

Blackfriars

SIR WALTER'S POST-BAG. Edited by Wilfred Partington.
(John Murray; 16/-.)

More than a hundred years ago Sir Walter Scott decided to have the letters he had received from contemporaries arranged chronologically in letter-books. His deaf amanuensis, Huntly Gordon, was given the task of sorting a great mass of correspondence and reducing it to order, with the result that six thousand letters were preserved and bound up in twenty-four volumes. Mr. Partington, the editor of *Sir Walter's Post-Bag*, says that Huntly Gordon 'made but a poor job' of his work, but the same cannot be said of Mr. Partington, who has made a very good job of his selections from the letter-books as well as of the enlightening comments that accompany them and serve to weld the multifarious quotations into book form.

A great variety of subjects are touched upon by Sir Walter's correspondents, Catholic Emancipation among them, a measure that Scott regarded with considerably less apprehension than he did the Reform Bill. His son-in-law, the editor of the *Quarterly Review*, had published an article by the Poet Laureate attacking the measure. Lockhart writes:

'Southey's article on Emancipation may not please some of our friends, but *has* pleased the two people I care most about at Court, the King and Knighton. . . . He (Knighton) spoke for a long while about the Quarterly; said the anti-Catholic paper was everything fine—the King was anxious it should be printed separately. I said I had been afraid of doing harm. He said No, No—no harm; but great good. . . . He proceeded to intimate that the argument about the Protestant Thronedom being endangered, by possibility, at some time, were the Protestant Parliamentdom shaken, makes a strong impression on some minds—his own for one.' (267-8).

Sir Walter did not at all approve the line his son-in-law had taken, for he did not consider it wise or just to rail at Catholics on account of their religion. He replied vigorously that Southey was 'a fanatic on the subject' and 'no better than a wild bull' in his political judgments. It would seem that Mr. Partington has been unnecessarily discreet in quoting from Lockhart's letters about Sir William Knighton. Scott had buckled this gentleman to his heart during the royal visit to Edinburgh and certain advantages had accrued and were expected to accrue to the Scott family from this friendship. Charles Scott was through his good offices to receive a nomina-

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tion to the Foreign Office, and his father had been permitted to dedicate to the King the edition of his works known as the *Magnum Opus*, thereby in those days of patronage advancing its commercial value. Sir Walter had also been invited to dine in a friendly way at the Royal Lodge in Windsor Forest and was almost on a footing of intimacy with His Majesty. Lockhart saw no harm in trying to share in the perquisites of patronage. While 'angling for a government job' (255) he from time to time reported progress, telling his father-in-law that 'the Great Unseen' or 'the Invisible'—names the Keeper of the King's Privy Purse went by in the Scott circle—always seemed pleased to see him and sometimes grasped him 'with two hands,' 'God-blessing' him 'at a great rate.' This affability might mean something favourable for had not he coupled it with the observation that 'the Duke' had spoken of Lockhart in an interested way. 'By the bye, the Invisible said' (and was there a double meaning to be read into the innocent words?) 'We are all anglers at Windsor and of course delighted with Sir W(alter) on *Salmonia*. What a pity you can have not given a small puff to the dace and chub of Virginia Water!' (258).

It is interesting to find a letter from Lord Bathurst defending his official support of Sir Hudson Lowe as Napoleonic gaoler. Whig London was ringing with stories of the abominable treatment meted out to this great man and Lady Holland was flaunting regulations by sending parcels regularly to St. Helena. To Sir Walter the Secretary for War and Colonies explained that Lowe's temper, always irritable, had been soured by persecution, he had begun by wishing to be 'on a cordial footing' with Napoleon and when he found this impossible he 'could not conceal his disappointment';

'You may ask perhaps why, when I saw things go on so ill I did not recall Sir Hudson. I answer . . . that I always felt that an Officer in high command abroad left his honour in my custody and that I was bound to watch it as jealously as I would my own. . . . Had I recalled Sir Hudson because he had not given satisfaction to those whom it was his duty to watch, how could I have expected a zealous guardian in his successor who would have felt that his interest and character too depended more upon the will of those whom he was employed to watch than upon me who employed him.' (236.)

It would have been nice if Mr. Partington had included more from Lady Abercorn's gossiping letters of which so many re-

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main unpublished. She was in a position to hear all that went on in the great world. In the longest quotation from her correspondence entitled *Profligacy La Mode* she discusses the rights and wrongs of the Queen's case and gives Sir Walter a list of heirs to peerages who have married women of the town. In yet another of her letters, this time from Lausanne, where she finds the cost of living incredibly cheap, she says that 'Julia has been to Mont St. Bernard with Lady Hardy she dined with the monks at their Convent and walsed (sic) for them; and they sang and played for her. They are none of them above thirty and quite fine gentlemen. Their Convent is the highest habitation in the old world.' (143).

It is well known that Sir Walter was completely indifferent as to the manner in which his poems and novels were presented on the stage. Joanna Baillie, however, was determined he should know all about the *Knight of Snowdown* when it was produced at Covent Garden, for it was one of the many plays and operas adapted from the *Lady of the Lake*. In concluding a descriptive letter she says that in the last act 'the King prophesies that some *future* Poet will in deathless rime record the gallant feat of Snowdown's Knight. This last is all the notice taken of your Lordship from beginning to end!'

Use of the index to *Sir Walter's Post-Bag* has revealed its curiously undependable character. Dr. Lyons does not appear in it at all and many references are given to pages on which the indexed word is not printed. Except for this oversight *Sir Walter's Post-Bag* is very well edited and extremely interesting. Mr. Partington is to be warmly congratulated on his work.

UNA POPE-HENNESSY.

SOME UNPUBLISHED LETTERS OF SIR WALTER SCOTT. Edited by J. Alexander Symington. (Basil Blackwell; 10/6.)

This book is important not so much for the intrinsic interest of the letters contained in it as for the light it throws on some parts of Scott's career, notably the legal aspect. No future biographer (and the definitive life of Scott still remains to be written) can afford to neglect the information disclosed in it. For example it was supposed in 1817 that Sir Walter was eager to be appointed to the Scottish Exchequer Bench; we find confirmation of this in his letter to the Secretary of the Admiralty, Croker, soliciting English patronage for a brother 'in the Canadas' and explaining that he is unable to plead with Scot-