all this closely contemporary criticism, including his own: that the statements made and points raised were "at once so delicate and so impossible either of direct proof or of direct disproof."²

Unfortunately the unruffled tone of Minto's letter provoked Swinburne to turn upon the unfortunate editor and castigate his reply, which, he said, halted "between inadequate apology and tremulous defiance".³ His criticisms in this letter are levelled against editor rather than author, and although he maintains the same scaring tone, the dispute finally degenerates into

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1. The Academy, No. 1075, Vol. XLIII, 10 December 1892, Correspondence, p.541.
 2. The Academy, No. 1076, Vol. XLIII, 17 December 1892, Correspondence, p.567.
 3. The Academy, No. 1077, Vol. XLIII, 24 December, 1892.

quibbling and stupidity. Swinburne implies that Scott was never much of a success as a poet or artist, and maintains that this makes doubly intolerable his unflattering reminiscences of greater writers and artists. He gives the impression that although he had liked Scott well enough, his tributes to him while he lived had sprung from courtesy rather than from any respect for Scott's talents. So far, although the name of his family had been so often mentioned, W. M. Rossetti had taken no part in the controversy. He had however made his private judgement, Christina, taking her opinion from him, did not read the book because she was told it contained painful references to Gabriel. W. M. Rossetti's letter to the Academy of 24 December¹ said that he had read Sharp's review and Minto's reply and was now proposing to break silence because his brother's name was involved. He comes to the attack with a theory that if there are inaccuracies in The Notes on the occasions when he himself appears, it follows that there are probably misstatements in the rest of the book. All Scott's evidence is consequently suspect.

The final letter came from Minto and was a reply both to Swinburne and W. M. Rossetti.² In answering Swinburne, Minto was concerned with defending himself against the charge that he either would not or could not recognise the unpleasantness in The Notes. He counter-claimed that, far from being blind to the spirit of the writing, he genuinely considered every reference by Scott to Swinburne to have been made "the occasion of a compliment".

1. Ibid, a letter from W. M. Rossetti, London, 16 December 1892, p.591.

2. The Academy, No. 1078, Vol. XLII, letter dated 25 December 1892, pp.608-609.

Replying to W. M. Rossetti he felt he could be more moderate, and professed himself willing to correct the inaccuracies pointed out. At the same time he made it clear that he considered them unimportant since they did not injure the overall truth of Scott's portrait of Dante Gabriel.

So the immediate controversy closed, but the attitude of mind it had fostered did not die. That part of the book concerned with Rossetti continued to attract most attention, and almost every subsequent biographer has accepted without question the legend that Scott wrote of a man supposed to be his friend with malice and no consideration for truth. One of the earliest articles outside the limits of the immediate controversy was by John Skelton, and appeared in Blackwood's.¹ Skelton had made Rossetti's acquaintance in 1859 and evidently admired him. His article was occasioned by the treatment of Rossetti in Autobiographical Notes, but was not concerned with detailed charges. He began by quoting and taking sides with Swinburne and W. M. Rossetti, and he announced that from his own knowledge he was able to refute two of the faulty impressions put abroad by The Notes: that Dante Gabriel was "jealous and ungenerous, as well as moody and uncertain";² and that he resorted to illegitimate means of advertising himself and his work. The article tends to develop into an account of the author's friendship with Rossetti, and somehow reads as if the controversy over the Notes had been seized upon by Skelton as a providential opening for talking about this.

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1. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. CLM. No. DCCCXXVIII, February 1893, John Skelton, "Dante Rossetti and Mr. William Bell Scott", pp.229-235.
 2. Ibid, p.229.

It was not many years before W. M. Rossetti began the task of editing and publishing his brother's correspondence and the rest of the material relating to the Pre-Raphaelite movement, very probably with the idea that there should be some sort of reliable evidence to confute the mass of gossip and legend which had grown up round Gabriel. He may not have contributed very largely to the controversy in the press, but this attitude comes out very sharply now in the great pains he takes to point out every occasion on which Scott is guilty of an inaccuracy or may be said to misrepresent an incident connected with his brother. His insistence that Scott's book "served to determine what is the least favourable light in which the proceeding of Dante Rossetti can be viewed"¹ becomes weakened by repetition. At the same time he makes quite clear the attitude he would prefer critics to adopt in the case of his brother:

I can only regret having had to point out so much of misstatement and over-statement in the writing of a thoughtful man, of many fine gifts and feelings, upon his 'dearest of friends', whom he knew moreover to be in some respects an invalid, and thus one to whom indulgence might have been an acquaintance's duty and an old familiar's prerogative.²

Rossetti's theory about the ethics of biography found its full expression when he prepared his Reminiscences. In his preface he made it plain that he considered it might be an author's duty to suppress some of his material so that he should not "cast a slur here or violate a confidence there", and this duty he held to come before that of giving the whole picture of a man. What

1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, His Family Letters with a Memoir, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1895, I, 331.

2. Ibid.

Rossetti had to say there takes us back to the beginning of this chapter and Scott's standards for biography. The two are directly opposed. The important fact is that Scott and Rossetti had exchanged views on the subject as long ago as 1885, so that neither could claim to be under any illusions about what the other was trying to do. What Scott wrote then had reference not only to William's proposed biography of his brother but to all writing about Gabriel:

Watts did excellently in his paper called 'The Truth about Rossetti' and I suppose has done so in the Encyclopedia^{*}, but I am not of the opinion that the persistence of a friend writing eulogiums does good. You will observe that in no case has any other laudatory writing about our dear G. appeared. Robert Buchanan's attack was in consequence of so many laudatory notices having been planted by G. himself before publication.¹

Scott always maintained that the business of a review or a full length biography is not to give unqualified praise, but thorough understanding based on the fullest evidence.

Sidney Colvin, writing in 1921, attempted to find some reason for Scott's resentment against Rossetti, but in doing so he only gave weight to the idea that resentment there was.² The idea has passed current until the present time, and Mrs. Janet Camp Troxell, one of the foremost collectors of Rossetti material, shares the feeling of the family that Scott treated Gabriel very shabbily in his Memoirs, never missing an opportunity to oppose the admiration of Rossetti's poems.³ It is significant that by this time the opinion was one

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1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, 20 November 1885. The article by Watts appeared in The Nineteenth Century, in March 1883. He contributed a considerable part of the article on Poetry in the Encyclopedia Britannica.
 2. Sidney Colvin, Memories and Notes of Persons and Places 1852-1912, London, 1921, p.74.
 3. v. Three Rossetti's, Unpublished Letters to and from Dante Gabriel, Christina, William, Harvard U. P., 1937.

of those which are accepted rather than examined, and the evidence she calls to support it is far from convincing. In fact it could more reasonably be brought as the best evidence to show Scott's discretion and integrity as a critic:

About the etching, [the Gate of Memory - originally intended as an illustration for Maryanne] I am now uncertain as to the propriety of reprinting the poem it was to illustrate, and the truth has been, the amount of false feeling and writing about my friend D.G.R. has made me shy of doing anything involving his memory in any way. However I have not settled the question yet to my own satisfaction, and may still ask to be allowed to fulfil the intention of etching.¹

I cannot find that Scott took an unfair advantage of his personal friendship with his subjects to reveal any of their private affairs. In fact he wrote with discretion and showed a scholar's integrity when it came to omitting purely personal feelings. In his published work we hear nothing, for instance, of this kind of irritation with D. G. Rossetti:

As for Gabriel Rossetti he is, in all that relates to his movements and doings one of the men who drives me wild - I should either have to murder him or go mad if I had much connection with him. He never turns up when he appoints, he is never to be found or depended upon - breakfasts when he should dine and dines when he might reasonably be expected to breakfast. They say he is quite different now, but he has been to come here several times for the last month, so I give him up with the sweetest benediction.²

So too, the reference in the Notes to Gabriel's marriage with Elizabeth Siddal is a very discreet version of this, in a letter to W. M. Rossetti:

So Gabriel's wedding has come off after all. How helpless a man seems to be with a fixed idea in his mind, years pass on, it seems all done with, when the slightest breeze of emotion (either mental or bodily in the case of matrimonial ideas) and it is flaming away again beyond the remedy of fire engines.³

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1. W.B.S. to Moncure D. Conway, 24 March 1884.
 2. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 16 October 1862.
 3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 24 May [1860].

Difficulties in the way of friendship with Rossetti were experienced and expressed by other men besides Scott. Swinburne recognised them, but had evidently forgotten the occasion on which he wrote this letter to Scott:

To this day I am utterly unable to conjecture, why, after the last parting in the early summer of 1872, he [Rossetti] should have chosen suddenly to regard me as a stranger. But by all accounts it is as well for my recollection of him that it was so, and under the circumstances I felt my attendance at his funeral could have been but a painful mockery.¹

Even Colvin, though he is a severe critic of the inaccuracy and ill-nature of Autobiographical Notes, admits that he feels a certain pity for Scott when he is the subject of Rossetti's wit, and points out the difficulties of remaining on cordial terms with a person who believes he may say anything without his friends taking offence:

... Could the same friend [Scott] be expected to take it kindly when the essential weaknesses of his talent were faithfully and scathingly hit off as follows?

There's a queer kind of painter called Scotus,
A pictor most justly ignotus;
Shall I call him a poet?
No not if I know it,
A drabble-tailed bungler like Scotus.²

The critics weaken their case most surely as soon as they admit the general truth of the picture of Rossetti as it is given in the Notes. Few biographies can have been subjected to such searching investigation as Scott's received, but all the research can only point out errors of fact in minor details such as other writers have made without being taken to task. In the

1. Algernon Charles Swinburne to W.B.S., 1882.

2. Sidney Colvin, Memories and Notes of Persons and Places, 1852-1912, London, 1921, p.74.

end the right to his interpretation lies with Scott, for he claimed that this portrait and all the others in the book were based on personal knowledge. This grudging comment of W. M. Rossetti is however the nearest thing to praise that The Notes ever received:

... it is true that in his published Autobiographical Notes, compiled partly before and partly after my brother's death, he said some ill natured things about him - ill natured past doubt, and, though containing several grains of truth, in detail very inaccurate.¹

1. W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, London, 1906, I, 59.

CHAPTER XVI

Relations with the Rossettis.

Autobiographical Notes give Scott's version of his friendship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In writing of the book I have tried to indicate why his account had that particular twist which caused it to be so universally condemned. The private letters and papers of the two men, together with W. M. Rossetti's extensive correspondence with Scott, seem to present a very different picture of the relationship. I have sought to show how the two versions are related, the published one compensating in some degree for Scott's failure to find real pleasure in the actual friendship. The difference between them is not a difference between the true and the untrue, but between an ordered account in which all the incidents and anecdotes are brought together with set purpose, and an impression based on scattered references in miscellaneous writing, only brought together by the casual interest of the reader. The second picture is more tedious to build up and more elusive. Therefore it has been less surely reckoned with than the published book. The portrait of Rossetti in that book is true in essentials, but it does not follow that Scott has been able to make his subject live, or to convey anything of the warmth and intimacy of the friendship, though that was the fact in which he took most pride. He failed because he could not endure a rival and was intelligent enough to appreciate that he had a formidable one in Rossetti. Had he been

a less acute critic he would not have realised by how far the younger man surpassed him, and so would not have been driven to such lengths in his attempt to conceal it. W. M. Rossetti hit off Scott's feelings when he put these words into his mouth:

If he [Rossetti] was a painter and a poet, am not I the same and did I not precede him in both functions? And who sounds the praises of William Bell Scott.

Scott called to his aid two devices to bolster up his self-esteem. He comforted himself with the opinion that he was in a position to see Rossetti in a more astute and balanced way than any other of his biographers, and this he exploited to the utmost. He also wrote of Rossetti in a niggardly spirit, praising him with so many reservations that the praise was void, and omitting any mention of the fascination the young man exercised over a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. Scott could never have been a successful chronicler of any aspect of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, in spite of his unique opportunities for collecting the facts, because he never shared their spirit and felt himself dull and middle-aged in the face of their vigour. This forced him to the same sort of compensations as he employed in the case of Rossetti. He never let it be thought that the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood excited or over-awed him, but in his care to do this he paid the penalty of failing to understand it and of failing to communicate its quality of enthusiasm to others. In many cases we may read side by side Scott's original response to some happening connected with Rossetti or the P.R.B. and his considered version of it in the Notes, when the whole quality of his feelings has

1. W. M. Rossetti, *Some Reminiscences*, London, 1906, Preface.

been altered.

The two men, Scott and Rossetti, first made each other's acquaintance in 1847, when Rossetti was only 19 and Scott 36. It was the young man who sought out Scott in most persistent fashion, proclaiming himself an admirer of his poetry, and asking where the very early work might now be had. Rossetti had come upon two of the shorter poems, Rosabell and The Dream of Love, in the Monthly Repository, then under Leigh Hunt's editorship. These attracted him and he searched past numbers of the magazine for more work by the same author, but could find nothing but some papers on art. At last he saw a review of The Year of the World, obtained a copy and read it with enthusiasm at one sitting. Still unsatisfied Rossetti finally wrote to the unknown poet with his request for information. His introduction of himself parallels that of his request for drawing lessons to Ford Madox Brown, though it is not so well known. The recognition implied in the young man's letter wholly delighted Scott and he accepted the praise without demur, never for one moment suspecting, as Brown did, that it might be a hoax. He wrote:

This generously enthusiastic letter took me by surprise. I was, it seemed, not destined to be wholly unknown at a sufficient distance.

A correspondence began and very soon Rossetti despatched a parcel of MS. poems labelled 'Songs of the Art Catholic'. We are left in no doubt about the initial amazement and enthusiasm the poems roused in Scott, but from the very beginning he mingled with his recognition of Rossetti's unusual powers a faintly patronising note. He was too shrewd a critic to miss the quality of

1. A.N. I, 244.

the poetry, but he maintained his superiority by affecting to find the thought weak to one of a more penetrating philosophic mind:

It may easily be allowed that I must now have written with extraordinary delight. The mastery in rhythm and the invention in these poems were both equally astonishing to me, especially in a youth of manifest immaturity, as apparent in certain peculiarities evidently cherished as his favourite characteristics. But the title applied to the poems collectively - 'Songs of the Art Catholic' - was most perplexing. To one who had written and published a long poem founded on the progressive development of humanity, a believer in the three watchwords of the French Revolution too, it seemed that somehow or other the Oxford Tractarianism just then distracting weak intellects had possibly already undermined that of this wonderfully gifted boy!

One cannot fully understand Scott's later attitude to Rossetti unless one remembers his pleasure in that brief period when Rossetti was the disciple and he the master; remembers too the fact that he was one of the first outsiders to be trusted to read and comment on the poetry, which explains the freedom with which he was always to suggest alterations in Rossetti's work. In 1847 or early 1848 Art School business brought Scott to London, and he took the first opportunity of calling at the Rossetti home in Charlotte Street. There he met two of the family; Christina, a slender, very reserved young girl of 17 or 18, and the old father,

sitting by the fire in a great chair, the table drawn close to his chair, with a thick manuscript book open before him, and the largest snuff-box I ever saw beside it conveniently open,²

his mind preoccupied with abstruse problems in Dante. Gabriel was not at home and Scott did not prolong this visit, but the family must have made it plain that he was henceforward welcome, and very soon William Michael Rossetti

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1. Ibid, pp. 245-246.
 2. Ibid, p.247.

was able to write that they found their new friend interesting both as a poet and because he was David Scott's brother (not perhaps the most flattering of reasons). The friendship was no longer Gabriel's exclusive concern, but was now extended to all the family, so that Scott could say "the two men have often been to me like brothers,"¹ and Letitia count herself a friend of Christina and Maria Rossetti. This drawing together of the members of both families was a matter of the first importance, for it formed a link between Scott and Rossetti over the years when they had small chance of seeing each other and were going their diverse ways. An understanding of this indirect friendship through the medium of the Rossetti family is a valuable clue to the way in which Scott treated Gabriel. He took to himself no small measure of the family concern, and from William Michael in particular he adopted something of the air of an elder brother. This he combined with a delight in being able to tell the family any new and personal details about Gabriel which had escaped them.

Scott made Rossetti's acquaintance at an early enough date to see the inception of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, but since it was a movement almost entirely dependent on personal contact and he was away in Newcastle, it is quite understandable that it did not move him to the same enthusiasm as it did those who were drawn together in daily meeting and discussion during the brief but intense existence of the actual Brotherhood. William Michael admitted Scott to the secret of the letters P.R.B. in 1848, and told him something of their plans for a magazine. Scott remarked:

1. Ibid, p.245.

The communication about the promised monthly publications of the Brotherhood soon arrived; in letter after letter describing the preparations and wanting contributions; but I took little notice of them, though very curious to see what the publication would resemble.¹

Unfortunately there is sufficient evidence to show that this indifference of Scott's is not original but affected. When Gabriel wrote in September 1849, asking for contributions, Scott promptly replied enclosing a sonnet 'Early Aspirations', and a blank verse piece 'Morning Sleep', which the brothers held to be "gloriously fine"² and which William, many years after, still felt to be "one of his [Scott's] most equable pieces of execution"³. This poem was earmarked for No. 2 of the Germ and duly appeared therein, at which Scott, in quite a different tone from The Notes, wrote to W. M. Rossetti:

I received your poem so kindly sent to me, and your note by which I am happy to learn your favourable opinion of my contribution to the Germ.⁴

There seems no doubt that Scott saw in the Brotherhood that spirit of fellowship between artists which he had looked for in vain during his early years in London, and admired them for their willingness to exchange ideas and their combination of seriousness and honesty of motive with careful workmanship. After visiting Holman-Hunt and Rossetti in their studio he wrote:

Although I saw no more of these two men for nearly a year, this meeting was the beginning of a new interest of life for me; from them sprang a knowledge of many men, and of other fields --- Hunt and Rossetti and all their circle made me almost regret having left London.⁵

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1. Ibid, p.282.
 2. Pre Raphaelite Diaries and Letters, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1900, p.247.
 3. The Germ, a facsimile reprint ed. by William Michael Rossetti, London, 1901, p.21.
 4. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 23 January 1850.
 5. A.N.I., 251.

Scott understood and valued their ideal of fellowship more than he did their subjects or manner of painting. When it came to writing about their actual productions Scott's ungenerous temperament made him a disgruntled and undiscerning critic. His first introduction to their work was by way of Hunt's 'Oath of Rienzi over the Body of his Brother' and Rossetti's 'Girlhood of Mary Virgin'. Scott could not help but be amazed at "this daring performance of a boy turning what was naturally a lyrical subject into a picture"¹, especially when it was so clearly a first picture and Rossetti was without any sound training in the management of oils. He believed the young man to be a Romanist, expressing his adoration in poem and painting, and he scoffed at this as a weakness. Unfortunately Scott prejudiced his own case as a critic by misinterpreting all the symbolism of the picture. At the same time he wrote of Pre-Raphaelitism in general terms which could be excused only in a casual and not very well-informed observer. He distinguished two main features of their style: an elaboration of detail and an imitation of the early Flemish manner. Scott fell very promptly into one of the commonest misunderstandings about the aims of the Brotherhood and made his error public when he wrote that it was most concerned with representing every detail in a picture with photographic accuracy. In spite of Holman Hunt's and Rossetti's explanations that this was not so, Scott clung to his theory and in the Notes he recorded a conversation with Millais which was designed to give support to his opinion. The conversation concerned an Italian engraving of incredible detail which Scott noticed in Millais' studio. Millais is reported to have said:

1. Ibid, p.250.

Ha! you've observed that, have you; that's P.R.B. enough, is it not? We haven't come up to that yet.

But, he went on:

I for one won't try; it's all nonsense; of course nature's nature, and art's art, isn't it? One could not live doing that!¹

Scott comments, to his own purpose:

So soon had the principal executive tenet of the bond fallen off from the ablest expert of the three painters who were giving the new school its renown.²

Scott's account of the Pre-Raphaelite movement is much more valuable as a personal than as a critical document. In essence it is a straightforward account with the emphasis on Scott himself, on what he thought, and how he responded. It is interesting that he does not belittle the P.R.B., but he examines it without enthusiasm and insinuates that it was futile from the beginning. Moreover he manages to tell us very little about the person of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and a very great deal about William Bell Scott and his opinions.

Scott does not tell us when he first met William Michael Rossetti, though it was at Gabriel's introduction. He says in Autobiographical Notes that William came to stay at Newcastle in 1848, but this is unsubstantiated and seems probably a mistaken date. W.M.R. himself questions it sharply in his letter to The Academy shortly after the publication of the Notes. Early in 1850 they knew each other well enough to write, though still in fairly formal tones. William Michael Rossetti sent his poem "Mrs. Holmes Grey" for Scott's

1. Ibid, p.278.

2. Ibid.

comment. The reply showed Scott's interest and his pleasure in being invited to the task, but it was stiff and restrained. The friendship only took on a personal quality in the summer of that year when Rossetti visited Newcastle and enjoyed a holiday with the Scotts. He says himself in his Reminiscences that his friendship with Scott developed more quickly and gave more pleasure to Scott than the relationship with Gabriel. In the early pages of Autobiographical Notes Scott named his first three close friends, William Shand, Thomas Sibson and Gabriel Rossetti. In the whole course of the book he never singled out William Michael Rossetti as a close friend though he might more justly have done so. Their relationship was distinguished by its warmth and constancy; it lasted until Scott's death and survived even the querulous comments of his old age such as this:

In old times you used to send me your books, but alas, I am forgotten too soon, as you have not given me your new edition, nor did Knight give me his Life.¹

There remain some two hundred letters from Scott to W. M. Rossetti to witness to the community of interest and the like natures of the two men. Very little of the real quality of the friendship can be discovered from other sources, though there is one almost lyrical outburst to Lady Trevelyan, who had recently met W.M.R.:

I am so glad you have seen William Rossetti. He is beautiful and one of the best informed and balanced minds I have had the luck to know. He has twice come down to me and I absolutely love him although should not dream of telling him so.²

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, Girvan, Ayrshire, 10 July 1887.

2. W.B.S. to P., Lady T., N., 14 December 1856.

The two men did not see each other a great deal. Both had official duties which gave them scant leisure time, but the friendship grew and flourished by letter, Scott valuing it not only for the personal relations with William, but because it kept him in touch with London and what sometimes seemed like another world. This letter expresses something of what the correspondence meant:

My dear W.M.R.,

Never since I saw you in London have I had a single word of writing from either you or Gabriel. How long it is since I wrote him it is now impossible to say, and with the immense amount of news that must have accumulated about him it is really too bad. As for you I had the unhappiness to provide an excuse in the disgust you must have at the instrument of your daily torture. To ask you to write is like asking me to teach or Gabriel to relax his industry and snatch a little idleness. And yet I must e'en pray for something like one of your old letters with all about new pictures and old friends.¹

The subject-matter of their letters has an interest of its own to the literary and art critic, for both Scott and Rossetti had a personal acquaintance with the foremost young painters and poets of the day, and their comments have the value of freshness and contemporary opinion. But to the biographer of Scott or Rossetti the emphasis will not be so much on what was talked of in the letters, as upon the tone in which they were written, which is valuable for its evidence of the quality of friendship between the two. We may learn from the correspondence of Scott and Rossetti a good deal of their individual characteristics, but, more important, we may there come upon certain admirable qualities which seem to be brought out only in

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 6 April 1856.

this relationship. The letters were written in a lively conversational style which is a sign of the warmth and complete lack of affectation which distinguished their friendship. Such deep affection could only in the ultimate sense spring from the compatible natures of the two men; no feeling of social obligation would account for it, but it is true that they were drawn closer by the background of friendship between their two families; by all the queries and messages which make the letters so intimate. Scott is never shy in asking Rossetti to do quite mundane business for him, arrange his passport, buy a hearthrug or make enquiries about an antique. Very often the letters end with love and remembrances to Christina and Maria, or to Lucy, William Rossetti's wife.¹ Sometimes there is a promise from Mrs. Scott that she will write, a message of sympathy in illness, or a confession by Scott himself that he is not in the best of health.

Of course Scott and Rossetti had an abundance of topics which interested them both; not only 'new pictures and old friends' but contemporary writing and their respective work, particularly that of editing and art-criticism. The two were fairly evenly matched in intellectual power and in their particular type of mind, neither causing a great stir, both thorough and painstaking. In the field of work they held each other in mutual respect, Scott proving that he could be generous in his admiration and could, to a friend, write without reserve or professional jealousy:

1.v.W.B.S. to W.M.R., Newcastle, 9 August 1855, "My wife sends kind remembrances to your Mamma and Christina. She looks forward to Maria fixing the time of her visit."

My dear W.,

I have read your article in Fraser. It appears to me simply excellent. The right treatment and the right succinct expression. Most likely I have changed your point of view in considering Greek sculpture, but I only wish I had made some of your distinctions, especially the definition of the Christian ideal. I point out the early Italian purism as Christian ideal, but that is a limited and unsatisfactory one.¹

William Michael Rossetti gave invaluable and untiring assistance to Scott when Half-Hour Lectures and the Life of Durer were in preparation. Occasionally, half-apologetic, Scott says he must be tiring Rossetti, but his friend never failed to give hours of careful work to proof-reading and correction whenever it was asked of him. In turn Scott was able to be not only the recipient of kindnesses but to repay them in some measure by his ready and intelligent discussion of such matters as the problems of Shelley editing or of defining terms in art criticism. William Rossetti was generally engaged in work which Scott could appreciate and many of the letters are taken up with exchange of information and suggestions for sources and references. It is pleasant to read of Scott, with fine generosity, giving his friend a leaf of "The Revolt of Islam" in Shelley's own handwriting because it seemed to have more interest for Rossetti who was at the time engaged on an edition of the Poems. That the friendship was soundly based at an intellectual level was perhaps most surely proved when Scott, with considerable understanding of his friend's taste, and considerable discernment himself, sent William Michael Rossetti a copy of Walt Whitman's Leaves of Grass which had reached him in a curious fashion by way of a pedlar of books and his Sunderland friend Thomas Dixon. Rossetti followed up his chance introduction to Whitman and this resulted eventually

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Newcastle, 21 April [1861]

in the first English edition of any of Whitman's poems.¹

In the foregoing brief survey of their correspondence between 1850 and 1890, I have tried to show how strong was the community of interest, and how unaffected the attitude both men brought to the friendship. Scott writes openly, without fear of being misunderstood; he is unguarded, honest to W. M. Rossetti about his feelings, his ambitions, his dejection on occasions, and even his work. He writes:

I have been very busy with these deuced etchings for the Glasgow Art Union and with my pictures which are I fancy better than bad - more than can always be said of mine.²

Out of the spirit of trust and good humour comes the lighter side of Scott's character which could scarcely have been brought out in any other way. A note of lively banter creeps in. Scott knows Rossetti will appreciate the amusing side of his remarks about the binding, and of course 'superb quality', of *Poems 1854*. The "never-to-be-too-much-puffed *Poems*" delighted their author when they appeared at the price of 5/- in their "lettered cloth of cerulean blue with a bunch of flowers outside worth twopence itself and the interior stout with advertisements".³ Scott also expresses his real affection for Rossetti by indulging in occasional teasing messages, such as this from Lady Trevelyan, who, Scott tells his friend:

-- praises your ugly mug in such a way as might make you vain for life if you think as much of her as I do.⁴

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1. This was *Poems of Walt Whitman*, selected and ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London 1868.
 2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 7 March 1853.
 3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 14 November 1854.
 4. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 22 December 1856.

Because they were such close friends and had that measure of understanding in which no subject need be avoided, they could be open and honest in their criticism. Their comments on contemporary writing are interesting, but generally a matter of first impression rather than the result of considered thought. It is in the criticism of their own work that we see how the two men could exchange opinions without rancour. Scott showed that with this friend at least he had learnt the grace of accepting advice in a good spirit, even if he was not able to agree with it.

You do me more good than medicine by your letter. All the points you mention are, I well recollect, somewhat badly expressed - they are known to me as such - the very words you mark as doubtful, and not conveying quite the meaning.¹

In return he knew that he might express a hard opinion to W.M.R. without fear of occasioning insult, and this privilege of friendship he extended to Gabriel, always considering that he might offer a straight criticism of Gabriel's work.

Have I written since receiving the Magazine from Gabriel, he asked.

It is a bad thing to alter one's poems on second printing, some of the changes in the Blessed Damozel I can never like - at the same time others are manifest improvements, yet I like the old.²

Scott's subject-matter was often I suppose what must be termed 'gossip', but it was scarcely ever malicious, and he evidently trusted W.M.R. to be discreet. In every matter where topic and correspondent were well joined, Scott wrote vividly and at considerable length. In particular his opinions

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 9 November 1852.
2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 5 April 1857.

were full and lively when they concerned any item of news over which he could presume that Rossetti's response would match his own. Sir Henry Cole's appointment to the Directorship of the Department of Practical Art was a case in point. Rossetti was well informed of the wrangles within the central executive and went to some trouble to keep Scott in touch with affairs at headquarters, even sending to Newcastle extracts from the current reports of the Council of the School of Design, because he knew that when Scott received them officially they were too old to be of any interest. It was a friendly act and typical of the man.

The friendship with William Michael Rossetti seems to have given Scott confidence. He was under no strain and he knew that his pleasure in the friendship was returned, and this sense brought out the pleasant qualities of his character which were never revealed to those with whom he felt he must be more guarded, because of some real or fancied superiority they possessed. His relationship with Dante Gabriel, consciously or unconsciously I believe to have come under the second group. This was why it was so unrewarding, except in the most superficial way, and why Scott continually pushed himself forward when he spoke of Rossetti. Nor is this a matter of guessing after the event, for it may be concluded from the fact that Gabriel's letters and Scott's letters give quite different impressions of their friendship. Gabriel's letters probably show the truer nature of the relations between himself and Scott. They take the attitude that Scott is an old friend, sharing the same circle of acquaintances and therefore eligible for news. No particularly intimate relationship is implied, though Gabriel with his rather boisterous sense of fun, obviously thought that he knew Scott well enough to chaff him. He

appreciated the man but knew his limitations; he had an affection for him as a person, though he was not particularly attracted to his poetry or painting and could write light-heartedly of them even to Alice Boyd:

I went to the R.A. the other day. Scotus's 'Greased Lightning' looks well though perhaps rather American --- I met Matthew Arnold the other day at dinner. Poor man! What do you think? He admires Scotus as a bard!¹

Scott, on the other hand, overdramatises the whole affair because the friendship matters more to him in his scale of things than it does to Rossetti. Scott, who was no fool, must soon have recognised how people were attracted by Rossetti's queer, vivid personality. His reaction, for he considered this to show weakness in the beholder, was to attempt to keep a balanced judgement in the midst of what he dismissed as a pack of hero-worshippers. We cannot doubt Rossetti's power of inspiring admiration; it is too well vouched for by quite sober men. One such writes:

Face to face I felt such a sense of littleness as I have never experienced in contact with any but himself - His freedom from envy of his fellows either in art or poetry singled him out.²

Scott, in his turn was not insensible to this, but he had, as I said in the beginning, come to know Rossetti in circumstances which were flattering to himself, and he made a determined stand to keep the advantage. For this purpose he chose not to be overawed by Rossetti and to treat him with unaffected equality as a fellow-poet. Max Beerbohm drew a brilliant cartoon which puts a finger on Scott's efforts to assert himself in the midst of so much devotion towards his friend. It shows Rossetti leaning languidly against

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1. The Fortnightly Review, No. DCCXXXVII New Series, May 1928.
 2. The Life and Letters of Frederic Shields, ed. by Ernestine Mills, London, 1912, p.82.

a tree in the garden at Cheyne Walk. A circle of friends, prominent amongst them Swinburne and Morris, and various of his pets surround him in adoring attitudes. Scott stands aloof with a disapproving expression and the title runs:

Mr. William Bell Scott wondering what it is these fellows seem to see in Gabriel.¹

William Michael Rossetti knew enough about Scott to be aware of this attitude when he came face to face with Autobiographical Notes, and to see in the book:

-- an honest desire to treat a man of mark without any of these disingenuous glosses and smug compromises which are often applied to such persons, and thus to strip him of any adventitious prestige and write truths about him.²

This attitude of Scott's would have made him a most valuable and out-of-the-ordinary commentator had it not been accompanied by an idea of his that not only did he see Rossetti in a markedly different way from other people, but that he enjoyed a greater share of Rossetti's confidence. With this in his mind he gradually began to make more mystery than necessary about Rossetti, so that he might seem to possess a particular understanding of the man.

While Scott continued to live in Newcastle he saw very little of Gabriel, though the friendship was kept alive by the letters they exchanged and by an occasional visit, but more than anything else by the goodwill between Scott and W. M. Rossetti. Scott describes and documents this period from 1847 - 1868 fairly fully in Autobiographical Notes, but the account is on the whole

1. Max Beerbohm, Rossetti and his Circle, London, 1922.

2. W. M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences, London, 1906, I, 59-60.

disappointing, for he seems to have nothing personal or particularly revealing to say about Rossetti. The letters he quotes don't generally tell us a great deal about Gabriel, but contribute rather to building up an impression about Scott, and to pushing him forward. They show that he was 'in the circle', friendly with Hunt, Woolner and Madox-Brown; and, more important, that Gabriel admired his work.

I have quoted one of Rossetti's letters expressing great praise of one of my Wallington pictures,

Scott writes.

I might have quoted many more. The admiration for the scenic treatment and the accessories in the 'St. Cuthbert' picture, for the sea and the sky, the birds, and other matters, which he reports with still increasing emphasis of other following pictures suggests a few remarks.¹

'The remarks' were concerned with the value to an artist of keeping a sketch-book from Nature, and led Scott to give his opinion of Rossetti's work, though in a secondary place to Rossetti's comments on his pictures. It shows very clearly that as a critic Scott was singularly free from the danger of over-praising his subject and strove to retain a balance in his judgement.

He wrote:

--- D.G.R. poet and imaginative inventor, who never made a memorandum of anything in the world except from the female face between sixteen and twenty-six, was torn to pieces by the waste of energy and excruciating difficulty entailed by the getting of his picture backgrounds reasonably right --- Rossetti is a poet, and feels the core of the matter to be all important; but his powers of observation of the actual world are nearly nil. I mention these defects in the accessories of his pictures as an argument for the value of sketching from nature; they were infinitely insignificant compared with the richness of invention, purity of feeling, and loveliness of the figures represented in the works of each of these men.²

1. A.N.II, 43.

2. Ibid, p.45.

Scott's letters to W. M. Rossetti show very clearly that the friendship between himself and Gabriel was neither constant nor intimate during the years he lived in Newcastle. Enquiries about Gabriel had often to be made in letters to his brother:

Let me hear from you more at large and especially about my book. Tell Gabriel too to write to me. I sympathise with his over-worked state, but can't let him off.¹

His interest in D.G.R. had evidently to be satisfied by inquiries about how his work goes, occasional messages and demands for a letter. It is significant that he was not told personally of Gabriel's marriage or of Elizabeth Siddal's death.

Gabriel came to Newcastle for a visit in 1853 and it was only then that Scott actually got to know him and discovered how attractive and conversely how annoying he was as a person. Rossetti was not in good health and he grumbled at everybody and everything within sight, although he also talked of poetry and religion with brilliance and enthusiasm, thereby entralling Scott, who admitted:

During these weeks I began to feel some sort of fascination about the person of D.G.R., that makes one accept certain peculiarities in him. I found all his intimate associates did so, placing him in a position different from themselves, a dangerous position to the man whose temperament takes advantage of it.²

This visit was the occasion on which Rossetti helped Scott to revise Rosabell, his long poem telling the story of a prostitute from her innocent girlhood to her death in wretched poverty. It is not a matter of great import in itself, but I mention it as a piece of evidence in that curious and

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 10 October 1854.

2. A.N.I., 289.

ill-grounded controversy about the possible plagiarism of the subject matter. This may seem stupid a century later, but the question of who might rightly claim the priority was debated in all seriousness by the three men concerned; Scott, who had written 'Rosabell'; Rossetti who had written the poem 'Jenny' and had the idea for the picture 'Found'; and Holman Hunt who painted 'The Awakened Conscience'. That no definite conclusion was possible should surely be obvious; the problem of the fallen woman was a matter of common concern at that period and might have been taken up by any sensitive writer or artist.

In spite of family news and reports of work to exchange, the friendship naturally enough held little possibility of development while Scott was caught up in the routine duties of the art school and was unable to capture for himself the spirit of Rossetti's circle. So he writes quite understandably:

For years about that time, being fully occupied I cannot say that I continued to take the same interest in Rossetti as I had done at first when his early poems had drawn my whole heart to him.¹

Rossetti himself was able to maintain the friendship at a lighter level. It was not that he did not feel a certain amount of affection for Scott, but he also allowed himself to be amused by his friend. He was not afraid to say that he found Scott stuffy and unable to stimulate him, and his affection itself was of a boisterous kind which was occasionally translated into rather malicious high spirits, especially in the writing of limericks, a game which entertained him at that time. Even Colvin, who is no advocate for Scott, is forced to admit that the quality of this humour might well have been more than a man could bear in good temper, and even when it was of the more harmless kind

1. Ibid, p.317.

it must have become wearing after a while. The following is a fair sample:

There's a crabbed old fellow called Scott,
Who seems to have hair but has not;
Did he seem to have sense
A still vainer pretence
Would be painfully obvious in Scott.¹

Moreover there is a hint in more than one place that Scott found Rossetti unreliable and did not share his enthusiasms for banding together, in sketching clubs and making them a 'first-rate thing', or for entering into such a wild scheme as the decoration with frescoes of the Oxford Union Society. Of the latter he wrote:

The whole thing to an accomplished artist of any school in the world must have the aspect of an enormous lark. Rossetti wanted me to undertake one yesterday - he is shortly going down to start, but I really could not stand it, and declined to come within their magic circle.²

No doubt he responded in a tone which seemed cold; but like many another moderate man, Hunt included, he felt such coteries to be a mistake and had not regretted the break-up of that best known association the P.R.B.

It would be an error to suggest that the friendship had actually faded before Scott's retirement in 1864. At that period Rossetti gave every evidence of welcoming Scott as a near neighbour. His brother wrote:

Mr. Bell Scott and his wife, leaving Newcastle-on-Tyne, settled in London in 1864, and from that date forward Rossetti saw his old friend frequently, and continued to value him highly.³

The two families dropped easily into a round of afternoon calls by the ladies and regular whist parties with Dante Gabriel.

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1. Sidney Colvin, Memories and Notes of Persons and Places 1852-1912, London, 1921, p.73.
 2. W.B.S. to Lady T., 89 Gt. Russell Street, 2 July 1857.
 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Family Letters with a Memoir, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1895, I, 259.

During his first years of retirement Scott undoubtedly came to know Rossetti more intimately and the period might almost have been a preparation for the autumn months of 1868 and 1869, when Rossetti, in a precarious state of health, came to Penkill as the guest of Miss Boyd, and made a strenuous effort to recover himself. He was suffering from an affliction of the eyes which specialists held to be caused by nervous trouble rather than any specific disease. It not only tormented him then, but he became possessed by a conviction that he was going blind and would never be able to paint again. It was obviously necessary to persuade him to find some interest which would replace, or at least take his mind from painting. Scott claims quite unequivocally that it was he and Miss Boyd who together hit on the remedy and persuaded Rossetti to adopt it. He writes:

--- his talk continually turned upon his chance of blindness and the question, why then should he live? 'Live for your poetry', said I. Strangely enough, this seemed never to have occurred to him as a possible interest or resource.¹

Scott stresses that even after he had made the suggestion it was no easy task to persuade Rossetti to his way of thinking. Existing circumstances were strongly against it:

--- he had buried his MS. poems, and had ceased from the study of original subjects in poetry, and even from the habit of writing, apparently for ever.²

But Scott and Miss Boyd were very sure of the rightness of what they were doing, and Scott explained:

1. A.N.II, 109.

2. W. B. Scott, Illustrations to the Kings Quair of King James I of Scotland, Edinburgh, Privately printed, 1887, p.17.

Rossetti was a poet before he was a painter, and will probably retain his place as a poet when his pictures are mainly remembered by their poetic suggestions in design. We recalled him so strenuously to his early love, making him repeat the poem he remembered, that at last suddenly, like a dying man with a new life transfused into his veins, he became absorbed in the desire to have them all written out and printed.¹

There is not the slightest suggestion in the Notes that Scott ever realised what a tremendous strain he imposed on Rossetti by urging a return to poetry-writing, not because of the writing itself but because this gift of his was bound up with the tragic death of his wife and the lovely but futile gesture by which he placed his MS. poems in her coffin amongst her red-gold hair. During the winter of 1868-69 Rossetti must have written out some of the lost poems and worked on new ones, but the following autumn he returned to Penkill and was, according to Scott, more gloomy and troubled than ever. He was writing some of his finest poetry and had in preparation a thin volume with the prose story 'Hand and Soul' at the end, but more and more he wanted the poems from Elizabeth Siddal's grave and was troubled by the impossibility of remembering them correctly. He spent the evenings pacing the old drawing-room high up in the peel-tower correcting or revising his work for the press and piecing together from scraps and reminiscences those poems of which he did not possess a fair copy. His overwrought mind dwelt on superstition and curious coincidence, and Scott, who was acting as Rossetti's self-appointed keeper, believed him to be on the verge of suicide when the chance unfortunately presented itself to him on a visit to the falls at the Lady's Glen.

1. Ibid, p.17.

--- Never shall I forget the expression of Gabriel's face when he bent over the precipice peering into the unfathomed water dark as ink, in which sundry waifs flew round and round like lost souls in hell. In no natural spectacle had I ever known him to take any visible interest; the expression on his pale face did not indicate such interest; it said, as both Miss Boyd and I at the same moment interpreted it, 'One step forward and I am free'!¹

William Michael Rossetti was disposed to doubt the meaning Scott saw in Gabriel's fear, though Scott had told him in a letter the year before that Gabriel spoke of 'the short ending to his ills'.

Scott's story of the two Penkill visits as it is given in his autobiography is most clearly part, in fact the climax, of his efforts to say something of Rossetti which was both personally observed and out of the general run of things. His whole attitude suggests that he seized on the fact that he was virtually alone with Gabriel at a time of particular moment in Rossetti's career. One may almost feel the delight in Rossetti as a curiosity. Scott warmed to the sense of importance; to the pleasure of being able to inform even William Michael Rossetti of his brother's state of mind. In 1868 he wrote:

Don't you think Gabriel's beginning to take an interest in his poetry a very good thing? At Penkill we had most serious talks about the chances of his powers of painting - a matter on which I may write or speak to none but you. I tried by every means to make him revive his poetry, but apparently without effect. Now however he is really doing so. Of course one trusts the defective sight is only temporary, still one must not forget that his eyes have not been strong for some time.²

The next year he added:

Gabriel is employing himself with good effect on his poetry, both correcting old and constructing new. At first I thought him very well, but now I see him more intimately he does not appear so strong and right as I thought. There are disturbing causes which may be softened away by time.³

1. A.N.II, 112.

2. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 30 November 1868.

3. W.B.S. to W.M.R., Penkill, 6 September [1869]

It would be almost impossible to over-emphasise Scott's strong sense that he was the exclusive chronicler of this period, or the extent to which he rejoiced in his unassailable position. In the last resort, one cannot absolutely challenge the truth of his account, although Rossetti's own letters give us reason to doubt just how far Scott was in his confidence, and the evidence offered by other writers forces us to attempt a reassessment of Scott's part in helping Gabriel to recover his balance. Rossetti's letters to William Allingham and Ford Madox Brown, to Shields and Miss Losh, suggest that Scott over-emphasised his depression, unless their cheerfulness is forced and Scott was right about the 'fearful skeletons' Rossetti only spoke of when they walked together along the Barr road. They tell of the beauty and quietness of Penkill, the pleasures of Scotus' and Miss Boyd's company and the work in poetry he was accomplishing, with even a definite note of humour when he contemplates that 'double-distilled drone' Scotus working on the Life of Dürer. He writes:

Scotus has read us his book on Albert Dürer right through in the evenings. He seems in composing it to have been seized every now and then with this constitutional somnolence but to have gone on writing all the same. Accordingly after waking from a nap he generally found that the leading incident of the portion in hand had been left out, and these have had to be heaped together in an Appendix. The arrangement may be thought peculiar, but of course (seriously speaking) the book is a most excellent and most interesting one.¹

John Purves, who studied Dante Gabriel Rossetti's letters to Alice Boyd,² considered that Rossetti felt he owed a good deal to Miss Boyd's friendly

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1. Three Rossettis, Unpublished Letters to and from Dante Gabriel, Christina, William, collected and ed. by Janet Camp Troxell, Haward U.P., 1937, p.89.
 2. Purves published his conclusions in an article to The Fortnightly Review of May 1928, entitled "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Letters to Miss Alice Boyd."

solicitude and that he responded bravely by trying to entertain her with gossip of the studio and their common acquaintances rather than by any morbid discussion of his own ailments. Scott, on the other hand, was writing with an eye on his part in restoring Rossetti to health, not on Rossetti's own efforts, and chose to say little of the atmosphere of Penkill, in which quietness and calm unhurried intellectual pursuits must have helped Rossetti's jangled nerves.

It would be difficult to dispute Scott's personal impression about the state of Rossetti's physical and mental well-being, but he did make some factual statements which show that he was certainly not in Rossetti's confidence at this time, and which have been held by many writers to discredit all his witness. The first concerns a certain amount of money borrowed by Gabriel from Miss Losh, Miss Boyd's cousin, during his visit in 1868. Neither Scott, Miss Boyd, nor W. M. Rossetti seems to have been well informed about exactly what passed, for it was not until 1881 or 1882 that Scott learned the end of the story which he recounted to William:

You remember that her [Miss Boyd's] cousin old Miss Losh took a great liking for D. G. Well, he protested to me he would never accept or borrow from her, but forthwith did so over and over again --- Mrs. Penell, Miss Losh's heir, produced acknowledgment for many loans of money to Miss Boyd, and asked her what she should do with them. A.B., considering how it would trouble Gabriel, beginning to be very much discomposed about many things, advised her to put the papers in the fire. Whether this was actually done A.B. does not certainly know, but believes it was.¹

There would seem to be no vindictive reason behind Scott's mention of this incident. He simply felt the scrap of information to be interesting and therefore included it in The Notes.

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 26 May [1882]

Scott took great pride in his story that he had persuaded Rossetti to take up writing poetry once more, and it is something of a shock to find that even this has strong evidence against it. In fact Rossetti had begun to consider the publication of his poetry before he went to Penkill in 1868. Oswald Doughty believes that Scott's impression can only have arisen from the fact of Rossetti's not having told his friend of this. He goes on:

Rossetti, perhaps forgetful of his recently awakened poetic interests, probably, in his morbid and anxious state fallen into a passing phase of indifference began to take a new interest in his poems.¹

Moreover Colvin, an independent witness, believes that the return to poetry was a natural one on Rossetti's part, unprompted by any but the most general interest of his London friends.

Whether or not Scott was in Gabriel's confidence about his decision to reclaim the MS. poems from his wife's grave is hard to decide. Miss Courtney Boyd and her cousin Mrs. Cameron consider that A.B. and Scott were instrumental in persuading Rossetti to the actual decision of opening the grave; an act of sacrilege the family must have been strongly against had they been consulted. Mrs. Janet Camp Troxell, however, proves that Rossetti's letters to Howell show it to have been a matter under consideration the whole time he was at Penkill, while Scott writes of it as if it had been a sudden decision which he set about accomplishing immediately. At all events Scott was in the happy position of being able to inform William Michael when the recovery was made.

Scott informs me that the uncoffining of Gabriel's MS. poems has now been effected,²

he writes in his diary for 13 October 1869.

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1. Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to his Publisher F. S. Ellis, ed. by Oswald Doughty, London, 1928, p.xix.
 2. Rossetti Papers 1862 to 1870, ed. by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1903, p.411.

On the whole it is difficult to say whether these claims and counter-claims are of much avail. No one is in a position to disprove Scott's account and if it errs it is in that lack of artistic restraint consonant with his attitude that he was in a privileged position with regard to Rossetti. It errs in fact because he attempts to give himself too prominent a role and he intensifies Rossetti's depression that the recovery may seem the more striking. In this view the disproving of much of what Scott wrote about the two Penkill visits does not so much discredit his witness as read like a severe blow at his prestige, and at his most cherished idea that he was Rossetti's confidant.

In 1871, after the publication of his poems, Rossetti went to Kelmscott, near Lechlade. He and the Morrises had taken over jointly the lease of the fine Elizabethan Manor House there the previous year. From Kelmscott he wrote almost daily to Scott. These letters show Rossetti in excellent spirits, working and enjoying the quiet beauties of the house and country, the nearest perhaps that he ever came to being contented. The talk was of poetry and painting and Scott took care to make it known that Rossetti sent MS. copies of new poems for his suggestion and comment. He was without a trace of self-consciousness about Rossetti's mixed reception of his critical judgements and published compliment and chaff together:

Moreover, Scotus, some of your verbal cruxes remain quite dark to me. What particular fault can be found in the line 'All shafts of shelterless, tumultuous day'. I endeavour to trace but fail entirely; also to discover the weak point in the last word of 'Cloud confines', which is 'still'. Can it be that you think it might seem ambiguous with its synonym meaning quiet. Surely not. Your remarks on the sunset poem baffled me too - moreover I seem to trace in the charge of being 'fantastic' a covert form of the insidious 'quaint'. There Scotus!! --- I hope all this palaver doesn't look as if I didn't value your opinion, which I assure you I set great store by, and only call in question because it set me thinking.¹

1. A.N.II, 151-152.

Scott's connecting remarks date from the time when The Notes were written and show Scott at his worst, deliberately unenthusiastic. He writes:

The poem here given, 'Between Holmscote and Hurstcote' or 'The River's Record', I now forget what I said of. It was not in D.G.R.'s way, as he says, but still has good qualities.¹

Strangely enough this sort of unpleasantness was not remarked by the many critics of The Notes. Scott made certain that the Rossetti letters he quoted contained plentiful references to his own work and in the end he led up to the point where he must needs quote his own poems:

But since I have given Rossetti's complimentary opinion as well as persevering criticism, showing both the fulness of his expression of friendly and favourable verdict, and his willingness to aid with advice, I think it necessary to give the reader the sonnets about Burns themselves ---²

But in fact whether or not it was self-esteem which made Scott quote these letters from Rossetti entire, we are the richer, for it is this kind of material which makes the book so valuable.

The 'last Kelmscott letter', contained a reference important far beyond this brief notice, to an article in the Contemporary Review called the "Fleshly School of Poetry", which Rossetti had not yet read, though he understood that he was its first victim. It was this article and the discovery of its author which brought a return of the distressing nervous and mental illness from which Rossetti never fully recovered. Once more Scott was given the opportunity for a personal account of Rossetti's sufferings, for after the first violent attack it was arranged that the invalid should be moved to a country house near Perth, where he could have complete quiet. Together with George

1. Ibid, p.135.

2. Ibid, pp.163-164.

Hake, son of the doctor, Scott stayed at Stobhall for three weeks watching over Rossetti.¹ He says little of the experience except to imply that it was distressing, but he makes it plain that he considered himself the mainstay of the family in this crisis, comforting W. M. Rossetti and assisting in Gabriel's affairs. He confesses that he was amazed at his friend's recovery, but soon found it to be purely physical, the mental trouble persisting more markedly than ever and making true friendship with Gabriel no longer possible. He writes:

After having been both his banker and his nurse I could not depend upon him either in action or in word. Still I remained faithful to the old tie, and Miss Boyd agreed in doing so also. We continued our occasional visits, either morning or evening, the only two of all his old circle.²

W. M. Rossetti contested Scott's account of this period very decidedly, though it is difficult to see that Scott had any unfriendly purpose in writing as he did; rather it was the familiar one of trying to make the most noise about his own assistance. Amongst W. M. Rossetti's censure it is pleasant to come upon a compliment to Scott which seems to prove that the friendship between them was essentially sound and Scott's claims just. He writes:

I went round for Mr. Scott [on the occasion of Gabriel's illness] -- and he, as usual, acted in a spirit of the truest and kindest friendship.³

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1. Alice Boyd offered Penkill to the invalid, but it was not thought advisable to move him. v. W.B.S. to Ford Madox Brown, Stobhall, Stanley by Perth, 6 July [1872]. "Miss Boyd is wanting me to bring our dear G. there; she wants me back in fact, but he would not be so quiet there as here, and in short it will not do. He wd. not drive out even with her carriage at his command, and the grind about the want of sleep and difficulties of making his bed, about his wine, everything indeed, makes it out of the question."
 2. A.N.II, 181.
 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, His Family Letters with a Memoir, ed. by W.M. Rossetti, London, 1895, I, 297.

From that time until Rossetti's death in 1882 Scott saw little of him. He did not visit him during his last illness at Birchington, nor was he present at the funeral. Ordinary social intercourse with Rossetti was impossible because he rarely stirred from the house and one could not judge his mood if one visited him. Scott evidently tried to interest him in new work in poetry, for he introduced him to the writing of Gosse and Marzials; but Rossetti's temper was still so uncertain that Scott dare not risk allowing the young men to meet him. This note from Scott to Gosse shows a certain fussiness concealing a genuine concern for Rossetti's peace of mind.

I have just had a note from Watts, the solicitor, a little fellow you must have seen, a great friend of old D. Hake and his sons, saying he is coming in the evening with D.G.R. and as, all things considered, it will be best he meets no one but myself in this his first venture out as I may say, we will have our talk in time to let you off. I dare say you would not and could not stop so long as to remain here when he comes at anyrate, but in case he comes earlier than usual, come you early. Were you recognised as my particular friend here when he came he wd. say I had done it on purpose.¹

It is surely significant that Scott should contrive to turn one of his last personal reminiscences of his friend into a compliment to himself, and it makes a fitting close to this account. Scott had read his new poems to Rossetti and he records:

--- when very short readings sufficed to tire him, the old enthusiasm in my verses burst out, and the tears that came to his eyes were answered by mine, alas! from a different cause.²

1. W.B.S. to Edmund Gosse, Bellevue, 1872.

2. A.N.II, 306.

CHAPTER XVII

Scott, the Poet

To be a poet was an ambition touched with romance in young Scott's eyes at an age when most boys want to be an engine-driver, or at all events something practical. It was an ambition which troubled the rest of his life, long after he had made his decisions and devoted the greater part of his time and energy to 'common affairs'; his work as headmaster in the School of Design or his writing of prose criticism, the essay in the periodical or the introductory memoir. One may feel that here was a falling-off, an admission of the need for more tangible assurances of success and greater security than the poet may hope for. Yet Scott's early sense of vocation had been strong, and poetry always held the first place in his order of things. While still a school-boy he was writing lengthy blank verse poems in the grand manner, and in his youthful imagination:

The boy was then assuming something of the young man, the 'genius' in private, and had in his pocket, not a big-bladed knife and a top, but the draft of a poem of many hundred lines in blank verse, on the sublimest theme; a poem he hoped would be the grandest ever written in the English tongue.¹

His conception of a poet was nebulous; it skimmed over the practical details, left far behind the humble practitioner, and centred on an ideal of the great creative artist removed from all mundane associations and endowed with an undeniable superiority over common folk, distinctive qualities which the growing lad claimed that he and his brother had already sensed in themselves:

1. A.N.I., 56.

An arcane sense of unlikeness, a sort of right of exclusiveness, as that of a chosen people.¹

Scott wrote of such a figure in one of his own early poems; lonely, unrewarded, perhaps persecuted, but always strong in his ideals:

He had seen the moon's eclipse
By the fire from Etna's lips,
With Orion had he spoken,
His fast with honey-dew had broken,
Seen the nether world unveiled,
Nor had fainted nor had quailed:
And here he stands amidst the throng,
On his tongue a wise sweet song,
In his hand a laurel fair,
An opal rainbow round his hair,
Truth reigning from his great wild eye,
And in his heart humility.

Of him the rabble say:

We've chosen our Genius, and want no mo',
One like ourselves we've chosen, one
Who has not with such haste begun,

With that they drive him from the place,
They raise their hands against his face,
They will not suffer his eyes' sharp light,
They mock him and drive him into night.²

The only early portrait of Scott now hangs in Penkill Castle, and its handsome sensitive face confirms this impression of a young man in love with poetry as another might be in love with love.

Scott's upbringing was as fortunate as might be for the ambitions he had in mind. His boyhood days were secluded because of the gloomy nature of his parents; so, while other boys were running wild, he and his brothers turned

1. Ibid, p.12.

2. Poems: 1854, pp. 133-134.

to the books and stacks of prints from his father's workshop which filled their home to overflowing, and William's ideas for poetry were fostered and guided by much that he came upon. Very soon, however, his father introduced the question of some practical training. Robert Scott was in any case a realist about the commercial value of art and poetry, but his own failing health and precarious business prospects made the matter one of greater urgency to him. Therefore, although he was kindly towards William's aspirations, he insisted that his son learnt engraving, a confessedly dull occupation, tempered only by attendance at art classes of the Trustees Academy.

This was the age at which Scott became caught up in a parallel occupation in 'common affairs'. He was no longer the poet-elect, dissociated from the necessities of the time; and the adjustment this required of him comes to be the story of the rest of his life. He was to be trained to earn a living in ways not uncongenial to him, but which he regarded as belonging to a lower order than the writing of poetry. This had two consequences for his development as a poet; it enabled him to be independent in pecuniary matters and hence free from a slavish reference to public approval; and it carried with it the penalties of being 'half a poet', of owning other strong allegiances which demanded time and energy. The poetic impetus must be strong to withstand such a situation, for independence of public approval may encourage peculiarities. At the same time, success in other spheres, being more immediate, may well prove specific to woo the poet from a way devoid of present reward. Yet, in his early years, engraving and its related interests did not

seem to be a serious distraction, nor anything but a temporary let to his ambitions. Poetry was uppermost in Scott's mind while he attended classes in art and worked at the bench in his father's workshop, and, such was its reality that these practical occupations, although sharpened by necessity, were pushed into the background, while poetry was nurtured and treasured in preparation for the time when it might be brought triumphantly to the fore. Scott distinguishes for us between poetry, pursued with delight, the subject for which advice was persistently and eagerly sought; and art, taken up without anything of this sense of personal enthusiasm: "I gravitated into art as a profession --- almost without consideration, by force of circumstances,"¹ he writes, and again: "I had humoured my father by learning engraving."²

Of course, as yet he had published nothing, so that his standing as a poet was a personal claim, unsubstantiated by public accord. When he appealed to the judgement of his readers their verdict was added against him. Scott countered this by his repeated assertion that he wrote to please no one but himself, a claim difficult to accept in its entirety. The plan of his publications tells its own story of his alternation between pressing his claims as a poet and withdrawing into himself, determined to try his luck no more, having learned:

To throw no dice with fortune; to remain
Spectator more than actor.³ ----

The reason for this dispirited attitude will be found in the fact that Scott was caught in his own toils. The work of prose-writing, painting, teaching, though of a lower order by his own definition, proved not unpleasant,

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1. A.N.I., 82.
 2. Ibid., p.99.
 3. Poems: 1854, pp. 164-165.

nor was success in these spheres unwelcome. But this very success was galling in so far as Scott realised that it came from the achievements he did not greatly care about and not from those he did.

Scott's first poems to appear in print were marked by enthusiasm and urgency. Naturally enough the young poet has his idols, and it was to Keats and Shelley that he wrote his first panegyrics. His 'youngness' is perhaps not something to be commented on at length, for it would be surprising were he otherwise, but it is interesting to find that twenty years later Scott was able to discern in the work of another young poet the very quality he had himself shown:

Have you seen Alex. Smith's book? I fancy I know what it is made of so well that to read it is unnecessary. Here is a man with a glorious faculty - a wonderful gift of nature, but for my own part I feel as if I was too old a fellow to admire that kind of excellence. To the next generation of poetry lovers and rhymers, he will be an idol as Keats was to me (to us I may say?) but now I feel inclined to say 'here is a youth writing a Life Drama without any knowledge of Life or experience of human nature, or range of acquirements, what have I to do with him and his 'gift' however wonderful.' Nothing used to be more inexplicable to me than the merciless treatment of Keats by the better critics of the day - was it imbecility or was it malignity? - it was neither, but only a mature judgement sitting upon the claims of a new thing, juvenescent certainly, whatever other qualities it possessed.¹

But there was much to come in Scott's poetic career before 1853 and the fading of his own youthfulness. When he came to London in 1836 he spoke of his poetry, then in MS., as 'cherished possessions';² but although he was convinced of the importance of what he had to say, he had already learnt not to confuse what he would like to do with what must be done for success in the strange and highly competitive society in which he found himself. His first

1. W. B. S. to W. M. R., N., 6 May [1853].

2. A.N.I., 102.

poems therefore made a modest debut, in format if not in subject. In 1838, when "the spirit of the age was essentially unpoetical"¹ according to the publisher John Murray, Scott published a "thin and uninviting little volume"² called Hades; or, the Transit: and the Progress of Mind. It was poorly bound in black cloth, and forty years later was almost unknown, to the relief of its author. In the Preface Scott made it clear that his hope lay in gaining a limited but discerning audience. He was, in fact, sounding the poetry-reading public to see if they would give their attention to undisguised philosophy and hard ideas. The result was reasonably encouraging. His subject was not rejected out of hand, and that to Scott was the most important concern. Criticism centred instead on the cursory and inappropriate treatment he had given to such a vital matter. He was forced to be content with the assurance that at least one critic found "intimations of a true poet" in the volume, but on a more detailed analysis concluded

the idea of the gradual passage from earth-like death into the spiritual and nobler blessing of the final future, is on the whole splendidly conceived though very inadequately expressed.³

The poem is about a Moslem, a Christian and a Jew, dead and buried, but awakened in the grave by the angel of death. In that moment their spirits are released:

From the flesh which is the earth-worm's spoil.⁴

Thereafter the subject of the poem is the progress of these souls to "the fullness of self-knowledge";⁵ a progress from confusion to harmony which is symbolised by the music of the spheres; music which mortals cannot hear, but which seems the key to the mystery of life:

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1. This opinion is quoted by Derek Hudson in Martin Tupper: His Rise and Fall, London, 1949, p.27.
 2. The Examiner, 24 February 1839, in a review of Hades.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Hades, 1838, p.14.
 5. Ibid., p.28.

'-- the melody that can recreate,
And bind again the link of fate.¹

The poem rejects orthodoxy: when the three souls are awakened it is not at all like anything their religions had pictured for them. In fact, the purpose is to deliver men from the orthodox religions:

He laughed aloud as he thrust abroad
His hands, like one who prayed to God -
I am awake! awake and well;
And not as craven faiths forebode,
Like foolish prophets lying,
That I should swim through an endless hell
With maniac doubters dying.²

Scott is proud that his poetry may be considered as a work of the higher faculty of imagination dealing 'through symbol, with things occult'.³

Yet, although it derives from dissension, his picture of what happens after death is not startling or revolutionary and is, indeed, most imperfectly worked out. It is not surprising that such a subject attracted the young man who had been brought up with Blake's designs for Blair's The Grave, a book which, apart from impressing Scott's mind with an interest in life after death and a belief that it could be somehow portrayed, contained some lines which may be the actual suggestion for Hades:

--- 'Tis here all meet!
The shiv'ring Icelfander and sun-burnt Moor;
Men of all climes, that never met before,
And of all creeds, the Jew, the Turk, the
Christian.⁴

1. Ibid, p.12.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid, Preface.

4. Robert Blair, The Grave, London, 1808, p.21. This is the edition with the original Blake designs engraved by Schiavonetti.

Scott's explanation of life after death depends on the belief that death is only part of a cycle: "For still decay creates anew"¹ and connects ultimately with his strong belief in the theory of progress; the perfectibility of man.

Thus the world, from death to death,
Goeth on breathing its youthful breath,
And attaining a good more firm and high.²

The way in which the spirits are actually reformed is very vaguely explained. It seems that they are troubled by memories and visions - tormented by a feeling of great unrest, in a phantom landscape lit by a

---- leprous light, no gleam
Of star is it nor white moonbeam;
Like the shine from the sightless eyes of death,
Like winter's pestal breath;³

They ask for respite but see instead a further masque of spectres engaged in strife, and only then does the melody come to soothe them. One weak point in Scott's philosophy is that the spirits undergo no particular self-examination; they are not reproached by sin or the memory of sin, but only seem to be troubled by this sense of being outcast and restless. Though they may "writhe in the throes of memory" their torments are in no way personal to them.

'Music of the Spheres', from Poems: 1875, is a condensed version of Hades and contributes a good deal to an understanding of the earlier poem; for it is more sure in its expression and philosophy, though it loses in poetic quality.

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1. Hades, 1838, p.11.
 2. Ibid, p.12.
 3. Ibid, p.17.

This was a fantastic theme and needed a certain extravagance of writing to trick it out. When Scott tried to put it into more exact terms it seemed threadbare and ineffective. In the first poem he may not have been sure of what he wanted to say, but the youthful fullness of the verse was good and there were some fine lines, justifying the reviewer who found in the poem some signs of a true poet. Such a description as this of the unfriendliness of Hades is omitted in the shorter version, with the loss of at least one very fine line:

Walls and towers around us grow,
With spires and pillared walks and domes -
An infinite wilderness of homes.¹

Another line is lost by clumsy revision when

In the mole eyed light of day²

is changed to:

In the dull light of this cold day;³

The later version may be more strictly coherent, but the earlier has more felicity of expression and sheer delight in words, a quality all too rare in Scott, whose power of expression seldom equalled his subtilty of thought.

Hades was published together with an ode called The Progress of Mind which Scott later wished forgotten, evidently considering it bad. He describes in general terms the advancement of the human race during the ages in which it has inhabited the world, and marks a progress from the most primitive relationship with Nature, in which man tends and cultivates and Nature pours out her fruits in gratitude. This is succeeded by the coming of wisdom from the region

1. Ibid, p.17.

2. Ibid, p.17.

3. Poems: 1875, p.216.

of the Ganges. Thereafter men desire more knowledge than they are given by the senses. Gradually there comes an age of culture, when men grow in appreciation of beautiful things and honour their musicians and poets:

He who first caught their music from the spheres,
And echoed it to mortal ears;

They whose tongues enwreathen speech,
Mightier than the thunders roll,
That over heaven's whole breadth doth reach,
Captive hath led the wide-eyed soul.

This rich civilisation is shattered by invasion from the North and the South; described with sudden vividness of imagery:

The wine-press of the chariot-wheel;
The wine, how plentiful, how high!
The song bursts from them as they reel
Writhing, the song of agony.²

Evidently this part symbolises the destruction of Greece and Rome by the barbarians from the North and Moslems from the South. Once the old empires fell a reign of liberty succeeded; an age which indulged in excess and was epitomised in the French Revolution. This was the time when men relied on scholarship to answer all their questioning, and was followed by a reaction from excess: blind devotion to custom. Scott believed that hope for mankind was restored with their return to philosophy, that power which sees beyond the senses:

Then searchest inward to the grave,
And upward through the stars that pave
The bounds of our mortal sight:³

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1. Hades, 1838, p.41.
 2. Ibid, p.42.
 3. Ibid, p.45.

His final vision is of "the man of coming days", who has learnt the golden mean amongst the attractions of the world and has found harmony of an undefined sort:

No, he hath felt all and hath pass'd
Onward to happiness at last.¹

The poem owes a great deal to Shelley; both verbally in the opening invocation to the powers of nature, which compares closely with the beginning of *Alastor*, and, less precisely, in the spirit in which it is conceived.

Not many years after the appearance of *Hades*, actual responsibilities allied themselves to Scott's native prudence, and he accepted the post of headmaster of the Newcastle Branch School of Design. But, before official duties and privately arranged painting commissions demanded almost all his time, Scott made what one must regard as a bid for poetic reputation. The work he published was *The Year of the World*, a philosophical poem written at Newcastle in the early spring mornings before work claimed him for the day. That it was written in a spirit of urgency and published as a challenge to thinking people is, I think, made clear in the *Dedication*, a separate poem.

Perhaps within its fabric not one thread
Of gold is woven, and those thoughts that weighed
Upon me as a duty weighs, till speech
And action frees the conscience from its claim,
Will be to others uninformed and null:
Perhaps the sheep may bleat, the small dogs bark,
And not one man's voice answer me at all:
So be it: on the waters cast I still
My bread, remembering it hath been to me
The bread of life according to my light, --²

There is a note of weariness here, enough to suggest what Scott's attitude in failure will be, but that is not the feeling of the *Preface* or the *Poem* itself.

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1. *Ibid*, p.47.
 2. *Poems: 1854*, pp.162-163.

There Scott makes it plain that he considers The Year of the World to be an answer to metaphysical speculation, rather than a mere exploration of profound problems:

--- The scheme therein worked out appears of the utmost importance to the Author, and is in his mind a true conviction; not empirical speculation, but the gradually developed result of his reading and cogitations, in elucidation of the old problems with which ethics and metaphysics have always dealt. Thus the publication of the poem possesses to the Author something of the interest attaching to the promulgation of a creed, as well as that of a work of art.¹

There is a youngness of mind about his not seeing the immensity of his claims, and one receives the impression of a poet who knows the importance of his conceptions better than he understands the difficulties of formulating them, and in his own words:

--- would wish the intentions of the poem to be estimated, rather than its execution admired.²

The Year of the World continued Scott's general debt to Shelley. It repeats many of the ideas of The Progress of Mind, but gains by a stronger sense of narrative and a central figure. The journey of Lyremmos is the journey Man has made from a state of instinctive happiness, such as that in which Lyremmos dwelt with his sister Mneme, the spiritual, through the philosophies of the world, after he has tasted of Knowledge and so separated himself from the realm of pure untroubled instinct. Once he has knowledge he must reascend the path which leads him back to the spiritual and that union of intellect and spirit, or, as Scott expresses it, "the readjustment of the human with the divine nature ---". Lyremmos, who embodies many characters

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1. Year of the World, p.VII.
 2. Ibid, p.VII.

and fulfils many functions during the poem, eats of the Tree of Life, though without any suggestion that this is wrong. It does however fill him with a feeling of terror, for he is unable to see the kindly spirits which formerly surrounded him. His first period of human existence is similar to that primitive state described at the beginning of the Progress of Mind. Lyremmos attempts to explain to his sister that he has experienced an awakening and is now conscious of the power of thought, speaking of himself as

---- a mere question
With ever-twisting heart; ---¹

This is bound up with Scott's personal belief that the 'dawn of consciousness, the perception of the 'me' as opposed to the 'not me', is perplexing, for so he found it when he was a child:

a change from the repose of instinct to that of thoughtful perplexity and unrest, responsibility and isolation, never to be again lost. The mystery underlying all nature is around us everywhere every moment of life ---²

The young man is now ready to set out on his journey into the conscious life, his immortality safe within him, and before the second part of the poem opens he explains his quest:

--- 'Tis happiness I seek,
But it must be a happiness secure,
Enjoyed because I know it for my own.³

The first practical step Lyremmos takes in finding again the unity of intellect and spirit is by way of the Hindu doctrine of Contemplative Absorption. This Scott described with very close reference to the Bhagavad Gita,

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1. Ibid, p.16.
 2. A.N.I, 37.
 3. Year of the World, p.17.

the Sanscrit scriptures. The hope of progressing through passivity does not however satisfy Lyremmos, who renews his journey, choosing the way of labour. This period of his existence is complicated because he is offered advice by many strange and false demons all singing the praises of knowledge:

Do we not know, and is not knowledge life.¹

Here Scott finds place for his own theory of the relative value of Knowledge, a feeling which echoes his childhood protest against his parents' religion which offered to make all known, while his own soul told him that much was unknowable:

----- I would revere
All language of the spirit, and announce
A mighty sphere, in which the Known revolves
Narrowly circumscribed; the mystical
Being the throes and longings of the soul
To realise this sphere to its own Present.

This mystical, oh! is it not the food
Of hope which makes all nature glad; the gift
Of stars which recompenses us for night.
And fable is the garb which to our eyes
Makes visible the spiritual harmonious voice
Of thought and feeling, moving so together²
That words acquire the bridal sound of song.

Passages such as this are most valuable for our understanding of Scott, but do tend to break into the main narrative of the poem. When we take this up again it is at the point at which Lyremmos explains the converse of Contemplative Absorption, the doctrine of Self-Elevation, in which worship is combined with self-reverence and self-examination. This provides no final answer, and Lyremmos continues his journey through the civilisations of Greece and Rome while they are at their finest period. The tension grows; there are

1. Ibid, p.53.

2. Ibid, pp. 56-57.

rumours and speculations, and then a sudden quiet before Scott describes the Advent. The characters in his story are a Youth, symbolising Pantheism, and the Christ Child. The Youth finds the Christ child's particular form of strength difficult to understand, but the opposed ideals they hold seem to be multiformity and unity. At this point in the poem there is a good deal of confusion between Lyremmos and the Youth, both of whom seem to have lived through similar experiences and whose problems seem to be answered by the Christ-child. Scott for himself, considers that Christianity will not bring rest to the world an easy way, and he is bitter about the change which has come over the first pure unadorned Christianity:

Missives of shepherds became canons holy:
The Shepherds tribute-gifted, and their crooks
Gem-crusted gold!¹

The poem now returns to Lyremmos, and after a brief recapitulation of his journey we learn that his hope for the future now lies in Science. The conclusion is vague and indefinite in the extreme. Scott tenders a belief that we have arrived at some sort of hope for the reunion of the human and divine in man, but he pauses before the future, not in fear, but rather in uncertainty. There the poem passes to a lyric movement reminiscent of Prometheus Unbound, and we leave Lyremmos restored to his home.

The Year of the World attracted little attention; it was long, and woven round an ill-defined scheme of philosophy, "printed, published and still-born".² One or two men, those whom Scott liked to consider as most discerning, read and praised the poem, though whether they thoroughly understood it we have no sign.

1. Ibid, p.87.

2. A.N.I, 235.

R. W. Emerson and D. G. Rossetti were the two most notable. By and large it failed as David's pictures had failed, because it was unwieldy and inadequate in the expression of its thought. Scott had a number of shorter poems in MS. at the time, some dating from Edinburgh days, and he continued to work at other small things in a leisurely way. In 1852 he began to discuss with W. M. Rossetti the possibility of bringing out a collected volume of his poetry. The fairly rapid return to thoughts of publishing would seem to indicate that the comparative failure of The Year of the World had caused Scott no concern about possible deficiency in his innate poetic power, but was taken only as a sign that he must reconsider his medium and adapt it to the public. His plans for his next publication showed him more circumspect than bold. The attitude reminds one of David, but a David who had capitulated instead of continuing to stand out against the demands of the world. Scott admits that more general applause for his poetry would be profitable as well as pleasant, though at the same time he continues to maintain that he is remote from such concerns and realises that his best work will find only limited appreciation:

I have been thinking over your letter in respect to the advice to include 'The Year of the World' in my proposed volume, but without agreeing with you on the propriety of so doing. Many small poets and critics have really a pique against a man for writing such a poem, and resent it as an insult. A volume of small pieces meets comparatively with favor or at least with a fair field. Besides it was tried, and the only chance for it is in my proving more famous by other means. This same 'Year of the World' is most likely the best thing my diggings such as they are, will ever produce, - abstractly you are doubtless right that the volume I propose ought to have it as principal, - my objections are from the prudential point of view. One of these objections is the cost. The book would become much more expensive.¹

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 9 November 1852.

The volume appeared in 1854, "printed at a provincial press in a careless manner".¹ Scott did not seem to feel about it in the same way as he had done about Hades or The Year of the World. It was offered to the world as if its author, who had already made some name as artist and critic, regarded it as an additional grace. Nevertheless it forms a group with the two earlier volumes of poetry; for although most of the pieces are in a different style, shorter and with a wide range of subject, the volume is new, a part of Scott's process of exploration, of that assessing of public taste which shows that he was not yet without hope of finding his place as a poet:

From title-page to finis the volume is original, and that is something to say in the present age²

granted even the critics.

It is perhaps difficult at first sight to see any particular shape, sequence or sense of purpose in this miscellany of short pieces. It reads as if Scott, having failed with a long poem of unified theme and epic scale, is determined to show that his failure does not find him at the end of his poetic resources, but, on the contrary, master of a wide variety of styles. The poems do, in fact, fall naturally into three groups. There is one considerable group related in thought to Hades and The Year of the World, expressing Scott's acute consciousness of the mystery surrounding all that we understand by the ordinary operation of our five senses. It may be held that these are not new, in so far as they represent a return to earlier material, but the problem was by no means exhausted and these short effective pieces, with only the slightest narrative background, are a clear departure from the epic style. This concern with the unknown was to be one of the fountain-heads

1. Poems: 1875, Preface, p.VIII.

2. The Athenaeum, in a review of Poems: 1854.

of Scott's poetic inspiration right through his life, and as such it never flagged because his opinions were never static. On the contrary he showed a definite development from the youthful desire to find some solution to the mystery of the unknown, through despair that all solutions are unconvincing, to the strength of realisation that the unknown is the unknowable and must be bravely faced. This final stage is important because of its relation to Scott's religious views. The problems of religion he counted among those things he had relinquished as insoluble, but in which he still took a vital interest, as if he recognised that the meaning of things lies in these problems, but is not to be won from them.

In especial, the Christian faith dominates our author's thought: if he offers no worship at the altar he haunts the vestibule and paces the aisles.

This attitude was typical of many Victorians, who were not afraid of hard thinking and small comfort in matters of religion.

In Scott's poetry one may distinguish two seemingly contrary ways of writing about religious subjects; either as a philosopher, taking the outward view and not committed to believe in what he sets forth, or as a mystic, seeming to have a genuine perception of the devotional impulse. "Anthony" and "Saint Margaret" are the finest examples of the second way of thought, though Scott's acknowledgement of the great spiritual force in Christianity is clear from the sonnet "Restoration of Belief", fifth of the Ten Sonnets Embodying Religious Ideas.

1. MacMillans Magazine, Vol. XXXIII, March 1876, W.M. Rossetti, "William Bell Scott and Modern British Poetry", p.418 et seq.

Poems: 1854 is however valuable for other things beside its accomplishments in the philosophical-metaphysical sphere. It holds a promise of success in two new fields; the ballad, conventional and unconventional; and the simple lyric, concerned with "some homelier subject, something more within my experience",¹ in the style which Christopher North had advised so many years before. There was little more than a foretaste of Scott's skill as a balladist in this volume. "Woodstock Maze" has the clearest claim to be included under such a heading, but "The Incantation of Hervor", "The Four Acts of Saint Cuthbert", and even "Maryanne", are related to the ballad proper. Scott's interest in this form, and particularly in medieval subjects, was greatly strengthened by Rossetti's enthusiasm for them, but it is important to remember that it was not wholly derivative. From the beginning he showed the gifts of the ballad-writer; simplicity, a feeling for the grotesque, and a good sense of story. Scott's success with simple homely themes was not unmixed, but it has its importance because this kind of writing was to be the heart of his last poetry. He was happiest when he glimpsed the beauty of something in nature. At his best in this kind of writing he was graceful, as in his few love poems; at his worst he was flat and prosy.

There is little doubt that Scott desired the favourable reception of his poems, even to suggesting that he would welcome friendly reviews. W. M. Rossetti was sounded first:

I sent you a copy of my book and have not heard your opinion of it, and now I have a suggestion from Munro at Oxford who says if you write a criticism he will get it into Mackays' Illustrated News. Munro will be back in town in a day or two, he tells me

1. A.N.I., 72.

by yesterday's post, and if such a notice of my book could appear - that is to say as the papers' own notice (not with the words 'from a correspondent' - above it which would nearly drive me mad) I wish you would do it. Not that I wish the thing mightily but in an apathetic way.¹

The reception of the poems was not however very encouraging. It is true that most reviewers singled out those qualities which Scott rated most important, his intellectual quality and his vigour.

--- They are stamped with the impress of a masculine and vigorous intellect; full of thought, with great force of expression, and occasionally with a fine poetical conception nobly sustained ---²

said one; but, in almost every case, this praise was coupled with severe censure on his want of art, or worse still on his seeming disregard of the graces of poetry:

Most of them [the poems] are harsh and inharmonious, many are verse only to the eye, and about them all there is a defiant carelessness of the ordinary means of attraction used by the poetical art.³

This is interesting not so much as a technical criticism, but for the reason adduced to support it; that Scott was a man of strong self-will and gloomy temper whose character and fortune in life were reflected in his poetry, most decidedly not to its gain:

They are the composition of a man apparently at odds with the world and of an unhappy frame of mind, one whose aspirations and performances have not been altogether equal⁴

wrote one critic, and Scott, noticing how general was this opinion, commented to W. M. Rossetti:

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1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 14 November 1854.
 2. The Guardian, December 1854.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid.

--- from your silence I begin to think you find me 'a sour and gloomy nature', as the Spec. says (he is a man of wonderful discrimination though who wrote that article) or 'a man of little intellectual volition' as the Weekly News and Chronicle has it.¹

If his diagnosis is correct, and it occurs not once but many times in the various reviews of Poems 1854, then it may be that here we have the reason for Scott's long silence from 1854 until 1875, and the publication of his next volume of poetry. An inherently pessimistic nature, troubled by unfavourable reviews; the press of common affairs; tangible success in other spheres bringing a consequent fading of the consciousness of holding to ideals which must be expressed: all these may well have worked together to dissuade Scott from sounding the public again. Few men will persist in a hard and disappointing pursuit when they can derive satisfaction from work which is less demanding, and the truth is that Scott did find satisfaction in the work he classed as being of a "lower order", and this in spite of the fact that he protested so vigorously he did not. He may also have found that acquaintance with poets greater than himself and very different in style, served to unsettle him, or at least to keep him from further appeal to the public until he was goaded to it by stronger feelings of needing to assert his claims to be called a poet.

During the twenty years between the two collected volumes Scott wrote only a small number of new poems. His main work must have been revision, sometimes of very early pieces. Occasionally he published a single poem in a periodical or a sonnet in the Athenaeum. "Anthony" first appeared in the Fortnightly Review during 1868,² before its inclusion in Poems: 1875, yet the

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., N., 14 November 1854.

2. The Fortnightly Review, July 1868.

original draft was old enough to have been seen by Christopher North. Although therefore not a proof of Scott's poetic vigour at that time it seemed to show that he was interested in keeping before the public eye as a poet, with good result.

"I was greatly pleased with Scotus's poem in the Fortnightly," wrote Rossetti.

It is full of the real thing, only seems to me a little abrupt in its transitions and a little lacking in basic faith. One can't help seeing Scotus's grin all through Antony's terror. Everyone seems to admire the poem greatly, and I hope it may induce its author to resume the pen.¹

This must have been distinctly encouraging. Scott followed it with a new poem called "The Prodigal" in the same magazine the following year.² In it he once more proved his sense of a good story, though it would have been improved by shortening and in places lacked incision in the telling. The landscape of the poem showed it akin to "Anthony", macabre and unearthly. Such rare issue of new work meant that Scott was quickly forgotten as a poet by the general reader; the press of coming men was too great for it to be otherwise, in spite of the inquiries after him by friends and acquaintances. One of the most interesting documents of this interim period was a long article, dating from 1871 and published in The Sunday Times, which recalled Poems 1854 and the promise of Scott's work. Such a piece of writing was at once a compliment and yet relegated him to the class of "forgotten poets worth remembering".³ It first of all revealed the extent to which he was regarded.

1. The Fortnightly Review, May 1928, John Purves, "Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Letters to Miss Alice Boyd."

2. The Fortnightly Review, 1 February, 1869, p.146.

3. The reference is to the title of a Monograph by R. H. Shepherd about the poet Ebenezer Jones, which appeared in The Athenaeum of September 1878, and formed part of a controversy over rights in using MS. material in which Scott was a leading figure.

A favourite with the few, and known and prized by those whose favourable verdict is the poet's highest reward, Poems by a Painter has remained a sealed book to the public.

The writer sought a reason for this in the unpropitious time of its publication, but was bound to admit an untutored roughness in many of his poems. There was considerable praise for Scott's qualities of thought, sincerity and directness, with particular references to a revival of interest which may have weighed with Scott as he pondered a reappearance.

Poems: 1875 is a different kind of book inspired by a different motive. It was produced with greater care for appearances, and made at once more beautiful and more expensive by the etchings. On his own admission people now knew Scott as a poet only by hearsay. This volume was at once a summing-up, with a note of completion; a reissue of older work called for by his friends; and a fresh challenge in the form of new work to those who desired visible sign of his poetic talent. In this second function it had a faint relationship with the brave pioneering spirit of the first group of poetry. One must read Poems 1875 as the last declaration that poetry holds a leading place amongst Scott's activities, with the memory of his youthful homage to it in mind, before one can appreciate the sadness of the case. It is a desperate claim, made in the face of a consciousness that he had allowed 'common affairs' to usurp his time and energies; and of a sense that others evidently do not consider him as first and foremost a poet. It embodies all the sadness of the middle-aged man looking back at the visions of his youth in the light of accomplished fact, and this in spite of the brave note of its Preface.

1. The Sunday Times, 20 August 1871, in a review of Poems by a Painter, as Poems: 1854 was sometimes called.

My "credentials to be considered a poet"¹ he wrote there, and added that for many years now friends had urged him to collect and publish the poems he most wished to preserve, while he had been content without any appeal to the public:

But there is a day for all things, and after a period of active work of very various kinds, obeying the maxim, 'What thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might', he thinks the time has come for the pleasant task of putting his poetical house in order.²

Both Preface and contents of this volume have their particular importance in a study of Scott the poet. The selection and revision by the author of this group of shorter poems from amongst the work of forty years gives evidence of the relative value he placed on his poems, and points to the themes and kind of work he most wished to emphasise. It is in clear succession to Poems: 1854, using most of the same material with additions and variations. This was intended to be a more representative collection, and so Scott included, for instance, the two juvenile poems to Keats and Shelley, which are allowed to stand with their young sympathies and flatness of writing unchanged, interesting because they are an early expression of a most persistent thought about the sadness of recognition coming to a man too late. For the rest, the poems fall into the same broad groups as those in the earlier volume. There is no striking departure in theme or style, but Scott's reputation as a balladist is worthily maintained by six, new to this collection, including the "Witch's Ballad", which Browning thought to be "very weird, and in the true witch style; shewing a compound of rage and impotence; devilish malignity with fickle levity".³

1. Poems: 1875, Preface, p.V.

2. Ibid, p.VI.

3. Browning's opinion is recorded in a letter of 9 December 1875.

This is a tale of four beautiful witch-girls who came from 'a warm land far away' to a country market in order to trick the innocent folk into buying their magic and worthless wares and to capture each a husband by means of their charms. The poem moves with assurance from beginning to end and its lilting rhythms have a trick of staying in the memory. It is often chosen to represent Scott's work in anthologies, 'Q' put it in the Oxford Book of Verse, but unhappily it is not a typical example. In fact it would not be unfair to say that it stands alone, free from Scott's so frequent defects and sustained with unusual ease.

The idea of treating a simple homely theme was taken up once more, and his group of sonnets *The Old Scotch House*, *Penkill Castle*, are the fulfilment of his gift for this sort of writing and closely connected with the greater number of the short pieces which were to make up his last volume *A Poet's Harvest Home*. They reveal the deep affections of which he was capable, but as poetry they are uninspired. At the same time it would be wrong to regret that Scott ever attempted this sort of poem, for occasionally he succeeded almost triumphantly, writing simply, poignantly, and with complete control of his medium, though it were an elaborate movement. Such are "Parting and Meeting Again"; "Parted Love"; and the lovely "May", wisely retained from *Poems: 1854*.

The additions and variations in this volume are not wholly a matter of new work. The material taken over from earlier sources was almost always revised and it is in this revision that we learn a great deal about Scott as a poet and about the stage of development he had reached when he decided to present the public with his "credentials to be considered a poet". Was it the climax - or already retrogression?

More than one critic has spoken of the ill-success of Scott's alterations, and has drawn the conclusion that a writer who could mar earlier work can have little natural poetic sense, but has most likely stumbled upon his occasional happy phrases by accident. In fact this is an ill-based conclusion, for Scott's revisions have no real consistency. Their general purpose was a sound one; to pull the poetry together and give it more sinew, while at the same time cleaning away any obscurities in the meaning. Scott overcame a tendency to diffuseness which had marked the earlier versions of his poetry either by clear omission of unnecessary parts, as in the Artist's Birthplace and Monody; by rearrangement of his material, whole blocks of a poem sometimes being differently combined, a way of revision most strikingly used in "Monody"; or by rewriting. This last was naturally the way which showed most surely whether Scott had made any advance in poetic skill, and the evidence is in favour of a clear development in at least one way. Sometimes Scott did mar earlier work: it was an unfortunate thought which changed:

Let him be lapt in gold and cedern wood
In purple and in heraldries grotesque.¹

to:

Let him be lapt in costliest panoply
Painted all over with new heraldries.²

and on many other occasions persuaded him to the introduction of more consciously 'poetic' expressions.

The possession of a genuine and persistent sense of poetry is argued by the fact that a good proportion of the really fine lines are already there in the earlier versions, such as these from "Midnight":

1. Poems: 1854, p.56.

2. Poems: 1875, p.136.

---- The wind sings loud,
The sharp moon presses against the cloud,
And cuts it through: anon she seems
Set in a ruff, and her great white face
Looks silly and sad from the void blue space;¹

On the other hand an advance in technique is indicated by the fact that often where there is only a hint or a fumbling after an idea in the 1854 poem, it is brought out by greater economy of word and shapeliness of writing at a later date. "Monody" offers a good illustration. In 1854 Scott wrote:

----- honey of the heart
Was ever in his gift, and imaginings
Of purity were his, and life
Was ever around him in its unknown hopes.²

which was altered to:

----- honey of the heart
Was ever in his gift, and curious spells
Of richest fantasy were his, and life³
Was all before him luminous in its hopes.

One might summarize by saying that the basis of the later work was present in the earlier and that the advance was one of technique rather than inspiration. Scott had learned better craftsmanship: he greatly strengthened single lines as well as whole passages; he attempted to overcome roughness and awkwardness as well as sheer banality, which is, after all, one of the most usual and most legitimate kinds of revision; but, he added little for which there was not at least a pointer in 1854.

Poems 1875 is an end: A Poet's Harvest Home was a beginning again under a different sort of inspiration. Of its conception Scott speaks for himself:

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1. Poems: 1854, p.94. This is also in Poems: 1875, p.141.
 2. Poems: 1854: p.37.
 3. Poems: 1875, p.132.

With regard to the poems, the novelty of their unplanned production, while it deprived them of recognised form, gave them simplicity of expression, not one elocutionary or unnecessary word being admitted. -- This centum of poems or rhymes - many of them abrupt as epigrams should be, others ballads or short narratives or sonnets - came to me fully dressed, as it were, every morning between waking and rising, in the autumn months of 1881. The motive, with every line to be employed in its development, came to me as if from memory; they were written down in pencil on pieces of paper I had placed under my pillow the night before. Every day I thought, now the good fairy has exhausted himself, I shall have no more! but still it went on till I had a good many over a hundred, some mornings bringing me two or three.

The silence had virtually lasted from 1854 until the publication of A Poet's Harvest Home: twenty-eight years during which he knew no press of inspiration. The volume shows unmistakable signs of age in spite of its ease of composition; it is very frequently reminiscent or autobiographical in subject; in fact there is a note of wistfulness reflecting the years of retirement; it is more orthodox and has none of the reach and strangeness of his early work; and it is generally simple in metre and often in thought, as if Scott has learnt that difficulty will damn a poet. The second part of "Hortus Paradisi" sums up the new note:

'When blooms are best, they 'gin to go!
Our moralising gardener said;
Yes, it must indeed be so,
Thus nature's cycle must be read.

But if the longing of the heart
Is to be listened to at all,
'Tis merely sad from friends to part,
When the face turns against the wall.

The curtain falls this side the sun,
But we upon the farther side
Shall find another walk begun
With flowers as fair on fields as wide.

1. A.N.I., 303-304.

If this hath been so from of old,
What multitudes of souls wake there!
Their earth-like motives dead and cold,
With other names, if names they bear.

Thus we grope this side the sun,
Blind-folded children play just so:
Time is eternity begun
'When blooms are best, they 'gin to go'.¹

On first impression this volume seems very different from Scott's other poetry. The shortness of the pieces, the more regular verse instead of his former roughness, the lighter touch, seem closer to Austin Dobson and the British Museum poets of the late 1800s. Little in the volume rises above the general level: his poetry is more even, but duller, and this is unlike the young man who could be vivid in a couple of lines and flat for twenty. Yet, on a closer look, the connections with Scott's early writing become more prominent than the differences. He writes about much the same subjects which had interested him from the beginning; the newness lies in the proportions of each kind of poetry in the book. This miscellany shows Scott in his home, among his friends, as none of his other books had done. He finds contentment with children and delight in their games:

The boughs with dark-brown leaves o'erspread,
And crimsoned fruit; the sky pure white,
With dense blue clefts that look so high,
Everything so sharp and bright,
Made up a picture chased outright
My tiresome news; besides in joy,
The happy household voices too,
That touch the heart, a welcome threw
About me, ---²

This seems to be an entirely new theme, yet a similar poem, "The School Children", has its roots in part of "Rosabell", written while Scott was still

1. P.H.H., 1893, p.70.
2. Ibid, p.56.

at home in Edinburgh. Simple writing about subjects close at hand had been attempted from the beginning, on John Wilson's advice, but was only developed later. A true Blake-like simplicity had eluded Scott, but now it was caught with assurance in such a poem as "Little Boy", Part IV. A great many more poems are written round the day or the scene and this group has a clear relation to The Old Scotch House. Scott seems to have no breath for a long poem now, and generally concentrates on making one point. This, together with a tendency to moralise, I read as a sign of age:

Speech is silver, silence gold:
Speech goes out,
Speech roams about,
To market flies, is bought and sold:
Silence at home spins fold on fold,
Folds thick or thin
To wrap her in,
Thoughts strong or weak,
Spins she round her body bare,
Having nothing else to wear:
But speech is silver, silence gold!
Why should we speak?¹

Scott seems to have little that is important to say, but at their best these slight pieces, particularly the love poems, are gracefully turned.

Rose Leaves

Once a rose ever a rose, we say.
One we loved and who loved us
Remains beloved though gone from day;
To human hearts it must be thus,
The past is sweetly laid away.

Sere and sealed for a day and year
Smell them, dear Christina, pray,
So nature treats its children dear,
So memory deals with yesterday,
The past is sweetly laid away.²

1. Ibid, p.96.

2. Ibid, p.98.

His poems about love are not deep and passionate, but light and tender; the love of the young unspoilt children he sees, rather than that of their elders. At their worst the slightness of many of the poems is irritating, and though Scott concludes:

The best is often nearest home¹

the poem in which it comes, "Of me", may be held to give us cause to doubt the wisdom of this for Scott. It is almost equally disconcerting when he makes an attempt to be humorous, a note which had not before appeared in his poetry, and which is alarmingly heavy. The story of the portly monk who asked his patron-saint for help in mounting his horse and then leapt upon it with such vigour that he went right over the other side, ends in Scott's worst vein:

He rubbed his shin, set straight his hood,
And to his saint again he cried,
Worse and worse! you're over good,
I always like to stop half way!²

His finest poetry, and a kind in which he had made very definite progress, was the ballad. A Poet's Harvest Home contained a fair proportion of these, and in them Scott found the true ballad simplicity which he had missed in the strange ill-defined narratives with refrains of Poems: 1875, close to Rossetti in their form. "Glenkindie" is perhaps the finest, with its odd graceful stanzas:

Now he wore not that collar of gold,
His dress was forest green,
His wondrous fair and rich mantel
Had lost its silvery sheen.

No tongue can tell how sweet it was,
How far and yet how near,
We saw the saints in Paradise,
And bairnies on their bier.³

1. Ibid, p.75.

2. Ibid, p.24.

3. Ibid, p.18 and p.20.

None reached the sustained heights of "The Witch's Ballad", but over and over again Scott showed that he had an ear for a promising story, though he sometimes failed in the making of story into ballad. It was not usually so much a failure of expression now as that he did not make enough of his material. He seemed content to leave it unexplored, a quality which no doubt has connections with the slightness of most of the poetry in the book. The volume was published in a most pleasant and delicate binding in 1882, a very pretty little book, according to William Morris. Scott was delighted with its reception by many old friends, who no doubt valued it for sentimental rather than poetic reasons. Their only critical opinion confirmed his mature view that short poems are more effective than long ones.

During the last eight years of his life, in the words of his editor:

He wrote very little verse. All his life it had been a principle with him never to write verse except under a strong inspiration, and this excitement being dangerous was not encouraged. Now and again however, the impulse seized him and would not be denied.¹

The result was the twenty-one short poems printed as an Aftermath in the second edition of A Poet's Harvest Home, which did not appear until after his death, when it was seen through the press by his literary executor, William Minto. It was printed in an edition of 300 copies and probably added little to his fame. The poems in the Aftermath are mainly reflective or reminiscent in subject. Several are printed in Autobiographical Notes in the context of their composition. Scott more often writes sadly now, aware of the passing seasons and their tale of years slipping away, but he seems to have found a

1. A.N.II, 330.

peace of mind which contrasts strangely with the questioning of his early poetry:

But now the book is closed, the dusk falls low
Upon the unknown sea: For me no more
The Pleiades and Bear will shine: I go;
My unknown home is on the further shore,
And when my darkened eyes mark naught below
The Mighty Hand shall guide me as before.¹

To give a verdict on Scott's poetic talents is a depressing task. He was so plainly not a good minor poet: this is a distinguished class and few really merit the title. His longer philosophical poems had not the extravagance and colour of an Orion or Festus to command attention, and his shorter poems were very unequal. Altogether he wrote only two or three outstanding poems and some vivid single lines or short passages in amongst duller work. Scott's most positive virtue was his originality, and it is no doubt an achievement for a man who is not a very good poet to be original rather than imitative. W. M. Rossetti, summing up a study of Scott as a poet, said of him:

Mr. Scott has undoubtedly been an independent, an original poet, moving along a track of his own, not affecting discipleship nor courting association - and yet so far in harmony with the larger forces of thought in his time that he is found, now his poems are collected, to have been working in like line with other poets, his coevals or juniors ---²

The distinction Rossetti makes is valuable: Scott is interesting because he offers his personal meditation on some of the current problems of the nineteenth century; the prostitute at one extreme and life after death at the other. He was not afraid of hard thought himself and he aimed at giving his

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1. P.H.H., 1893, p.194.
 2. Macmillan's Magazine, Vol. XXXIII, March 1876, W. M. Rossetti, "William Bell Scott and Modern British Poetry", p.418 et seq.

audience something which was intellectual and fairly strong meat. His main concern was to state his thought clearly, but at the same time there seems no doubt that he sought some graces of expression.

This question of Scott's power of expression is the stumbling block for most of his readers. Almost all his critics agree that the power of his conceptions far surpassed his ability to put them into poetry. Yet in this also, Scott's striving for originality is the clue. He seemed to be seeking for some way of writing which would simulate the processes of his thought, but the result was rough and lacked polish. Except for his sonnets, which were competent in craftsmanship, Scott did not seem to concern himself with a study of metres and verse forms. His poetry shows little imitation of other writers because he was not prepared to study and practise the art of poetry in this way. This does not mean that he did not admire other poets and show the influence of this admiration in his work. I have mentioned Keats and Shelley as early masters: the actual resemblance between Scott's work and their's is slight. There is some verbal imitation at first, but Scott soon departs from the lyrical-philosophical manner of writing because he has none of the passionate spirit of Shelley to give it life. Similarly, though he wrote one or two poems in the style of Keats, he quickly gave it up, for his was not a rich and sensuous appreciation of beauty. There is a natural, and I am sure unconscious, resemblance to Coleridge's reflective poems such as "The Lime-Tree Bower or "Frost at Midnight"; but whereas Coleridge makes a momentary mood and its natural setting full of significance and draws the whole together, Scott lets the same sort of thing slip through his fingers and the relationship

escapes him. There is little doubt that Scott would have wished to write like Blake in his short lyrics, but unfortunately he started from the opposite end with a slight notion which was adequately expressed in a short, simple poem, rather than with an immense, almost incomprehensible idea.

Many critics have found in Scott a resemblance to Tennyson, based on his desire to write naturally about everyday events and surroundings. I cannot see this resemblance and Scott's own opinion of Tennyson would seem to make it very unlikely:

Really Gardiner's daughters and 16 year old Mauds with murdering lovers, as well as consumptive music-masters and donkey-poets making mannerless love to proud ladies are very closely allied to things silly, so at last only the juveniles will be the readers of poetry. --- As for Woolner and his worship of Tennyson, surely that is excessive. He called Tennyson the "Mighty giant of the modern ages"!! looking round him with an expression that said plainly, dissent from me if you dare!¹

Scott has the marks of a man who would have dearly loved to write good poetry and who constantly tried. He saw things as possible subjects, and occasionally brought off a graceful poem if he was simple and short. It would be dishonest to talk of Scott's poetry without giving one such successful poem - a lyric from "Rosabell":

I've come through the fields to meet thee, lass,
Over the meadows misty green,
Before the sun has dried the grass,
Or the earliest bird is seen.

I've come through the rye to meet thee, lass,
Through the long rye-rigs deep,
Before the clouds from the hill-tops pass,
While the sheep even seem to sleep.

1. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 4 November 1856.

My father's wains are on the highway,
We will meet them by the tree,
And drive to the town this market day
In each other's company.

Then dip thy face in the water clear,
Lave thy neck, thy shoulders fair,
Quickly lave thy boddice, dear,
And quickly snood thy hair.

For I've come through the rye to meet thee, lass,
Over the meadows misty green,
Before the clouds from the hill-tops pass,
Ere the plover or lark are seen.¹

In conclusion, one can only think that most people with Scott's limited talents would have abandoned the idea of poetry-writing early in life, or at least never have thought of publishing. It is difficult to know how much Scott wrote which never appeared but judging from his discussion of his work in letters, and the absence of unpublished MSS. it was probably little. His published work seems to represent his entire output.

1. A.N.I., 137.

CHAPTER XVIII

Scott the Artist

If one reads William Bell Scott's name in a modern book it is most probable he is mentioned as an artist, for his paintings have stood the test of time more successfully than any of his other productions. While his poetry is lost under the dust of second-hand bookshops, and his connection with the School of Design hidden in the obscurity of Parliamentary Reports and newspaper files, his pictures are still known and reproduced, his work seen by those who visit art galleries or have come to Wallington Hall since it was opened to the public by the generous provisions of Sir Charles Trevelyan. As I have made enquiries for Scott's major paintings, or had them shown to me, I have never heard an adverse comment about his work as an artist. On the contrary, those competent to judge have always surprised me by the warmth of their admiration for Scott's 'sense of picture' and sound craftsmanship.¹

All his life Scott found great pleasure in painting. This was in most marked contrast to the sense of difficulty and strain which assailed him when he was writing all but his last volume of poetry. It was probably a difference of purpose which distinguished the two arts, even more than the proportionate talent Scott showed for them. In poetry he was conscious of his message and laboured under a painful sense of vocation; in painting he seemed to have no ulterior motive and no sense of urgency. It is probable that Scott's art

1. A letter I received from John Woodward, Assistant Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, 8 December 1948, is a good example of this. He writes: "Probably the finest work you will find by him (Scott) is his superb portrait of Swinburne in the hall of Balliol College. There is a rough etching of this, as far as I remember, in Bell Scott's journal, which gives no idea of its power."

would not have continued so free and spontaneous if it had ever been his bread-and-butter occupation. As it was it remained a lucrative hobby. Only once, when Scott was a young man living in London, did it seem as if he was going to succeed in making a living by his pictures, but providentially he failed, and painting continued to bring him refreshment and delight during a hard-working, sometimes unhappy, life and a long retirement.

Yet Scott's delight in painting did not mean that it took the first place in his hierarchy of values for creative work. Poetry was at the peak, considered by him as the finest way of expression; critical work, which he despised, was at the bottom. Painting had its place somewhere between the two. It was however unique amongst his activities in that it both engaged his talents and energies to his satisfaction and brought him tangible success in the form of money and praise. In contrast to what he said of his critical prose, it is pleasant to learn that Scott felt all the work he did in art, commissioned or not, to be worthy of his powers. There was no question of apologising for its production.

Scott is indebted to his boyhood for his unselfconscious pleasure in art. At home, in the winter evenings, painting was part and parcel of the children's play. They quarrelled over the prints their father brought home from his workshop; laughed over the quaintly literal illustrations in his books of poetry. When Scott was quite small his elder brothers, greatly impressed by their first visit to a public art exhibition, returned home to organise one

of their own. They

screened off a recessed dormer window and charged everyone in the family a penny each to get within the screen and see the prints daubed over with colour with which they had covered the interior.¹

Yet as a systematic introduction to art that which Scott received was dangerously limited. It was almost entirely by way of engravings, most of them landscapes of "some castle, gentleman's 'seat', or church."² Many of these were his father's own work, or were produced in his shop. The boy learnt the names of the artist and unconsciously formed his taste. It was Hogarth and Blake who, for different reasons, made the most profound impression. Hogarth filled William with loathing "and made the little sister cry";³ Blake made him solemn, and, many years later, remembering his childish awe, he expressed it in a sonnet:

And now that age hath shriven and
tensured me,
When labouring much in thriftless fields
hath filled,
The tablets of my memory, these burn
With their old fires; within them still
I see
An Inspiration in art little skilled;
My heart wakes up, my childhood awes return.⁴

Scott was unusually silent about his own growing powers as an artist, and rarely expressed any ambitions in the way of painting. His attendance at the Antique Class of the Trustees Academy; his first visit to London to sketch at the British Museum and Hampton Court; or that to Paris, where he made many

1. A.N.I, 20.

2. Ibid, p.13.

3. Ibid, p.17.

4. Ibid, p.24.

pencil sketches of the curious streets and houses; these scarcely find mention in his autobiography. The years of training, and the considerable amount of work he did on his own, slipped into the background at a time when poetry was in the forefront of his mind, and Scott never made a re-orientation. From his own evidence we must conclude that the way was made plain for him to become a painter; so plain that the prospect kindled no real enthusiasm.

Art classes at the Trustees Academy, no matter how much they were enjoyed for themselves, were of course associated in Scott's mind with the drudgery of engraving and the anxieties of his father's failing business; hard companions for a young boy. Yet it seems that he must always have painted because he liked doing so, for the sketchbooks kept at Penkill contain a good deal of early work, some done when Scott was only fifteen, and before he applied for admission to the Trustees Academy. Most of these are landscapes, no doubt exercises in placing the interest and making a piece of scenery into a picture. One, dated at Kippen, August 1826, which must have been painted in a holiday period, is of country we know that Scott loved. It seems hardly likely that it was a task. In the same way his delightful sketches of his everyday surroundings; the home in Edinburgh; his father's workshop; betray a certain affection for these places and a delight in drawing them.

In January 1827 Scott applied for admission to the Trustees Academy with two landscapes, water-colours in tones of sepia. He received a very comprehensive training in art and his sketchbooks contain work of very various kinds done as exercises and not obviously related to the style familiar in the mature artist. At the same time it is plain that much of it was sound

preparation for his later painting, particularly for the large historical pictures with which Scott made his name as an artist. The drawing of casts in the antique class; or of figures in costume from the tapestries at Hampton Court were excellent groundwork, though Scott seems to have had little exercise in the composition of a subject picture. His skill in this was evidently in-born, for the sketchbooks show little evidence of practice in work requiring invention. On the contrary, the many studies of vases, ornaments and such things which Scott made during his student days at the British Museum seemed more likely to be preparation for the careful but pedestrian workmanship of the Antiquarian Gleanings. The sketches of furniture and objets d'art in this book can add little to his reputation as an artist, though it is true that, like those of figures and costume, they are an indirect preparation for his large oils; arguing an observant eye, an interest in the adjuncts of historical painting, and a care over detail. Scott proved most truly that he was an artist, and could not resist the impulse to try and render what he saw on paper, by his many colour studies of the sky in various moods, of sunset, and the play of light. These he continued to paint in his leisure time all his life, though they were of no immediate practical value and were never intended to come before the public.

Scott's mature work was not of course only in large scale oils. The pencil-sketches of old houses in Edinburgh and Paris which he kept from his student days may not seem to be in the tradition of the big historical pieces, but they do foretell the artist who could paint such small water-colours as the Entrance to the Black-Gate and the Bigg Market, both scenes from Newcastle.¹

1. These two pictures, painted in 1846, are now in the Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle.

These have no particular individuality, but are what one might call "drawing-room pictures", pleasant and unobtrusive. In the second place Scott was also a decorator. When he began his work at Wallington it may have seemed that he had little training in the requirements of formal decoration. It is therefore interesting to discover proof of his studies in a design of 1847 for a large screen which is in almost exactly the same tradition as the spandrels at Wallington. It was to be painted with figures in medallions, surrounded by foliage in a decorative pattern.

During the preparatory period in Edinburgh Scott exhibited little original work, though he sent to the R.S.A. several engravings from pictures. In 1834 a landscape¹ of his was accepted for exhibition by this body and appeared with a set of etchings of Loch Katrine and the Trossachs. None of this work promised an artist of very original qualities. It was not until he came to London that he made any show of individuality. As with poetry his debut was very modest: a set of etchings of subjects from the Civil War did not attract any attention, and the picture which really marked the beginning of his career was 'The Old English Ballad Singer', exhibited and sold in 1839. It was original in subject and composition and distinct in style. Scott gained confidence after this and during a very busy life found a place for various expressions of his artistic impulse, from large canvases in oil to delicate engravings of his own invention. It is interesting that the manner in which inspiration came to him and was translated into the finished work appears to have been similar for poetry and painting. Although Scott was not a 'poetic painter',

1. This picture represented a dark forest, with a hermit praying. The subject was taken from Coleridge's verse in The Ancient Mariner:

He kneels at morn and noon and eve,
He hath a cushion plump:
It is the moss that wholly hides
The rotted old oak stump.

nor yet a poet of verbal pictures, there is a connection between the two arts. Scott's sense of story is comparable to his eye for a composition, and once the idea for poem or picture was in his mind he could be fairly sure of getting the main lines at once. Medieval-historical subjects attracted him in both mediums: the balladist and painter are very clearly related, and in each role Scott had success with the grotesque and macabre. It is however a matter for regret that his power of invention was surer than his power of expression whether he was writing of Cuthbert and Bede, or painting them as they might have looked in life.

One must of necessity group Scott's large output of work and it falls naturally into four classes: the two decorative schemes at Wallington and Penkill; the easel pictures in oil; the smaller works such as sketches and water-colours; and the illustrations. The first-mentioned are his central and most important work. He had had no actual experience in carrying out the kind of painting he undertook at Wallington, though he had no doubt followed and contributed to the debate on mural decoration which was a leading topic in the mid-nineteenth century, revived by the Government's decision to decorate the new Houses of Parliament. How Sir Walter Trevelyan came to be convinced of Scott's capabilities we do not know, for although he had by then painted many historical subjects and exhibited frequently in Newcastle, the decoration of the Hall at Wallington meant grappling with difficulties of architecture, and designing in every detail the purely formal decoration which was to set off the eight pictures illustrating scenes from Border history. His only work

of anything like similar function and scale had been the two cartoons submitted to the Westminster Competitions and these found no success. Certainly Scott does not seem to have looked for such a commission as the decoration of Wallington, though this is difficult to know for certain because we do not hear of it from him until he has already been invited to undertake it and has entered into the delight of first plans. He accepted the commission with equanimity in spite of the fact that it presented obvious difficulties. Probably Scott appreciated this challenge to his powers after the dullness of routine work in Newcastle.

The question it presents to his critics is whether Scott was primarily a decorator, or a painter of easel pictures who chanced to succeed in using eight of his finest in a single decorative scheme. This is not a question debated only by his critics. It was originally raised by Scott himself because so many people commented on his work as if it should conform to the requirements of fresco. He therefore felt it necessary to explain that his was an experiment and had its own standards.

The paintings in the Hall at Wallington and on the staircase at Penkill have been described in their turn. By reason of their setting they were schemes of decoration; and rightly they were judged by those who saw them as decorative rather than pictorial. No one who had read Scott's letters about the planning of the work at Wallington could doubt that he had a thorough grasp of decorative principles and an understanding of the beauty of pure ornament. Hubert Horne, writer of a discerning appreciation of Scott, records that he said:

I have always felt that ornament should be imaginative, and that anyone, with poetry in his nature, would find decoration a free field for invention. The great thing is to keep the invention sane, and subject to a beautiful impression.¹

This statement, it will be noticed, looks for qualities in decorative painting almost contrary to those one would expect to find in pictorial art, and the eight great canvases at Wallington, with their historical subjects do not readily seem to fit in. At Penkill Scott did not so obviously stray from the bounds of decorative art, for the painting there has the flatness, lightness and brightness of colour which properly belong to the mural.

Scott was clear in his own mind about the character of his pictures at Wallington.

In the Hall the pictorial treatment prevails certainly,² he wrote to Lady Trevelyan while he was working on them. However, when the finished series was exhibited in London he found that those who saw them judged them with their decorative purpose in mind, and a word of explanation to Sir Walter was necessary, so that he could correct this opinion:

The pictures happily are not strictly mural, although some of the critics have chosen to represent them so.³

Yet all the insistence in the world by Scott did not clear up the misunderstanding and he met it again six years later when he gave two papers to the Institute of British Architects on his work at Wallington and Penkill. After the first paper a speaker commented on Scott's work according to the generally expected qualities of mural decoration:

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1. Hubert P. Horne, William Bell Scott, Poet, Painter and Critic, reprinted in pamphlet form from The Hobby Horse, magazine of the Century Guild, Chiswick Press, 1891.
 2. W.B.S. to Lady T., [1861?]
 3. W.B.S. to Sir Walter Trevelyan, Penkill Castle, by Girvan, Ayrshire, [1861?].

I must say I think they are treated too much like oil pictures. I think they would have been better done to distemper a fresco, and in much lighter colours. It also appears to me that a more uniform tone is required.¹

Scott's reply at that meeting was concerned entirely with the relative merits of fresco and oil as the medium for murals, but at the next meeting he took up the point again and attempted to explain that his pictures should not be judged by the standards of decorative work. They were:

-- rather easel pictures than wall decorations, having comparatively little of the simplicity induced by tempera painting and necessitated by fresco.²

The best way is surely to judge them for what their author claimed them to be: easel-pictures. At once it becomes plain that Scott fell between two stools. The difficulty lay in his attempt to put historical subject-pictures into a scheme of decoration where they had to compete with the ornamental work on the pilasters and spandrels. In so doing Scott tended to a "vividness of effect" and "absence of tone"³ which, though it gave dominance to his work was not a quality to be praised if that work was to be judged purely according to the requirements of easel pictures.

Standing face to face with the eight great canvases at Wallington, however, one may well feel that all this is a matter of technicalities and that the pictures create their own order - within which they are a triumphant success. The scenes from history are so vividly realised and painted with such vigour that they impress by their very force. There is no doubt they

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1. W. B. Scott, Mural Decorations at the Mansion of Sir Walter Trevelyan Bart., at Wallington, a paper read to the Royal Institute of British Architects, 2 December 1867.
 2. W. B. Scott, On Mural Paintings for Penkill Castle, a paper read to the Royal Institute of British Architects, 6 January 1868.
 3. The Daily News, date unknown.

are major work, and it is wise to consider them amongst his other paintings as the finest and most sustained expression of his powers. They reflect a deep interest in their historical backgrounds; a loving care over details of costume and setting; and above all a capacity for sheer hard work which is all the more remarkable when one remembers that these canvases were painted during infrequent holidays and brief leisure.

Scott's easel pictures are a very mixed group united by the fact that he always shunned the trivial in art. In his critical writing he lamented that so much of it was seen in exhibitions and presumably was well received by the public. In his own painting he concentrated on intellectual quality. Like most of the Victorians, Scott valued a good subject, though his moralising was not as obtrusive as it was in many of his contemporaries. At the same time he was not afraid of employing symbolism: the skull, the hour-glass and the dove round the dying Bede are examples of clear and simple use of this device. The 'Eve of the Deluge', which showed the wickedness of the world before the flood had an obvious moral; what Scott called the "sentiment" of his picture. He went on:

It is a beautiful and calm night, no premonition felt. They ate, they drank, they builded, etc. till the day when Noah entered the Ark, and the waters came and carried them all away.¹

There is no doubt that a notice which singled him out as a "thoughtful, masculine and original painter"² gave him great satisfaction because it mentioned those qualities for which he most wished to be valued.

1. W.B.S. to W.M.R., 33 Elgin Road, [18 February 1865].
2. The Shilling Magazine, June 1865.

Scott's favourite subjects were historical ones; either particular incidents or general scenes. He shows a considerable range; 'The Old English Ballad Singer'; 'Chaucer, John of Gaunt and their Wives'; 'King Alfred disguised as a Harper'; 'James VI examining the Witches of North Berwick'; 'Bell Ringers and Cavaliers celebrating the entry of Charles II into London'; and the 'Building of the New Castle'. Very often these subjects seemed to demand an epic scale: 'The Veil of the Temple Rent in Twain' or the 'Eve of the Deluge' are two such. Scott seems to have had no difficulty in working on bold lines or of realising a scene; and it is these qualities which perhaps show most clearly his relations to David. He had a ready gift of bringing the past to life; "a rare fidelity to history".

As a contrast to such strong and vigorous pictures, some of Scott's oils showed a quality we rarely associate with him; a delicate fancy. Instead of praise for the strength and sweep of his work we read for instance that 'The Fairy Barge of Queen Mab' is "a little gem of exquisite fancy. It is sweetly painted".¹ The circling fairies of 'Cockcrow', hastening away at dawn, are yet another witness to Scott's light and delicate touch.

Scott was generally counted by the critics as belonging to the Pre-Raphaelite movement. They had a pre-selected stock of phrases indicating faults in perspective, stiffness and inelegance, and over-insistence on detail, which they used whenever they were reviewing a new picture from a member of this

1. The Caledonian Mercury, February 1845.

school. Therefore what they said of Scott is usually to be read as part of the traditional praise or censure of Pre-Raphaelite qualities, rather than any attempt at an appraisal of his individual worth. It is true that Scott did show faults in perspective; even Miss Boyd was pained by them. But whether this was because of a Pre-Raphaelite outlook which did not consider such things of first importance, or whether Scott was incapable of getting perspective right it is difficult to say. A critic wrote of 'The Danes':

- - beautifully painted; yet so Pre-Raphaelitishly, that the perspective suffers.¹

a comment which bears every mark of being the expected one, instead of being an opinion founded on unbiased observation. It was also true that Scott showed a certain inelegance alongside the strength of his painting. He realised this himself when he wrote:

--- will you kindly look at the hood of the saint and let me know if you find any resemblance to a bird's beak in a ludicrous way,²

But the critic who said:

Like his more distinguished brother, this artist disclaims or is incapable of embodying high 'elegance or beauty'³ ---

made an absurd generalisation. On the other hand, praise was accorded him for the care with which he painted every detail of costume and ornament. It was a care not only in the painting, though this was sometimes so finely detailed that one can for instance read the newspaper in the picture 'Iron and Coal', but was more particularly a care in obtaining expert warranty for the dresses

1. The Gateshead Observer, June 1858.

2. W.B.S. to Lady T., N., 1 February 1857.

3. An Edinburgh paper, probably The Scotsman, of 1858.

and furniture of the period he was painting, and in considering most carefully the suitability of his models. One may learn his labour from his letters to Sir Walter and Lady Trevelyan, and it is therefore strange to read that a few years earlier she had criticised him for "want of models and close study".¹

Perhaps his increasing care was due to the watchful eye of his patroness, and not, as the critics thought, from his Pre-Raphaelite affinities; though whatever its origin it is true that

the innumerable minute and faithful touches throughout the picture are all in keeping with the principles of the new school in English art; or, as we should rather have said, are admirable elucidations of those principles --²

Scott's occasional comments on Pre-Raphaelite principles do not always carry conviction that he understood the movement, but in his own practice he demonstrated that he had grasped a fundamental; although careful detail is to be admired, it must not obscure the main lines of the picture: the "design which goes into one's mind".³ Whether he always succeeded is a matter for individual decision, but a combination of the two beauties of detail and strong composition was his aim.

Scott was not remarkable as a colourist and could indeed be very unskilful. His preliminary studies show that the scheme of colours to be used in a picture was rarely achieved without some unsuccessful experiments first. One would look for Scott's distinctive qualities in his powers of design. Indeed he used one form of composing a picture so frequently that it is rightly regarded as characteristic of his work; this was to take a view which had a foreground

1. The Scotsman, March 1852.

2. The Northern Daily Express, 12 December 1856.

3. Ibid.

of considerable height and a background far below. Such a composition combines nearness and detail, distance and generalisation; striking foreground and figures, dwindling people and scene. He used it in 'The Roman Wall', 'The Descent of the Danes'; 'The Building of the New Castle', 'Dürer in Nuremberg'; and in a modified form in the 'Eve of the Deluge'. Yet it must not be thought that Scott's power of composition was stereotyped. He was in fact a considerable experimentalist, and one of his most interesting pieces of work is The Entry of Charles II into London. This picture is shaped like a narrow stained-glass window and shows the belfry of a church as if it were cut vertically to expose its three different floors, rather in the manner of a simultaneous stage setting. The middle section is very dark and helps to confine one's attention to the lower and widest part which shows the figures of the bell ringers. On the other hand the composition very cleverly carries the eye upwards by its curve and the clever placing of two lights.

Scott's youthful ambition was to be a landscape painter, yet pure landscape subjects are not a well-known part of his mature work. He very soon realised that the public were not interested in them since historical and anecdotal pictures had taken their fancy. Scott did however draw and paint many landscapes for his own pleasure, finding abundant material in the historical and picturesque places near Newcastle and later in the lovely country round Penkill. There in the castle most of these small pictures now hang, witnessing to his skill in this kind of work. Moreover it was only after coming upon a rough sketch for the setting of Scott's picture of the building of the Roman Wall at Craigloch up on the Northumbrian moors that I realised

the striking quality of much of the landscape painting in pictures which are first and foremost historical. In the same careful way Scott studied the background for 'St. Cuthbert', and seascape for 'Grace Darling', and it is interesting to discover that separate from the figures these have their own beauty. His small water-colours are many of them very delightful; some pleasant country; others curious old buildings in the towns he knew or had visited; Newcastle, Edinburgh; Paris, Nuremberg. Scott loved the country round Penkill; the rocks and sea and the stretch of sky with its magnificent sunsets behind Ailsa Craig. His style of landscape painting changed considerably over the years, from the conventional gloom and twisted trees which were closely related to his father's style of engraving, to his natural studies of the beauties of light and colour, wide sweeps of sky and sea. His only picture of a town scene which is readily available is that in the autobiography which shews the view of Edinburgh Castle from his father's workshop in Parliament Square.¹ It is only a rough sketch but attractive and surprisingly modern in its style. Scott's only large picture which showed a subject like this fully worked out was that of the Market-place at Hexham in Northumberland. His own description of its painting explains his mature attitude to landscape:

I was 'but a landscape-painter', and found how happy a contented soul might be so spending his life, were it not for the ambition of doing great things in art, of intensifying the impressions directly received, of accepting the doctrine 'Art for Art's sake', of improving upon nature, indeed. But, alas, on the other hand, not to do so is to be obscure, to take no place in the exhibition-room, to lose the approbation of the town.²

An unfamiliar quality which appears in Scott's collection of sketches is that of humour; humour in drawing people. Scott made no particular claim

1. A.N.I., facing p.44.

2. A.N.I., 224.

to be a portraitist, yet his occasional essays do seem to catch the personality of the subject, even if they are made rather ludicrous by faults of execution. His Swinburne is a case in point; a portrait much argued over and certainly not complimentary, yet probably true as a caricature is true.¹ An early study of his father asleep is very fine, as is the sketch of Letitia recovering after a serious illness; neither shows any exaggeration. Scott's humour however emerges in his studies of groups of people; the ladies at his private class at the School of Art; unknown people in trains; children in the Corporation School.

Chorea Sancti Viti, the set of designs Scott published in 1851, may be considered as in some sort a link between his smaller pictures and sketches and his illustrations. Properly they do not belong to either, for they are a series of drawings, independent of any narrative, which tell their own story of a self-seeking man's progress from mysterious birth, through all the vices which can be combined with respectability, to inglorious death. The designs were self-invented and carried out in exactly the style of Scott's illustrative work. When a Newcastle friend obtained permission to republish them with Illustrative Poems twelve years later, though Scott would have been angry at the imputation, the designs took their place as illustrations of that poetical commentary, so for all practical purposes they may be considered.

When one looks at Scott's strongly composed and boldly drawn historical pictures or the massive and powerful single heads in the sketchbooks, it is difficult to realise that the rather thin and sometimes feeble drawing of the

1. There is an etching from this portrait in A.N.II, facing p.18.

illustrations is the work of the same hand. Scott did more illustrative work than is generally realised, both of his own poetry and the works of other authors. He had a characteristic style which shews little variation in spite of different subjects. One of Scott's earliest commissions was to illustrate The Nursery Rhymes of England by James Halliwell, but what he did was slight; a few head and end designs not at all indicative of his possibilities. The first book which showed a fair and representative collection of his works was his own poem The Year of the World. The illustrations in this were very similar in style to those of Chorea Sancti Viti and the later editions of various poets he edited for Messrs. Routledge and must be treated as one group. They are very thin line drawings with a great deal of white background and many of the faces are either feeble or ugly in expression. Scott formed a curious habit of drawing the clothes of his figures as if they emerged from their bodies, and of making them transparent. Scott's powers of invention were not great; he was straightforward as an illustrator, rather than vastly original, and seemed to work in the tradition of Millais rather than that of Rossetti if the illustrations to the Moxon edition of Tennyson are any guide. At their best it is true Scott's illustrations do succeed: they shew delicacy of drawing, and excellent grouping, which includes a very good sense of using space. Most of them take the eye in competition with the text: some are undoubtedly imaginative in conception such as that to A Castle on the Rhine in the volume of Letitia Elizabeth Landon's poems. This illustration shews a scene which is conceived as a setting for something only suggested in the poem. The composition is very skilful and the eye is carried upwards

to the castle by the strong lines. Scott has managed to picture a village and give it an existence in a way which compares very favourably with Dürer's famous engraving of the village of Eytas. At their worst they are weak in expression, uninspired and even meaningless. Those to the Keats and Coleridge volumes published by Routledge are particularly poor.

Scott was curiously uneven in his powers but his general virtue was that he knew the value of simplicity and never erred by crowding too much into an illustration.

CHAPTER XIX

Scott the Critic and Editor.

At the age of seventy Scott wrote a valedictory poem which began:

So many years I've gone this way,
So many years! I must confess
Waste energies, much disarray,
Yet can I own no weariness,
Nor see I evening's shadows fall
Down my much inscribed wall:¹

This expressed the older man's feelings on his birthday, with all its sobering associations; and it was conventional enough. Yet, in spite of its conventionality, the poem gives us one important item of personal information about its author: that his life's activities had little apparent unity or direction. It was an observation frequently made by Scott in letters and conversation. On this occasion he assured his readers that it did not disturb him as he reminisced: he pictured his life as full and worthwhile. Yet over many years Scott had openly alternated between satisfaction and dissatisfaction with what he had accomplished. Many people are familiar with such a swing, though Scott had perhaps more reason than most for feeling it. It came not so much from the actual diversity of his interests as from the fact that the productions of his working and leisure time obviously varied in value in the sight of both their author and his public.

It is however, true that at times the very variety of his work seemed to accuse him of indecision. This was by no means an invariable feeling, for Scott spoke with pride :

-- of a period of active work of very various kinds, obeying the maxim,
'What thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might' --²

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1. P.H.H. 1893, p.147.
 2. Poems: 1875, p.VI.

Even when it assailed him most strongly he attempted to defend the rightness of what he had done, writing:

I was, indeed, haunted by the consciousness of having missed my mark by following 'all things by starts, and nothing long' - a habit that had become necessary to me; it was ruinous to me, in one way, but my salvation in another, assisting me in keeping up a naturally defective interest in life, and filling every moment with more than its due weight of occupation, my most efficient means of preventing the recurrent attacks of a species of nervous despair.¹

That Scott was conscious of some difficulty in apportioning his energies is apparent from the situation I have described in the preceding chapters. He was a poet and painter: painter not only of easel-pictures, but of mural decorations. He was a headmaster and writer of text-books on art as well as critiques and magazine articles. More variously he was an editor; illustrator and engraver; well-informed collector of prints; and, on one occasion, architect. Scott's excursions into various arts were not perhaps so remarkable at this period as they would have been at some; for amongst the Pre-Raphaelites it was not uncommon for a man to move from easel-painting or sculpture to poetry; from poetry to designing stained-glass windows. In Scott's case the diversity of interests was not so great as may appear at first sight. His activities were often related to a central theme; most probably some matter which had interested him from boyhood onwards, for his affections were abiding. For instance, his knowledge of engraving is the link which unites activities as various and widely spaced as writing his brother's biography; illustrating the book he called Antiquarian Gleanings, drawings of furniture, china, and curiosities of that sort in old houses in the North; compiling an illustrated catalogue of engravings; writing several

1. A.N.II, 169.

well-informed books on Albrecht Dürer and the Little Masters; and making a very fine private collection of their prints.

There is no doubt that poetry held a secure place in Scott's affections.

He wrote:

Untiring industry I certainly had, what my hand found to do I did with all my might - might of hand, not of mind, and mainly to meet the necessities of the hour. That accomplished I feel back upon my secret speculations in an ocean of regrets and tobacco smoke; and on my poetry, which shared in all the peculiarities of my nature.¹

Unfortunately he sought to exalt what could only be defended as a personal preference into a definite judgement of the relative value of his own work. Yet while he protested about the value of his truly creative work he could not entirely conceal a deep interest in his other occupations. Belittle them he could and did: but his interest extended far beyond mere conscientiousness. It is telling too that Scott could not bring himself to diminish the obvious success of his endeavours in these other spheres. He wrote with scarcely concealed pride:

--- oddly enough I received a creditable amount of consideration as a sensible fellow in common affairs!²

which would seem to indicate that any disparagement of mundane occupations was not very thorough. All in all it was a streak of vanity and a misguided sense of the poet's place which made Scott write as he did. He would have been more honest to admit a natural pleasure in all he attempted.

We are of course under no obligation to accept that Scott's affection for his poetry gives it prior claim to our commendation. After a consideration of all his work, the day to day routine of the art-school as well as the

1. A.N.I, 3.

2. Ibid, p.3.

prose-writing and painting, an independent critic may give a very different evaluation and even conclude that Scott wasted his energies and obscured his true worth by turning his back on his more prosaic talents and straining after other qualities he did not possess.

Scott had studied the conditions in England during the 1830s and 1840s when taste in art and art-manufactures was most debased; and at all times he was interested in effecting a radical cure. His headmastership of the School of Design has received high commendation. It proved the practical worth of Scott's abilities: and in that work he enjoyed the satisfaction of training numbers of young people to take pleasure in the practice of art and to have a right appreciation of it. His prose criticism, of both art and poetry, had a parallel function and commanded a wider audience than he could hope to have in the school. It is to this considerable body of writing that we may look for poetry's rival claimant on Scott's time and energy in the later years. The truest judgement of Scott's critical writing is not his own opinion; though that must probably be the starting-point and will in any case emerge very clearly. Ultimately, however, his work must face comparison with other writing which has a similar function.

But to begin with his own opinion. Scott recalls:

Among the literary work of the passing day I wrote a Christmas book on the Venetian School and one on the Spanish --- Others followed, on English Sculptors; English Landscape Painters; Italian Masters, Lesser and Greater, etc. These were better than they deserved to be, and only made me feel I was throwing my time away and was in danger of looking like a literary hack; so I did no more.¹

1. A.N.II, 170.

This brief reference comes in the Autobiographical Notes. It is deliberately casual and dismisses curtly one part of Scott's critical writing which, in amount at least, is prominent amongst his published work. At the same time it gives two important pieces of information: that Scott had ambitions to earn a literary reputation in another field, which we know to have been poetry; and that he felt commissioned 'hack-writing' to be beneath his dignity. He evidently believed that he could denigrate the 'kind' of writing, its subject and the circumstances of its production, yet still take pleasure in his natural qualifications for the task; Scott implies, in fact, that this work has revealed talents which he now felt he ought to use to more individual purpose.

We have seen that there was a friction in Scott's life between that which he was well qualified to do, but despised, and that which he chose but could not reach. It brought in its train dissatisfaction and restlessness; states of mind which might have been avoided had it not been for a perverseness bred in him. The critics remarked on 'a restless and ill-judged ambition' as the reason for David Scott's failure, and it was a measure of this same quality which disturbed William's peace of mind. W. M. Rossetti, one of his firmest friends and a critic of much the same calibre, might have served him as an example of a writer who had the good sense to regard the rather pedestrian memoir or magazine article, the editing of a poet or writing of a review, as an integral part of his literary activities, and work in which he might justly take pride. But Scott did not heed the example, and in the face of his open scorn of what he called 'hack-writing' the critic must establish other standards by which to judge this work. Did it promise to engage the energy and

interests of an intelligent man? What were the qualifications it required, and in what measure did Scott possess them?

The Victorians had a most astounding thirst for information and sought the appearance of a cultivated taste. This was catered for in one respect by the 'table-books' of the period: elegantly bound sets of engravings accompanied by an essay which introduced their readers to a school of art or the work of a great master. Essays and articles of this scope are intended for the general reader. Therefore they can only touch upon the main points of a large subject, seeking at once to make that subject understandable by the limited facts they can include, and to invite and stimulate further inquiry, the writer who embarks on such a task needs to be able to give a succession of facts, which are yet not quite characterless; and to be brief without being superficial.

Scott tackled the difficulties of such work most competently. His writing always gives the impression of being selected and simplified from an immensely fuller knowledge: consequently it is never thin. "An unusual amount of condensed information"¹ was deemed to characterise the Half-Hour Lectures, yet, at the same time, they are good general reading. Any essay of such limited length must make its main points clearly and immediately. This requires a firmness of touch in the writing: that "succinct, vivid and cheerful"² style which at least one reviewer found in Scott. It also demands the ability to make a statement and leave it without labouring it. In the articles he wrote for periodicals, Scott learnt to give coherence to his writing by concentrating

1. The Globe, 13 May 1861.

2. The Athenaeum, 10 August 1861.

on one main point round which he gathered the rest of his observations. Straightforwardness and good sense are essential; within the scope of an introduction there is not space for eccentric theories or personal rivalries, nor would it be the right battlefield. This does not mean however that the opinions expressed there should attempt to be impersonal. In fact, Scott was able to earn a reputation for sound judgement and a fair summary of the facts, while at the same time introducing a good deal that was personal in the way of anecdote, or the expression of pleasure in some aspect of his subject. These just and discriminating remarks about Ruskin are perhaps the supreme example in Scott of the critic's fairness combined with a personal interest in his subject which amounted almost to hatred:

As Turner with colours on cloth, so Ruskin with words in prose, for it is strange that a man with the speech of an angel should not be a poet, have both done more than any other men for English art, and yet have fulfilled a cycle, have become gigantic egotists and left the public exhausted.

Approaching his subject from an altogether new and emotional point of view, and gifted with something like a divine power of persuasion, all he said was at first assented to, partly because he said so much. That was not only true but like a revelation, but mainly because he has a supreme eloquence of speech.¹

Though Scott's essays and prefaces were popular, rather than scholarly works, they came under the eagle eye of the reviewers who were sticklers for accuracy and insisted on care over authorities. Scott, drawing on a lifetime's knowledge of some of his subjects, was not likely to be otherwise than accurate, but it is pleasant to find him recommended for this and to discover that his name is reckoned to be an indication of good taste and sound text in a book. He

1. William Bell Scott, British Landscape Painters, London, 1872, p.35.

himself always insisted that, while he used authorities for his skeleton of facts, the critical judgements involved in his essays, memoirs, prefaces, were always his own: and they were judgements which were in no sense non-committal, and sometimes sharp. Guiding the reader in appreciation was a more difficult task than all the assembling of facts, but a very needful task if we recollect the state of popular taste in art during the earlier part of the century. Once again Scott was commended for his efforts:

Mr. Scott has written with care and clearness, and is a capital guide to the formation of sound opinions on his subject.¹

Few men would have the gift of combining careful adherence to fact with independence of judgement, or would bring to ephemeral essays a thorough knowledge of the subject together with the sensitivity of the creative artist and the discrimination of a man of taste. Scott could be commended on almost every count and the one fault which *marred his work was seldom remarked by* his critics. Yet his affectation of modesty could be both infuriating and tedious, as when he wrote:

It is well for the writer of the following pages that the latest and most analytic works on our subject are not in the Spanish language. Those above mentioned have been his authorities for all the historical facts, and in some degree for the inferences and conclusions deduced from them. The critical verdict, where the author has ventured to express one, which he can only do within limitation, belongs to himself.²

All Scott's commissioned writing belongs to the years when he had retired from Newcastle and was supplementing his pension. It is therefore quite true to say that he welcomed it because it was lucrative, even if, at the same time, he belittled it because it required competence rather than inspiration. One

1. The Athenaeum, 10 December 1870.

2. William Bell Scott, Murillo and the Spanish School of Painting, London 1873, Preface, p.VI.

of his earliest contributions to journalistic literature must have been an article about ornamental art in England.¹ This combined a brief history of such art in Europe and the East with a comment on its present condition in England; all of which formed an excellent introduction for the more immediate story of the Central School of Design and a personal comment on the Newcastle Branch. Scott followed with a review of the art season of 1871 for Fraser's Magazine, of which J. A. Froude was then editor.² In a short space he managed to give, not a mere catalogue, but a summing-up of the year's activities round one or two clearly made general points. The essay showed a sense of form and was effectively rounded off. Scott gave the impression of knowing his subject, of having some definite requirements from art, and of not being afraid to make his writing personal. For instance, when he commented on the abnormal influx of French art he gave it as his considered opinion that internationalism in art is dangerous, that being one subject which should be at pains to retain its national characteristics. Throughout the essay one gets the impression that Scott was now making use of the insight he had gained during those early years in London when he observed the condition of art in England. Many of his conclusions seemed to have been in his mind since the 1830s and now he wrote:

We had, of course, the usual historical organ-grinding, the sentimentalising of Mary, Queen of Scots and Charles II, the unlicensed brutalising of Oliver Cromwell: we had also the same amount of sweet young women and their lovers, suggested by Haddon Hall backgrounds and theatrical costumes. Yet is the tide evidently rising in amount of learning, poetry, mental aims and feeling.³

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1. The Fortnightly Review, "Ornamental Art in England".
 2. Fraser's Magazine, New Series Vol. IV, August 1871.
 3. Ibid.

The same year Scott agreed to write a preliminary essay and notices of the artists to accompany a collection of engravings and woodcuts illustrating the British School of sculpture. This was an elegant 'table-book', most beautifully bound in blue cloth with a red and gold cover-design. In the preface Scott made some comment on his aim in this particular sort of critical writing. It was to find a course between a 'learned treatise' and 'the misty-fine writing' which represents an attempt by the critic to recreate in his reader's mind the emotional response evoked by the work of art he is studying. Scott's introductory essay is readable for the layman because of the sound generalisations and the way in which facts are carried along by narrative such as the fables of Prometheus or Pygmalion. Though a very general account, it is clear and well-summarized under main headings. As a piece of writing it has sufficient pace and assurance to gain immediate attention. Scott contrived to keep the interest of his readers by detail and story from his well-stocked mind, and by variation of style, from the firm, pleasant account of facts to the almost tender relation of an incident in which his personal affection was involved.

"Unable to go among other boys, Flaxman the sculptor," Scott tells us,

-- sought amusement among the 'images' and materials about him: he sat for months and years in a little stuffed chair raised so high that he could just see over the counter, trying to teach himself reading, both English and other languages, with such books as he could get, relieving one solitary occupation by another, the black chalk and paper being supplied him by his mother when his father was from home.¹

1. William Bell Scott, The British School of Sculpture, London, 1871, p.37.

British Landscape Painters, probably of the next year, is a similar book, handsomely bound, with a preliminary essay and biographical notices of the artists. In the preface, Scott Touched on various matters beside the subject in hand and contrived to introduce his own interpretation of the nineteenth century of 'progress' by relating it to his historical approach to the material of his book. His text is most readable, partly because it is interwoven with items of personal knowledge, and partly because it is often humorous and sharp. This kind of mention may incense readers, it will surely never leave them uninterested: it concerns a picture by George Barret:

Part of Melrose Abbey on the River Tweed, by moonlight. Belonging to his Grace the Duke of Buccleugh — (It is the Abbey, not the picture, that belonged to the Duke of Buccleugh.) The proprietorship of Barret's work was of little importance.¹

Venetian Painters, dating from about 1871-1872, was published by the same firm. It was if anything more vigorous and more definitely personal than the preceding work. Scott's assurance was clearly growing. In the preface he made a point of his actual acquaintance with the works of the Venetian school and seemed to take pride in this qualification. He also used his text, more openly than before, as a vehicle for a general comment about the weaknesses of nineteenth century art which must have been in his mind for a considerable number of years, and which seems to have assumed the proportions of a 'righteous cause'. Scott's cry was for criticism of art by practising artists, for, he said:

The understanding of pictures, and of the masters as painters, belongs to the initiated, and, in the arts, no man is initiated except by practice.²

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1. William Bell Scott, British Landscape Painters, London, 1872, p.14.
 2. William Bell Scott, Pictures by Venetian Painters, Preface.

This was not an uncommon plea amongst his fellow-artists, and a question which Scott had recently discussed in his correspondence with William Holman-Hunt, then painting in Jerusalem. Hunt wrote:

I am glad that you have been publishing the Life of Dürer, not that I know the book yet, but I rejoice, now that so many who know nothing about Art issue volumes in tens and hundreds about it, that an artist should once on a time say something derived from practical observation and experience. Professed critics - and I say it with all deference to our old friends who follow that line of business - are becoming a great impediment to true healthy art. --- They talk as though they regarded artists as waiting for their orders. We, too at times have our crotchets at night, but the easel work of the following day modifies them ---

Even when Scott was simply setting down his facts he was interesting because he felt that what he was doing had a mattered purpose, and because he was clear in his mind about the function of his writing. He wrote in the preface:

--- if not carried away by the rhetorical powers of a writer, we require the most practical treatises, on the historical aspect of the subject, showing us its surroundings, to maintain popular interest.²

At the same time Scott knew the art of varying his pace; occasionally he paused over a descriptive passage and wrote with unusual sensitiveness. After the general introduction he continued with an account of the separate artists, written with a tone of authority; and, with his own experience to give backing and contributory interest, he endorsed Vasari's opinion about the ephemeral nature of fresco painting.

Murillo and the Spanish School of Painting, which appeared in 1873, was a similar book, although it was undertaken for Routledge, the publishing firm

1. A.N.II, 90-91.

2. William Bell Scott, Pictures by Venetian Painters, p.1.

for whom Scott, in the same year, began his series of editions of the poets. He seemed less certain of his ground than in Venetian Painters, but although he made his customary acknowledgements to the proper authorities for his facts, he claimed the critical judgements as his own, limited only by the fact that he was not as well acquainted as he would have wished with the works of the Spanish school. When he gave an opinion it was sure in its expression, and in particular he inweighed against sentimentality and ill-based criticism. The text of Scott's book is, in fact, valuable not so much for what it has to say about the subject in hand as for its general comments on the function and obligations of criticism.

Within a year Scott returned to his former publishers and wrote for them the introduction and essay to accompany a set of engravings from the Italian Masters. Most of his general points were a reiteration, particularly his observations about the weaknesses of religious art with its limited field of subjects. The book is of interest to the general reader because Scott's accounts of the individual artists are biographical rather than technical. Here and there he flushes out with a general observation which shows him to be in touch with a wide field of art and poetry; a man of some depth of thought. All the books of this group, within their sphere, were a success. They fulfilled their function with grace and individuality and they were quoted by later writers as a sound source for facts and judgements.

Apart from the collection of etchings from Blake, which Scott published with an explanatory text in 1878, the rest of his art criticism can be grouped together by reason of its common subject-matter. The Blake book was different

from the other collections of engravings to which Scott contributed a letter press, because he had also prepared the plates. It was perhaps less pretentious than the table-books published by Messrs. Virtue & Co., but it was no less carefully and beautifully produced. Published by Chatto and Windus, it had the plates on separate pages, interleaved and mounted, while the text had ample margins. All this made the book a pleasure to handle. It was a graceful compliment to a poet and artist whom Scott had admired since his childhood, when he pored over Blake's illustrations for Blair's poem The Grave, and whose style and ideals he could not fail to connect with those of his brother David. He wrote only a short general introduction, making it plain that he regarded Blake as pre-eminently a poet, and distinguishing in his art that possession of genius but lack of talent which likewise condemned David Scott's work. By talent Scott meant executive powers, without which the most powerful intellectual passion is hidden and useless.

The work I have grouped together was entirely concerned with the early German engravers; Dürer and his successors, the Little Masters. However deeply Scott hated the drudgery of actual engraving, the study of it was a life-long interest, and he formed a fine collection of prints centring round these artists of the fifteenth century. His first published work which derived from this hobby of his was a life of Dürer, published in 1869; a book written in the leisure hours of a summer at Penkill. It was a clumsy ill-balanced piece of work, seeming as if it had been written before Scott had a thorough enough acquaintance with his materials. It is significant that the character of Albrecht Dürer himself emerges more vividly from the

short chapter given to him in The Little Masters than it does from the length of this book. The number of corrections necessary for the second edition tell a similar story of premature writing. In 1876 Scott produced for the Holbein Society, of which he was a council member, a facsimile reprint of Albrecht Altdorfer's Fall of Man. To this he contributed an introduction which included some valuable comparison of Altdorfer with the other Little Masters, and promised better things than the Dürer Life. Here Scott reconsidered many of the matters raised in his first book which seemed capable only of doubtful proof; such as the settling of the precedence in place and date of the origin of engraving, or the system of apprenticeship which existed and whether the masters actually cut the wood-blocks for printing themselves. Three years later Scott wrote two articles for Fraser's Magazine:¹ these described his own collection of engravings, and gave some guidance to an appreciation of the work of the early masters. The writing is not strongly personal, and gives no sense of the collector's zeal, but there is a quiet note of delight in the beauty of engraving, sterner and less luxurious than that of painting. Scott writes:

--- their works have the freshness of the early days of modern civilisation; they are like boyhood in life; and possess the daringness of boyhood. Such a collection I would venture to say, containing within itself the choicest flower and fruit of German art, affords to the intelligent the greatest fund of enjoyment of any possession within the region of taste.²

The last book Scott published on this subject was The Little Masters. It had the merit of springing from a genuine desire on Scott's part to write about those artists with whose work he had such long and pleasant acquaintance.

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1. Fraser's Magazine, New Series, Vol. XIX, February 1879 and March 1879, William Bell Scott, "A Portfolio of Ancient Engravings".
 2. William Bell Scott, The Little Masters, London, 1880, pp. 5-6.

He once more took up the theme which had occupied him in each of the earlier books; that of the profound change which had taken place in the choice of subjects through the centuries. He distinguished the new outlook, allowing realism and 'genre' subjects, and contrasted it with the old, which had dwelt exclusively among saints and Christian mythology. Scott tackled the main problems connected with this school and period, and came to some settled opinions about the most controversial. His own upbringing and professional training very naturally directed his interest in particular to the system of training future generations of artists in the ateliers of the masters. Scott had advanced in craftsmanship as he wrote these several accounts of the German engravers; a progress most apparent because he was handling much the same material in each case. His later writing about them is more readable because the subject has been made more thoroughly his own, instead of seeming rough and preparatory work, as it did in Dürer.

About the beginning of the 1870s it was suggested to Scott by his publisher that he might edit and illustrate the poetry of Burns. He began his task with very real enthusiasm and gave many hours of study to it, but the scheme came to nothing, though Scott records with native concern that he was paid for the work! This work, though it was never carried through to publication, introduces us to the third group of critical writing which Scott produced during the early years of his retirement. This was a series of editions of English poets: Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Shakespeare, Inchbald, Walter Scott and Letitia Elizabeth Landon; a curious assembly undertaken for Messrs. Routledge over the years 1873-1874. These were intended for the general reader and should not be judged as scholarly editions.

Scott generally contributed a Memoir and the illustrations, so that, all in all, he had a fair chance of giving a rounded portrait of the poet-subject. His memoir may give the progress of the poet's career but none is rich in dates. In that of Byron, for instance, only those of birth, marriage and death are given. They are simply essays on their subject, claiming the essayist's privilege of one point of view, and are of very general reference. Their merit is that they do introduce, in the sense of choosing the right facts to stimulate interest, and do not attempt to give a 'potted' study of the poet. More than that they succeed in picturing the poet's character and touching on the sort of person he or she was. Scott was able to do this because of a considerable sympathy for his subjects, particularly for the rather pathetic person of Letitia Elizabeth. He seemed genuinely moved by the circumstances of her marriage, her sudden death, and her misfortune in her wretched husband George Maclean, whom he dismissed under a charming but non-committal verdict:

Mr. George Maclean, it maybe, is still living, the most respectable of inarticulate and taciturn colonial governors, more fit to deal with captured slavers than with the highest and most accomplished womanhood, or he may really be and feel himself above suspicion, a much injured Scotchman deserving of sympathy as well as admiration.¹

In the Keats Memoir too the writing is touched with sadness as it describes the young poet's death. In the matter of style Scott understood the value of a good opening, and did attempt coherence and a rounded whole.

Scott attempted some indication of the way in which a poet's writing was spread over his life, or otherwise concentrated in a particular period. For

1. The Poetical Works of Letitia Elizabeth Landon, ed. by William Bell Scott, London, 1873.

instance he saw Coleridge's main poetic period as being from the age of 22 to 26 or 27:

-- in the first warmth of friendship with Southey and Wordsworth, he was wholly a poet, and wrote all the pieces that gave him his position, now so high and so incapable of change.¹

Apart from such general indications Scott offered few poetic judgements. There were more perhaps in the edition of Byron than in any of the others, and this was further distinguished by having explanatory notes at the end of the volume; but on the whole he declined to make assessments of the quality of the writing or to make any attempt to place each poet in his context; distinguish the styles in which he best succeeded; or remark the influences to which he was indebted. Nevertheless the reader may come upon interesting opinions: such a one is that it was fortunate for Keats he knew no Greek and could not master Greek legends in the original, a state of affairs which enabled him to mingle the spirit of Greek myths and poetry with the free imagination of John Keats. Furthermore Scott hit upon several common-sense things which needed saying, particularly about the folly of identifying poets with the characters of their poems.

Scott's usual plan seemed to be to select the main poems and place them first, grouping the remainder under several headings. In the Keats edition *Endymion*, *Lamia*, *Isabella*, the *Eve of St. Agnes* and *Hyperion* opened the volume. The rest were classed as miscellaneous, with a group of sonnets and a group of Epistles brought together: *La Belle Dame* brought the volume to a close. This kind of arrangement gave some indication of his opinion of the poems, but was

1. The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. by William Bell Scott, London, 1874, p.XII.

very unscholarly, especially when one adds to it the fact that very often there was no dating of the poetry and hence chronological order could not be decided. Nor was there any bibliography or attempts to indicate possible lines of reading, except for Shelley, where Scott did list some of his authorities for the life. His introductions to these various poets are undeniably as readable as the essays which accompanied the engravings of the 'table-books'.

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AN ABSTRACT OF
THE LIFE AND WORK OF
WILLIAM BELL SCOTT
1811-1890

A Thesis Presented to the University of Durham
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Vera Walker,
February, 1952.

This account of the life and work of William Bell Scott, poet, painter and man of letters, is written in five sections, each practically self-contained. Scott had a way of being absorbed by his immediate environment and did not, on the whole, try to keep up friends and associations once he had moved from the place where he made them. The exception to this was Newcastle: while Scott lived and worked in the North, as Head Master of the Government School of Design, he kept up close ties with London, so that it seemed natural enough for him to return there on his retirement. Indeed one comes to regard him as belonging to London in a way that he never belonged to his birthplace, Edinburgh.

The thesis opens with an account of Scott's childhood and youth in Edinburgh. The next section is concerned with the period of exploration and development when he first came to London. After that comes a group of four chapters concerned with his work and residence in Newcastle from 1844-1864. This is the central period. Scott was working hard in the cause of art education and at the same time his own talents were maturing and bearing fruit. His official retirement and removal to London closes this section. The next deals with his later and more personal achievements now that he was able to devote time to his own work in literature and art. Scott was living half the year in London; the other half at Penkill, the home of his devoted friend Miss Alice Boyd. The London chapters should therefore be read with that telling his 'holiday-half' of the year in Scotland, which covers the same period of time. The final section covers the years of his complete retirement to Penkill, when he lived as an invalid under Miss Boyd's care.

Following the biography, two separate chapters are given to the two most important relationships of Scott's life, with his brother David, and with the Rossetti family. The last section of the thesis, which is divided into three parts, covers Scott's contribution to art, poetry and the work of criticism. I have attempted to write of these activities not only as they appear to the outsider, but according as Scott valued and enjoyed them.