sheriff and clerk, hospitable laird, poet, novelist, and miscellaneous man of letters, publisher and printer, though the prosperous excitement sustained him for a time, soon told upon his health. Early in 1817 began a series of 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 filled the four volumes of the second series of *Tales of My Landlord,* and has remained one of the most popular among his novels. *The Bride of Lammermoor, The Legend of Montrose,* forming the third series by “ Jedediah Cleishbotham,” and *Ivanhoe* (1820) 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 semi-public 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. The first of the series concerning which there were murmurs of dissatisfaction was *The Monastery* (1820), which was the first completed after the re-establishment of the author’s bodily vigour. The failure, such as it was, was possibly due to the introduction of the supernatural in the person of the White Lady of Avenel; and its sequel, *The Abbot* (1820), in which Mary, Queen of Scots, is introduced, was generally hailed as fully sustaining the reputation of “ the Great Unknown.” *Kenilworth* (1821), *The Pirate* (1822), *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), *Peυeril of the Peak* (1822), *Quentin Durward* (1823), *St Ronαn's Well* (1824), *Redgauntlet* (1824) 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 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 Bayes’s maxim, “ What the deuce is a plot good for but to bring in good things?’’ Yet some competent critics prefer *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* (1825, containing *The Betrothed* and *The Talisman)* 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.

During the years 1821-1825 he edited Richard Franck’s *Northern Memoirs* (1821), *Chronological Notes of Scottish Affairs from the Diary of Lord Fountainhall* (1822), *Military Memoirs of the Great Civil War* (1822), and *The Novelists' Library* (10 vols., London, 1821-1824), the prefatory memoirs to which were separately published in 1828.

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 reflection, “ 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 off this enormous debt, declining all offers of assistance and asking no consideration from his creditors except time, and how nearly he succeeded, is one of the most familiar chapters in literary history, and would be one of the saddest were it not for the heroism of the enterprise. His wife died soon after the struggle began, and he suffered other painful bereavements; but, though sick at heart, he toiled on indomitably, and, writing for honour, exceeded even his happiest days in industrious speed. If he could have main­tained the rate of the first three years, during which he completed *Woodstock* (1826); *Chronicles of the Canongate* (1827), which included three tales—“ The Highland Widow,” “ The Two Drovers ” and “ The Surgeon’s Daughter ’’; *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828, in the second series of *Chronicles of the Canongate); Anne of Geierstein* (1829); the *Life of Napoleon* (9 vols., 1827); part of his *History of Scotland* (2 vols., 1829-1830, for *Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia);* the Scottish series of *Tales of a Grandfather* (four series, 1828-1829-1830-1831; inscribed to “Hugh Little­john,’’ *i.e.* John Hugh Lockhart), besides several magazine articles,

@@@1 *The Doom of Deυorgoil.* This and his other dramatic sketches, *Macduff's Cross, Halidοn Hitt* (1822) and *Auchíndrane, or The Ayrshire Tragedy,* printed with *Devorgoil* in 1830, 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.