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SIR WALTER SCOTT

QUENTIN DURWARD

Introduction by C. L. Bennet

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

QUENTIN DURWARD

SIR WALTER SCOTT

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SIR WALTER SCOTT

Introduction

WALTER SCOTT was born in Edinburgh, of a good Scottish family, on August 15, 1771, and was trained to follow his father's profession of the Law. But although he was admitted to the Bar at the age of twenty-one, and became a Clerk of the Court and Sheriff of Selkirkshire, his dominating interest from childhood was the study of romantic history and legend and the reading and telling of stirring tales of chivalry and romance.

At the age of twelve, following the influential example of Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, he began his own manuscript collection of early ballads. While still at school he exercised the photographic memory that made possible his omnivorously retentive reading and his rapid and copious writing in both verse and prose. The two writers that influenced him most were perfectly suited to his inborn interests and aptitudes—Macpherson's wildly romantic "translations" from the Gaelic of "Ossian" and Spenser's magnificent tapestry of *The Faerie Queene*—and he committed to memory "whole duans of the one and cantos of the other."

The collecting of old ballads was followed by translations from German romantic poetry and drama, but it was not

until 1805 that he published his first original work, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. This was followed, in similar subject form and style, and with increasing acclaim, by *Marmion* in 1808 and in 1810 by *The Lady of the Lake*, which he never surpassed and which brought the climax of his reputation as a writer of verse. Scott's seven verse tales and the "Waverley" novels that followed were all distinguished by rapid narrative, crowded and sometimes impeded or interrupted by detail. Against a background of history and legend, fictitious characters and plot provided a more or less important thread for the narrative and a central interest for its development. Its basic theatrical appeal was supported by romantic scenery and innumerable museum pieces of stage property; by the manners and customs of bygone days; by their sports and pastimes, rituals, and observances, superstitions, witchcraft, and demonology; by maidens in distress and champions—as often as not in disguise—who rescued them from unwanted suitors and won their undying gratitude if not their hand in marriage. The greatest poetry was to come from the greater Romantic poets, but the art and craft of Scott, whether in verse or in prose, was not that of the poet, the prose stylist, or the historian, but that of the teller of stirring tales of action.

Even before Byron "woke to find [himself] famous," Scott had decided that novels might be better suited than narrative verse to his need for a broad and crowded canvas with brightly colored brush strokes and a wealth of historical and antiquarian detail. Disappointed by his smaller success with *The Lord of the Isles* (1815), he remarked to his partner James Ballantyne that "we must not droop, for we can't afford to give over. Since one line has failed, we must stick to something else." He had "failed" only by comparison with the spectacular success of the earlier tales in verse and with the newer and equally spectacular success of Byron. Before *The Lord of the Isles* was off the press, Scott had almost finished *Guy Mannering* (1815), one of the best of the "Waverley" novels, which did more than

Byron to eclipse Scott's reputation as a writer of verse. Although the writing of fiction proved to be his proper field, Scott's earlier experience in metrical composition was valuable both in itself and as training and discipline for prose. Without it, he would have been, at best, slower to discard the early overload of historical detail and to subdue his reading and research to the pace variety and human interest of creative fiction. A beginning had been made on *Waverley* in 1805. In 1809-10, it was included in Ballantyne's list but withdrawn because James Ballantyne, with better than his usual judgment, found the early chapters tiresome. To this day, these same chapters with their museum-catalogue of antiques turn many readers away. They have as little resemblance to fiction as *Queenhoo Hall* (1808), an antiquarian report by Joseph Strutt which Scott, the ever-friendly historian, made over for publication. When Scott had learned that history should be the servant and not the master of fiction, *Waverley* was finally published, anonymously and with Scott's repeated denial of authorship, in 1814. The magnificent series of more than two dozen historical romances in seventeen years ended only with his death in 1832 from the strain on a constitution undermined by painful illness alternating with a strenuous outdoor life, by overwork from heroic efforts to make good the obligation to his own conscience for the collapse of his ill-starred association with the Ballantynes, by his own careless generosity, and by the lavish hospitality of his baronial mansion and estate of Abbotsford. Besides his astounding production as a novelist, at times uneven but at its best as unsurpassed in quality as in quantity, he was equally busy as a chronicler, an editor, and a biographer. Neither success nor disappointment could alter his courage, his cheerful independence, his integrity, or the essential manliness that shines through all his work and that caused Byron to say: "Walter Scott is as nearly a thorough good man as man can be."

Quentin Durward (1823) was written when Scott was at the height of his power, and most of his admirers con-

sider it to be one of his four or five best novels. Appearing shortly after the somewhat labored *Peveril of the Peak*, which left English readers less sympathetic toward yet another Waverley novel, and as the first of the series to have its setting in continental Europe, it at first received greater acclaim in France than in Britain, and did much to establish Scott's persisting popularity as a writer of European stature. The title character, a young Scottish soldier of fortune, courageous, straightforward, and resourceful, was a man whom Scott was well able to invent and portray, but the plot, the crucial events, and the principal characters, Louis XI of France, Charles the Bold, Duke of Normandy, William de la Marck ("the Wild Boar of the Ardennes"), follow closely upon the factual history of 1468 as based on the chronicles of Philip des Comines and later memoirs and histories. Comines himself has his place in the novel, and Scott felt obliged, in a note to a later edition, to apologize for having wrongly made him, for the sake of contrast with the principal characters, a man of small stature when he was in fact shown on good authority to have had an impressive and commanding figure. Few modern readers would regret the change or require the explanation, nor would many be disturbed by a shift of fourteen years even in so important an event as the murder of the Bishop of Liège. Minor changes which troubled Scott and were picked up from him by too many of his later critics can equally be disregarded by those who read for pleasure and who may find that the story, as a story, makes a better beginning with the appearance of Quentin in the second chapter.

French readers found special interest in this new kind of writing, about their own country and its not-too-dependable satellites, by a writer in English who was to prove himself as the literary ancestor of their own Dumas, *père et fils*. Common rivalry, suspicion, and latent or open hostility with England made a bond between Scotland and France that was symbolized for centuries by the Scottish Company of

Archers, to which Quentin, after a near miss from execution, was admitted through the intervention of his uncle "le Balafré," to the series of adventures arising from the struggle for authority between the crafty King of France and the truculent Charles of Burgundy whom, as a virtual monarch in his own Duchy, Louis was obliged to treat at one time as a subject, at another as an ally, and at another as an enemy. The Scottish Archers, later the Scots Guards, who answered their roll call in Gaelic, and to whom Louis XI entrusted his own son, were not disbanded until 1830, when there were few Scots among them. They were of most importance to France in the fifteenth century, chiefly in their support of Joan of Arc in the earlier years and of Louis XI at the time of our story. Their independence of French political intrigue gave Quentin a freedom that Scott could put to good use in developing both his story and his character. Although in real life Scott was familiar with Scots and English of every rank and station, he was most at home with his shrewd, practical, and independent shepherd, Tom Purdie, a former poacher whose good-humored honesty of speech made Scott, from the Bench, dismiss the charge against him and take him into his trusted service and friendship. In his novels, also, he was most at ease with men and women of the people, as for example the family of the Syndic Pavillon of Liège. In *Quentin Durward* the historical characters are most important, but to Quentin, as to the author and to ourselves, the King is more human, as also are the titled ladies, when Scott has exchanged the trappings of aristocracy for a disguise appropriate to more familiar ways of life and speech. But since this is a romance of the later Middle Ages, these more realistic portrayals serve chiefly by way of relief to set off in the more varied and exciting portraits of the ruthless and ferocious "Wild Boar," the princes and the prelate, the heralds, the jester, and the astrologer, and the "Bohemian" gypsy Hayraddin Maugrabin, with the plots and counterplots, the imprisonments and

escapes, the councils and parleys, the sieges and battles that mark the splendors and dangers of the period of European history that was best suited to furnish the memories, stimulate the imagination, and inspire the pen of the first and still the foremost writer of romantic historical fiction.

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PREFACE

The scene of this romance is laid in the fifteenth century, when the feudal system, which had been the sinews and nerves of national defence, and the spirit of chivalry, by which, as by a vivifying soul, that system was animated, began to be innovated upon and abandoned by those grosser characters, who centred their sum of happiness in procuring the personal objects on which they had fixed their own exclusive attachment. The same egotism had indeed displayed itself even in more primitive ages; but it was now for the first time openly avowed as a professed principle of action. The spirit of chivalry had in it this point of excellence, that, however overstrained and fantastic many of its doctrines may appear to us, they were all founded on generosity and self-denial, of which, if the earth were deprived, it would be difficult to conceive the existence of virtue among the human race.

Among those who were the first to ridicule and abandon the self-denying principles in which the young knight was instructed, and to which he was so carefully trained up, Louis the XIth of France was the chief. That Sovereign was of a character so purely selfish—so guiltless of entertaining any purpose unconnected with his ambition, covetousness, and desire of selfish enjoyment, that he almost seems an incarnation of the devil himself, permitted to do his utmost to corrupt our ideas of honour in its very source. Nor is it to be forgotten, that Louis possessed to a great extent that caustic wit which can turn into ridicule all that a man does for any other person's advantage but his own, and was, there-

fore, peculiarly qualified to play the part of a cold-hearted and sneering fiend.

In this point of view, Goethe's conception of the character and reasoning of Mephistopheles, the tempting spirit in the singular play of "Faust," appears to me more happy than that which has been formed by Byron, and even than the Satan of Milton. These last great authors have given to the Evil Principle something which elevates and dignifies his wickedness; a sustained and unconquerable resistance against Omnipotence itself—a lofty scorn of suffering compared with submission, and all those points of attraction in the Author of Evil, which have induced Burns and others to consider him as the Hero of the "Paradise Lost." The great German poet has, on the contrary, rendered his seducing spirit a being who, otherwise totally unimpassioned, seems only to have existed for the purpose of increasing, by his persuasions and temptations, the mass of moral evil, and who calls forth by his seductions those slumbering passions which otherwise might have allowed the human being who was the object of the Evil Spirit's operations to pass the tenor of his life in tranquillity. For this purpose Mephistopheles is, like Louis XI, endowed with an acute and depreciating spirit of caustic wit, which is employed incessantly in undervaluing and vilifying all actions, the consequences of which do not lead certainly and directly to self-gratification.

Even an author of works of mere amusement may be permitted to be serious for a moment, in order to reprobate all policy, whether of a public or private character, which rests its basis upon the principles of Machiavel, or the practice of Louis XI.

The cruelties, the perjuries, the suspicions of this prince, were rendered more detestable, rather than amended, by the gross and debasing superstition which he constantly practiced. The devotion to the heavenly saints, of which he made such a parade, was upon the miserable principle of some petty deputy in office, who endeavours to hide or atone for the malversations of which he is conscious, by liberal gifts to those whose duty it is to observe his conduct, and endeavours to support a system of fraud, by an attempt to corrupt the incorruptible. In no other light can we regard his creating the Virgin Mary a countess and colonel of his guards, or the cunning that admitted to one or two peculiar forms of oath the force of a binding obligation, which he denied to all others, strictly preserving the secret, which mode of swearing he really accounted obligatory, as one of the most valuable of State mysteries.

To a total want of scruple, or, it would appear, of any sense whatever of moral obligation, Louis XI added great natural firmness and sagacity of character, with a system of policy so highly refined, considering the times he lived in, that he sometimes overreached himself by giving way to its dictates.

Probably there is no portrait so dark as to be without its softer shades. He understood the interests of France, and faithfully pursued them so long as he could identify them with his own. He carried the country safe through the dangerous crisis of the war termed "for the public good;" in thus disuniting and dispersing this grand and dangerous alliance of the great crown vassals of France against the Sovereign, a King of a less cautious and temporising character, and of a more bold and less crafty disposition than Louis XI, would, in all probability, have failed. Louis had also some personal accomplishments not inconsistent with his public character. He was cheerful and witty in society; caressed his victim like the cat, which can fawn when about to deal the most bitter wound; and none was better able to sustain and extol the superiority of the coarse and selfish reasons by which he endeavoured to supply those nobler motives for exertion, which his predecessors had derived from the high spirit of chivalry.

In fact, that system was now becoming ancient, and had, even while in its perfection, something so overstrained and fantastic in its principles as rendered it peculiarly the object of ridicule, whenever, like other old fashions, it began to fall out of repute, and the weapons of raillery could be employed against it, without exciting the disgust and horror with which they would have been rejected at an early period, as a species of blasphemy. In the fourteenth century a tribe of scoffers had arisen, who pretended to supply what was naturally useful in chivalry by other resources, and threw ridicule upon the extravagant and exclusive principles of honour and virtue, which were openly treated as absurd, because, in fact, they were cast in a mould of perfection too lofty for the practice of fallible beings. If an ingenuous and high-spirited youth proposed to frame himself on his father's principles of honour, he was vulgarly derided as if he had brought to the field the good old knight's Durindarte or two-handed sword, ridiculous from its antique make and fashion, although its blade might be the Ebro's temper, and its ornaments of pure gold.

In like manner, the principles of chivalry were cast aside, and their aid supplied by baser stimulants. Instead of the high spirit which pressed every man forward in the defence of his country, Louis XI substituted the exertions of the ever

ready mercenary soldier, and persuaded his subjects, among whom the mercantile class began to make a figure, that it was better to leave to mercenaries the risks and labours of war, and to supply the Crown with the means of paying them, than to peril themselves in defence of their own substance. The merchants were easily persuaded by this reasoning. The hour did not arrive, in the days of Louis XI, when the landed gentry and nobles could be in like manner excluded from the ranks of war; but the wily monarch commenced that system, which, acted upon by his successors, at length threw the whole military defence of the State into the hands of the Crown.

He was equally forward in altering the principles which were wont to regulate the intercourse of the sexes. The doctrines of chivalry had established, in theory at least, a system in which Beauty was the governing and remunerating divinity—Valour her slave, who caught his courage from her eye, and gave his life for her slightest service. It is true, the system here, as in other branches, was stretched to fantastic extravagance, and cases of scandal not unfrequently arose. Still they were generally such as those mentioned by Burke, where frailty was deprived of half its guilt, by being purified from all its grossness. In Louis XIth's practice, it was far otherwise. He was a low voluptuary, seeking pleasure without sentiment, and despising the sex from whom he desired to obtain it; his mistresses were of inferior rank, as little to be compared with the elevated though faulty character of Agnes Sorel, as Louis was to his heroic father, who freed France from the threatened yoke of England. In like manner, by selecting his favourites and ministers from among the dregs of the people, Louis showed the slight regard which he paid to eminent station and high birth; and although this might be not only excusable but meritorious, where the monarch's fiat promoted obscure talent, or called forth modest worth, it was very different when the King made his favourite associates of such men as Tristan l'Hermite, the Chief of his Marshalsea, or police; and it was evident that such a prince could no longer be, as his descendant Francis elegantly designed himself, "the first gentleman in his dominions."

Nor were Louis's sayings and actions in private or public, of a kind which could redeem such gross offences against the character of a man of honour. His word, generally accounted the most sacred test of a man's character, and the least impeachment of which is a capital offence by the code of honour, was forfeited without scruple on the slightest occasion, and often accompanied by the perpetration of the most enor-

mous crimes. If he broke his own personal and plighted faith, he did not treat that of the public with more ceremony. His sending an inferior person disguised as a herald to Edward IV, was in those days, when heralds were esteemed the sacred depositaries of public and national faith, a daring imposition, of which few save this unscrupulous prince would have been guilty.[1]

In short, the manners, sentiments, and actions of Louis XI were such as were inconsistent with the principles of chivalry, and his caustic wit was sufficiently disposed to ridicule a system adopted on what he considered as the most absurd of all bases, since it was founded on the principle of devoting toil, talents, and time, to the accomplishment of objects, from which no personal advantage could, in the nature of things, be obtained.

It is more than probable that, in thus renouncing almost openly the ties of religion, honour, and morality, by which mankind at large feel themselves influenced, Louis sought to obtain great advantages in his negotiations with parties who might esteem themselves bound, while he himself enjoyed liberty. He started from the goal, he might suppose, like the racer who has got rid of the weights with which his competitors are still encumbered, and expects to succeed of course. But Providence seems always to unite the existence of peculiar danger, with some circumstance which may put those exposed to the peril upon their guard. The constant suspicion attached to any public person who becomes badly eminent for breach of faith, is to him what the rattle is to the poisonous serpent; and men come at last to calculate, not so much on what their antagonist says, as upon that which he is likely to do; a degree of mistrust which tends to counteract the intrigues of such a faithless character, more than his freedom from the scruples of conscientious men can afford him advantage. The example of Louis XI raised disgust and suspicion rather than a desire of imitation among other nations in Europe, and the circumstances of his outwitting more than one of his contemporaries, operated to put others on their guard. Even the system of chivalry, though much less generally extended than heretofore, survived this profligate monarch's reign, who did so much to sully its lustre, and long after the death of Louis XI it inspired the knight without Fear and Reproach, and the gallant Francis I.

Indeed, although the reign of Louis had been as successful in a political point of view as he himself could have de-

[1] See Note XII. Disguised Herald.

sired, the spectacle of his deathbed might of itself be a warning-piece against the seduction of his example. Jealous of every one, but chiefly of his own son, he immured himself in his Castle of Plessis, entrusting his person exclusively to the doubtful faith of his Scottish mercenaries. He never stirred from his chamber; he admitted no one into it, and wearied Heaven and every saint with prayers, not for the forgiveness of his sins, but for the prolongation of his life. With a poverty of spirit totally inconsistent with his shrewd worldly sagacity, he importuned his physicians, until they insulted as well as plundered him. In his extreme desire of life, he sent to Italy for supposed relics, and the yet more extraordinary importation of an ignorant crack-brained peasant, who, from laziness probably, had shut himself up in a cave, and renounced flesh, fish, eggs, or the produce of the dairy. This man, who did not possess the slightest tincture of letters, Louis reverenced as if he had been the Pope himself, and to gain his goodwill founded two cloisters.

It was not the least singular circumstance of this course of superstition, that bodily health and terrestrial felicity seemed to be his only objects. Making any mention of his sins when talking on the state of his health, was strictly prohibited; and when at his command a priest recited a prayer to Saint Eutropius, in which he recommended the King's welfare both in body and soul, Louis caused the two last words to be omitted, saying it was not prudent to importune the blessed saint by too many requests at once. Perhaps he thought by being silent on his crimes, he might suffer them to pass out of the recollection of the celestial patrons, whose aid he invoked for his body.

So great were the well-merited tortures of this tyrant's deathbed, that Philip des Comines enters into a regular comparison between them and the numerous cruelties inflicted on others by his order; and, considering both, comes to express an opinion, that the worldly pangs and agony suffered by Louis were such as might compensate the crimes he had committed, and that, after a reasonable quarantine in purgatory, he might in mercy be found duly qualified for the superior regions.

Fénélon also has left his testimony against this prince, whose mode of living and governing he has described in the following remarkable passage:—

"Pygmalion, tourmenté par une soif insatiable des richesses, se rend de plus en plus misérable et odieux à ses sujets. C'est un crime à Tyr que d'avoir de grands biens; l'avarice

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