# SCOTT

# THE LADY OF THE LAKE

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SIR WALTER SCOTT

# THE LADY OF THE LAKE

EDITED BY

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# PREFACE.

AS this edition of *The Lady of the Lake* is intended for Junior students, no apology is needed either for the short and simple character of the notes, or for the length of the glossary. I have tried to make both explanatory rather than illustrative, because I thought that the class of students for whom this edition is primarily intended would be hindered rather than helped by illustrative quotations and etymological discussions, such as would naturally be included in an edition designed for more advanced readers.

The text of *The Lady of the Lake* has recently been carefully revised by Mr Rolfe and by Professor Minto. In this edition I have followed Professor Minto's text, with only one or two trifling changes, which are referred to, where they occur, in the notes. I have added a short glossary of Gaelic names, for which I am chiefly indebted to Robertson's *Gaelic Topography*. I have tried to indicate the cases where his interpretations are not generally accepted; but any detailed discussion of the questions at issue would be out of place.

I have made free use of previous editions of the poem, and also of Scott's notes, where they seemed suitable.

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# INTRODUCTION.

## The Author.

WALTER SCOTT belonged to the Border family of the Scotts, of which the Duke of Buccleuch was the head. He was descended from Wat of Harden, celebrated in the sixteenth century for his plunderings in the borders. His great-grandfather, Walter Scott of Teviotdale, had acquired the name of 'Beardie' from his oath that he would not cut his beard till the Stuarts were restored. He kept his oath, and narrowly escaped being executed as a traitor for his efforts on their behalf.

Beardie's second son, Robert Scott, farmed a small estate at Sandyknowe, near Dryburgh, and lived the life of a country gentleman. Walter, the eldest son of this Robert Scott, and father of the poet, settled in Edinburgh as a writer to the Signet, or what in England is called a solicitor. He appears to have been the first of the family who ever adopted a town life, and we may trace the influence of the family traditions in Scott's love of military adventure, and of open air life, of which his poems give us so many illustrations.

Walter Scott, the poet, was born in Edinburgh on the 15th of August, 1771. Owing to an illness at the age of eighteen months, which left him permanently lame, he spent much of his childhood at Sandyknowe. Here he wandered freely among the ruins of the Castle of Smailholm:

"That mountain tower
"Which charmed my fancy's wakening hour—"

stored his mind with border songs and legends, and almost entirely outgrew his early delicacy of health.

After some years of this life Scott returned to Edinburgh, where he attended the boys' High School. His leisure hours during these school days were largely occupied in devouring English literature—history, poetry, travels, romances—as chance threw them in his way. His favourite poet at this time was Spenser. In his autobiography he speaks of the delight he found in the society of the knights and ladies and dragons and giants of the *Faerie Queene*. A little later he became acquainted with Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry*. "I do not believe," he says, "that I ever read a book half so frequently, or with half the enthusiasm." He afterwards learned Spanish, Italian and German in order to be able to read the Romance literature of those countries.

As a result of this promiscuous reading Scott's love for Poetry and Romance was strongly developed by the time he left school, and commenced to study law with a view to entering his father's profession. He qualified as an advocate, and practised for some time with moderate success. Meanwhile, in 1796, he published his first work, a translation of two German Romances, followed three years later by a translation of one of Goethe's tragedies. His first serious attempts at original composition belong to this period, and were due to the influence of Mr Lewis —'Monk' Lewis as he was called, after his best known work *The Monk*. Of these early attempts at ballad poetry *Glenfinlas* is the most interesting, as the first indication of Scott's familiarity with that Highland district which *The Lady of the Lake* was destined to make so widely popular. While studying law in Edinburgh, Scott had spent much of his leisure in gathering ballads of the Scottish Border from the country people, among whom such ballads were handed down in the memory for generations. As a result of these rambles he published, in 1802, a collection of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* in two volumes; a third following in the next year. These volumes first showed Scott's wide learning and critical ability. He had included in the collection some original poems written in imitation of the old ballads, and in 1805 he published *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, the first of his great poems, the success of which

was immediate. Meanwhile, in 1797, after a disappointment in love which he seems to have felt keenly, and to which he probably refers in the closing lines of Canto VI. of *The Lady of the Lake*, Scott married a Miss Carpenter or Charpentier, the daughter of a French refugee, whom he met when on a visit to England in the summer of that year. In 1804 he accepted the office of Sheriff of Selkirk, and left the cottage on the Esk, where he had spent the first years of his married life, as he was obliged to live in the county of which he was sheriff. He moved to Ashestiel, a house on the bank of the Tweed, seven miles from Selkirk, where he spent the next eight years.

The success of the *Lay* decided Scott to make literature the chief occupation of his life. In the following year he applied for and obtained the Clerkship of the Court of Session at Edinburgh, a step which practically implied the abandonment of any desire for further advancement in the legal profession, and from this time to the end of his life Scott was at once the most successful and the hardest-worked literary man of the time.

In 1808 *Marmion* was published, and proved at least as popular as the *Lay* had been. The following year (1809) was crowded with literary work of various kinds, and in the autumn Scott began *The Lady of the Lake*. The locality which he chose for his new poem was one with which he was already familiar. From his fifteenth year he appears to have paid frequent visits to a Highland client of his father, Alexander Stuart of Invernahyle, in Perthshire, from whom he derived much of the knowledge of Highland customs which appears in *The Lady of the Lake* and in *Waverley*. But his first expedition into the actual district of Loch Katrine was undertaken for the purpose of enforcing the execution of a writ on some tenants of Invernahyle's brother-in-law. "An escort of a sergeant and six men was obtained from a Highland regiment lying in Stirling, and the author, then a writer's apprentice (or attorney's clerk) was invested with the superintendence of the expedition....And thus it happened, oddly enough, that the author first entered the romantic scenery of Loch Katrine riding in all the dignity of danger, with a front and rear guard, and loaded arms." Scott several times revisited the

district, and in the summer of 1809 spent some time in careful observation of the scenery. It was during this visit that he rode at full gallop from Loch Vennachar to Stirling to test the accuracy of the time he proposed to allot to Fitz-James in Canto v.

In the Introduction to the edition of the poem published in 1830 Scott says: "The ancient manners, the habits and customs of the aboriginal race by whom the Highlands of Scotland were inhabited, had always appeared to me peculiarly adapted for poetry. The change in their manners, too, had taken place almost within my own time, or at least I had learned many particulars concerning the ancient state of the Highlands from the old men of the last generation. I had also read a great deal, and seen much, and heard more of that romantic country where I was in the habit of spending some time every autumn; and the scenery of Loch Katrine was connected with the recollection of many a dear friend and merry expedition of former days. The poem, the action of which lay among scenes so beautiful and so deeply imprinted on my recollections, was a labour of love, and it was no less so to recall the manners and incidents introduced. The frequent custom of James IV., and particularly of James V., to walk through their kingdom in disguise, afforded me the hint of an incident which never fails to be interesting if managed with the slightest address or dexterity."

He goes on to tell how a lady, to whom he was nearly related, tried unsuccessfully to dissuade him from jeopardising his reputation by publishing another poem. He replied in the words of Montrose,

> "He either fears his fate too much,
> Or his deserts are small,
> Who dares not put it to the touch,
> To win or lose it all."

The poem was gradually completed, and was published in May, 1810. Its appearance had been anxiously expected; and while it received as warm a welcome from the public as its predecessors, it was more favourably reviewed by the critics. "The whole country rang with the praises of the poet—crowds set off to view the scenery of Loch Katrine, till then comparatively

unknown; and as the book came out just before the season for excursions, every house and inn in that neighbourhood was crammed with a constant succession of visitors. It is a well-ascertained fact that from the date of the publication of *The Lady of the Lake*, the post-horse duty in Scotland rose to an extraordinary degree." Five editions of *The Lady of the Lake*, numbering in all over twenty thousand copies, were sold during the year of publication, and ten thousand more before 1825, when the poem was included in Scott's collected works.

The rest of Scott's life must be shortly told. Other poems—*Don Roderick*, *Rokeby*, *The Bridal of Triermain* (published at first anonymously) and *The Lord of the Isles*—followed in succession. But the popularity of Scott's poems declined. *Rokeby*, and still more *The Lord of the Isles*, seemed to lack the freshness of the earlier poems, and Byron had begun to catch the public ear with his more luxurious and sensuous oriental ballads.

Meanwhile, in 1814, Scott published, anonymously, *Waverley*, the first of that wonderful series of Waverley Novels that has made him even more famous as a novelist than as a poet. Riches and honour came to Scott, and the little farm on the Tweed, to which he had moved from Ashestiel, grew into the castle and estate of Abbotsford. He had been appointed, in 1807, Clerk to the Court of Session at Edinburgh, and in 1820 was made a baronet by George IV. But in 1825 a publishing firm, in which Scott was a sleeping partner, became bankrupt, with debts of over £100,000, which Scott felt himself bound in honour to pay. The rest of his life is the story of his brave struggle to raise this immense sum. The general regard felt for him was shewn by the offers of help which he received from all sides as soon as his position became known. But he declined them all, as he was determined that "his own right hand should do it." By hard work he had paid more than half the amount, when his health broke down, and after a voyage to Italy in a frigate placed at his disposal by the Government, he came home, only to die at Abbotsford, within hearing of the murmur of his loved Tweed, in 1832.

## The Poem: its natural scenery.

*The Lady of the Lake* no doubt owed some part of its popularity to the beauty of the scenery which forms the background to the incidents of the poem. The Highlands of Scotland were not altogether unknown when Scott made them the scene of this poem. As early as 1703 Martin's *Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* had aroused interest in Highland customs and scenery, and had inspired Collins' *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland, considered as the subject of poetry*, in which he urges Home, the author of the tragedy of *Douglas*, to take his pencil to his hand, and paint the Highlander and his customs. After the suppression of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 a small but constantly growing band of travellers visited the northern districts of Scotland, and not a few books were written describing the scenery. Dr Johnson's tour in Scotland is famous, and a full and interesting description of parts of this region was published by Pennant in 1769. In 1794 Mr Robertson, a minister in Callander, speaks of the Trosachs as already frequented by "persons of taste who are desirous of seeing Nature in her rudest and most unpolished shapes." But as with the Romantic revival, so with the scenery of the Highlands, it was Scott who first popularized what was already known only to a cultured few.

The district in which the greater part of the poem is located lies around three lakes in west Perthshire—Lochs Vennachar, Achray and Katrine. Loch Vennachar, the most easterly of these, is an uninteresting sheet of water, except on its northern shore, where the dark mass of Ben Ledi rises 'ridge on ridge.' After passing the Brigg of Turk and the entrance to Glenfinlas, the road skirts Loch Achray, a silver lake the quiet beauty of which sets off by contrast the wild grandeur of the Trosachs. The Pass of the Trosachs, hemmed in by Ben Venue on the south, and by the ridge of Ben-an on the north, extends for about two miles, from the western shore of Loch Achray to the silver strand on Loch Katrine. The road winds among

rocky hillocks, which rise out of the thick wood that covers the valley and the slopes of the cliffs that surround it; and the whole forms as romantic a scene as could well be imagined. Loch Katrine opens gradually on the view—"a narrow inlet, still and deep"—fringed with thickly wooded promontories and islands along its eastern shores, but growing bare and uninteresting towards the west.

Scott uses the beauty of this scenery very skilfully in maintaining the interest of the poem. We are made to move through it as the plot developes; every Canto opens with a sunrise painted with a master hand, and almost every incident has its background of lake, wood or hill.

This use of natural scenery is an interesting feature of Scott's poetry. In older Romance poetry supernatural agencies play a large part, and help to awaken and sustain interest. The background of the stage is crowded with gnomes and giants, spectres and goblins. But Scott wrote for an age when men's imaginations were stirred more by the beauty of the natural world than by the wonder of the supernatural. And so, while the German Romance writers, and their English followers like Lewis, 'harked back' to the supernatural machinery of earlier Romances, Scott, in *The Lady of the Lake*, weaves into his story the world of nature instead.

In Scott's treatment of natural scenery two points of interest may be noted. In the first place, Scott regards the world of nature as a painter rather than as a poet. He does not find in her a solution of human problems, or an echo of human passions. He pictures natural scenes as he sees them, studies in light and colour. Form, as Ruskin points out, occupies little place in his descriptions, and in the one passage in this poem where he tries to give form to the scenery, the whole machinery of cupolas, minarets and pagodas gives a less vivid and true picture than the one line that describes the sunset view of Loch Katrine:

"One broad sheet of living gold."

It is this sense of the charm of colour that makes Scott

select hills and lakes, where broad colour-effects are best seen, as the prominent natural objects in the scenery of his poems.

But Scott also sees Nature with the eye of an antiquarian. It is thoroughly characteristic of his view of scenery that he makes Fitz-James, in Canto I. xv., picture the shores of Loch Katrine as occupied with all the machinery of mediaeval Feudalism—castle, bower, cloister, and cell. Just so Scott had from his earliest years loved to dream of the castles and hills of his own Border country as full of the moss-troopers and barons of the old days of foray and war; and it was this power of associating every scene with the life of the past that made Scott the greatest Romance writer of his own, or perhaps of any other age.

## Chief characters.

James V. is the only historical character who appears in *The Lady of the Lake*. He was born in 1512, and succeeded to the Scottish throne in 1513, after the death of James IV. at Flodden. During the years of his minority he was kept almost a captive by a group of nobles who ruled in his name (see V. vi. 11–16). The Duke of Albany, the nominal Regent, was gradually ousted from power by the party of the Earl of Angus, the king's step-father, who became practical regent, and guardian of the king, in 1526. Two years later the young king escaped from his control, and Angus and all his family were banished. After some years, spent in reducing the Border and Highland clans to order, James visited France, in 1536, and married Magdalen, the daughter of the French King. On his return he alienated many of his nobles by attempting to curb their power, and finally became involved in a war with Henry VIII., which resulted in the defeat of his army at Solway Moss—an event which is said to have caused his death, which took place in December, 1542.

James was regarded as a friend of the lower orders, and was popularly known as the *King of the Commons*. Many stories

are told of his adventures when wandering in disguise through his dominions, generally under the name of the *Gudeman* (i.e. farmer) *of Ballenguich*, a name which Scott found unsuited for poetry, and so changed to the *Knight of Snowdoun.*

The character of James in this poem illustrates Byron's remark to the Regent that Scott was "particularly the poet of Princes, for they never appeared more fascinating than in *Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake.*" The picture of the King is true to history except in one particular—he is described as middle-aged. This change, unimportant in itself, is interesting as illustrating Scott's preference for middle-aged heroes. Cranstoun and Deloraine in the *Lay*, Marmion and De Wilton in *Marmion*, Roderick Dhu and Fitz-James in this poem, are all examples in point. Possibly this preference may be due to the fact that Scott was himself verging on middle-age when these poems were written.

James Douglas, the supposed uncle of the Earl of Angus, is a fictitious character. Representatives of the Douglas family appear in all Scott's first poems. The older branch of the family had fallen into obscurity under James III.; and the Earls of Angus, the representatives of a younger branch, whom he raised to power, were from this time forward among the most powerful Scottish nobles till their exile under James V. Scott has transferred to James Douglas the guardianship of the King, which had been exercised by Angus, and in the return of Douglas in Canto v. he has followed to some extent the history of Archibald Douglas of Kilspindie, an uncle of Angus, and a friend of the King's boyhood, whose return to Court, however, ended not in reconciliation but in his banishment to France.

The exiled Douglas, confronting adversity with stately and uncomplaining dignity, stands in strong contrast with the impetuous and passionate Highland chief under whose protection he lives. Roderick Dhu is an illustration of the difficulty, which other poets besides Scott have found, of preventing the villain of a poem from becoming its hero. It is only by keeping constantly in the foreground the reckless and brutal character of Roderick's raids that Scott succeeds in retaining us on the

side of law and order, and preventing the chivalrous and valiant chieftain from winning too much of our sympathy. From his dramatic entrance in Canto II. to his death in Canto VI. he is the most interesting figure in the poem—free from the mere brutality of William of Deloraine, and from the meanness that disfigures the character of Marmion.

No clan actually occupied the whole of the district over which Roderick's sway is pictured as extending, but Clan-Alpine is probably intended to represent the Macgregor Clan, which claimed descent from Alpine, and at one time occupied a part of this district.

Malcolm Græme is at once a less conspicuous and a less interesting figure in the poem. It is worth noting that the successful lovers in Scott's two preceding poems—Cranstoun in the *Lay* and De Wilton in *Marmion*—are also both rather uninteresting. The only incident in which Malcolm plays an important part does not exhibit him in a very favourable light, and in spite of the excellent character given him by the poet (see II. XXV.) we scarcely feel that he is worthy of the love of Ellen Douglas.

Ellen Douglas, the Lady of the Lake, is an admirable heroine. She is neither merely sentimental, like Margaret of Branksome; nor merely 'lovely and gentle and distress'd,' like Clara de Clare. Her love for her father, and her touch of innocent coquetry, give a charm of variety to her character, and make her the most interesting and fresh of all the female characters of Scott's poems.

Finally, to complete the necessary machinery of a Romance, the parts of minstrel and magician are supplied by Allan Bane and Brian, the grim loyalty of the one to his clan contrasting with the faithful devotion of the other to his master.

## Metre.

The metre of *The Lady of the Lake* is the old Ballad metre called octosyllabic, in which each line contains eight syllables, alternately unaccented and accented, and the lines rhyme in

couplets. But in this poem Scott has abandoned most of the methods by which, in the *Lay* and *Marmion*, he gave variety to the metre. In the account of the Battle of Beal' an Duine in Canto VI. the metre is more varied, and closely resembles that of *Marmion*. The only methods of giving variety to the metre that are adopted in the rest of the poem are:

(1) The transposition of the unaccented and accented syllables, generally at the beginning of a line, where the first word of the line is to be emphasized,

> The àntler'd mònarch òf the wàste
> Sprùng from his heàthery coùch in hàste. I. ii. 3–4.

> Eàger as grèyhound òn his gàme
> Fièrcely with Ròderick gràppled Græme. II. xxxiv. 14–15.

(2) The introduction of Songs, about which Scott wrote to Southey: "I omitted no opportunity that could be given, or taken, of converting my dog-trot into a hop-step-and-jump."

The metres of these songs do not require detailed notice. In Ellen's song in Canto I. the accent is thrown on the first of each pair of syllables,

> Sòldier rèst, thy wàrfare o'èr
> Sleèp the sleèp that knòws not wàking,

and the double or feminine rhymes give a musical cadence to the verses. Clan Alpine's Boat Song is an irregular metre where two unaccented syllables follow each accented:

> Hail to the chief who in triumph advànces, &c.

which gives the sense of a slow steady swing of oars, just as the metre where one accented syllable follows two unaccented, as in the song in *Marmion*,

> Oh yoùng Lochinvàr has come oùt of the wèst,

gives the sense of a fast gallop.

The Ballad of Alice Brand is in the favourite old Ballad metre of Chevy Chase, which Coleridge had used with great effect in the *Ancient Mariner*. In Blanche's Song in Canto IV. xxv. the rhymes are intentionally careless in imitation of the old Ballads.

(3) By occasional introduction of shorter lines of six syllables, often preceded by three or four lines rhyming. The only examples of this (besides those in the Battle of Beal' an Duine), are in the early part of Canto III. (stanzas ix—x).

(4) By introducing each Canto with one or more stanzas in Spenserian metre. This metre is so called because it was first employed by Spenser in the *Faerie Queene.* It consists of verses of nine lines, eight of ten syllables, of which the first and third; the second, fourth, fifth and seventh; and the sixth and eighth lines rhyme. The last line, rhyming with the eighth, has twelve syllables, and is called an *alexandrine.* Scott's *Don Roderick*, and Byron's *Childe Harold*, were written entirely in this metre.

The metre of the poem was criticized by Ellis in the *Quarterly Review*, and Scott's defence of it is of sufficient interest to be worth quoting almost in full. In a letter to Ellis he says:

"I am still inclined to defend the eight-syllable stanza, which I have somehow persuaded myself is more congenial to the English language—more favourable to narrative poetry at least—than that which has been commonly termed heroic verse. If you will take the trouble to read a page of Pope's *Iliad*, you will probably find a good many lines out of which two syllables may be struck without injury to the sense. The first lines of this translation have been repeatedly noticed as capable of being cut down from ships of the line to frigates, by striking out the said two syllabled words, as:

'Achilles' wrath, to Greece, the *direful* spring
Of woes unnumbered, *heavenly* goddess sing.
That wrath which sent to Pluto's *gloomy* reign
The souls of *mighty* chiefs in battle slain,
Whose bones unburied on the *desert* shore
Devouring dogs and *hungry* vultures tore.'

Now since it is true that by throwing out the epithets underscored, we preserve the sense without diminishing the force of the verse, I do really think that the structure of verse which requires least of this sort of bolstering, is most likely to be forcible and animated. The case is different in descriptive poetry, because these epithets, if they are

happily selected, are rather to be sought for than avoided, and admit of being varied *ad infinitum*.....

"Besides, the eight-syllable stanza is capable of certain varieties denied to the heroic. Double rhymes, for instance, are congenial to it, which often give a sort of Gothic richness to its cadences; you may also render it more or less rapid by retaining or dropping an occasional syllable. Lastly, and which I think its principal merit, it runs better into sentences than any length of line I know, as it corresponds, upon an average view of our punctuation, very commonly with the proper and usual space between comma and comma."

## Criticisms.

*The Lady of the Lake* was accorded a more favourable reception by the leading critics than either of Scott's former poems. The criticism of Lord Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* is generally regarded as the best and most discriminating contemporary criticism of Scott's poetry, and is worth quoting from at some length:

"The great secret of his (Scott's) popularity and the leading characteristic of his poetry, appear to us to consist evidently in this, that he has made more use of common topics, images, and expressions, than any original poet of later times. In the choice of his subjects, for example, he does not attempt to interest merely by fine observation or pathetic sentiment, but takes the assistance of a story, and enlists the reader's curiosity among his motives for attention. Then his characters are all selected from the most common *dramatis personæ* of poetry;—kings, warriors, knights, outlaws, nuns, minstrels, secluded damsels, wizards, and true lovers.—In the management of the passions, again, Mr Scott appears to have pursued the same popular, and comparatively easy course....He has dazzled the reader with the splendour, and even warmed him with the transient heat of various affections; but he has nowhere fairly kindled him with enthusiasm, or melted him into tenderness. Writing for the world at large, he has wisely abstained from attempting to raise any passion to a height to which worldly people could not be transported; and contented himself with giving his reader the chance of feeling as a brave, kind, and affectionate gentleman must often feel in the ordinary course of his existence, without trying to

breathe into him either that lofty enthusiasm which disdains the ordinary business and amusements of life, or that quiet and deep sensibility which unfits for most of its pursuits. With regard to diction and imagery, too, it is quite obvious that Mr Scott has not aimed at writing either in a very pure or a very consistent style. He seems to have been anxious only to strike, and to be easily and universally understood....There is a medley of bright images and glowing words, set carelessly and loosely together—a diction tinged successively with the careless richness of Shakespeare, the harshness and antique simplicity of the old romances, the homeliness of vulgar ballads and anecdotes, and the sentimental glitter of the most modern poetry—passing from the borders of the ludicrous to those of the sublime—alternately minute and energetic—sometimes artificial, and frequently negligent—but always full of spirit and vivacity,—abounding in images that are striking, at first sight, to minds of every contexture—and never expressing a sentiment which it can cost the most ordinary reader any exertion to comprehend.

* * * * * * * *

"For our own part we are of opinion that it (this poem) will be oftener read than either of the author's former publications....It is more polished in its diction, and more regular in its versification, the story is constructed with infinitely more skill and address; there is a greater proportion of pleasing and tender passages, with much less antiquarian detail; and, upon the whole, a larger variety of characters, more artfully and judiciously contrasted."

Most of the other critics of the poem naturally tried to compare it with its two predecessors; and Lockhart sums up the general opinion by saying—"the *Lay* is generally considered as the most natural and original, *Marmion* as the most powerful and splendid, *The Lady of the Lake* as the most interesting, romantic, picturesque, and graceful."

It would probably be correct to say that *The Lady of the Lake* is still the most frequently read of any of Scott's poems, but is regarded by critics as on the whole inferior to its two predecessors. Hutton, in his *Life of Scott*, says that *The Lady of the Lake* seems to him to depend too much on the mere interest of the story:—

"*The Lady of the Lake*, with the exception of two or three