attacks of agonizing cramp of the stomach, which recurred at short intervals during more than two years. But his appetite and capacity for work remained unbroken. He made his first attempt at play-writing @@1 as he was recover­ing from the first attack ; before the year was out he had completed *Rob Roy,* and within six months it was followed by *The Heart of Midlothian,* which by general consent occupies the highest rank among his novels. The *Bride* ***of*** *Lammermoor, The Legend of Montrose,* and *Ivanhoe* were dictated to amanuenses, through fits of suffering so acute that he could not suppress cries of agony. Still he would not give up. When Laidlaw begged him to stop dictating he only answered, “Nay, Willie, only see that the doors are fast. I would fain keep all the cry as well as the wool to ourselves ; but as to giving over work, that can only be when I am in woollen.”

Throughout those two years of intermittent ill-health, which was at one time so serious that his life was despaired of and he took formal leave of his family, Scott’s semi­public life at Abbotsford continued as usual,—swarms of visitors coming and going, and the rate of production on the whole suffering no outward and visible check, all the world wondering at the novelist’s prodigious fertility. Mr Ruskin lately put forward the opinion that there is a distinct falling off in the quality of Scott’s work traceable from the time of his first serious illness, arguing as a proof of the healthiness of Scott’s organization that “ he never gains anything by sickness ; the whole man breathes or faints as one creature ; the ache that stiffens a limb chills his heart, and every pang of the stomach paralyses the brain.” Yet, when the world was not aware of the state of the novelist’s health, and novel after novel was received without any abatement of enthusiasm, but rather with growing wonder and admiration, no critic was acute enough to detect this, and it is somewhat unfortunate for the theory that Mr Ruskin has mistaken the date of Scott’s first illness and included among the masterpieces produced in perfect health *Rob Roy* and *The Heart of Midlothian,* both composed through recurrent fits of intense bodily pain. The first of the series concerning which there were murmurs of dissatisfaction was *The Monastery,* which was the first completed after the re-establishment of the author’s bodily vigour. The failure, such as it was, was due rather to the subject than the treatment, and *The Abbot,* in which Mary Queen of Scots is introduced, was generally hailed as fully sustaining the reputation of “the Great Unknown.” *Kenilworth, The Pirate, The Fortunes of Nigel, Peveril of the Peak, Quentin Durward, St Ronan’s Well, Redgauntlet,* followed in quick succession in the course of three years, and it was not till the last two were reached that the cry that the author was writing too fast began to gather volume. *St Ronan’s Well* was very severely criticized and condemned. And yet Mr Leslie Stephen tells a story of a dozen modern connoisseurs in the Waverley novels who agreed that each should write down separately the name of his favourite novel, when it appeared that each had without concert named *St Ronan’s Well.* There is this certainly to be said for *St Ronan’s,* that, in spite of the heaviness of some of the scenes at the “ hottle ” and the artificial melodramatic character of some of the personages, none of Scott’s stories is of more absorbing or more bril­liantly diversified interest. Contradictions between con­temporary popular opinion and mature critical judgment, as well as diversities of view among critics themselves, rather shake confidence in individual judgment on the

vexed but not particularly wise question which is the best of Scott’s novels. There must, of course, always be in­equalities in a series so prolonged. The author cannot always be equally happy in his choice of subject, situation, and character. Naturally also he dealt first with the subjects of which his mind was fullest. But any theory of falling off or exhaustion based upon plausible general considerations has to be qualified so much when brought into contact with the facts that very little confidence can be reposed in its accuracy. *The Fortunes of Nigel* comes comparatively late in the series and has often been blamed for its looseness of construction. Scott himself always spoke slightingly of his plots, and humorously said that he proceeded on Mr Bayes’s maxim, “ What the deuce is a plot good for but to bring in good things ? ” Yet so com­petent a critic as Mr Hutton has avowed that on the whole he prefers *The Fortunes of Nigel* to any other of Scott’s novels. An attempt might be made to value the novels according to the sources of their materials, according as they are based on personal observation, documentary history, or previous imaginative literature. On this prin­ciple *Ivanhoe* and *The Tales of the Crusaders* might be adjudged inferior as being based necessarily on previous romance. But as a matter of fact Scott’s romantic char­acters are vitalized, clothed with a verisimilitude of life, out of the author’s deep, wide, and discriminating know­ledge of realities, and his observation of actual life was coloured by ideals derived from romance. He wrote all his novels out of a mind richly stored with learning of all kinds, and in the heat of composition seems to have drawn from whatever his tenacious memory supplied to feed the fire of imagination, without pausing to reflect upon the source. He did not exhaust his accumulations from one source first and then turn to another, but from first to last drew from all as the needs of the occasion happened to suggest.

Towards the close of 1825, after eleven years of brilliant and prosperous labour, encouraged by constant tributes of admiration, homage, and affection such as no other literary potentate has ever enjoyed, realizing his dreams of baronial splendour and hospitality on a scale suited to his large literary revenues, Scott suddenly discovered that the foundations of his fortune were unsubstantial. He had imagined himself clear of all embarrassments in 1818, when all the unsaleable stock of John Ballantyne & Co. was bargained off by Rigdum to Constable for Waverley copyrights, and the publishing concern was wound up. Apparently he never informed himself accurately of the new relations of mutual accommodation on which the print­ing firm then entered with the great but rashly speculative publisher, and drew liberally for his own expenditure against the undeniable profits of his novels without asking any questions, trusting blindly in the solvency of his com­mercial henchmen. Unfortunately, “lifted off their feet” by the wonderful triumphs of their chief, they thought themselves exempted like himself from the troublesome duty of inspecting ledgers and balancing accounts, till the crash came. From a diary which Scott began a few days before the first rumours of financial difficulty reached him we know how he bore from day to day the rapidly unfolded prospect of unsuspected liabilities. “Thank God,” was his first reflexion, “ I have enough to pay more than 20s. in the pound, taking matters at the worst.” But a few weeks revealed the unpleasant truth that, owing to the way in which Ballantyne & Co. were mixed up with Con­stable & Co., and Constable with Hurst & Robinson, the failure of the London house threw upon him personal responsibility for £130,000.

How Scott’s pride rebelled against the dishonour of bankruptcy, how he toiled for the rest of his life to clear

*@@@1 The Doom of Derorgoil.* This and his subsequent dramatic sketches, *Macduff's Cross, Halidοn Hitt,* and *The Ayrshire Tragedy,* were slight compositions, dashed off in a few days, and afford no measure of what Scott might have done as a dramatist if he had studied the conditions of stage representation.