SCOTTISH NATIONAL HUMOUR.

NO one can pass a lifetime among the people of our countryside without being made aware, in ways pleasant and the reverse, of the great amount of popular humour ever bubbling up from the heart of the common people. It is to them the salt of intercourse, the oil on the axles of their life. Not often does it reach the stage of being expressed in literary form. It is lost for the time being in the stir of farm-byres, in the cheerful talk of ingle-nooks. You can hear it being windily exchanged in the greetings of shepherds crying the one to the other across the valleys. It finds way in the observations of passing hinds as they meet on the way to mill, and kirk, and market.

For example, an artist is busy at his easel by the wayside. A rustic is looking over his shoulder in the free manner of the independent Scot. A brother rustic is in a field near by with his hands in his pockets. He is uncertain whether it is worth while to take the trouble to mount the dyke for the uncertain pleasure of looking at the picture. "What is he doing, Jock?" asks he in the field of his better situated mate. "Drawin' wi' pent!" returns Jock, over his shoulder. "Is 't bonny?" again asks the son of toil in the field. "OCHT BUT BONNY!" comes back the prompt and decided answer of the critic. Of considerations for the artist's feelings there is not a trace. Yet both of these rustics will appreciatively relate the incident on coming in from the field and washing themselves, with this rider: "An' he didna look ower weel pleased, I can tell ye! Did he, Jock?"

This great body of popular humour first found its way into the channels of our historic literature mainly in the form of ballads and songs—often very free in taste and broad in expression, because they

were struck from the rustic heart, and accordingly smelt of the farm-yard where common things are called by their common names.

But in time these rose to higher strata in the poems of Lindsay, in some of Knox's prose—very grim and strong it is—and in Dunbar and Henrysoun, mixed in every case with strongly personal elements. Burns alone caught, and held the full force of it, for he was of the soil and grew up near to it. So that to all time he must remain the finest expression of almost all forms of Scottish feeling. As to prose, chap-books and pamphlets innumerable carried on the stream, which for the most part was conveyed underground, till, in the fulness of the time, Walter Scott came to give Scottish humour world-wide fame in the noble series of imaginative writings by which he set his native land beside the England of William Shakespeare.

Scott was the first great literary gardener of our old national stock of humour, and right widely he gathered, as those know who have striven to follow in his trail. Hardly a chap-book but he has been through—hardly a generation of our national history that he has not touched and adorned. Yet because Scotland is a wide place, and Scottish humour also in every sense broad, no future humorist need feel straitened within their ample bounds.

Of all the cherished delusions of the inhabitant of the southern part of Great Britain with regard to his northern brother, the most astonishing is the belief that the Scot is destitute of humour. Other delusions may be dissipated by a tourist ticket and the ascent of Ben Nevis—such as that, north of the Tweed, we dress solely in the kilt—which we do not, at least, during the day; that we support life solely upon haggis and the product of the national distilleries; that the professors of Edinburgh University, being "panged fu' o' lear," communicate the same to their students in the purest Gaelic—a thing which, though not altogether unprecedented, is, I am told, considered somewhat informal by the Senatus.

These may be taken as examples of the grosser delusions which leap to the eye, and are received upon the ear as often as the subject of Scotland arises in a company of the untravelled, and as we should say "glaikit Englisher."

But such vulgar errors are now chiefly confined to the solemnly fatuous sheets which proclaim themselves to be comic papers; and which, as I observe from the evidence of the railway bookstalls, command a much more ready sale in England than the works of all the humorists from Charles Lamb to Mr. Jerome K. Jerome. A man is known by the company he keeps. He is still better known, at least when he travels, by the papers he buys. For it is but rarely that we can select our travelling companions; while, on the contrary, when, at that gay and pleasing mart of literature of which I confess myself a devotee, the railway bookstall, a man says boldly, "*Illustrated*

Scrapings, *Orts*, *Bits*, *Chips*, and the *Pink 'Un!*" he writes himself down as a genuine lover of literature, of a kind, indeed, but I know well that Mr. Lang and Mr. Barrie will not profit by him.

It is, however, not always wise to judge by appearances. A friend of mine upon one occasion very nearly lost the important goodwill of the father of the lady to whom his affections were at the time somewhat engaged, by foolishly colloguing with a certain prospective brother-in-law, a youth wholly without reverence, and buying a large quantity of the aforesaid *Orts-and-Scrapings* illustrated literature. This the ill-set pair strapped conspicuously upon the outside of the paternal dressing-cases and rugs—which, not being discovered till the journey was far spent, occasioned great indignation in the owner, who had instructed the buying of *Punch*, the *Guardian*, the *Spectator*, and other serious literature of that kind. Explanations and apologies were not accepted; and, as I say, this man of my acquaintance nearly lost a fairly good wife over this occurrence.

It is a dictum of the most justly celebrated of emeritus professors of the classics (alas! gone from the upper world since this paper was in print) that "every person who despises the Greek language and literature proves himself to be either a conceited puppy or an ignorant fool." Our own attitude towards the Greek language at that time was not, however, that of contempt. We have always had the deepest respect and admiration for the Greek language, as well as for the equator; and we are sure that upon more intimate acquaintance that admiration and respect would increase, we may say, on both sides. So that, though the professor frequently told us that he had known several learned pigs to make much better Greek verses than ourselves, we are yet free of his greater excommunication.

But I should like to pass on his commination, after expressing my envious admiration of the strength and compactness of his language. This (it is understood) is what married ladies are wont to do, who have been sorely tried during the day by the stupidity of servants and the contrariness of circumstances—they wait till their husbands come home, and *pass it on*. For this makes the thing fair all round and prevents hard feelings.

So I should much like to say, here and now, that "every person who despises Scottish national humour proves himself to be either a conceited puppy or an ignorant fool." I should like to add—"or both!"

There is a classical passage in the works of Mr. Stevenson, which, with the metrical psalms, the poems of Burns, and the Catechisms, Shorter and Larger, ought to be required of every Scottish man or woman before they be allowed to get married. It is sad to see young people setting up house so ill-fitted for the battle of life. The passage from Mr. Stevenson is as follows. I protest that I never can read

it, even for the hundredth time, without a certain sympathetic moisture of the eye.

None but an Edinburgh lad could have written it—none but one to whom nature and the works of God meant chiefly the Pentlands and the Lothians :

"There is no special loveliness in that grey country, with its rainy, sea-beat archipelago; its fields of dark mountains; its unsightly places, black with coal; its treeless, sour, unfriendly-looking corn-lands; its quaint, grey, castled city, where the bells clash of a Sunday, and the wind squalls, and the salt showers fly and beat. I do not know if I desire to live there; but let me hear, in some far land, a kindred voice sing out, 'Oh, why left I my hame?' and it seems at once as if no beauty under the kind heavens, and no society of the good and wise, can repay me for my absence from my country. And though I would rather die elsewhere, yet in my heart of hearts I long to be buried among good Scots clods. I will say it fairly, it grows on me with every year; there are no stars so lovely as Edinburgh street-lamps. The happiest lot on earth is to be born a Scotsman. You must pay for it in many ways, as for all other advantages on earth. You have to learn the Paraphrases and the Shorter Catechism; you generally take to drink; your youth, so far as I can make out, is a time of louder war against society, of more outcry, and tears, and turmoil, than if you were born, for instance, in England. But, somehow, life is warmer and closer, the hearth burns more redly; the lights of home shine softer on the rainy street, the very names, endeared in verse and music, cling nearer round our hearts. An Englishman may meet an Englishman to-morrow, upon Chimborazo, and neither of them care; but when the Scotch wine-grower told me of Mons Meg, it was like magic.

"From the dim shieling on the misty island,
Mountains divide us and a world of seas;
Yet still our hearts are true, our hearts are Highland,
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides."

Our humour lies so near our feeling for our country that I would almost say, if we do not feel this quotation—ay, and feel it in our bones—we may take it for granted that both the humour and the pathos of Scotland are to be hid from us during the term of our natural lives.

However, as Mr. Whistler said, when a friend pointed out to him a certain suggestion of the landscape Whistlerian in an actual sunset—"Ah, yes, nature is creeping up!" so we may say, with reference to the appreciation of Scottish humour south of the Tweed, England is "creeping up." The numbers of editions of Scott, edited and inedited, illustrated and annotated, plain and coloured, prove it. Other things also prove it. It is always a good brick to throw at a literary pessimist, to tell him the number of editions of Scott that have appeared during the last half-dozen years. I do not know how many there are—I have no idea—but I always say fifty-three and four more coming, for that sounds exact, and as if one had all the statistics up one's sleeve. If you say these little things with a confident air, you are never contra-

dicted. No one knows any different. It is a habit worth acquiring. I am not proud of the accomplishment, and I don't mind saying that I learned the trick from listening to the evidence of skilled witnesses in the Courts of Law.

My subject is "Scottish National Humour in Fiction."

Therefore let us look for a moment at the national humour of fact. The Scots were, for instance, a people intensely loyal to their kings and queens. Yet, so long as they were with us, we dissembled our affection. Alas, we never told our love! In fact, we always rebelled against them, so that they might have a good time hanging us in the Grassmarket and ornamenting the Netherbow with our heads. But as soon as we had driven these kings and queens into exile, we became tremendously loyal, and kept up constant trokings with the exiled at Carisbrook, in Holland, or with "the king over the water." Our very Cameronians became Jacobites and split on the subject, as the Scottish kirks always did—being apparently of the variety of animalculæ which multiply by fissure. So we went on, till we got them back, and again seated on the throne with a firm seat and a tight rein. Then we rebelled once more, just to keep them aware of themselves. Thus was our national humour expressed in history.

Or we had our family feuds. It mattered not whether we were kilted Macs of the North or steel-capped, leathern-jacked Kennedies of the South, we loved our name and clan, and stood for them against king and country. But, nevertheless, we arose early in the morning and had family worship, like Mr. John Mure of Auchendraine. Then we rode forth, with spear and pistolet, to convince some erring brother of the clan that he must not do so. I received a delightful entry from an old family register of facts the other day. It was mixed up with religious reflections, and had this trifling memorandum interpolated to break the placid flow of the spiritual meditation. "This day and date oor Jock stickit to deid Wat Maxwell o' Traquair! Glory be to the Father and to the Son!"

This also is a part of our national humour of fact.

Master Adam Blackadder was an apprentice boy in Stirling in the troublous times of the Covenant. The military were coming, and the whole Whiggish town took flight.

"'I would have been for running, too,' says young Adam, the merchant's loon, 'I would have been for the running, too, but my master discharged me to leave the shop. "For," said he, "they will not have the confidence to take the like of you, a silly young lad." However, a few days thereafter I was gripped by two messengers early in the morning, who, for haste, would not suffer me to tie up my stockings, or put about my cravat, but hurried me away to Provost Russel's lodgings—a violent persecutor and ignorant wretch! The first word he spak to me (putting on his breeches) was, "Is not this braw wark, sirr, that we maun be troubled wi' the like o' you?" I answered (brave loon, Adam!), "Ye hae gotten a braw prize, my lord, that

has claucht a poor prentice!" He answered, "We canna' help it, sirr, we must obey the king's lawes!" "King's lawes, my lord," I says, "there is no such lawes under the sun!" For I had heard that, by the bond, heritors were bound for their tenants and masters for their servants—*and not servants for themselves* (and so Andrew had him). "No such laws, sirr," says our sweet Provost, "ye lee'ed like a knave and traitour, as ye are. So, sirr, ye come not here to dispute the matter; away with him, away with him to the prison.'"

So accordingly they haled away the humoursome apprentice of Stirling to Bridewell, where, as he says, and as we should expect, he was never merrier in his life, albeit within iron gates and waiting on the mercy of the "sweet Provost" whom he surprised "putting on his breeks."

But how exquisitely humorous is the whole scene—the lad, not to be "feared," and well content to get the better of the Provost in the battle of words, derives an admirable satisfaction from the difficulties of his enemy, who has perforce to argue while "putting on his breeks," a time when teguments, not arguments, are most fitting. Meanwhile the Provost is grimly conscious that he is getting the worst of it, and that what the prentice loon said to him will be a sad jest when the bailies congregate round the civic punch-bowl; yet, for all that, he is not unappreciative of the lad's national right to say his say, and, not without some reluctance, silences him with the incontrovertible argument of the "iron gates." This also is Scottish and national, and could hardly be native elsewhere.

As we go on to consider these and other similar circumstances chronicled in our national history, certain ill-defined but obvious sorts and kinds of national humour emerge. They look at us out of all manner of unexpected places—out of the records of the Great Seal, out of the minutes of the Privy Council, out of State trials, out of the findings of juries. "We find that the prisoner killit not the particular man aforesaid, yet that *nevertheless* he is deserving of hanging." On general grounds, it is to be presumed, and to encourage the others! So hanged the acquitted man duly was. Then there is the famous indictment upon which (if all tales be true) one Mossman was hanged, on May 20, 1785. "1st. He was fand onabil to give an account of himsel'. 2nd. He wan'ered in his discoorse. 3rd. He said that he cam' from Carrick!" He was immediately executed.

Disentangling some of these threads of humour which shoot scarlet through the hodden grey of our national records, we can distinguish four kinds of historical humour—first, the humour which I propose, without any particular law or licence, to call by analogy "Polter Humour." The best attested of all apparitions is a certain Galloway ghost—the spirit which troubled the house of Collin, in the parish of Rerrick, for months, and was only finally exorcised after many wrestlings with

all the ministers of the country-side in Presbytery assembled. It was a merry and noisy spirit of the type called (I am informed) the Polter Ghost, a perfect master of the whistling, pinching, vexing, stone-throwing, spiritualistic athletic. So following this analogy we may call a considerable part of our national humour of fact "Polter Humour." It is the same kind of thing which, mixed with the animal spirits and primitive methods of the undergraduate, leads him occasionally to thump upon the floor of philosophy class-rooms in a manner most unphilosophic. I am, it may be, thinking of the things that were in the good old times, when it was a mistake, trivial in the extreme, to forget one's college note-book, but capital to leave behind one's stick. The Polter Humour of Scotland is largely the humour of the unlicked cub, playing with such dangerous weapons as swords and battle-axes, instead of boot-laces and blacking.

"There is no discourse between a full man and a fasting. Sit ye doon, Sir Patrick Grey," said the Black Douglas to the king's messenger, sent to demand the release of Maclellan of Bombie. Sir Patrick, who might have known better, sits him down. The Black Douglas moves his hand and his eyebrow once; and even while the messenger is solacing himself with "doo-tairt" and a cup of sack, poor Maclellan is had out to the green and beheaded. Sir Patrick finishes, and wipes his five-pronged forks in the national manner underneath his doublet. He is ready to talk business, and so is the Black Douglas—now. "There is your man. Tell his Majesty he is most welcome to him," said the Douglas; "it is a pity that he wants the head!"

That is the Polter Humour *in excelsis*—the undergraduate playing with the headsman's axe instead of the harmless necessary cudgel which costs a shilling.

It is a primitive kind of humour of savage origin; and how many varieties of it there are among savage tribes, and amongst that largest of all savage tribes, the noble outlaw Ishmaels of the world, Boys—Mr. Andrew Lang only knows.

Of this Polter Humour, perhaps the finest instances are to be found in the chap-books of the latter half of last century and the first ten years of this. So soon as Scott had made the Scottish dialect into a national language, the edge seemed completely to go off these productions. With one consent they became flat, stale, and unprofitable. Indeed, they can hardly be called "profitable" reading at the best. For it is like walking down a South Italian lane to read them, so thickly do causes of offence lie around. But for all that, in them we have the rough give-and-take of life at the country weddings, the holy fairs, the kirns and christenings of an older time. I never realised how great and clean Robert Burns was, till I saw from what a state of utter depravity he rescued such homely topics as these.

Yet in these days we are uneasily conscious that even Robert Burns has need to have his feet wiped before he comes into our parlours. As a corrective to this over-refinement, I should prescribe a counter-irritant in the shape of a short but drastic course in the dialect chap-books of the final thirty years of last century.

In the novels of Smollett is to be found the more (or less) literary expression of this form of humour. True, one cannot read very much of him at a time, for the effect of a score of pages acts physically on the stomach like sea-sickness. But yet we cannot deny that there is this Polter Humour element in Scottish fiction, though the fact has been largely and conveniently forgotten in these days. There are, however, some pearls among an inordinate number of swine-sties. Yet we can see the origin, or at least the manifestation, of this peculiar humour in the old civic enactment which caused it to be proclaimed that any citizen walking down the Canongate upon the side causeways after a certain hour of e'en, did so at "the peril of his head." There is to this day a type of sturdy, full-blooded Scot, who cannot imagine anything much funnier than the emptying of a pail of suds out of a window—upon someone else's head. Sometimes this gentleman gets into the House of Commons, and laughs when another member sits down upon his new and glossy hat, which cost him a guinea that morning.

Among the tales of James Hogg there are many examples of Polter Humour. Hogg is, in some of his many rambling stories, the greatest example in literature of the Scottish Picaresque. He delights to carry his hero—who is generally nobody in particular, only a hero—from adventure to adventure without halt or plot, depending upon the swing of the incident to carry him through. And, indeed, so it mostly does. "The Bridal of Polmood," for instance, is of this class. It is not a great original work, like the "Confessions of a Justified Sinner," or a delightful medley of tales like the "Shepherd's Calendar." But it is a sufficiently readable story, though as like the actual life of the times as Tennyson's courtly knights are to the actual Round Table men of Arthur the King. In the "Adventures of Basil Lee" and in "Widow Watts' Courtship," we find the Polter Humour. But, on the whole, the finest instance of Hogg's rattling give-and-take is his briskly humorous and admirable story of "The Souters of Selkirk."

From recent Scottish literature this rough and thoroughly national species of humour has been almost banished; but there is no reason why, having cleaned its feet a little, the Polter Humour might not be revived. There is plenty of it, healthy and hearty, surviving in the nooks and corners of the hills.

The second species of humour which I shall try to discriminate is what, for lack of a better name, I shall call the Humour of Irony. It is akin to the Polter Humour in that it has chiefly reference to actions,

but is of a quieter variety. Of this sort, and to me an exquisite example, is the advice Donald Cargil offered to Claverhouse as he was riding from the field of Drumclog, after his defeat, as hard as his horse could gallop, to "Bide for the afternoon diet of worship!"—a jest which did credit to the grim old "faithful contender," considering that he had been so lately a prisoner in the hands of John Graham himself. I am sure that Claverhouse appreciated the ironical edge of the observation, even if he did not forget the jester:

"Two soldiers reported a squabble between two of their officers to Colonel Graham.

"'How knew ye of the matter?' said Claverhouse.

"'We saw it,' they replied.

"'But how saw ye it?' he continued, pressing them.

"'We were on guard, and, hearing the din and turmoil, we set down our pieces and ran to see.'

"Whereupon Colonel Graham did arise, and gave them many sore paiks, because that they had left their duty to gad about and gaze on that which concerned them not."

In like manner, and in the same excellent antique style, it is told of Duke Rothes that, finding that his Lady was going just a step too far in the freedom with which she entertained proscribed ministers under his very nose, he sent her Ladyship a message, that it behoved her to keep her "black-coated messans" closer to her heel, or else that he would be obliged to kennel them for her.

Perhaps the finest instance of this humour is the well-known story, probably entirely apocryphal, but none the less worthy on that account, of the Fifeshire laird, who, with his man John, was riding to market. (It is, I think, in "Dean Ramsay," and, being far from books, I quote from memory.) The laird and John are passing a hole in the moor, when the laird turns his thumb over his shoulder and says: "John, I saw a tod gang in there!"

"Did ye, indeed, laird?" cries John, all his hunting blood instantly on fire. "Ride ye your lane to the toon; I'll howk the craitur oot!"

So back goes John for pick and spade, having first stopped the earth. The laird rides his way, and all day he is forgathering with his cronies, and "preeing the drappie" at the market town—ploys in which his henchman would ably and willingly have seconded him. It is the hour of evening, and the laird rides home. He comes to a mighty excavation on the hillside. The trench is both long and deep. Very tired and somewhat short-grained, John is seated upon a mound of earth, vast as the foundation of a fortress. "There's nae fox here, laird!" says John, wiping the honest sweat of endeavour from his brow. The laird it not put out. He is, indeed, exceedingly pleased with himself. "Deed, John," he says, "I wad hae been muckle surprised gin there had been a tod there. It's ten year since I saw the beast gang in that hole!"

Here the nationality of the ironical humour consists in the non-committal attitude of the laird. It is none of his business if John thinks of spending his day in digging a fox-hole. It is, no doubt, a curious method of taking exercise when one might be at a market ordinary. But there is no use trying to account for tastes, and the laird leaves John to the freedom of his own will. History does not relate what were John's remarks when the laird fared homeward. And that is, perhaps, as well.

This, the method ironical, with an additional spice of kindliness, is Sir Walter's favourite mode of humour. It is, for instance, the basis of Caleb Balderston, especially in the famous scene in the house of Gibbie Girder, the man of tubs and barrels:

"Up got mother and grandmother, and scoured away, jostling each other as they went, into some remote corner of the tenement, where the young hero of the evening was deposited. When Caleb saw the coast fairly clear, he took an invigorating pinch of snuff, to sharpen and confirm his resolution. 'Cauld be my cast,' thought he, 'if either Bide-the-Bent or Girder taste that broche of wild fowl this evening.' And then, addressing the eldest turnspit, a boy of eleven years old, and putting a penny into his hand, he said, 'Here is twal pennies, my man; carry that ower to Mistress Smatrash, and bid her fill my mill wi' sneeshin' and I'll turn the broche for ye i' the meantime—an' she'll gie ye a gingerbread snap for yer pains.'

"No sooner had the elder boy departed on his mission, than Caleb, looking the remaining turnspit gravely and steadily in the face, removed from the fire the spit containing the wild fowl of which he had undertaken the charge, clapped his hat on his head, and fairly marched off with it."

It will not surprise you to hear that in Scott's own time this mode of humour was thought to be both rude and undignified, and many were the criticisms of bad taste and the accusations of literary borrowing that were made, both against this great scene, and against similar other chapters of his most famous books. Their very success promoted the rage of the envious. We find, for instance, the magazines of the time full of ill-natured notices, which, in view of the multiplied editions of the great Wizard, read somewhat strangely at this day. Let me take one at random:

"Scott is just going on in the same blindfold way, and seems, in this as in other things, only to fulfil the destiny assigned to him by Providence—the task of employing the hundred black men of Mr. James Ballantyne's printing office, Coul's Close, Canongate, for I suspect that this is the only real purpose of the author of 'Waverley's' existence."

I read this when the critics prove unkind, and these words are only the beginning of as satisfactory a "slating" as ever fell to the lot of mortal writer.

Of course Scott was too great and many-sided a man to neglect any kind of humour, but on the whole perhaps that national humour of allowing circumstances to take their course, and the persons

engaged to realise the rough under-side of things, is his favourite kind. But in such a masterpiece as "Wandering Willie" he rises to the heights that are not humour alone, but literature of the greatest—mingling the most daring imagination and the finest narrative with something that is as far above humour as humour is above wit. Indeed, it is practically agreed that, in the writing of the short story, art and genius can no further go. And this, in spite of the belief attributed to Mr. W. D. Howells that the short story has recently been discovered in America, and is peculiar to that country.

But nothing tells us more surely of the essential greatness of the master than the way in which, by a few touches, he can so ennoble a humorous figure that he passes at a bound from the humorous to the pathetic, and touches the springs of our tears the more readily that up to that point he has chiefly moved our laughter.

Thus, at the close of Scott's great humorous conception of Caleb Balderston, we have a few words which like a beacon serve to illuminate all his past humours—his foraging, his bowl-breaking, his unprecedented readiness to lie for the sake of the glories of his master's house. It is the last scene in "The Bride of Lammermoor":

"'But I have a master,' cried Caleb, still holding him fast, 'while the heir of Ravenswood breathes. I am but a servant; but I was born your father's—your grandfather's servant—I was born for the family—I have lived for them—I would die for them! Stay but at home and all will be well!'

"'Well, fool, well!' said Ravenswood, 'vain old man; nothing hereafter in life will be well with me, and happiest is the hour that shall soonest close it!'

"So saying, he extricated himself from the old man's hold, threw himself on his horse, and rode out at the gate; but, instantly turning back, he threw towards Caleb, who hastened to meet him, a heavy purse of gold.

"'Caleb,' he said, with a ghastly smile, 'I make you my executor,' and, again turning his bridle, he resumed his course down the hill.

"The gold fell unheeded on the pavement, for the old man ran to observe the course which had been taken by his master. Caleb hastened to the eastern battlement, which commanded the prospect of the whole sands, very near as far as the village of Wolf's Hope. He could easily see his master riding in that direction, as fast as his horse could carry him. The prophecy at once rushed on Balderston's mind, that the Lord of Ravenswood would perish on the Kelpie's Flow, which lay halfway between the tower and the links, or sand-knolls, to the northward of Wolf's Hope. He saw him, accordingly, reach the fatal spot, but he never saw him pass farther.

" . . . Only one vestige of his fate appeared. A large sable feather had been detached from his hat, and the rippling waves of the rising tide wafted it to Caleb's feet.

"The old man took it, dried it, and placed it in his bosom."

Scott is eminently unquotable, yet I should be prepared to stake his genius on a few passages like this, in which, by one or two magic touches, his usual kindly and careless irony suffers a sea-change into something rich and rare—the irony of the gods and of insatiable and

inappeasable fate. Then, indeed, one actually sees the straw and stubble, the wood and stone of his ordinary building material being transmuted before our eyes into fairy gold at the touch of him who, whatever his carelessness and slovenliness, is yet the great Wizard of all time and the master of all who strive to tell the Golden Lie.

I have now come to a humour which is less represented in the nation's past, or, at least, less in the trials and tragical records which constitute the main part of the inheritance of our tumultuous and unpeaceful little land. This, again, for lack of a better name, I call the "Humour of About-the-Doors."

It is hard to say when this began; probably with the first of the race—for the Scot has ever been noted for making the best of his man-servant and his maid-servant, his ox and his ass, and especially of the stranger within his gates. Concerning the Scot's repute for haughtiness, John Major says (I am quoting from Mr. Hume Brown's admirable "Early Scotland," 1521):

"Sabellicus, who was no mean historian, charges the Scots with being of a jealous temper, and it must be admitted that there is some colour for this charge to be gathered elsewhere. . . . . A man that is puffed up strives for some pre-eminence among his fellows, and when he sees that other men are equal to him, or but little inferior, he is filled with rage and breaks out into jealousy. I do not deny (says most honest Major) that some of the Scots may be boastful and puffed up, but whether they suffer more than their neighbours from suchlike faults, I have not quite made up my mind. Sabellicus also asserts that the Scots delight in lying; but to me it is not clear that lies like these flourish with more vigour among the Scots than among other people."

It is pleasant to see Major, nearly four hundred years ago, as the Americans would say, "spreading himself" in praise of his own particular part of broad Scotland, after having made out that, in spite of all faults and all temptations, the Scots are yet the noblest people in the world. He is a worthy predecessor of all such as celebrate their Thrums, their Swanston by the Pentland edge, their Yarrow and Tweedside, their Lang Toun, their Barncraig and Gushetneuk and Drumtochty, their St. Serf's and Carricktown.

Major has been celebrating the fish of the rivers of Scotland:

"Besides these there are the Clyde, the Tweed, and many other rivers, all abounding in salmon, turbot, and trout. [How Mr. Andrew Lang would admire to catch a turbot in the pool beneath the Kelso cemetery, where lies Stoddart, that mighty angler.] And near the sea is plenty of oysters, as well as crabs, and polypods of marvellous size. One crab or polypod is larger than thirty crabs such as are found in the Seine. The shells of the jointed polypods that you see in Paris clinging to the ropes of the pile-driving engines are a sufficient proof of this. In Lent and in summer, at the winter and summer solstice, people go in the early morning from mine own Gleghornie and the neighbouring parts to the shore, drag out the polypods and crabs with hooks, and return at noon with well-filled sacks."

The poor French nation! One native polypod from "mine own Gleghornie" equal to thirty misbegotten polypods of the Seine! And how much nobler 'tis to the polypodic mind to be dragged out with hooks, and stuffed in a bag at the summer and winter solstice, than to cling to the ropes of wretched pile-driving engines in the insignificant city of Paris. "Paris for pile-driving, Gleghornie for pleasure," is the motto for all true polypods!

And so was it ever, and so, please the pigs, shall it be so long as this sturdy knuckle-end of Britain sticks into the Arctic wash of the northern sea.

To the Scot his own gate-end, his own ingle-nook is always the best, the most interesting, the only thing indeed worth singing about and talking about.

So, deep in the Scottish nature, began the Humour of About-the-Doors. It is little wonder that the romancers have generally begun with descriptions of their own kail-yairds—which are the best kail-yairds—the only true kail-yairds, growing the best curly greens, the most entrancing leeks and syboes, lying fairest to the noontide heat, and blinked upon, as John Major says, by the kindliest sun, the sun of "mine own Gleghornie."

It appears to me that John Galt, with all his most absolute limitations, is yet the most excellent, as he was the first, of all these students of "my ain hoose," and "my ain folk." The names, the characters, the descriptions of the places, delight me like a bonny Scots song sung by a bonny Scots lass—and that is the best kind of singing there is. I care not so greatly for plot. I can make my own as I go. I am not greatly interested in what happens to the characters; but the Humour of About-the-Doors interests me past telling; and I read Galt arching my back by the fireside, like a pussy-bawdrons when she is stroked the right way. I should like to see an edition of Galt reprinted—it would not need to be edited, for learned comment would spoil it. I am persuaded that an edition of all the Scottish books of Galt would sell to-day better than they ever did in his own time.* Yet I should be sorry too, for he is a fine, tangled, unexplored garden wild for the wandering Autolycus, and for that I should miss him.

How admirable, for instance, to pull down the first volume of Galt that comes to hand, is the following description of the office-houses of an old Scottish mansion:

"Of somewhat lower and ruder structure was a desultory mass of shapeless buildings—the stable, sty, barn, and byre, with all the appurtenances properly thereunto belonging, such as peat-stack, dung-heap, and coal-heap, with a bivouacry of invalided utensils, such as bottomless boyns, headless

* In contrast with the usual fate of such suggestions, this hint, thrown out to an Edinburgh audience, bids fair to ripen into an excellently printed edition of all the worthy works of John Galt.

barrels, and brushes maimed of their handles—to say nothing of the body of the cat which the undealt-with packman's cur worried on Saturday se'enight. The garden was suitable to the offices and mansion. It was surrounded, but not enclosed, by an undressed hedge, which in more than fifty places offered tempting admission to the cows. The luxuriant grass-walks were never mowed but just before hay-time, and every stock of kale and cabbage stood in its garmentry of curled blades, like a new-made Glasgow bailie's wife on the first Sunday after Michaelmas, dressed for the kirk in the many-plies of her flounces."

Now there are people who do not care for this sort of thing, just as there are folk who prefer the latest concocted perfume to the old-fashioned southern-wood that our grandmothers used doucely to take to the kirk with them folded in their napkins. For me, I could not spare the stave of a single barrel, nor the ragged remains of a single boyn. I take them with a mouth like an alms-dish; and, like the most celebrated of charity boys, I ask for more.

I need not point the moral or enter into the history of the Humour About-the-Doors in recent fiction. Mr. Stevenson, in "Portraits and Memories," Mr. Barrie in all his books, have chronicled how the world grew for them when they were growing, and how the young thoughts moved briskly in them. Mr. Stevenson, being more subjective, was interested mainly in these things as an extension and explanation of his personality. He saw the child he was, the lad he grew to be, move among these surroundings, and they took substance and colour from the very keenness and zest of his reminiscence. Mr. Barrie, stiller and less ready to be understood, waits round the corner, and grips everything as it passes him. But Mr. Stevenson ever went out to seek strange lands. Already, as a child on the shores of an unknown Samoa, he had built him a lordly pleasure-house to the music of the five waterfalls. For he was the eternal Argonaut, the undying treasure-seeker. Each morning he woke and went out with the hope that to-day he would find a new world. To him the sun never grew old, and the hunter hunted the hill to the day's ending ere he came to "lay him down with a will." Rare, very rare, but almost heart-breaking when they do occur, are Mr. Stevenson's tendernesses about his native land:

> "Be it granted me to behold you again in dying,
> Hills of home! And to hear again the call—
> Hear about the graves of the Martyrs the pee-wits crying—
> And hear no more at all!"

Mr. Barrie's feet, without ever straying so far, yet carry him on the track of many a romance, woven of tears and laughter when the world was young. The skies may be unkindly, the seasons dour, the steps steep, and the bread bitter—in Angus and in Thrums. Hard the lot and heavy the sorrow there! Up the steps the bowed woman goes to write a letter, in which the only cry of affection, "My dear

son, Queery," is never uttered by her lips. The bent-backed weaver wheels his web up the brae with creaking wheelbarrow, and lo, in a moment Thrums melts away—we see before us the Eden door, at which stands the angel with the sword of flame, and Adam bending to his mattock, earning the first bairn's bread with the sweat of his brow. There Jess sits by her window, and there Leeby lies in her grave; while never any more comes a "registrardy" letter from London, when the blithe postman's knock had not time to fall before flying feet were at the door to welcome Jamie's letter. For Jess is Eve, the ancient mother, bearing her heavier burden. For Eve's secret is that woman's sorrow only begins with the bringing forth. Also there is Cain going out upon the waste—a bloodless if not guiltless Cain, who has only broken those three hearts that loved him—and his own. I never want to read any more when I have read of Jamie fleeing hot-foot over the commonty, yet like a hunted thing, ever and anon looking back. I want to go up and look at some bairns that lie asleep, each in his cot. And then I learn what it is to pray.

There are other humours that are of our people—and of them alone. These I cannot deal with, for time would fail me to tell of the humour of the Out-of-Doors, the humour of byre and stable—the humour of "When the Kye Comes Hame," of the lowsing-time, of Hallowe'en and Holy Fair. I know not whether there is as much of it now as there once was. They say that there is not. I only know that there was enough and to spare in my time, and that we in those days certainly did not kiss-and-tell. We said little about these jocund humours to our grave and reverent seniors; and now that we are growing suchlike ourselves, I think analogy will help us to believe that there are yet humours in the lives of our juniors as innocent and gladsome, as full of primeval mirth as those of the departed days which we now endeavour, generally so unsuccessfully, to recall.

I do not think that any one will succeed in setting down these things—the humours of his country, his lost years, his lost loves—without finding the tears as often in his eyes as the smile is on his lips. He will not succeed because he sets himself to do it. He must be purposeful, but conceal his purpose and write with his heart. No great romance was ever written with what is known as a purpose. The purpose must emerge, not be thrust before the reader's nose, else he will know that he has strayed into a druggist's shop. And all the beauty of the burnished glass, and all the brilliancy of the drawer labels will not persuade him that medicine is a good steady diet. He will say, and with some reason, "I asked you for bread—or at least for cakes and ale—and lo! ye have given me Gregory's Mixture!"

So he will walk out, and not deal any more at your shop, save

when he wants medicine—for some other body. A lady sent me a book and she wrote upon it that she hoped it would do me good. Now, I did not want it for myself particularly, but I have a friend, a wicked lawyer, and I instantly recognised that this good book was the very thing for him. So I sent it to him; and he never even thanked me.

> "Man's inhumanity to man
> Makes countless thousands mourn."

Scott did not write with any purpose, save with the primitive instinct to tell an entrancing story. And in spite of Gervinus and cartloads of commentators, chiefly Teutonic, I do not believe Shakespeare did, either. On this point, however, I am open to conviction; but, like a late great ecclesiast, let me add, "I wad like to see the man that could convince me!"

For the "novel of purpose" developed round some set thesis is not of the essence of story-telling, but of preaching and pamphleteering. These two things are, no doubt, of the world's greatest necessities, but I would not have them trench upon the place of creative imagination. Scott, our greatest, was as conspicuously free from moralising as Homer, yet what infinities of actual good have arisen from the reading of his books. No, the goodness and the moral must be in the man himself—in the writer—and there is no fear but that they will come out in his story, without spoiling one whit the artistic beauty of his conception. After all, art teaches and elevates by making men and women gladder; and though there are failures and mistakes, the sound of wedding bells is, on the whole, as wholesome and heartsome a sound in fiction as it is in reality. It will be better if, instead of posing as the religious regenerator of the future, the novelist confines himself to telling a plain tale in the best way he can, simply striving by the thrilling of his own heart to cast a spell upon the hearts of others.

The romancer had best be a little more modest than he has been of late. If he tells his story with his heart and soul, all that is good in him and in his message will emerge in the course of the narrative without being obtruded. You will not permanently improve the readers of fiction by the methods of Mrs. Squeers. When we read fiction we do not want to take doses of brimstone and treacle, whether we will or no, "to purify our systems," as Mr. Squeers said. I think it is better to stand by fiction as a branch of the world's art, rather than as a department of its pathology. And to look for its effect upon men's lives as an anodyne for sore hearts, a heartening of sorrows, a pathway of escape from the dulness or contrariness of things into another and a fresher world. After all, for religion we still have our Bible, and in my opinion we are not likely to better that as doctrine and reproof for the conduct of our lives. We have our daily newspaper which tells us, among other things, how to

vote or how to act. I decline to believe that the great problems of religion can be adequately discussed and settled in the conversations of the novel of purpose. I want to take my Bible plain and my newspaper plain; I do not want to mix them and label them "The Fiction of the Future." In fact, being a quiet and old-fashioned person, the fiction of the past is good enough for me. If I can make half as good as the present I shall be content.

Finally, I desire to say a few words upon the so-called Scottish dialect, not by any means as one who speaks *ex cathedrâ*, but only in order to express my own feelings and beliefs.

We are not of those who look upon Scottish dialect as merely a corrupt kind of English. It would be, indeed, much truer to say that modern English is a corrupt and much-adulterated variety of Scots.

For the old Scottish language has had a history both long and distinguished. In it the first of Scottish romancers, John Barbour, wrote his saga-tales of Wallace and Bruce. In it Dunbar sang songs, Robert Henrysoun, dominie and makkar, fabled; while Ramsay, Burns, Scott, Hogg, and Galt carried on its roll of noble names.

Of recent years, with the increasing localisation of fiction, there has arisen a danger that this old literary language may be broken up into dialects, each one of which shall possess its interpreters, accurate and intelligent, no doubt, but out of the true, legitimate line of apostolic succession.

Now, what I understand to be the duty of the Scottish romancer is, that he shall not attempt to represent phonetically the peculiarities of pronunciation of his chosen district, but that he shall content himself with giving the local colour, incident, character, in the noble, historical, well-authenticated Scots language, which was found sufficient for the needs of Knox, of Scott, and of Burns, to name no other names. Leave to the grim grammarian his "fous" and "fats" and "fars." Let the local vocabulary-maker, excellent and indispensable man, construct cunning accents and pronunciation-marks. Leave even Great Jamieson alone, save for amusement in your hours of ease. As Mr. Stevenson once said, "Jamieson is not Scots, but mere Angusawa'!" A pregnant saying, and one containing much sense.

There is another danger. It is difficult to write the Scottish dialect. It is easy to be vulgar in dialect. Shall our great literary language be brought down by the vulgarisms of the local funny man to the condition of a mere idiom? Certainly, if the people want it so. But there is no need to call the rubbish Scottish dialect.

For myself, I love to discern a flavour of antique gentlemanship about a man's Scots, something that takes me back to knee-breeches and buckled shoes, to hodden grey and Kilmarnock bonnets. They might be a little coarse in those days, but they were never vulgar.

There never was a nobler or more expressive language than the

tongue of the dear old ladies who were our grandmothers and great-grandmothers in these southern and western counties of Scotland. Let us try to keep it equally free from Anglicisms which come by rail, Irishisms which arrive by the short sea-route, from the innuendo of the music-hall comic song, and the refinements of the boarding-school—in fact, from all additions, subtractions, multiplications, and divisions, by whomsoever introduced or advocated. There is an idea abroad that in order to write Scottish dialect, it is enough to leave out all final g's and to write *dae* for do—which last, I beg leave to say, is the hall-mark of the bungler!

Now the honest Doric is a sonsy quean, clean, snod, and well put on. Her acquaintance is not to be picked up on the streets, or at any close-mouth. The day has been when Peg was a lady, and so she shall be again, and her standard of manners and speech shall be at least as high as that of her sister of the South.

The result will not show in the reports of the Board of Trade; neither will it make Glasgow flourish yet more abundantly, or the ships crowd thicker about the Tail of the Bank. But it will give broad Scotland a right to speak once more of a Scottish language, and not merely of a Dundee, a Gallowa', or a "Doon-the-watter" accent. And it will give her again a literature frankly national, written in her ancient language, according to the finest and most uncorrupted models.

S. R. CROCKETT.