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Notes and Documents

WASHINGTON IRVING TO WALTER SCOTT:
TWO UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

Usually a staid scholar, Stanley T. Williams had difficulty—we can judge from his excited tone—in controlling himself when, in writing his excellent biography of Washington Irving, the time arrived to describe the first meeting of the American and Walter Scott. In relatively short staccato sentences, he reviewed the collision courses of Irving and Scott, rising to a breathless emotional peak: "Now Irving was to take Scott by the hand, to ask him the questions surging in his mind."1 In fact, as the biographer illustrated by his later discussion, Irving had come to Abbotsford more intent on listening than on asking questions. Be that as it may, however, there was ample justification behind Williams' excitement, for this meeting on 30 August 1817, in addition to being an event of great personal meaning for the two men, was—to use Williams' phrase—a "conjunction of stellar representatives of the two literatures."2

Scott had admired Irving's writings since The History of New York had kept him laughing until his sides ached; Irving had read and reread the works of the Scotsman until he could quote portions from memory. For both men the four days which they spent together at Abbotsford was a period of extreme pleasure.3 For Irving, however, it was much more than that: advantages resulting from this meeting ex-


2 Ibid.

3 In Scott's official biography, J. G. Lockhart mentioned the great pleasure the visit had given to his subject. Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart. (Edinburgh, 1837), IV, 88.

The relationship of Scott and Irving is discussed both historically and critically by Williams, though his ideas are presented in a very uncollected manner. See especially I, 116, 159-163, 175-176. (The index citations under Scott's name [II, 437-438] are incomplete and occasionally wrong.) A most readable account of the Irving-Scott friendship is in R. B. Van Wart, "Washington Irving and Scotland," Blackwood's Magazine, CCLXVI (Sept., 1949), 257-263.

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tended far into his future. Not only did Irving acknowledge inspiration from Scott in the preparation of The Sketch Book (which would give him his greatest fame), he also found in Scott a ready ally for trying to secure its publication. Nor should one forget the influence of Scott over his prospective son-in-law, John Gibson Lockhart, the fierce "Scorpion" of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine and later editor of the Quarterly Review, who had surprisingly good things to say about Irving's work. Finally, this meeting provided Irving with notebooks filled with jottings and a mind filled with memories which in 1835 he turned into one of his best essays, "Abbotsford," recounting hour by hour the activities of the memorable visit.

Among the Walter Scott Papers in the archives of the National Library of Scotland are six manuscript letters which Irving wrote to Scott, 1817-1820. Four of the letters, in part or whole, have been published, but two have escaped the attention of previous Irving scholars and are presented here in print for the first time.

BEN HARRI S McCLARY

THE UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

[See over]

*See Tour of Scotland 1817 and Other Manuscript Notes and Notes While Preparing Sketch Book &c, ed. Stanley T. Williams (New Haven, 1927), passim.

*In England this essay was published as part of Abbotsford, and Newstead Abbey (London, 1835). For Williams' evaluation of this item, see Life, II, 320-321.


*With the kind permission of the Librarian, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.
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21 Edward St. Portland Place London
Nov. 3d. 1819.

My dear Sir,

I wrote you a few days since requesting your kind word with Mr Constable on the subject of a work I am scribbling, but as I neglected to give my address Mr Constable will not know where to write to me, should he feel so disposed. I am obliged therefore to trouble you again which I do with great reluctance, and have given my address at the top of the letter.

It is with great concern I have heard lately of the death of that worthy wight Lockie Longlegs, whose appearance I shall never forget striding along the profile of knoll in his red night cap, with his flimsy garments fluttering about him. I trust he will not be lost to history in this biographical age.

Interestingly it remained for Irving, some three years after Scott's death, to give Lauchie his biographical immortality. In "Abbotsford" Irving described him and told his story concluding: "His person, his character, his name, his story, and his fate, entitled him to be immortalized in one of Scott's novels, and I looked to recognise him in some of the succeeding works of his pen; but I looked in vain." Abbotsford, and Newstead Abbey, pp. 63-67.

With kind remembrances to your family I am my dear Sir

With great regard,
Yours faithfully,

Washington Irving

Walter Scott Esqr


[^9]: Archibald Constable was Scott's publisher in Edinburgh. Irving had seen him in 1817. (See Tour of Scotland, p. 28.) With Constable Scott had no success, but he did influence another publisher. See below, fn. 11.

[^10]: On 27 Sept. 1819 Scott wrote to his son about the death of "our kind neighbour Lauchie" who died, not unlike Dame Van Winkle, in a fit of passion. He quarrelled with his brother and sister over his wife's virtue, and Scott explained: "there is little doubt the violence of the agitation . . . broke a blood vessel in the heart or brain." Lockhart, Memoirs, IV, 305.
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London, August 15th 1820.

My dear Sir,

In consequence of the favourable reception of the first volume of the Sketch Book, and the encouragement you are so kind as to give me, I have been induced to bring out a second, a copy of which I trust you have before this received.11 I wish the work were better; and under other circumstances I think I could have made it better; but I have been so new to the ground I was treading, and so daunted by the idea of writing absolutely for a British public, that my powers, such as they are, have been almost paralyzed.

I write this letter chiefly to apologize for the liberty I have taken in dedicating the work to you without previously ascertaining from you whether it would be agreeable; but in fact the last sheet was going to the press, and I could not resist the impulse to express simply but honestly the feelings of my heart.12 I had no idea that you could be honoured or flattered by so poor a tribute from so inconsiderable a personage, but I felt as if it would do me good and ease a certain fulness of the heart just to say what I have said.

In the last number of Blackwood I perceive a very flattering notice of my Knickerbocker,13 which I presume is from the pen of Mr Lockhart. I feel very sensible to the warm and friendly feeling that shines through his writing, and which induces him to give me more praise than even my vanity as an author can admit. These eulogiums will oblige me to publish an edition of the work in this country; Murray has repeatedly mentioned the thing; but I have always felt afraid [sic] of the work as being local, crude and juvenile. I find however that the notices in Blackwood have put one of the Booksellers in the American trade on the scent; and I shall, I fear, be obliged to publish in my own defense, to prevent a spurious & incorrect republication.14

I shall leave London the day after tomorrow for the continent, and shall probably remain for some time at Paris. Could I render you any service while

11 In London, John Miller had published the first volume of The Sketch Book at Irving's expense. Inspired by the success of the book and Scott's enthusiasm for it, publisher John Murray took it over, brought out a new edition of the first volume, and added to it a second volume. See Williams, Life, i, 176.

12 The dedication reads: "To Sir Walter Scott, Bart., The Work is Dedicated, in Testimony of the Admiration and Affection of the Author."


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there it would give me the greatest pleasure, and a letter addressed to me to
the care of.  

Present my particular remembrances to Lady Scott and the family and I
beg you will assure Mr Lockhart that I shall be happy at some future day to
acknowledge to him personally how much I have been flattered and gratified
by his literary friendship.  

With the highest regard  
I am my dear Sir.  
Truly yours  
Washington Irving

Sir Walter Scott Bart.  

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15 Remembering the purpose behind the writing of the previous letter,
this is an amusing omission. On the same day he wrote to his friend Henry
Brevvoort: "When you write to me next direct to the care of Beasley our
Consul at Havre who will forward the letter to me wherever I may be." The
Letters of Washington Irving to Henry Brevvoort, ed. George S. Hellman
(New York, 1915), II, 135.

16 Lockhart had married Scott's eldest daughter in April of this year and
settled with her on the Abbotsford estate.

17 As early as 1818 the Prince Regent had expressed his wish to confer a
baronetcy upon Scott, but it was not until 30 March 1820 that the honor
was actually bestowed.