The Pirate: Andrew Lang Edition

Walter Scott

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The Pirate: Andrew Lang Edition

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Transcriber's note:

[oe] represents the oe-ligature.

THE PIRATE.

Nothing in him---- But doth suffer a sea-change.

Tempest.

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The Waverley Novels

With New Introductions, Notes and Glossaries by Andrew Lang

THE PIRATE

by

SIR WALTER SCOTT, Bart.

Illustrated

University Library Association Philadelphia

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Andrew Lang Edition.

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO THE PIRATE.

The circumstances in which "The Pirate" was composed have for the Editor a peculiar interest. He has many times scribbled at the old bureau in Chiefswood whereon Sir Walter worked at his novel, and sat in summer weather beneath the great tree on the lawn where Erskine used to read the fresh chapters to Lockhart and his wife, while the burn murmured by from the Rhymer's Glen. So little altered is the cottage of Chiefswood by the addition of a gabled wing in the same red stone as the older portion, so charmed a quiet has the place, in the shelter of Eildon Hill, that there one can readily beget the golden time again, and think oneself back into the day when Mustard and Spice, running down the shady glen, might herald the coming of the Sheriff himself. Happy hours and gone: like that summer of 1821, whereof Lockhart speaks with an emotion the more touching because it is so rare,--

the first of several seasons, which will ever dwell on my memory as the happiest of my life. We were near enough Abbotsford to partake as often as we liked of its brilliant society; yet could do so without being exposed to the worry and exhaustion of spirit which the daily reception of new visitors entailed upon all the society except Sir Walter himself. But, in truth, even he was not always proof against the annoyances connected with such a style of open-house-keeping. Even his temper sank sometimes under the solemn applause of learned dulness, the vapid raptures of painted and periwigged dowagers the horse-leech avidity with which underbred foreigners urged their questions, and the pompous simpers of condescending magnates. When sore beset in this way, he would every now and then discover that he had some very particular business to attend to on an outlying part of his estate, and, craving the indulgence of his guests

overnight, appear at the cabin in the glen before its inhabitants were astir in the morning. The clatter of Sibyl Grey's hoofs, the yelping of Mustard and Spice, and his own joyous shout of _reveillée_ under our window, were the signal that he had burst his bonds, and meant for that day to take his ease in his inn.... After breakfast he would take possession of a dressing-room upstairs, and write a chapter of "The Pirate"; and then, having made up and dispatched his parcel for Mr. Ballantyne, away to join Purdie where the foresters were at work....

The constant and eager delight with which Erskine watched the progress of the tale has left a deep impression on my memory: and indeed I heard so many of its chapters first read from the MS. by him, that I can never open the book now without thinking I hear his voice. Sir Walter used to give him at breakfast the pages he had written that morning, and very commonly, while he was again at work in his study, Erskine would walk over to Chiefswood, that he might have the pleasure of reading them aloud to my wife and me under our favourite tree.[1]

"The tree is living yet!" This long quotation from a book but too little read in general may be excused for its interest, as bearing on the composition of "The Pirate," in the early autumn of 1821. In "The Pirate" Scott fell back on his recollections of the Orcades, as seen by him in a tour with the Commissioners of Light Houses, in August 1814, immediately after the publication of "Waverley." They were accompanied by Mr. Stevenson, the celebrated engineer, "a most gentlemanlike and modest man, and well known by his scientific skill."[2] It is understood that Mr. Stevenson also kept a diary, and that it is to be published by the care of his distinguished grandson, Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, author of "Kidnapped," "The Master of

Ballantrae," and other novels in which Scott would have recognised a not alien genius.

Sir Walter's Diary, read in company with "The Pirate," offers a most curious study of his art in composition. It may be said that he scarcely noted a natural feature, a monument, a custom, a superstition, or a legend in Zetland and Orkney which he did not weave into the magic web of his romance. In the Diary all those matters appear as very ordinary; in "The Pirate" they are transfigured in the light of fancy. History gives Scott the career of Gow and his betrothal to an island lady: observation gives him a few headlands, Picts' houses, ruined towers, and old stone monuments, and his characters gather about these, in rhythmic array, like the dancers in the sword-dance. We may conceive that Cleveland, like Gow, was originally meant to die, and that Minna, like Margaret in the ballad of Clerk Saunders, was to recover her troth from the hand of her dead lover. But, if Scott intended this, he was good-natured, and relented.

Taking the incidents in the Diary in company with the novel, we find, in the very first page of "The Pirate," mention of the roost, or rost, of Sumburgh, the running current of tidal water, which he hated so, because it made him so sea-sick. "All the landsmen sicker than sick, and our Viceroy, Stevenson, qualmish. It is proposed to have a light on Sumburgh Head. Fitful Head is higher, but is to the west, from which quarter few vessels come." As for Sumburgh Head, Scott climbed it, rolled down a rock from the summit, and found it "a fine situation to compose an ode to the Genius of Sumburgh Head, or an Elegy upon a Cormorant--or to have written or spoken madness of any kind in prose or poetry. But I gave vent to my excited feelings in a more simple way, and, sitting gently down on the steep green slope

which led to the beach, I e'en slid down a few hundred feet, and found the exercise quite an adequate vent to my enthusiasm."

Sir Walter was certainly not what he found Mrs. Hemans, "too poetical."

In the first chapter, his Giffords, Scotts (of Scotstarvet, the Fifeshire house, not of the Border clan), and Mouats are the very gentry who entertained him on his tour. His "plantie cruives," in the novel, had been noted in the Diary (Lockhart, iv. 193). "Pate Stewart," the oppressive Earl, is chronicled at length in "the Diary." "His huge tower remains wild and desolate--its chambers filled with sand, and its rifted walls and dismantled battlements giving unrestrained access to the roaring sea-blast." So Scott wrote in his last review for the "Quarterly," a criticism of Pitcairn's "Scotch Criminal Trials" (1831). The Trows, or Drows, the fairy dwarfs he studied on the spot, and connects the name with Dwerg, though _Trolls_ seem rather to be their spiritual and linguistic ancestors. The affair of the clergyman who was taken for a Pecht, or Pict, actually occurred during the tour, and Mr. Stevenson, who had met the poor Pecht before, was able to clear his character.[3] In the same place the Kraken is mentioned: he had been visible for nearly a fortnight, but no sailor dared go near him.

He lay in the offing a fortnight or more,
  But the devil a Zetlander put from the shore.
  If your Grace thinks I'm writing the thing that is not,
  You may ask at a namesake of ours, Mr. Scott,

Sir Walter wrote to the Duke of Buccleugh. He paid a visit to an old lady, who, like Norna, and Æolus in the Odyssey, kept the winds in a

bag, and could sell a fair breeze. "She was a miserable figure, upwards of ninety, she told me, and dried up like a mummy. A sort of clay-coloured cloak, folded over her head, corresponded in colour to her corpse-like complexion. Fine light-blue eyes, and nose and chin that almost met, and a ghastly expression of cunning gave her quite the effect of Hecate. She told us she remembered _Gow the Pirate_, betrothed to a Miss Gordon,"--so here are the germs of Norna, Cleveland, and Minna, all sown in good ground, to bear fruit in seven years (1814-1821). Triptolemus Yellowley is entirely derived from the Diary, and is an anachronism. The Lowland Scots factors and ploughs were only coming in while Scott was in the isles. He himself saw the absurd little mills (vol. i. ch. xi.), and the one stilted plough which needed two women to open the furrows, a feebler plough than the Virgilian specimens which one still remarks in Tuscany. "When this precious machine was in motion, it was dragged by four little bullocks, yoked abreast, and as many ponies harnessed, or rather strung, to the plough by ropes and thongs of raw hide.... An antiquary might be of opinion that this was the very model of the original plough invented by Triptolemus," son of the Eleusinian king, who sheltered Demeter in her wanderings. The sword-dance was not danced for Scott's entertainment, but he heard of the Pupa dancers, and got a copy of the accompanying chant, and was presented with examples of the flint and bronze Celts which Norna treasured. All over the world, as in Zetland, they were regarded as "thunder stones." (Diary; Lockhart, iv. 220.) The bridal of Norna, by clasping of hands through Odin's stone ring, was still practised as a form of betrothal. (Lockhart, iv. 252.) Some island people were despised, as by Magnus Troil, as "poor sneaks" who ate limpets, "the last of human

meannesses." The "wells," or smooth wave-currents, were also noted, and the _Garland_ of the whalers often alluded to in the tale. The Stones of Stennis were visited, and the Dwarfie Stone of Hoy, where Norna, like some Eskimo Angekok, met her familiar demon. Scott held that the stone "probably was meant as the temple of some northern edition of the _dii Manes_. They conceive that the dwarf may be seen sometimes sitting at the door of his abode, but he vanishes on a nearer approach." The dwelling of Norna, a Pict's house, with an overhanging story, "shaped like a dice-box," is the ancient Castle of Mousa.[4] The strange incantation of Norna, the dropping of molten lead into water, is also described. Usually the lead was poured through the wards of a key. In affections of the heart, like Minna's, a triangular stone, probably a neolithic arrow-head, was usually employed as an amulet. (Lockhart, iv. 208.) Even the story of the pirate's insolent answer to the Provost is adapted from a recent occurrence. Two whalers were accused of stealing a sheep. The first denied the charge, but said he had seen the animal carried off by "a fellow with a red nose and a black wig. Don't you think he was like his honour, Tom?" "By God, Jack, I believe it was the very man." (Diary; Lockhart, iv. 222; "The Pirate," vol. ii. ch. xiv.) The goldless Northern Ophir was also visited--in brief, Scott scarcely made a remark on his tour which he did not manage to transmute into the rare metal of his romance. It is no wonder that the Orcadians at once detected his authorship. A trifling anecdote of the cruise has recently been published. Scott presented a lady in the isles with a piano, which, it seems, is still capable of producing a melancholy jingling tune.[5]

Lockhart says, as to the reception of "The Pirate" (Dec. 1821): "The

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