the extent of his reading as a schoolboy and a young man he was far from being a cloisteral student, absorbed in his books. In spite of his lameness and his serious illnesses in youth, his constitution was naturally robust, his dis­position genial, his spirits high : he was always well to the front in the fights and frolics of the High School, and a boon companion in the “high jinks” of the junior bar. The future novelist’s experience of life was singularly rich and varied. While he lived the life of imagination and scholarship in sympathy with a few choice friends, he was brought into intimate daily contact with many varieties of real life. At home he had to behave as became a member of a Puritanic, somewhat ascetic, well-ordered Scottish household, subduing his own inclinations towards a more graceful and comfortable scheme of living into outward con­formity with his father’s strict rule. Through his mother’s family he obtained access to the literary society of Edin­burgh, at that time electrified by the advent of Burns, full of vigour and ambition, rejoicing in the possession of not a few widely known men of letters, philosophers, historians, novelists, and critics, from racy and eccentric Monboddo to refined and scholarly Mackenzie. In that society also he may have found the materials for the manners and characters of *St Ronan's Well.* From any tendency to the pedantry of over-culture he was effectually saved by the rougher and manlier spirit of his professional comrades, who, though they respected *belles lettres,* would not tolerate anything in the shape of affectation or senti­mentalism. The atmosphere of the Parliament House (the Westminster Hall of Edinburgh) had considerable influence on the tone of Scott’s novels. His peculiar humour as a story-teller and painter of character was first developed among the young men of his own standing at the bar. They were the first mature audience on which he experi­mented, and seem often to have been in his mind’s eye when he enlarged his public. From their mirthful com­panionship by the stove, where the briefless congregated to discuss knotty points in law and help one another to enjoy the humours of judges and litigants, “ Duns Scotus ” often stole away to pore over old books and manuscripts in the library beneath ; but as long as he was with them he was first among his peers in the art of providing enter­tainment. It was to this market that Scott brought the harvest of the vacation rambles which it was his custom to make every autumn for seven years after his call to the bar and before his marriage. He scoured the country in search of ballads and other relics of antiquity ; but he found also and treasured many traits of living manners, many a lively sketch and story with which to amuse the brothers of “ the mountain ” on his return. His staid father did not much like these escapades, and told him bitterly that he seemed fit for nothing but to be a “ gangrel scrape-gut.” But, as the companion of “ his Liddesdale raids ” happily put it, “ he was *makin’ himsell* a’ the time, but he didna ken maybe what he was about till years had passed : at first he thought o’ little, I daresay, but the queerness and the fun.”

We may as well dispose at once of Scott’s professional career. His father intended him originally to follow his own business, and he was apprenticed in his sixteenth year ; but he preferred the upper walk of the legal pro­fession, and was admitted a member of the faculty of advocates in 1792. He seems to have read hard at law for four years at least, but almost from the first to have limited his ambition to obtaining some comfortable appoint­ment such as would leave him a good deal of leisure for literary pursuits. In this he was not disappointed. In 1799 he obtained the office of sheriff-depute of Selkirk­shire, with a salary of £300 and very light duties. In 1806 he obtained the reversion of the office of clerk of

session. It is sometimes supposed, from the immense amount of other work that Scott accomplished, that this office was a sinecure. But the duties, which are fully described by Lockhart, were really serious, and kept him hard at fatiguing work, his biographer estimates, for at least three or four hours daily during six months out of the twelve, while the court was in session. He discharged these duties faithfully for twenty-five years, during the height of his activity as an author. He did not enter on the emoluments of the office till 1812, but from that time he received from the clerkship and the sheriffdom combined an income of £1600 a year, being thus enabled to act in his literary undertakings on his often-quoted maxim that “ literature should be a staff and not a crutch.”

Scott’s profession, in addition to supplying him with a competent livelihood, supplied him also with abundance of opportunities for the study of men and manners. Char­acters of all types and shades find their way into courts of law. The wonder is that so much technical drudgery did not crush every particle of romance out of him ; but such was the elasticity and strength of his powers that this daily attendance at the transaction of affairs in open court face to face with living men—under a strain of attention that would have exhausted an ordinary man’s allowance of energy—seems rather to have helped him in giving an atmosphere of reality to his representations of the life of the past.

It was not, however, as a prose writer that he was first to make a reputation. The common notion is that Scott, having made a reputation as a poet, was led to attempt romances in prose by a chance impulse, hitting upon the new vein as if by accident. The truth seems rather to be that, as it is his prose romances which give the fullest measure of his genius, so the greater part of his early life was a conscious or unconscious preparation for writing them ; whereas his metrical romances, in every way slighter and less rich and substantial, were, comparatively speak­ing, a casual and temporary deviation from the main pur­pose of his life. According to his own account, he was led to adopt the medium of verse by a series of accidents. The story is told by himself at length and with his customary frankness and modesty in the *Essay on Imita­tions of the Ancient Ballad,* prefixed to the 1830 edition of his *Border Minstrelsy,* and in the 1830 introduction to the *Lay of the Last Minstrel.* The first link in the chain was a lecture by Henry Mackenzie on German literature, delivered in 1788. This apprized Scott, who was then a legal apprentice and an enthusiastic student of French and Italian romance, that there was a fresh development of romantic literature in German. As soon as he had the burden of preparation for the bar off his mind he learnt German, and was profoundly excited to find a new school founded on the serious study of a kind of literature his own devotion to which was regarded by most of his com­panions with wonder and ridicule. We must remember always that Scott quite as much as Wordsworth created the taste by which he was enjoyed, and that in his early days he was half-ashamed of his romantic studies, and pursued them more or less in secret with a few intimates. While he was in the height of his enthusiasm for the new German romance, Mrs Barbauld visited Edinburgh, and recited an English translation of Bürger’s *Lenore.* Scott heard of it from a friend, who was able to repeat two lines— “ Tramp, tramp, across the land they speed ;

Splash, splash, across the sea ! ”

The two lines were enough to give Scott a new ambition. He could write such poetry himself ! The impulse was strengthened by his reading Lewis’s *Monk* and the ballads in the German manner interspersed through the work. He hastened to procure a copy of Bürger, at once executed