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Washington Irving's Amiable Scotchj Friends: Three Unpublished Letters to the John Gibson Lockharts

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Notes and Documents

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"I shall be happy at some future day to acknowledge to him [John Gibson Lockhart] personally how much I have been flattered and gratified by his literary friendship." 1 Thus Washington Irving referred in 1820 to the Scotsman who within six years would become the powerful editor of the Quarterly Review. Their friendship, centered about a mutual love of Walter Scott, did reach a high social fruition before the end of the decade. In spite of his early enthusiasm,2 however, Lockhart did not completely approve of Irving's later writings, a fact which the American never understood. "What is W— Irving, good fellow [and] true, about?" 3 Lockhart asked publisher John Murray, and in virtually the same breath he questioned the wisdom of the publisher's involvement in Irving's latest work.4 Knowing this, the contemporary scholar can see the irony in Irving's letters referring John Murray to Lockhart for recommendations.5

2 See, for example, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, VII (June 1820) 360-369.
3 Unpublished letter, 9 July 1830, in Murray Archives, London.
4 See letter quoted in Samuel Smiles, A Publisher and His Friends: Memoir and Correspondence of the Late John Murray (London, 1891), II, 258-259.

In a letter dated 25 August [1835?] Lockhart referred to Irving's Legends of the Conquest of Spain, proofsheets of which the American had sent John Murray, hoping that he would undertake a British edition: "I have looked over Irving's very rough proofs & am sorry to say I think the whole affair feeble & vapid. Neither learned enough to be the historian, nor imaginative enough to be the poet of the Rodericks & Julians he gives matters to us sufficiently familiar in a middle style which seems to me, as in the case of the Conquest of
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Three previously unpublished Washington Irving letters in the Lockhart Papers, now deposited in the National Library of Scotland, reflect the Tory editor and his wife as Washington Irving saw them—amiable, socially oriented, and politically tolerant. This image Irving carried with him to his grave, his last venture into literature being a nostalgic review of Lockhart’s 1824 novel Reginald Dalton. One needs only to read recent biographical studies of Lockhart to see the other side of his face.

Tuesday morn. Oct. 26 [1830]

My dear Mrs Lockhart,

If your table is not full for Wednesday I wish you would permit me to bring with me Mr Henry Brevoort, one of my earliest and most intimate friends, who is on a transient visit to London. He once passed a winter in Edinburgh when you must have been a wee bit bairn and received the kindest attentions from your father. I think, if you have room for him, you would not be displeased with your guest. At any rate, you will excuse the liberty I take, as I know you have the old feeling of Scotch hospitality, which when it invites a person, is apt to include all his kin & clan.

Very truly yours,

WASHINGTON IRVING

Granada, devoid of any one characteristic worthy of his reputation. Seriously, his mind and taste seem to be weakening in America. Even he can’t help writing down I suppose to a scale of intelligence miserably below that of the poor old world.” (Unpublished letter in Murray Archives.) Nevertheless, in the same year, for obvious reasons, Lockhart is reported to have been responsible for Murray publishing Abbotsford, and Newstead Abbey. Smiles, II, 261.

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8 For example, see Marion Lochhead, John Gibson Lockhart (London, 1954), passim.

9 The year can be determined by P. M. Irving, II, 437.

10 Sophia Scott Lockhart, eldest daughter of Walter Scott, had married Lockhart in April 1820.


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London Sept 1, 1831

My dear Lockhart

I send you a review of the "Northmen." My object has been to be entertaining rather than erudite. I beg you not to lop down this article in your cursed bid of Precaution as you did its predecessors. I have not exceeded the bounds Murray allowed me, and within them you must let me have fair play. The touch of republican in the prelude is more for my own sake than for the sake of the author. I am vehemently suspected from the bad company I keep, and the Tory review in which I occasionally write. I wish to god I could be more political in my walks and associates, and could keep from contracting so much personal regard for individuals of this Tory society in which I am so often thrown. However, I must put forth a corner of my creed to show that I retain my sanctity though I sometimes walk with the ungodly.

I am truly happy to hear very favorable accounts of Sir Walter. Remember me to him in the most cordial manner. Give my kindest remembrances to Mrs Lockhart and believe me ever

Very faithfully yours
WASHINGTON IRVING

* * * * * *

New York, April 8th 1835

My dear Lockhart,

This letter will be handed to you by my friend Professor Long-


13 Before the review could be published in the Quarterly Review, Irving and John Murray II, the publisher of that periodical, had come to a dramatic break in their professional relations, and the piece was returned to its author. It was finally published in The North American Review, XXXV (October 1832), 342-371. Irving had previously written two review articles for the Quarterly Review.

14 Sir Walter, in failing health, was preparing for a voyage to remove himself to a warmer climate for the winter months. On 28 September he came to London. Irving was the only person outside of the family circle whom the Lockharts invited to greet the ailing writer. P. M. Irving, II, 458-459.

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fellow, a gentleman who has distinguished himself in literature in this country, and whose amiable manners and varied information acquired in the course of extensive travels in Europe will, I think, recommend him to your good graces.

With kindest remembrances to Mrs Lockhart,
I am my dear Lockhart

Yours very truly
WASHINGTON IRVING

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Of the Day Estivall: A Textual Note

Alexander Hume’s Of the Day Estivall has been generally recognized by critics and anthologists as one of the finest Scottish poems of the later sixteenth century. It is one of the few poems of this period in which Presbyterianism can be seen to have acted not as an inhibiting and repressive force but as a cleanser of the perceptive powers and a stimulus to the creative imagination. The emotional energy generated by Hume’s Puritanical reaction against mythological fancies and aureate conventionality is permitted to operate on the realities of the poet’s day-to-day experience because of his confident belief that description of Nature is praise of God; and the hammered rhythms of metrical psalmody communicate his vigorous response to the life and variety of his subject matter. Most readers are rightly dissuaded from close linguistic analysis by the over-all impression of clear and confident assertion; but the standard text of the poem, that edited by Alexander Lawson for the Scottish Text Society in 1902, deserves re-examination.

The first question that raises itself is that of stanza division. Lawson noted that the MS version was in eight-line stanzas, but he ac-

15 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was still a young teacher whose reputation as a poet was yet to be realized. He apparently presented this letter to Lockhart at his house in London on 2 June. See The Diary of Clara Crowinshield: A European Tour with Longfellow, 1835-1836, ed. Andrew Hilen (Seattle, Wash., 1956), p. 14.