

# **The Heart of Mid-Lothian**

**by**

**Walter Scott**

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## Editor's Introduction

SCOTT began to work on "The Heart of Mid-Lothian" almost before he had completed "Rob Roy." On Nov. 10, 1817, he writes to Archibald Constable announcing that the negotiations for the sale of the story to Messrs. Longman have fallen through, their firm declining to relieve the Ballantynes of their worthless "stock." "So you have the staff in your own hands, and, as you are on the spot, can manage it your own way. Depend on it that, barring unforeseen illness or death, these will be the best volumes which have appeared. I pique myself on the first tale, which is called 'The Heart of Mid-Lothian.'" Sir Walter had thought of adding a romance, "The Regalia," on the Scotch royal insignia, which had been rediscovered in the Castle of Edinburgh. This story he never wrote. Mr. Cadell was greatly pleased at ousting the Longmans--"they have themselves to blame for the want of the Tales, and may grumble as they choose: we have Taggy by the tail, and, if we have influence to keep the best author of the day, we ought to do it."--[Archibald Constable, iii. 104.]

Though contemplated and arranged for, "The Heart of Mid-Lothian" was not actually taken in hand till shortly after Jan. 15, 1818, when Cadell writes that the tracts and pamphlets on the affair of Porteous are to be collected for Scott. "The author was in great glee . . . he says that he feels very strong with what he has now in hand." But there was much anxiety concerning Scott's health. "I do not at all like this illness of Scott's," said James Ballantyne to Hogg. "I have often seen him look jaded of late, and am afraid it is serious." "Hand your tongue, or I'll gar you measure your length on the pavement," replied Hogg. "You fause, down-hearted loon, that ye are, you daur to speak as if Scott were on his death-bed! It cannot be, it must not be! I will not suffer you to speak that gait." Scott himself complains to Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe of "these damned spasms. The merchant Abudah's hag was a henwife to them when they give me a real night of it."

"The Heart of Mid-Lothian," in spite of the author's malady, was published in June 1818. As to its reception, and the criticism which it received, Lockhart has left nothing to be gleaned. Contrary to his custom, he has published, but without the writer's name, a letter from Lady Louisa Stuart, which really exhausts what criticism can find to say about the new novel. "I have not only read it myself," says Lady Louisa, "but am in a house where everybody is tearing it out of each other's hands, and talking of nothing else." She preferred it to all but "Waverley," and congratulates him on having made "the perfectly good character the most interesting. . . . Had this very story been conducted by a common hand, Effie would have attracted all our concern and sympathy, Jeanie only cold approbation. Whereas Jeanie, without youth, beauty, genius, warns passions, or any other novel-perfection, is here our object from beginning to end." Lady Louisa, with her usual frankness, finds the Edinburgh lawyers tedious, in the introduction, and thinks that Mr. Saddletree "will not entertain English readers."

The conclusion "flags"; "but the chief fault I have to find relates to the reappearance and shocking fate of the boy. I hear on all sides 'Oh, I do not like that!' I cannot say what I would have had instead, but I do not like it either; it is a lame, huddled conclusion. I know you so well in it, by-the-by! You grow tired yourself, want to get rid of the story, and hardly care how." Lady Lousia adds that Sir George Staunton would never have hazarded himself in the streets of Edinburgh. "The end of poor Madge Wildfire is most pathetic. The meeting at Muschat's Cairn tremendous. Dumbiedikes and Rory Beau are delightful. . . . I dare swear many of your readers never heard of the Duke of Argyle before." She ends: "If I had known nothing, and the whole world had told me the contrary, I should have found you out in that one parenthesis, 'for the man was mortal, and had been a schoolmaster.'"

Lady Louisa omits a character who was probably as essential to Scott's scheme as any--Douce Davie Deans, the old Cameronian. He had almost been annoyed by the criticism of his Covenanters in "Old Mortality," "the heavy artillery out of the Christian Instructor or some such obscure field work," and was determined to "tickle off" another. There are signs of a war between literary Cavaliers and literary Covenanters at this time, after the discharge of Dr. McCrie's "heavy artillery." Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe was presented by Surtees of Mainsforth with a manuscript of Kirkton's unprinted "History of the Church of Scotland." This he set forth to edit, with the determination not to "let the Whig dogs have the best of it." Every Covenanted scandal and absurdity, such as the old story of Mess David Williamson--"Dainty Davie"--and his remarkable prowess, and presence of mind at Cherrytrees, was raked up, and inserted in notes to Kirkton. Scott was Sharpe's ally in this enterprise. "I had in the persons of my forbears a full share, you see, of religious persecution . . . for all my greatgrandfathers were under the ban, and I think there were hardly two of them out of jail at once." "I think it would be most scandalous to let the godly carry it off thus." "It" seems to have been the editing of Kirkton. "It is very odd the volume of Wodrow, containing the memoir of Russell concerning the murder, is positively vanished from the library" (the Advocates' Library). "Neither book nor receipt is to be found: surely they have stolen it in the fear of the Lord." The truth seems to have been that Cavaliers and Covenanters were racing for the manuscripts wherein they found smooth stones of the brook to pelt their opponents withal. Soon after Scott writes: "It was not without exertion and trouble that I this day detected Russell's manuscript (the account of the murder of Sharpe by one of the murderers), also Kirkton and one or two others, which Mr. McCrie had removed from their place in the library and deposited in a snug and secret corner." The Covenanters had made a raid on the ammunition of the Cavaliers. "I have given," adds Sir Walter, "an infernal row on the subject of hiding books in this manner." Sharpe replies that the "villainous biographer of John Knox" (Dr. McCrie), "that canting rogue," is about to edit Kirkton. Sharpe therefore advertised his own edition at once, and edited Kirkton by forced marches as it were. Scott reviewed the book in the Quarterly (Jan. 1818). He remarked that Sharpe "had not escaped the censure of these industrious literary gentlemen of opposite principles, who have suffered a work

always relied upon as one of their chief authorities to lie dormant for a hundred and forty years." Their "querulous outcries" (probably from the field-work of the Christian Instructor) he disregards. Among the passions of this literary "bicker," which Scott allowed to amuse him, was Davie Deans conceived. Scott was not going to be driven by querulous outcries off the Covenanting field, where he erected another trophy. This time he was more friendly to the "True Blue Presbyterians." His Scotch patriotism was one of his most earnest feelings, the Covenanters, at worst, were essentially Scotch, and he introduced a new Cameronian, with all the sterling honesty, the Puritanism, the impracticable ideas of the Covenant, in contact with changed times, and compelled to compromise.

He possessed a curious pamphlet, Haldane's "Active Testimony of the true blue Presbyterians" (12mo, 1749). It is a most impartial work, "containing a declaration and testimony against the late unjust invasion of Scotland by Charles, Pretended Prince of Wales, and William, Pretended Duke of Cumberland." Everything and everybody not Covenanted, the House of Stuart, the House of Brunswick, the House of Hapsburg, Papists, Prelatists and Turks, are cursed up hill and down dale, by these worthy survivors of the Auld Leaven. Everybody except the authors, Haldane and Leslie, "has broken the everlasting Covenant." The very Confession of Westminster is arraigned for its laxity. "The whole Civil and Judicial Law of God," as given to the Jews (except the ritual, polygamy, divorce, slavery, and so forth), is to be maintained in the law of Scotland. Sins are acknowledged, and since the Covenant every political step-- Cromwell's Protectorate, the Restoration, the Revolution, the accession of the "Dukes of Hanover"--has been a sin. A Court of Elders is to be established to put in execution the Law of Moses. All offenders against the Kirk are to be "capitally punished." Stage plays are to be suppressed by the successors of the famous convention at Lanark, Anno 1682. Toleration of all religions is "sinful," and "contrary to the word of God." Charles Edward and the Duke of Cumberland are cursed. "Also we reckon it a great vice in Charles, his foolish Pity and Lenity, in sparing these profane, blasphemous Redcoats, that Providence delivered into his hand, when, by putting them to death, this poor land might have been eased of the heavy burden of these vermin of Hell." The Auld Leaven swore terribly in Scotland. The atrocious cruelties of Cumberland after Culloden are stated with much frankness and power. The German soldiers are said to have carried off "a vast deal of Spoil and Plunder into Germany," and the Redcoats had Plays and Diversions (cricket, probably) on the Inch of Perth, on a Sabbath. "The Hellish, Pagan, Juggler plays are set up and frequented with more impudence and audacity than ever." Only the Jews, "our elder Brethren," are exempted from the curses of Haldane and Leslie, who promise to recover for them the Holy Land. "The Massacre in Edinburgh" in 1736, by wicked Porteous, calls for vengeance upon the authors and abettors thereof. The army and navy are "the most wicked and flagitious in the Universe." In fact, the True Blue Testimony is very active indeed, and could be delivered, thanks to hellish Toleration, with perfect safety, by Leslie and Haldane. The candour of their eloquence assuredly proves that

Davie Deans is not overdrawn; indeed, he is much less truculent than those who actually were testifying even after his decease.

In "The Heart of Mid-Lothian" Scott set himself to draw his own people at their best. He had a heroine to his hand in Helen Walker, "a character so distinguished for her undaunted love of virtue," who, unlike Jeanie Deans, "lived and died in poverty, if not want." In 1831 he erected a pillar over her grave in the old Covenanting stronghold of Irongray. The inscription ends--

Respect the Grave of Poverty,  
When combined with Love of Truth  
And Dear Affection.

The sweetness, the courage, the spirit, the integrity of Jeanie Deans have made her, of all Scott's characters, the dearest to her countrymen, and the name of Jeanie was given to many children, in pious memory of the blameless heroine. The foil to her, in the person of Effie, is not less admirable. Among Scott's qualities was one rare among modern authors: he had an affectionate toleration for his characters. If we compare Effie with Hetty in "Adam Bede," this charming and genial quality of Scott's becomes especially striking. Hetty and Dinah are in very much the same situation and condition as Effie and Jeanie Deans. But Hetty is a frivolous little animal, in whom vanity and silliness do duty for passion: she has no heart: she is only a butterfly broken on the wheel of the world. Doubtless there are such women in plenty, yet we feel that her creator persecutes her, and has a kind of spite against her. This was impossible to Scott. Effie has heart, sincerity, passion, loyalty, despite her flightiness, and her readiness, when her chance comes, to play the fine lady. It was distasteful to Scott to create a character not human and sympathetic on one side or another. Thus his robber "of milder mood," on Jeanie's journey to England, is comparatively a good fellow, and the scoundrel Ratcliffe is not a scoundrel utterly. "'To make a Lang tale short, I canna undertake the job. It gangs against my conscience.' 'Your conscience, Rat?' said Sharpitlaw, with a sneer, which the reader will probably think very natural upon the occasion. 'Ou ay, sir,' answered Ratcliffe, calmly, 'just my conscience; a body has a conscience, though it may be ill wunnin at it. I think mine's as weel out o' the gate as maist folk's are; and yet it's just like the noop of my elbow, it whiles gets a bit dirl on a corner.'" Scott insists on leaving his worst people in possession of something likeable, just as he cannot dismiss even Captain Craigenfelt without assuring us that Bucklaw made a provision for his necessities. This is certainly a more humane way of writing fiction than that to which we are accustomed in an age of humanitarianism. Nor does Scott's art suffer from his kindness, and Effie in prison, with a heart to be broken, is not less pathetic than the heartless Hetty, in the same condemnation.

As to her lover, Robertson, or Sir George Staunton, he certainly verges on the melodramatic. Perhaps we know too much about the real George Robertson, who was no heir to a title in disguise, but merely a "stabler in Bristol" accused "at

the instance of Duncan Forbes, Esq. of Culloden, his Majesty's advocate, for the crimes of Stouthrieff, Housebreaking, and Robbery." Robertson "kept an inn in Bristo, at Edinburgh, where the Newcastle carrier commonly did put up," and is believed to have been a married man. It is not very clear that the novel gains much by the elevation of the Bristo innkeeper to a baronetcy, except in so far as Effie's appearance in the character of a great lady is entertaining and characteristic, and Jeanie's conquest of her own envy is exemplary. The change in social rank calls for the tragic conclusion, about which almost every reader agrees with the criticism of Lady Louisa Stuart and her friends. Thus the novel "filled more pages" than Mr. Jedediah Cleishbotham had "opined," and hence comes a languor which does not beset the story of "Old Mortality." Scott's own love of adventure and of stirring incidents at any cost is an excellent quality in a novelist, but it does, in this instance, cause him somewhat to dilute those immortal studies of Scotch character which are the strength of his genius. The reader feels a lack of reality in the conclusion, the fatal encounter of the father and the lost son, an incident as old as the legend of Odysseus. But this is more than atoned for by the admirable part of Madge Wildfire, flitting like a feu follet up and down among the douce Scotch, and the dour rioters. Madge Wildfire is no repetition of Meg Merrilies, though both are unrestrained natural things, rebels against the settled life, musical voices out of the past, singing forgotten songs of nameless minstrels. Nowhere but in Shakspeare can we find such a distraught woman as Madge Wildfire, so near akin to nature and to the moods of "the bonny lady Moon." Only he who created Ophelia could have conceived or rivalled the scene where Madge accompanies the hunters of Staunton on the moonlit hill and sings her warnings to the fugitive.

When the glede's in the blue cloud,  
The lavrock lies still;  
When the hound's in the green-wood,  
The hind keeps the hill.  
There's a bloodhound ranging Tinwald wood,  
There's harness glancing sheen;  
There's a maiden sits on Tinwald brae,  
And she sings loud between.  
O sleep ye sound, Sir James, she said,  
When ye suld rise and ride?  
There's twenty men, wi' bow and blade,  
Are seeking where ye hide.

The madness of Madge Wildfire has its parallel in the wildness of Goethe's Marguerite, both of them lamenting the lost child, which, to Madge's fancy, is now dead, now living in a dream. But the gloom that hangs about Muschat's Cairn, the ghastly vision of "crying up Ailie Muschat, and she and I will hae a grand bouking-washing, and bleach our claise in the beams of the bonny Lady Moon," have a terror beyond the German, and are unexcelled by Webster or by Ford. "But the moon, and the dew, and the night-wind, they are just like a caller kail-



blade laid on my brow; and whiles I think the moon just shines on purpose to pleasure me, when naebody sees her but mysell." Scott did not deal much in the facile pathos of the death-bed, but that of Madge Wildfire has a grace of poetry, and her latest song is the sweetest and wildest of his lyrics, the most appropriate in its setting. When we think of the contrasts to her--the honest, dull good-nature of Dumbiedikes; the common-sense and humour of Mrs. Saddletree; the pragmatic pedantry of her husband; the Highland pride, courage, and absurdity of the Captain of Knockdander-- when we consider all these so various and perfect creations, we need not wonder that Scott was "in high glee" over "The Heart of Mid-Lothian," "felt himself very strong," and thought that these would be "the best volumes that have appeared." The difficulty, as usual, is to understand how, in all this strength, he permitted himself to be so careless over what is really by far the easiest part of the novelist's task--the construction. But so it was; about "The Monastery" he said, "it was written with as much care as the rest, that is, with no care at all." His genius flowed free in its own unconscious abundance: where conscious deliberate workmanship was needed, "the forthright craftsman's hand," there alone he was lax and irresponsible. In Shakspeare's case we can often account for similar incongruities by the constraint of the old plot which he was using; but Scott was making his own plots, or letting them make themselves. "I never could lay down a plan, or, having laid it down, I never could adhere to it; the action of composition always diluted some passages and abridged or omitted others; and personages were rendered important or insignificant, not according to their agency in the original conception of the plan, but according to the success or otherwise with which I was able to bring them out. I only tried to make that which I was actually writing diverting and interesting, leaving the rest to fate. . . . When I chain my mind to ideas which are purely imaginative--for argument is a different thing--it seems to me that the sun leaves the landscape, that I think away the whole vivacity and spirit of my original conception, and that the results are cold, tame, and spiritless."

In fact, Sir Walter was like the Magician who can raise spirits that, once raised, dominate him. Probably this must ever be the case, when an author's characters are not puppets but real creations. They then have a will and a way of their own; a free-will which their creator cannot predetermine and correct. Something like this appears to have been Scott's own theory of his lack of constructive power. No one was so assured of its absence, no one criticised it more severely than he did himself. The Edinburgh Review about this time counselled the "Author of Waverley" to attempt a drama, doubting only his powers of compression. Possibly work at a drama might have been of advantage to the genius of Scott. He was unskilled in selection and rejection, which the drama especially demands. But he detested the idea of writing for actors, whom he regarded as ignorant, dull, and conceited. "I shall not fine and renew a lease of popularity upon the theatre. To write for low, ill-informed, and conceited actors, whom you must please, for your success is necessarily at their mercy, I cannot away with," he wrote to Southey. "Avowedly, I will never write for the stage; if I do, 'call me horse,'" he remarks to Terry. He wanted "neither the profit nor the shame of it." "I

do not think that the character of the audience in London is such that one could have the least pleasure in pleasing them." He liked helping Terry to "Terryfy" "The Heart of Mid-Lothian," and his other novels, but he had no more desire than a senator of Rome would have had to see his name become famous by the Theatre. This confirmed repulsion in one so learned in the dramatic poets is a curious trait in Scott's character. He could not accommodate his genius to the needs of the stage, and that crown which has most potently allured most men of genius he would have thrust away, had it been offered to him, with none of Caesar's reluctance. At the bottom of all this lay probably the secret conviction that his genius was his master, that it must take him where it would, on paths where he was compelled to follow. Terse and concentrated, of set purpose, he could not be. A notable instance of this inability occurs in the Introductory Chapter to "The Heart of Mid-Lothian," which has probably frightened away many modern readers. The Advocate and the Writer to the Signet and the poor Client are persons quite uncalled for, and their little adventure at Gandercleugh is unreal. Oddly enough, part of their conversation is absolutely in the manner of Dickens.

"'I think,' said I, . . . 'the metropolitan county may, in that case, be said to have a sad heart.'

"'Right as my glove, Mr. Pattieson,' added Mr. Hardie; 'and a close heart, and a hard heart--Keep it up, Jack.'

"'And a wicked heart, and a poor heart,' answered Halkit, doing his best.

"'And yet it may be called in some sort a strong heart, and a high heart,' rejoined the advocate. 'You see I can put you both out of heart.'"

Fortunately we have no more of this easy writing, which makes such very melancholy reading.

The narrative of the Porteous mob, as given by the novelist, is not, it seems, entirely accurate. Like most artists, Sir Walter took the liberty of "composing" his picture. In his "Illustrations of the Author of Waverley" (1825) Mr. Robert Chambers records the changes in facts made by Scott. In the first place, Wilson did not attack his guard, and enable Robertson to escape, after the sermon, but as soon as the criminals took their seats in the pew. When fleeing out, Robertson tripped over "the plate," set on a stand to receive alms and oblations, whereby he hurt himself, and was seen to stagger and fall in running down the stairs leading to the Cowgate. Mr. McQueen, Minister of the New Kirk, was coming up the stairs. He conceived it to be his duty to set Robertson on his feet again, "and covered his retreat as much as possible from the pursuit of the guard." Robertson ran up the Horse Wynd, out at Potter Row Port, got into the King's Park, and headed for the village of Duddingston, beside the loch on the south-east of

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