translations of several of his ballads, published two of them in a thin quarto in 1796 (his ambition being perhaps quickened by the unfortunate issue of a love affair), and was much encouraged by the applause of his friends. Soon after he met Lewis personally, and his ambition was con­firmed. “ Finding Lewis,” lie says, “ in possession of so much reputation, and conceiving that if I fell behind him in poetical powers, I considerably exceeded him in general information, I suddenly took it into my head to attempt the style of poetry by which he had raised himself to fame.” Accordingly, he composed *Glenfinlas, The Eυe of St John,* and the *Gray Brother,* which were published in Lewis’s collection of *Tales of Wonder.* But he soon be­came convinced that “ the practice of ballad-writing was out of fashion, and that any attempt to revive it or to found a poetical character on it would certainly fail of success.” His study of Goethe’s *Götz von Berlichingen,* of which he published a translation in 1799, gave him wider ideas. Why should he not do for ancient Border manners what Goethe had done for the ancient feudalism of the Rhine ? He had been busy since his boyhood collecting Scottish Border ballads and studying the minutest details of Border history. He began to cast about for a form which should have the advantage of novelty, and a subject which should secure unity of composition. He was en­gaged at the time preparing a collection of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.* The first instalment was published in 1802 ; it was followed by another next year, and by an edition and continuation of the old romance of *Sir Tristram;* and Scott was still hesitating about subject and form for a large original work. It seems probable from a conversa­tion recorded by Gillies that he might have ended by casting his meditated picture of Border manners in the form of a prose romance. But chance at last threw in his way both a suitable subject and a suitable metrical vehicle. He had engaged all his friends in the hunt for Border ballads and legends. Among others, the countess of Dal­keith, wife of the heir-apparent to the dukedom of Buccleuch, interested herself in the work. Happening to hear the legend of a tricksy hobgoblin named Gilpin Horner, she asked Scott to write a ballad about it. He agreed with delight, and, out of compliment to the lady who had given this command to the bard, resolved to connect it with the house of Buccleuch. The subject grew in his fertile imagination, till incidents enough had gathered round the goblin to furnish a framework for his long-designed picture of Border manners. Chance also furnished him with a hint for a novel scheme of verse. Coleridge’s fragment of *Christabel,* though begun in 1797—when he and Words­worth were discussing on the Quantock Hills the prin­ciples of such ballads as Scott at the same time was recit­ing to himself in his gallops on Musselburgh sands—was not published till 1816. But a friend of Scott’s, Sir John Stoddart, had met Coleridge in Malta, and had carried home in his memory enough of the unfinished poem to convey to Scott that its metre was the very metre of which he had been in search. Scott introduced still greater variety into the four-beat couplet ; but it was to *Christabel* that he owed the suggestion, as one line borrowed whole and many imitated rhythms testify.

The *Lay of the Last Minstrel* appeared in January 1805, and at once became widely popular. It sold more rapidly than poem had ever sold before. Scott was astonished at his own success, although he expected that “ the attempt to return to a more simple and natural style of poetry was likely to be welcomed.” Many things contributed to the extraordinary demand for the *Lay.* First and foremost, no doubt, we must reckon its simplicity. After the abstract themes and abstruse, elaborately allusive style of the 18th century, the public were glad of verse that

could be read with ease and even with exhilaration, verse in which a simple interesting story was told with brilliant energy, and simple feelings were treated not as isolated themes but as incidents in the lives of individual men and women. The thought was not so profound, the lines were not so polished, as in *The Pleasures of Memory* or *The Pleasures of Hope,* but the “ light-horseman sort of stanza” carried the reader briskly over a much more diversified country, through boldly outlined and strongly coloured scenes. No stanza required a second reading ; you had not to keep attention on the stretch or pause and construe laboriously before you could grasp the writer’s meaning or enter into his artfully condensed sentiment. To remember the pedigrees of all the Scotts, or the names of all the famous chiefs and hardy retainers “ whose gathering word was Bellenden,” might have re­quired some effort, but only the conscientious reader need care to make it. The only puzzle in the *Lay* was the goblin page, and the general reader was absolved from all trouble about him by the unanimous declaration of the critics, led by Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review,* that he was a grotesque excrescence, in no way essential to the story. It is commonly taken for granted that Scott acquiesced in this judgment, his politely ironic letter to Miss Seward being quoted as conclusive. This is hardly fair to the poor goblin, seeing that his story was the germ of the poem and determines its whole structure ; but it is a tribute to the lively simplicity of the *Lay* that few people should be willing to take the very moderate amount of pains necessary to see the goblin’s true position in the action. The supernatural element was Scott’s most risky innovation. For the rest, he was a cautious and conservative reformer, careful not to offend established traditions. He was far from raising the standard of re­bellion, as Wordsworth had done, against the great artistic canon of the classical school

“ True art is nature to advantage dressed. ’’

To “engraft modern refinement on ancient simplicity,” to preserve the energy of the old ballad without its rudeness and bareness of poetic ornament, was Scott’s avowed aim. He adhered to the poetic diction against which Words­worth protested. His rough Borderers are “dressed to advantage” in the costume of romantic chivalry. The baronial magnificence of Branksome, Deloraine’s “shield and jack and acton,” the elaborate ceremony of the com­bat between the pseudo-Deloraine and Musgrave, are concessions to the taste of the 18th century. Further, he disarmed criticism by putting his poem into the mouth of an ancient minstrel, thus pictorially emphasizing the fact that it was an imitation of antiquity, and provid­ing a scapegoat on whose back might be laid any remain­ing sins of rudeness or excessive simplicity. And, while imitating the antique romance, he was careful not to imitate its faults of rambling, discursive, disconnected structure. He was scrupulously attentive to the classical unities of time, place, and action. The scene never changes from Branksome and its neighbourhood ; the time occupied by the action (as he pointed out in his preface) is three nights and three days ; and, in spite of all that critics have said about the superfluity of the goblin page, it is not difficult to trace unity of intention and regular progressive development in the incidents.

The success of the *Lay* decided finally, if it was not decided already, that literature was to be the main busi­ness of Scott’s life, and he proceeded to arrange his affairs accordingly. It would have been well for his comfort, if not for his fame, had he adhered to his first plan, which was to buy a small mountain-farm near Bowhill, with the proceeds of some property left to him by an uncle, and