

SOME
SCOTTISH~NOVELISTS.

by
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Introduction

Sir Walter Scott.

George MacDonald

Robert Louis Stevenson

J. M. Barrie

S. R. Crockett

John Watson (Ian MacLaren)

Introduction

Scotland, the size and population being taken into consideration, stands near the first if not at the head in literary ranks. With other countries it has followed the usual line of development with one exception, that of the Drama. The Ballad literature is exceptionally fine, in fact is considered, by some critics, the best of the kind ever written. Their Lyrical poetry contains some of the most beautiful songs ever produced. Their History and Essay work is not so conspicuously good as their work in other lines, but still in this we must make one exception, that of Carlyle.

To the present century is due the honor of producing the best of Scottish writing the novel. Almost all types of the novel are here represented.

It would be impossible in this small space to speak of all the Scotch novelists so I will confine myself to six of the most famous of them and give a few thoughts on their preparation and work, not so much from my own ideas as from those of others who are more competent to judge than I.

Sir Walter Scott.

Sir Walter Scott though the first in importance was not the first Scotch novelist. His predecessors did fair work but of the kind

to be uninteresting in other than their own time to anyone but a student of literature.

Sir Walter Scott was of gentle birth, for he was directly descended from Walter Scott who was commonly called "Auld Watt of Horder". He says of himself "I am therefore lineally descended from that ancient chieftain whose name I have made to ring in many a ditty and from his fair dame the Flower of Yarrow. No bad genealogy for a Border minstrel." His mind was turned to the study of Border history and poetry, the basis of his fame as a poet and romancer, by his pride in the real or supposed feudal dignity and the marauding exploits of his ancestors. On his mother's side he could also trace his descent from chiefs of famous clans.

Scott's mother was a woman of imagination and culture, his father was methodical and industrious. The son seems to have inherited the best qualities of one and acquired the best qualities of the other.

Scott says that his speed of writing was due to preparation begun in boyhood. When a child he was left much to himself and being delicate was not pushed in school. He had much time

therefore to read. In this reading he acquired much of the romantic lore of which he made so much use in after years. Chance threw him in with much of this style of literature, not all from books but part from stories told him by friends and relatives. During his studies and apprenticeship he still pursued steadily and ardently his own favorite studies. That he was willing to master dry and uninteresting work, (It is said that Scott learned French and Italian for no other reason than to be able to read the romances and lore of those countries in the original language.) in pursuit of romantic reading shows to some extent the strength of Scott's passion.

Scott is really what may be called the father of the modern historical novel. He did not originate it, but he put it in the modern form. His historical novel is used as the model by later writers. Scott wrote at a very rapid rate and his stories show it; they move along rapidly and keep up your interest throughout the story. His characters are clearly and distinctly drawn. No two seem alike. It has been said of Scott that he was "Second only to Shakespeare in creative or

imaginative literature. Perhaps the best self-conscious of all our poets; a narrative poet of rare picturesque quality. All is great in the Waverley novels, material, effect, characters, execution."

His Ballads have the same interest to us as his novels. They are romances in verse instead of prose.

His most famous or rather most popular novels are Ivanhoe, The Antiquary, Old Mortality, Waverley, Kenilworth, The Talisman, Red Gauntlet, Guy Rannering, Rob Roy, Luncheon Burward, The Bride of Lammermoor and the Heart of Mid-Lothian.

Ivanhoe is perhaps the most read and most popular of Scott's novels. Ivanhoe is a story of the crusades in the time of Robin Hood the outlaw and his merry men the feudal system was still in its full strength and the Jewish persecutions were as bad as ever and Romance and Chivalry were still alive. It was when the church still held the whole of England under its rule. The story hinges upon feuds between the Saxon nobles and between the Saxon nobles and the Normans. Richard Cœur de Lion has just returned to England.

from his imprisonment in Austria, to find his brother John preparing to usurp the throne. The beauty of the story lies in the swiftness of movement. The vivid descriptions of scenery and characters, principally the characters of the men though Rebecca, who is one of his few well drawn woman characters in higher life, is one of the most forcible and beautiful characters in fiction.

George MacDonald

George MacDonald the next great Scotch novelist both in rank and time was born about 1824. His most famous novels are "Alec Forbes of Howglen," "Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood" and "Wilfred Cumberland." He rather inclines toward mysticism in his novels and retains throughout his stories a very strong religious tone. In most of them he develops the life of our young man from childhood up. Though his stories are various this is the usual plan. He was the first novelist to bring out the Scotch University life, and this he did with peculiar success. No one who has read Alec Forbes will ever forget this phase of it.

He is one of the most original novelists

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of the day, especially in describing humble Scottish life and feeling, whose genius 'loves to dwell on the border land between poetry and prose, between this world and romance'

"Mr Macdonald is a master of thought and sentiment, with fine fancy and descriptive power, but with little or no constructive tact. His ideas are apt to run away with him, and to cause one part of his story to move in a wholly different atmosphere from that of the other. The quaint realism of the first volume of David Elginbrod, but in differently reconciles itself with the spiritualistic effusiveness of the latter, The Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood errs in the same way also 'Malcolm'."

His Scotch is the dialect of the east of Scotland, Moray and Aberdeen, Not the classic Scotch of Burns and Scott.

Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Stevenson came into prominence about fifteen years ago and since then has been ranked very high. His stories are mostly of adventure or of the supernatural.

As a child he was not an especially

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brilliant scholar. It is said by a friend of his that when she first knew him his school days and tears were past and he was facing what he called "the equinoctial gales of youth" and beginning to put his self taught art of writing into print. His enthusiasm was very infectious and refreshing. He was always brim full of new ideas, new ventures, full of sweeping changes, a rabid radical. a religious doubter; though with him as with others, there was more belief in honest doubt than in half the creeds. He had an insatiable curiosity. It is said of the Picturesque notes of Edinburgh that no one could clothe the Historical facts of Edinburgh in more graphic words than this slim son of hers. To those who knew Stevenson he was not so much the famous author as the sympathetic comrade, the unique ideal talker we welcomed when he was a boy.

Hamilton W. Mabie says that Stevenson leaves the commonplace severely alone. He knew at a glance what was meaningless and what was significant of character, birth and tradition. He had a novelist's joy in whatever made a character, a dramatist's

delight in whatever suggests movement, passion, and the stir of elemental forces. This is what gives him the skill in treating semi-savage man. You find these in the story 'In the South Seas.'

Mabie also says "There are dim places and dark corners in Stevenson's imagination which he is careful not to explore too thoroughly. They hold in reserve for him the fears and fancies of an earlier time and he delighted to call out of their recesses strange and weird figures, such as "Will o' the Will" "Markheim" and "Thrawn Janet" illustrate a native power of evoking a kind of emotion and producing a kind of impression which has largely passed out of the possession of modern men."

In his book "Fables" Stevenson constantly deals with this elusive but mysterious element in human thought, but he holds it in close contact with the soundest kind of good sense.

"Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" most daring and most successful recent example of this power.

Opinions differ as to Dr. Jekyll and Mr.

Hyde one man says "The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde was never a work of art. It was set down, as it was at once apparent to the discerning, for exactly what it was worth; a dreamed dream monstrous Vague Malformed. It did indeed provide the "fresh shudder" It was Stevenson's elfin joke awful enough to the average mind. But it made an unpermissible story and one which has always borrowed from the unapproachable other work of its author an importance which it does not deserve.

Mr. Addington Symonds one of Stevensons dearest friends in a private letter to him gives this criticism. "I doubt whether any one has the right so to scrutinize 'the abysmal deeps of personality' at least I think he ought to bring more of distinct belief in the resources of human nature, more faith, more sympathy with our frailty, into the matter than you have done. The art is burning and intense. The Beau Le Chagrin disappears and Poe's work is water. Also one discerns at once that this is an allegory of all lively-natured souls who yield consciously

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to evil. Most of us are on the brink of educating a Mr Hyde at some epoch of our being. But the scientific cast of the allegory will only act as an incentive to moral self-murder with those who perceive the allegory profoundly. x x x You see I am trembling under the magician's wand of your fancy and rebelling against it with the scorn of a soul that hates to be contaminated with the mere picture of victorious evil. Our only chance seems to me to be to maintain against all appearances that evil can never, and in no way be victorious x x x The suicide end of Dr Jekyll is too commonplace. Dr. Jekyll ought to have given Mr. Hyde up to justice. This would have vindicated the sense of human dignity which is so horribly outraged in your book"

Several of Stevenson's tales have been dramatised successfully. The Master of Ballantrae ends on the stage where the story might well have ended with the duel between the brothers.

Barricade, Crockett, Watson.

The next three novelists I will take up in one group. they are almost always

classed in this way and quite often called the Rail-yard novelists on account of their dealing with the lower classes of society.

Banue

Of these three Banue is undoubtedly the most deserving of his fame. Any man that can write such a tribute to his mother as Banue did in *Margaret Agilvy* should be placed high in the annals of literature. "Mr Banue has written nothing more characteristic than '*Margaret Agilvy*.' " Noah Brooks of it "This sketch of Banue's mother is at once intimate and reticent, tender and strong - the delicacy of preception, the refinement of feeling, and the unaffected charm of style give this bit of biography the distinction which inheres in the mind of a man whose genius is an expression of a nature of singular purity and sweetness. The gentle Scotch woman with her homely loveliness, her quiet courage, her sunny temper and her charming humor, is a new figure in our literature. The sketch is a bit of autobiography as well; a glimpse into the childhood of the man who, in '*Sentimental Tommy*' has given us one of the truest and deepest records of a

boys life which has ever been written." "In 'Sentimental Tommy'" says the Critic "the subtle mixture of humor and pathos is unusual even with this master of those qualities," and in the 'Chicago Record' it is said "The scope is broader perhaps even than 'The little Munster' and there is the same flashing of humor and pathos, the quality which as much as any other, has gained Mr. Barrie his great popularity." Crockett.

No one who makes excursions into temporary fiction, says Hamilton Mabie after speaking of "In the South Seas," is supposed to remain long in the far East. Sooner or later he finds himself in Scotland a country which of late years has had the good fortune to develop a number of story-tellers of genuine gift. Among the most familiar of this group is S. R. Crockett, whose latest venture in the field of romance, "They Gray Mac" describes a series of incidents which grow out of the great feud between the two branches of the Clan of Kennedy during the reign of James VI. Like most of its predecessors from the same hand the novel is furnished with an abundance

of startling incidents and picturesque adventure.

Mr. Crockett's works are almost evenly good. The most marked thing you notice in reading them is that the first one you read you will like the best. They are usually ranked in the order of reading. The 'Raider' his first long story is very strong and I myself admire it most. 'The Man of the Moss Hags' is his only other novel of any importance.

John Watson (Ian MacLaren)

Ian MacLaren has put out but one long story "Kate Carnegie". It is quite on the level so far as humor and pathos are concerned with his earlier volumes of short stories and quite superior to them in solidity of structure and in excellence of literary workmanship. It will easily take a place among the best novels of the year (1896) and is likely to be read for some time to come.

Conclusion

One of the peculiar things that we notice about the Scotch novel, is the very small part that is played by the women

In some of the stories women are often mentioned but they are not so strongly or so well drawn as the men. Stevenson has no women - except to mention a wife to inn-keeper in Treasure Island and the keeper of Mr. Hyde's rooms. Mr. Crockett's women are all alike with the exception of Kate Kennedy. Nell Kennedy, Marion Lums and May Muschey, are all the same girl only with different associations. Scott's women are all well drawn with a few strong ones but they are not to be compared with his men, and besides they are mostly incomplete sketches. Of the remaining three Baner draws the strongest women. But can they compare with his other characters?

In spite of the exceptions that can be drawn it is true that they all excel in the drawing of characters in common life.

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