at school, never became exact in his knowledge of Latin syntax, and was so belated in beginning Greek that out of bravado he resolved not to learn it at all.

Left very much to himself throughout his boyhood in the matter of reading, so quick, lively, excitable and uncertain in health that it was considered dangerous to press him and prudent rather to keep him back, Scott began at a very early age to accumulate the romantic lore of which he afterwards made such splendid use. As a child he seems to have been an eager and interested listener and a great favourite with his elders, ap- parently having even then the same engaging charm that made him so much beloved as a man. Chance threw him in the way of many who were willing to indulge his delight in stories and ballads. Not only his own relatives—the old women at his grandfather’s farm at Sandyknowe, his aunt, under whose charge he was sent to Bath for a year, his mother—took an interest in the precocious boy’s questions, told him tales of Jacobites and Border worthies of his own and other clans, but casual friends of the family—such as the military veteran at Prestonpans, old Dr Blacklock the blind poet, Home the author of *Douglas,* Adam Ferguson the martial historian of the Roman republic—helped forward his education in the direction in which the bent of his genius lay. At the age of six he was able to define himself as “a virtuoso,” “one who wishes to and will know everything.” At ten his collection of chap-books and ballads had reached several volumes, and he was a connoisseur in various readings. Thus he took to the High School, Edinburgh, when he was strong enough to be put in regular attendance, an unusual store of miscellaneous knowledge and an unusually quickened intelligence, so that his master “ pronounced that, though many of his schoolfellows understood the Latin better, *Gualterus Scott* was behind few in following and enjoying the author’s meaning.”

Throughout his school days and afterwards when he was apprenticed to his father, attended university classes, read for the bar, took part in academical and professional debating societies, Scott steadily and ardently pursued his own favourite studies. His reading in romance and history was really study, and not merely the indulgence of an ordinary schoolboy’s promiscuous appetite for exciting literature. In fact, even as a schoolboy he specialized. He followed the line of overpowering inclination; and even then, as he frankly tells us, “fame was the spur.” He acquired a reputation among his schoolfellows for out-of-the-way knowledge, and also for story-telling, and he worked hard to maintain this character, which compensated to his ambitious spirit his indifferent distinction in ordinary school-work. The youthful “ virtuoso,” though he read ten times the usual allowance of novels from the circulating library, was carried by his enthusiasm into fields much less generally attractive. He was still a schoolboy when he mastered French sufficiently well to read through collections of old French romances, and not more than fifteen when, attracted by trans- lations to Italian romantic literature, he learnt the language in order to read Dante and Ariosto in the original. This willingness to face dry work in the pursuit of romantic reading affords a measure of the strength of Scott’s passion. In one of the literary parties brought together to lionize Bums, when the peasant poet visited Edinburgh, the boy of fifteen was the only member of the company who could tell the source of some lines affixed to a picture that had attracted the poet’s attention— a slight but significant evidence both of the width of his reading and of the tenacity of his memory. The same thoroughness appears in another little circumstance. He took an interest in Scottish family history and genealogy, but, not content with the ordinary sources, he ransacked the MSS. preserved in the Advocates’ Library. By the time he was one and twenty he had acquired such a reputation for his skill in deciphering old manuscripts that his assistance was sought by professional antiquaries.

This early, assiduous, unintermittent study was the main secret, over and above his natural gifts, of Scott’s extempore speed and fertility when at last he found forms into which to pour his vast accumulation of historical and romantic lore. He

was, as he said himself, “ like an ignorant gamester who keeps up a good hand till he knows how to play it.” That he had vague thoughts from a much earlier period than is commonly supposed of playing the hand some day is extremely probable, if, as he tells us, the idea of writing romances first occurred to him when he read Cervantes in the original. This was long before he was out of his teens; and, if we add that his leading idea in his first novel was to depict a Jacobitic Don Quixote, we can see that there was probably a long interval between the first conception of *Waverley* and the ultimate completion.

Scott’s preparation for painting the life of past times was probably much less unconsciously such than his equally thorough preparation for acting as the painter of Scottish manners and character in all grades of society. With all the extent of his reading as a schoolboy and a young man he was far from being a cloistered student, absorbed in his books. In spite of his lame- ness 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 liked 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 senti- mentalism. The atmosphere of the Parliament House (the law- courts 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 dare say, but the queerness and the fun.”

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