SCOTT AND HIS PUBLISHERS.[1]

We have here before us, in three considerable volumes, a rather discursive and wide-flowing account of the career of Archibald Constable, 'the grand Napoleon of the realms of *print*,' and of the Scott-Constable tragedy, which was matter of such deep interest to our fathers and grandfathers nearly fifty years ago, but which to most of us in the present day, notwithstanding Scott's connection with it, can hardly fail to have lost much of its interest. The author of the present work, the son of Archibald Constable, has been led into his task by feelings of filial piety and affection which one cannot but admire and sympathise with; and which ought in some degree to excuse the tone of complaint and refutation running through every page of it; this is perhaps natural, but it is far from pleasant. It is exactly seven and thirty years since Lockhart's *Life of Scott* was completed; and though it is not surprising that a son should deem it worth while, even at this late date, to clear his father's memory from what he considers to be false assertions made against it there, it is equally natural that a reader, having only a very moderate interest in the subject, and being without personal affection for the great bookseller, should think that, although Lockhart may be, in one or two particulars, harsh or even unjust, he has given us a picture of Constable which for vigour and genius leaves our author's far behind. Nor is Lockhart's picture, though he occasionally allows himself a point of view more *de haut en bas*, and a mode of handling more free than is agreeable to the feelings of the surviving relatives, at all different in essential points from that which is laboriously worked out for us here.

There is a lamentable want of method in the arrangement of the book before us. It reminds one of nothing so much as of a journey undertaken in one's sleep. We are carried very near to our destination, nay, sometimes even past it, but we never quite reach the spot aimed at. Precisely thus are we treated in the first two volumes, which are composed of little patches of biography and of letters from persons connected with the firm of Constable and Co. We are some thirty or forty times carried almost to the point, or else past it, of 'a painful crisis,' of a 'failure,' of 'ruin,' of 'confusions' which overset that firm; we witness our author's sorrow and indignation over Lockhart's treatment of his father, whom he characterises as a 'dead lion;' but are each time led to a new chapter, which contains the history of some new person, and leaves us, at the end of it, still more in the dark than before. Only in the third, and by many degrees the most interesting, volume do the uninitiated learn what these misfortunes really were.

Archibald Constable, we are told, was born in Fifeshire in 1774; he was a farmer's son, and received such an education as is common in parish schools in Scotland. Wilhelm Meister tells us how the childish puppet-show kindled in him an ardour for the theatre; and in like manner the great bookseller, looking back, in his still prosperous days, upon his past career, informs us in a rather long and watery narrative that a bookseller's shop in the village of Pitten-

[1] *Archibald Constable and his Literary Correspondence.* A Memorial, by his Son, Thomas Constable. In Three Vols. Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas. 1873.

ween, to which he and other schoolboys used to go on Saturday afternoons to supply themselves with copy-books and the like, engendered in him the desire to become a bookseller. In the window of this shop there was conspicuously exhibited a broadside, being the *History of Shon ap Morgan, a Shentleman of Wales, with his Portrait, riding on an Ass*, which was to the youthful Constable a magnet of strong attraction. Accordingly, at fourteen he was apprenticed to Hill, a bookseller in Edinburgh, well known to the biographers of Burns; indeed in the same narrative he tells us that Burns was 'a frequent visitor' at this shop, although, unhappily, he states nothing but the bare fact.

At twenty-one he was in business on his own account, with a signboard over his shop door, announcing 'Scarce old Books,' which, from the smallness of the collection, was quizzingly read, 'Scarce o' Books.' He seems to have had no want of an aim in life, for at this early age he is already married; having, as he tells us, '*several years* previously' fallen desperately in love with the daughter of a very good man, a printer in Edinburgh, who, whenever he is mentioned, which is but seldom, strikes us somehow as an interesting, affectionate, quiet-going old Scotchman. Constable's shop 'soon became a place of daily resort for the book collectors of Edinburgh.' To become Constable's customer seems to have meant becoming his friend; he praises all his early patrons; if he ever by chance blames one, it is but for the sake of making the virtues of another more conspicuous. He speaks of one gentleman's becoming 'his steady and attached customer;' that he had an unbounded heart is evident from his writing home to his newly wedded wife, on his first visit to London, that the inhabitants here 'are civil and attentive as they are numerous.'

To the trade of bookseller, Constable, having gradually stretched out his wings, soon added that of publisher. We may gather from facts mentioned here and elsewhere the utterly stagnant state of literary enterprise about this time in Scotland, chiefly caused by the comparative poverty of the people; and thus the more clearly see the immense impetus which Constable gave to it. Our author says:

> Money, in its metallic form, appears in those days to have been entirely in disuse by 'the trade' in their dealings with one another. It floated ethereally in bills and promissory notes from man to man, calling at the banks for transmutation when and so long as that could be effected; but that the system was a vicious and ruinous one is shown by the number of men I find suddenly writing to my father from the Abbey—a sanctuary for debtors in the neighbourhood of Holyrood Palace—and even from the more grim and definite Tolbooth.

It is currently reported that, not many years previous to this, Thomas Campbell, in recounting to his friend Dr. Anderson the tale of his various hopes and heart-breaking disappointments as to finding a publisher for his *Pleasures of Hope*, was so overcome by anger and despair at the prospect and retrospect, that at a certain point in the narrative he flung the MS. into the fire, from which, however, his friend managed to snatch it unburnt, and afterwards to sell it for 50*l*. Dr. Beattie, too, although at the time a man of mark, was unable to find any bookseller willing to take the risk of publishing his once famous *Essay on Truth* until Beattie's friends paid down 100*l*.

It was in this state that Constable found the business of publishing in Edinburgh; and we may fairly say that he is the originator of the system of 'cheap literature' which has grown to such alarming dimensions in our own days. Constable had no mean tradesman spirit, but was of a generous and munificent turn; never hindering any, but at

all times helping those who needed help, although frequently altogether without claim upon him, as is abundantly proved in these little disconnected patches of biography in the first two volumes.

Lockhart thus describes him:

It was at one of those Trinity dinners [at the house of John Ballantyne] this summer [1817], that I first saw Constable. . . . I happened to say that I had not been prepared to find the great bookseller, a man of such gentlemanlike and even distinguished bearing. Scott smiled, and answered, 'Ay, Constable is indeed a grand-looking *chield*,' adding that he reminded him of what Fielding said of Joseph Andrews, that 'he had an air which to those who had not seen many noblemen would give an idea of nobility.' . . . His conversation was manly and vigorous, abounding in Scotch anecdotes of the old time, which he told with a degree of spirit and humour only second to his great author's. No man could more effectually control, when he had a mind, either the extravagant vanity which, on too many occasions, made him ridiculous, or the despotic temper which habitually held in fear and trembling all such as were in any sort dependent on his Czarish majesty's pleasure. In him I never saw (at this period) anything but the unobtrusive sense and the calm courtesy of a well-bred gentleman.

Mr. Constable says:

In 1802, he was selected by Mr. Sydney Smith, Mr. Jeffrey, and the other projectors of the *Edinburgh Review* as the most suitable publisher for the journal, . . . and he accepted the commercial conduct of the work with all its pecuniary responsibilities. . . . The rate of remuneration to the contributors was soon thereafter fixed at sixteen guineas per sheet, and struck a key-note which has ever since been of some advantage to literary men connected with similar undertakings.

Jeffrey says:

Two-thirds of the articles were paid much higher—averaging, I should think, from twenty to twenty-five guineas a sheet on the whole number. I had, I might say, an unlimited discretion in this respect, and must do the publishers the justice to say that they never made the slightest objection.

It is difficult now to realise how complete the success of the *Edinburgh Review* was; one word of praise or blame from it could make or mar any literary project, and it continued in this flourishing condition even long after Scott had started the *Quarterly*.

Naturally, the great event in Constable's public career was his connection with Sir Walter, in these early days Mr. Walter, Scott. And to most readers the chief point of interest in the present work must be Scott's connection with it. There had been transactions between them as early as 1802. Five years later Constable & Co. write to Scott:

We have much pleasure in accepting your new poem, *Flodden Field*, and not less in agreeing to pay for the same the sum of one thousand guineas, . . . and we trust it will remain for ever in the hands of Edinburgh booksellers, for the honour and glory of Scotland.

Our author continues:

In 1808 *Marmion* made its appearance. . . . The notice of the poem in the *Edinburgh Review*, although giving high and cordial praise to some passages, was so unsparing in condemnation of others, and of the conception and general structure, that it gave deep offence to Mr. Scott, while it must have been at once disappointing and distasteful to my father—publisher both of the poem and of the critique (Jeffrey was himself the acknowledged author of the article)—and touching the poet at a very tender point when he accused him of 'neglect of Scottish feelings and Scottish character.' There is little doubt that the establishment of the London *Quarterly Review* was helped forward by this paper in the *Edinburgh*; as much, at least, as the alleged incivility of Mr. Hunter [Constable's partner at that time] led to the establishment of the publishing house of John Ballantyne and Co. Scott says: 'Constable, or rather that bear his partner [whom we shall hear of by-and-by], has behaved to me of late not very civilly, and I owe Jeffrey a flap with a fox-tail on account of his review on *Marmion*; and thus doth the whirligig of time bring about my revenges.' . . .

Mr. Scott was bent on becoming a publisher, and in the Messrs. Ballantyne [two brothers, printers, in Galashiels, whom he brought up to Edinburgh] he believed he had found the coadjutors who were needed to insure success.

Scott entered into partnership with them in 1805, as all the world knows, carefully concealing the fact even from his dearest friends.

. The success of this new firm was brilliant and immediate; for its typography was excellent, and the patronage secured by the influence of the great unknown and also unsleeping partner was extensive and commanding.

Lockhart says:

He [Scott] had, long before this, cast a shrewd and penetrating eye over the field of literary enterprise, and developed in his own mind the outlines of many extensive plans, which wanted nothing but the command of a sufficient body of able subalterns to be carried into execution with splendid success. . . . When the publishing firm was as yet little more than a twelvemonth old, James [Ballantyne] began to apprehend that some of the mightiest undertakings would wholly disappoint Scott's prognostications.

Scott's partners, Mr. Constable tells us,

though able men, had not been educated in this most delicate of crafts; and reverence for their friend and patron may often have restrained them from strongly objecting to enterprises recommended by him, even when these were such as they could not approve.

For the most part, the books published by this firm, under the superintendence of Scott, were edited in an extremely slovenly and careless manner, and failed to recommend themselves to the audience to which they were addressed. The shrewd Constable firm seem to have had more faith in Scott's mere name than he himself had, for we find one of these wary gentlemen, in a confidential letter, written several years afterwards, to the principal of the firm, warning him against anonymous editions by Scott in these words:

Your letter to Sir Walter [with reference to an edition of Shakespeare] wants one or two most important clauses. The first is as to his name; and I do not hesitate to say, except we have his name, the book is not worth paper and print. Without it copy-money appears out of the question. All the books with bare 'Abbotsford' at them leave not one shilling to the projectors.

In 1813, there was a complete block-up in the affairs of Ballantyne & Co. Cadell, Constable's partner and son-in-law, says:

Their reputation . . . had been gradually on the decline. It was notorious in the trade that their general speculations had been unsuccessful; they were known to be grievously in want of money. These rumours were realised to the full by an application which Messrs B. made to Mr. Constable in May 1813 for pecuniary aid, accompanied by an offer of some of the books they had published since 1809, as a purchase, along with various shares in Mr. Scott's own poems. Their difficulties were admitted, and the negotiation was pressed urgently; so much so, that a pledge was given, that if the terms asked were acceded to, John Ballantyne and Co. would endeavour to wind up their concerns, and cease as soon as possible to be publishers.

And by Mr. Lockhart we are told that:

Whatever success these endeavours [to reduce their stock and liabilities] met with, appears to have been due either directly or indirectly to Mr. Constable, who did a great deal more than prudence would have warranted in taking on himself the results of unhappy adventures, and, by his sagacious advice, enabled the distressed partners to procure similar assistance at the hands of others who did not partake his own feelings of personal kindness and sympathy.

The following extract from a letter written by Scott to John Ballantyne about this time is highly curious:

I think I will[1] make one cast for fortune and buy a lottery ticket; . . . as you are not very lucky, I would rather Mrs. Ballantyne or your mother took the trouble of buying it than you, as the doctrine of chances will be more in their favour. Or perhaps if Mr. Constable is walking that way, he will make the purchase. I should have some confidence in *his* good stars.

To Mr. Constable he writes on this same topic:

I embrace your proposal to stand to half of the chance of the ticket, and two halves, and we will see how luck will favour us. I shall be in town [Edinburgh] upon the 12th, and settle the bill for Dame Fortune's favours. For my own part I can't much complain of the good lady, having had my

[1] Scott in his letters shows a singular disregard of the proper use of *shall* and *will*.

own share of luck in this world, though we cannot expect it should be always smooth water.

Constable, as we have seen, came to the rescue in this crisis, and, apart from his skill in warding off the dreaded blow of bankruptcy and '*exposure*' (as Scott himself terms it), it appears to us there was a certain munificence and loyal generosity in Constable's behaviour to Scott at this time, which Lockhart, perhaps, passes over too lightly, and which Scott, twelve years afterwards, when he had to choose between Constable and his junior partner, Cadell, seems still more conspicuously to have forgotten.

The first two volumes, as we have said, are made up of disconnected patches of biography, and of letters to and from certain of Constable's friends and customers; they include such names as Washington Irving, Godwin, James Mill, Jeffrey, Alexander Murray the linguist, Miss Edgeworth, Anna Seward, Thomas Campbell, Henry Mackenzie, Dugald Stewart, Joseph Ritson, besides a host of 'twinkling little stars,' a faint glimmer, or reminiscence of a glimmer, of whose fame may still perhaps remain for those who live or have lived in Edinburgh, but which is quite extinct for less favoured individuals. The letters, moreover, are for the most part very dull, and of no general interest.

By far the most interesting chapter in these two volumes is that devoted to Hunter, Constable's boisterous partner. He was a Forfarshire gentleman, of good family, who, having grown weary of idleness, with the 'high living and hard drinking' for which that county was celebrated, joined the Constable firm in 1803. His letters are excessively lively, and bear the stamp of a man who saw clearly whatever came within reach of his keen eye. Those to Constable, in 1806, respecting the hospitalities which he and Mr. Murray, the London publisher, were then enjoying in a 'Northern tour,' describe the voracity and bibacity of the Scotch lairds in an amusing manner. But we must pass on to give one or two extracts from letters, written in 1807, while he is in London, to Constable:

The Bailie [Hunter's familiar name for his father] at length arrived from his rambles, and we went down to the House. The Speaker arrived, and entered about four o'clock; much struck with the solemnity and dignity of his appearance at the prayers. . . . . The business very tedious and uninteresting. The Bailie and I at length went up-stairs to the coffee-house in the garret, where we got the best and hottest beefsteak I ever ate. One fat cook dressed the whole, to not fewer than seventy or eighty people in different parties. The only food there was beefsteaks and mutton-chops, and one bottle of port. We paid *only seventeen shillings*!!! [too much for our Scotch pockets].

We dined in the kitchen, close to the fire; a most curious and novel scene of M.P.'s, peers, and lookers-on, all huddled *through other*, and no distinction paid to one more than another. London is the only place in the world where this is the case, I should think.

We . . . returned to our seats. . . . At length Mr. Paule's petition against Mr. Sheridan's election came on, and a very keen debate ensued, in which all the principal people in the House almost took part. . . . Sheridan a most animated, impressive, and clever fellow; but treated his opponents with rather too much contempt; I did not think that the House attended to him very patiently, or with very much respect. . . . Mr. Thomas Grenville I thought the most tiresome *drunt* of the whole; spoke at least an hour, and went round about it, and about, and about it, till I fairly fell asleep; and when I awoke he was making an apology for not having spoken longer, which he said it was his duty to have done. . . .

I was *ashamed* to have been so little interested by all I had seen. . . . I would not be an M.P. for 1,000*l*. a year; 'tis a most fagging, cursed business, and a most d——ble bore, I think, and you are compelled to attend under immense fines.

The debate was about whether the witnesses adduced ought to be examined at the bar, or by the counsel. I was often surprised to think I really saw and heard the men whom I had so often heard and read of with awe and astonishment.

It is impossible that any of those I heard could have equalled Pitt or Fox; indeed, I cannot *convince myself* that I have not

heard Adam Gillies or James Gibson speak better than any of them. But in this I must be grossly mistaken; so little are we poor stupid devils capable of estimating properly anything we either see or hear; and yet . . . '*Qui pauca considerat, de omnibus facile pronunciat.*' I came home very thoughtful and melancholy at all I had seen, and my own want of comprehension —read my wife's letter, which at once put me into excellent good spirits, and went to bed quite happy that I had no desire to be an M.P. . . .

. . . Went along with the clan Murray to dine at Mr. Disraeli's, where we had a most sumptuous banquet, and a very large party. . . . There was a very beautiful woman there, Mrs. Turner, wife of Sharon Turner, the Anglo-Saxon historian, who, I am told, is one of the *Godwin school*! If they be all as beautiful, accomplished, and agreeable as this lady, they must be a deuced dangerous set indeed, and I should not choose to trust myself amongst them. The whole company, except ourselves, I believe were Jews and Jewesses! . . . Our male part of the company consisted mostly of literary men—Cumberland, Turner, Disraeli, Basevi, Prince Hoare, and Mr. Cervetto. . . . Of course, our whole conversation was of a literary cast. . . . Those literary men whom I have been able to see in these two last journeys to London, are of a very inferior caste indeed to ours of Edinburgh. . . . Turner was the most able and agreeable of the whole by far; Cumberland, the most talkative and eccentric perhaps, has a good sprinkling of learning and humour in his conversation and anecdote, from having lived so long amongst the eminent men of his day—Johnson, Foote, Garrick, &c. His whole conversation is sadly disgusting, from irony and detraction, conveyed in a cunning sort of way, and directed constantly against the *Edinburgh Review* and Sir Walter Scott (who is a poor ignorant boy and *no poet*, and never wrote a five-feet line in his life), and such other d——d stuff. . . .

. . . I am completely satisfied now that there are more Scotsmen in London than in Edinburgh. There is scarcely one baker in London who is not Scottish, nor one gardener. . . . Curious, however, . . . the butchers and postilions, &c. are all English; chair-men and porters all Irish; milk-women almost all Welsh; sugar-bakers all Germans; dealers in gold and jewels all Jews; swindlers in bad pictures and prints, looking-glasses, weather-glasses, &c., all Italians; traitors and spies all French; booksellers are mostly idiots.

Hunter succeeded to his father's considerable estates in 1809; two years afterwards he retired from Constable's firm, and enjoyed his wealth only one year longer. In his last description of a dinner party, he says, 'I gave them port, sherry, claret and madeira, burgundy, champagne, hock, frontignac and côte rôtie. . . . My present life is so happy a one, that I am only alarmed seriously that it cannot last at this rate, else it would be too good for this world.' He again grows weary of his boisterous life, however, with its *wet weather* (as he calls the hard drinking); and only two days before his sudden death begs to be allowed to return to harness. There is something strange and in its way pathetic in what this large, noisy, burly individual writes to his partner just after his father's death: 'I felt it a very *sore thing* yesterday to go to the churchyard with Maule to mark off the new ground for two graves, and to fix where he and my father are to lie side by side. I did not cry, however, though it made my throat d——d sore trying to keep it in.'

The chapter on Alexander Murray, the wonderful linguist, for which the author has good materials, ought to be entertaining, but is not. Murray's letters, the greater number of which refer to his work of editing the *Travels of James Bruce*—a book much more forgotten now than it deserves to be—are in general dull and stilted, and our author's remarks upon them are far from lively.

The following extract of a candid letter from Jeffrey to Hazlitt in 1818, giving him advice as to lecturing, is characteristic, and creditable to that gentleman, and admits us to a curious little glimpse of the Edinburgh of those days:

. . . I say that in general I think Edinburgh the very worst place in the world for such experiments as you seemed to meditate [Hazlitt's lecturing there], both from the extreme dissipation of the fashionable part of its population, and from a sort of conceit and fastidiousness in all the middling classes, which, originating at least as much in a

coldness of nature as in any extraordinary degree of intelligence, make them very ready to find fault and decry. . . .

Estimating the merit of your lectures as highly as I am sincerely inclined to do, I could by no means insure you against a total failure; but I think it much more likely that you might find about forty or fifty auditors—not of the first rank or condition—and be abused as a Jacobin and a raving blockhead by a great many more. . . . We are quite provincial enough for that, I assure you, notwithstanding the allowance of liberality and sense that is to be found among us. If this prospect tempts you, pray come. I shall willingly do all I can for you, but I fear it will not be very much.

In the meantime I am concerned to find your health is not so good as it should be, and that you could take more care of it if your finances were in better order. We cannot let a man of genius suffer in this way. . . . I take the liberty of inclosing 100*l.*, a great part of which I shall owe you in a few weeks, and the rest you shall pay me back in reviews whenever you can do so without putting yourself to any uneasiness. If you really want another 100*l.* tell me so plainly, and it shall be heartily at your service.

Some of Scott's letters to Constable, when they are not driving a bargain, are bright and lively, but as a whole they are rather disappointing. 'The Lord High Constable,' as he is somewhere jestingly called, was often fortunate in supplying Scott with useful hints as to materials, &c., for his novels. Lockhart reports that Constable's partner, 'Mr. Cadell, says, his vanity boiled over so much at this time, on having his suggestions gone into, that when in his high moods he used to stalk up and down his room, and exclaim, "By G—, I am all but the author of the Waverley Novels!" It was Constable who gave *Kenilworth* its name; and encouraged by this, we suppose, he suggests that *The Abbot* should be re-christened *The Nunnery*; to which Scott answers:

Dear Sir,—The only objection I know to your proposal (if it be an objection) is, that there is neither Nun nor Nunnery mentioned in the affair from beginning to end. I remember Harry Siddons wrote a novel, which he sold to Mr. Lane of the Minerva Press, who, not liking the title, new-christened it *The Mysterious Bridal*, or some such name. 'Saar,' as poor Harry used to say, 'there was neither mystery nor bridal in my poor book. So egad, saar, the consequence was, I took my own book out of a circulating library for some new reading to Mrs. Siddons, and never found it out till I was far in the first volume.'

Yours etc. W. S.

The following little biographical extract from one of Scott's letters to Constable, written in 1822, is interesting:

I wish, my valued and very dear old friend, that I could bring you any man of art who could put you on your alert again. But I do not believe these gentlemen can do much for us beyond a certain point; but when they have regulated our body to the best of their skill, our spirit and our courage can do much for us afterwards. I remember when I was totally unable to walk without assistance, I insisted upon being lifted on my pony, with one man to lead it, and another to hold me on, and in that helpless state recovered my usual habits of the open air and free exercise. And day after day I lay on the sofa at Huntly Burn for half an hour, scarce able to speak a word, and then was escorted back to Abbotsford in the same doleful condition. So cheer up your heart, my good old friend; there are moments when our constitution takes an uncertain, changeable sort of wavering, but if attended to it settles. We fine, and renew our lease of life, if not quite on the same terms as in our youth, yet on those which are well worth having, though not quite so advantageous. I remember keeping my spirits afloat when I saw all around me despairing—even to Maida, my wolf-dog, who howled most detestably, and my piper, who assisted in laying me in the bath when I was very bad indeed—and chiefly by means of an old ballad of Robin Hood, in which, when in extreme peril, the hero is made to say:

'O blessed Virgin, quoth Robin Hood,
Thou art both mother and may,
I think it was never man's destiny
To die before his day.'

So keep up your heart, and we shall have a bottle of good claret betwixt us yet, and many an old-fashioned Scotch tale and story, such as would have pleased Oldbuck of Monkbarns. We have lost jocund Johnnie [John Ballantyne], to be sure, but we have enough of old recollections of times before our day, and in the earlier part of our own time, when we were both struggling to emancipate ourselves from obscurity, to make the chimney-nook a merry one in which we shall have our next social meeting.

Lockhart says he 'questions whether any single project that originated with Constable himself and continued to be superintended by his own care ever did fail.' But with the shining Scott element there came many confusions into his affairs; and, as early as 1814, we find Constable writing to his partner: 'We must cut all connection that is possible with the Ballantynes and Mr. Scott, though I think we are this next half-year to be benefited greatly by the latter.'

Our author tells us that he has not, for some unexplained reason, been allowed to consult the ledgers and other books of the firm of Constable and Co. in the preparation of this work; this doubtless made his task much more difficult, especially as regards the *crisis*, than it would otherwise have been, and certainly it has also increased the difficulty of understanding it tenfold for the reader.

Scott wanted endless supplies of money. Mr. Lockhart, in recounting what led up to the catastrophe, says:

> Much of the old unfortunate stock of Ballantyne and Co. still remained on hand—and with it some occasional recurrence of commercial difficulty as to *floating bills* was to be expected—while James Ballantyne's management of the pecuniary affairs of the printing-house had continued to be highly negligent and irregular. Nevertheless, the sanguine author had gone on purchasing one patch of land after another, until his estate at Abbotsford had already grown from 150 to nearly 1,000 acres. The property, all but his original farm, had been in the hands of various small holders (*Scotticè, cock-lairds*); these persons were sharp enough to understand, ere long, that their neighbour could with difficulty resist . . . an offer of more acres; and thus he proceeded buying up lot after lot of unimproved ground at extravagant prices . . . while the ejected yeomen set themselves down to fatten at their leisure upon their profits—most commonly the anticipated profits—of 'the Scotch Novels.'

So quickly did these works fly from Scott's pen, that Goethe believed he had a sort of literary manufactory in which there were a great many subalterns employed; that Scott supplied the necessary modicum of genius, and that the others copiously supplied the water! For one poem, which he wrote in two days (*Halidon Hill*, a dramatic sketch), he received a thousand pounds; and at one time he practically regulated his expenditure on the supposition that he was to earn 30,000*l.* in two years. A firm that had to make such payments to one customer needed no drag such as Constable's had in the shape of the Ballantynes' unsuccessful printing concern. There came a perceptible decline, too, in the popularity of their great author, who, generally having received payment in advance for as many as four and five unwritten novels of which, Lockhart says, neither he himself nor his publishers knew either the titles or the subjects, and spurred on by the desire of freeing himself from debt, was but too apt to ignore the feeling of the public in the matter. In 1823 we find even Constable remarking of his hero's novels: 'There is unparalleled genius in the works of the author of *Waverley*, but novelty has helped their sale;' while his London agent still more explicitly says of *Quentin Durward*: 'Our sale is deficient 1,000 copies. I would, honestly, as a prudent man of business, say that we ought to delay making a new bargain. *We may gorge the public.* Bank of England notes fall in value by an over-issue.'

Here is a statement, made with a view to publication, by Sir James Gibson-Craig, a personal friend both of Scott and Constable, to our author, which may give us some idea of what led up to the catastrophe, although it is somewhat hard to look upon Scott as he figures in this story, which is precisely the same, however, as that told many times in the work before us:

> My dear Sir,—In answer to your letter of yesterday, I beg to state that I remember

perfectly your father showing me a letter from Sir Walter Scott, written [in 1813 we presume] in great distress, informing him that his affairs were in such a state that he must call a meeting of his creditors, and requesting your father to do so.

After consulting with me, your father wrote Sir Walter that he hoped it would be unnecessary to call a meeting, and that if he would come to Edinburgh he thought he could devise means of avoiding so disagreeable a measure.

Sir Walter came, and by your father's advice he applied to the Duke of Buccleuch to assist him in raising money by annuity, which he did to the amount, I think, of 4,000*l.*

Your father proposed that Sir Walter should engage to write works for the press, on the faith of which your father agreed to give him bills to a very considerable extent, and he accordingly did so.

I believe this was the first transaction in bills Sir Walter and your father had. These transactions afterwards gradually extended to a large amount, and it became their practice that Constable and Co. should give bills to Sir Walter, which he discounted; and as a counter security, Sir Walter gave similar bills to the company, of which the company made no use.

After this had gone on for some time, your father became very uneasy, and wished to put an end to the dangerous system in which he had embarked; and he told me that he had gone to Sir Walter, taking with him all the bills he had received, and proposed to Sir Walter to give up these bills on condition of Sir Walter returning those Constable and Co. had given him.

Sir Walter said he could not possibly do so; on which your father told [him] that in that case he could not meet the engagements for Sir Walter without discounting the bills granted by him. This was accordingly done, and led to discounting to an immense amount, a double set of bills, which could not fail to produce, and did actually produce, the ruin of both parties.

The principle on which the connection between the firms of Ballantyne and Co. and Constable and Co. subsisted was false and unsound; they united, as we have seen, and as our author admits, in maintaining 'a system of fictitious credit.' There was a commercial panic in 1825. Money was very scarce in Edinburgh; and Hurst, Robinson, and Co., the London agents of Constable and Co., having caught the prevailing epidemic of speculation, and invested in *hops* to the extent of 100,000*l.*, destroyed their own and Constable's credit with the London banks. Constable was at this time very ill; not able to drag himself even as far as his own shop. After some delay on this account, he comes up to London, much broken in health; and after a week or two of tragical rushing about from one bank and one Jew to another to try and rescue his London agents, and through them his own and Scott's firm, from the whirlpool of bankruptcy, he is on the point of leaving London, with some hope that his strenuous efforts are, at least for the time being, successful, when he learns that all is over, and that Hurst, Robinson, and Co. have stopped payment, thus making bankrupt the firms of Constable and Co. and Ballantyne and Co. in Edinburgh.

Things were made worse for all concerned by the want of cordiality between Constable and his partner, Mr. Cadell. In reading the correspondence of this grim period, one is struck by the extreme cruelty of the remark which several of his business correspondents make to the poor suffering Constable that, 'if he had only been in London ten days before, it would all have been prevented,' when *ten days before* Constable was so ill that he could not stand on his feet.

Scott bore the blow when it came very manfully; he writes to Constable: 'Everybody has been kinder to me than another, especially the banking gentlemen; but it is a sad thing for a proud man to need that sort of kindness.'

In his journal are the following entries:

January 24, 1826.—Constable came yesterday, and saw me for half-an-hour. He seemed irritable, but kept his temper under command. Was a little shocked when I intimated that I was disposed to regard the present work as my own. I think I saw two things: 1. That he is desirous to return to the management of his own affairs without Cadell, if he can.

2. That he relies on my connection as the way of helping him out of the slough. Indeed, he said he was ruined utterly without my countenance. I certainly will befriend him if I can, but Constable without Cadell is like getting the clock without the pendulum—the one having the ingenuity, the other the caution, of the business. I will see my way before making any bargain, and I will help them, I am sure, if I can, without endangering my last cast for freedom. . . .

January 26.—Constable very anxious to have the husbanding of the books. I told him the truth—that I would be glad to have his assistance, and that he should have the benefit of the agency, but that he was to consider past transactions as no rule for settling those in future, since I must needs make the most out of my labours I could.

Scott decided to continue his connection with Constable's junior partner, Mr. Cadell; and we can well believe that to the hitherto prosperous bookseller, now quite broken in health, too, this decision on the part of Sir Walter was indeed a hard blow.

Mr. Archibald Constable, whose health, as we have said, had for some years previously been gradually breaking up, died about eighteen months after his bankruptcy.

To certain popular authors literature is still what it first became under Constable's reign, a land of Goshen, flowing with milk and honey. But we question whether, after all, the worldly circumstances of a truly great man would now be superior to what they were before that time. Nor indeed can an author's position ever be on a proper footing until, as has been wittily remarked, 'people are paid for what they do *not* write.' In contemplating the rubbish exhibited at our circulating libraries, or bookstalls, we are almost tempted to long for the days before Constable had invented even 'cloth bindings,' when the profession of literature, though a more narrow and thorny way, was in essential respects, it seems to us, a nobler than it has since become.

Few things are more strange in contrast than the view of literature taken by those two great Scotchmen, Burns and Scott. Sir Walter Scott, Bart., the representative of Border Chivalry—'I am,' he remarks, 'painting my baronial hall: . . . for the roof-tree I tried to blazon my own quarterings, and succeeded easily with eight on my father's side; but on my mother's side I stuck fast at the mother of my great-great-grandfather.' Scott 'contracts' for as many as four and five novels at a time; and receives 10,000*l.* for a Life of Napoleon, as melancholy a production of an utterly written-out (or sold-off) man of genius as one can contemplate. Whereas Robert Burns, the representative of Ayrshire ploughmen, with an income at the time barely sufficient to support himself and his family even on the most humble terms, when asked to write songs for Thomson's collection, answers: 'As the request you make to me will positively add to my enjoyment in complying with it, I shall enter into your undertaking with all the small portion of ability I have, strained to the utmost exertion by the impulse of enthusiasm. As to remuneration, you may think my songs either above or below price; for they shall absolutely be one or the other. In the honest enthusiasm with which I embark in your undertaking, to talk of money, wages, fee, hire, &c., would be downright *prostitution of soul*! A proof of each of the songs I compose or amend I shall receive as a favour.'[3] To Burns literature was something of a 'priesthood,' lifting him above the mean element in which he lived; to Scott it was little more than a congenial trade.

[3] Currie's *Burns*, iv. p. 5.