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Sir Walter Scott and Sir Ralph Sadler: a Chapter in Literary History, Part III

G. A. M. Wood
University of Stirling

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Sir Walter Scott and Sir Ralph Sadler: a Chapter in Literary History.

PART 3

A final correspondence, from another branch of the Sadler family, of little help in the compilation of Sadler, was turned to account by Scott for his next labour,—the collecting and editing of Swift. His correspondent, Thomas Sadleir, 1753-1815, a barrister of Sea Park, near Dublin, was the great grandson of Col. Thomas Sadleir of Sopwell Hall, a direct descendant of Sir Ralph Sadler.

Thomas Sadleir wrote to Scott on 26 March 1808, having seen an advertisement for the publication, and supposing Scott, whom he termed "Editor," claimed descent from Sir Ralph. He offered to supply various documents, patents, his own genealogical account and a copy of "the Writt of Inquisitio post Mortem —." ¹

Scott's reply is not known, but in his next letter sent on 9 May 1808, Sadleir apologised for his error in supposing that Scott was a relative. He suggested several books of reference, and sent some documents. "I send you through the means of his Excellency the Duke of Richmond, directed to Mr Constable by this nights post a pacquet containing the writ de Inquisitio post Mortem with its return—and the patent from Hen: y⁸th I send you along with them a short account of the Family since the death of St R: Sadleir as far as I know of it;—" ²

This "Inquisitio post Mortem" was Scott's source for his comments to Hayley on 7 June 1808, see Letter III, SSL Volume VII, 3, 149-150.

Sadleir next wrote on 1 August 1808 and his letter is more concerned with Swift than Sadler. Scott's reply is given in full.

¹NLS MS. 3876 ff 237-8.
²NLS MS. 3877 ff 49-50.
Letter XI

Scott to Thomas Sadleir, Ashiestiel
14 August [1808]a

My dear Sir / Accept of my best thanks for your kind invitation which I will not fail to avail myself of. When I can make out my Irish excursion. A great Alteration in our courts for the present renders my leaving Scotland out of the Question I should hope in the course of next Spring to make my party good, and will esteem myself very happy in having an opportunity to return my personal thanks for all your kindness. I am very happy that Marmion finds friends among you. As Mr. Theophilus Swift has it in view himself to publish a life of his illustrious relative I cannot in decency expect his assistance in compiling that which I must necessarily prefix to the proposed edition of his works. It is however possible that he may feel some interest in the works themselves being well edited and may be disposed to give some hints of encouragement to that department of my labours although not to my biographical. In this case I can only say like the conclusion of a begging Advertisement the smallest donation will be most thankfully accepted and acknowledged with gratitude.

You excite my curiosity very strongly concerning the Manuscripts in Trinity College. A Lady connected with Ireland (Miss Lydia White) took the trouble to write to the Provost on my behalf. This letter, though not in the Grierson Letters, was printed in The Athenaeum, London, No. 4192, 29 February, 1908, p. 257, under the title of "An Unpublished Letter of Sir Walter Scott," by Thomas Ulick Sadleir.

In his letter of 1st August, Sadleir had invited Scott to visit him in Ireland, but Scott was Secretary to the Commissioners for reporting upon alterations in the Scottish Judicature, 1807 to 1810. This restricted his freedom of movement and obliged him to postpone many journeys. Apart from a brief visit to the Giant's Causeway during the voyage of the Commissioners of the Northern Lights in September 1814, Scott did not visit Ireland till the summer of 1825, by which time Sadleir was dead.

Theophilus Swift (1746-1815), an Irish writer, did not publish his proposed life of Swift, but gave Scott a few anecdotes for his own edition.

Sadleir, 1 August 1808, had remarked on Swift manuscripts in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, "when my son who is a Fellow of the College returns to Town I will make him search for them and will be prepared to point out to you, any thing valuable they may contain on your arrival here." NLS MS. 3877 ff 104-105.

Lydia Rogers White (d. 1827), a bluestocking, was a loyal, if absurd, friend to Scott and did much to help him with Swift. See Scott's accounts of her in Letters, II, 5; and Journal, p. 314.
behalf & through her I learnt that one of the Librarians (the Under-Librarian as I think) had made some collections towards an edition of Swift probably from these very Manuscripts & that he was willing to dispose of them. My Booksellers Constable & Co of Edinburgh have written to say that they are disposed to treat with him on liberal terms but if his merit be merely that of transcribing from a public repository his demands ought not to be exorbitant. The Provost has shown himself most kind & obliging in the course of the enquiry, but as Miss White is now in the Highlands I am quite uncertain of the results.

I am very proud that Marmion finds freinds on your side of the channel & experiences the hospitality for which your Isle is so famous. When I have the pleasure of following him I shall be very anxious to pick up any fragments that remain of traditional history legends & superstitions but I understand these have been effaced from memory by recent melancholy events.

I am going on slowly with Sir Ralph at present as I am in the country where I have no access to the ponderous volumes necessary to be consulted I hope however, to have him launched about January when I will take care that a copy shall reach the hand of the worthy Knight's obliging descendant. A very old gentleman now residing at Southampton claims descent from Sir Edwin Sadler—this perhaps is a cousin more than you knew of.

Believe me Dear Sir
Your obliged humble Servant

Ashestiel by Selkirk  
14th August

Walter Scott

The last letter-series relevant to this account is that between Scott and his "Editor," Clifford. It will be obvious from previous letters that Scott had taken over most editorial duties, and there are few letters between Clifford and Scott, so that they are here reprinted in full, together with a hitherto unpublished letter from Scott to Clifford.

The earliest Clifford item of note is a letter from Sir Thomas Hugh Clifford—Constable, 1762-1829, Arthur Clifford's eldest brother. He wrote to John Murray, the London bookseller, who was one of the co-publishers of Sadler, on 13 September 1808. "By desire of Mr. Con-

*Scott wrote to Archibald Constable on 3 May 1808, "I have heard something of collections for a Life of Swift in Dublin but I own I do not fear an Irish editor. It was also intimated to me that some of these materials might perchance be purchased." [Letters, II, 62] There was much rivalry among editors of Swift at that time. A revised edition of John Nichols' Works of Rev. Jonathan Swift was published in 1808, and An Essay on the earlier Part of the Life of Swift, by Rev. John Barrett, Vice-Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, was published in London in late 1808.

*See Section II, note 4.
stable of Edinburgh, I sent you yesterday a box containing two Portraits, one of Lord Cromwell by Holbein the other an original Portrait of Mary Q. of Scots belonging to Sir Ralph Sadler—They went by a Liverpool Waggon—I hope Mr. Constable will have them both engraved for the Letters & by a first rate artist.” 10 Only the first picture seems to have been engraved for Sadler; the frontispiece to Volume I is an engraving by Cooper of a portrait announced as “Thomas Cromwel [sic] Earl of Essex, from an original Painting by Holbein in the Possession of Thomas Clifford, Esq. of Tixall.” The frontispiece to Volume II is indeed a portrait of Queen Mary, but “from an original Picture in possession of The Honble Wm Maule of Panmure MP.” Both plates are dated February 1809.

An earlier letter survives from Arthur Clifford to Constable the publisher, written in June 1808. Clifford sent on a copy of a letter from Lady Charleville to his brother, Thomas Clifford, respecting the Sadler family in Ireland, adding “—That Lord Charleville had a great veneration for Sir R.S.& would be delighted to hear of this publication, & would promote the sale of the work to the best of his power.—Mr. Clifford suggests that it might be advisable to dedicate the work to Lord Charleville.” 11 Sadler was duly dedicated, Vol. I, p. [5] to Charles William Bury, Earl of Charleville, by Arthur Clifford.

It is perhaps significant that Clifford wrote directly to the publisher, rather than to his collaborator. Certainly the relationship between Scott and Clifford seems to have been strangely formal, and it is not surprising that Scott gave Sadler less than his full attention.

Letter XII

Scott to Arthur Clifford, Edinburgh,
5 April [1809] 12

Dear Sir, I send you the memoir of Sir R. Sadler’s life which I wish you would look over before it goes to Mr. Ballanynce and make any alteration you please especially in the delicate subject of the Reformation Church Lands—I am, I thank God, Christian enough to respect every denomination of the faith & should be very much hurt were there a word capable of being interpreted

10 NLS MS. 682 ff 13-14.

11 NLS MS. 3877 ff 83-86. This item is catalogued by the National Library of Scotland as being by Thomas Clifford of Tixall; the hand is that of Arthur Clifford.

12 NLS MS. 1750 ff 92-94. MS. 1750 contains material which came in too late for the Grierson Letters, and this item is a copy of the original sent in by a Mary G. Thynne of London. No details of size or address are given.
into disrespect of that which you entertain. There is also wanting some notice of Sir Ralph Sadler's possessions which my information is not quite adequate to supply. I beg your acceptance of transcripts which I have caused to be made of a grant of Henry VIII & the Inquisition post Mortem relating to Sir Ralph—they are curious and ought to have been printed but I could get no one to correct the English law-latin nor had the printer types proper to express the contractions. Perhaps from these and Dugdale's Warwickshire Chauncey &c. you may be able to say something of Sir Ralph's property. The fate of Standon should also be mentioned whether in preservation or ruinous or pulled down.

Above all it will be necessary that as Editor you prefix an advertisement stating where the papers were preserved &c. The former advertisement inserted in the papers may serve for the mode but that in the book ought to bear your thanks as well as mine to

Lord Charleville
Thomas Sadler Esq. of Seapark county of Tipperary Ireland
Robert Vernon Sadler Esq. of Southampton [sic]
Lord Aston
William Hayley Esq author of The Triumphs of Temper &c
Thomas Sharp Esq. of Coventry
The Reverend Henry White of Lichfield
James Brown Esq. of St. Albans

The Cliffords were a prominent English Catholic family.

See above.

Scott quotes, in Sadler, I, xv-xviii, footnote, an indenture from King Edward to Sadler granting lands in Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, &c, and notes, p. xviii, "The original instrument occupies 25 sheets. For this abstract of its contents, I am indebted to Thomas Sharpe, Esq. of Coventry. Other grants to Sir Ralph Sadler are mentioned in Dugdale's 'Warwickshire,' Dr. Thomas's edition,— All tending to shew, how deeply he participated in the spoils acquired by the sweeping work of reformation." Sir Henry Chauncey, The Antiquities of Hertfordshire, 2 vols. (London, 1700).

See footnote 23.

Scott refers to Advertisements for the still uncompleted book in the contemporary newspapers.

The Advertisement to Sadler, I, [7], signed by Clifford and dated 1 May 1809, gives thanks, in Scott's name and his own, to everyone on Scott's list, and in exactly the same wording, only adding at the end "In particular I have to acknowledge the infinite obligations which I owe to my very learned and amiable friend, the Reverend John Kirk of Lichfield [sic], without whose kindness, zeal, and ability, in copying the original papers, this work would most probably have never seen the light." ¶ Thomas Sharp, 1770-1841, was an antiquarian. James Brown wrote to Cadell and Davies, the publishers, from St Albans on 3 December 1807, mentioning that he had seen advertisements for Sadler, sending a "Magazine & Pedigree to be conveyed to the Author of the Life, if you think it worth while," and suggesting sources of information about the family of Sir Ralph. NLS MS. 3876 f 132.
All of whom have liberally contributed papers or information concerning the work. I should like the proof sheets of the Memoir &c to be sent to me in London which will not waste much time because the Index is still to be printed.

Believe me Dear Sir
Editor. Yours very truly
5 April [1809] W Scott

Letter XIII

Arthur Clifford to Scott
Edinburgh, 15 April 1809

Edinburgh 15 April 1809

Dear Sir/ I have perused your Biographical Memoir of Sir Ralph Sadler with great pleasure. I think you have exhibited the character of Sir Ralph as a statesman an ambassador, & a man of shining abilities in a very advantageous light. I have taken the liberty as you desired me to alter two passages.

1. I have erased that passage in which you say that Sir Ralph procured an indulgence for himself & his posterity for three generations; because in the first place I never heard or read before that such a thing could be done in the Roman Catholic Church; & secondly because it is mentioned again in the Extract you have given from Loyds Worthies.

2. I have altered the passage where you say that Henry died a good Catholic &c. That like his profligate descendant Charles the Second he might wish to die a Catholic perhaps admits of little doubt; but I believe very few good Catholicks would wish to die like them or be willing to allow that they died good Catholicks.

I have thought that perhaps that a word might have been said about the style & composition of these letters, as illustrative of the progress & state of the English Language during the reigns of Henry & Elizabeth; but this I leave to Your better judgment.

\(^{29}\) Scott was in London between March and May 1809.

\(^{30}\) NLS, Walpole Letterbooks, MS. 3878 ff 59,60, four pages, quarto, no address or postmarks. Endorsed by Scott,—Mr. Clifford / 15 April 1809

\(^{31}\) Scott's willingness to pander to Clifford's religious prejudices is noteworthy. The passage on Henry's death was altered to read: "It may be supposed, that his [Sadler's] conversion to the Protestant faith was gradual, at least that his avowal of the reformed tenets did not proceed the death of Henry VIII, who wished to die a Catholic, although he seized the supremacy, and plundered the monasteries." (Sadler, I, vi).

\(^{32}\) Clifford's suggestion was not taken up.
I have added a Note respecting the fate of Standon Lordship. With respect to Sir Rafe's possessions, I have not thought it necessary to add anything to your narration. You have mentioned his large share of the Spoils at the Reformation, & that he was esteemed the richest commoner in England. This I think sufficient.

There is a very curious deed in the possession of Sir Hugh Smyth of Acton Court near Bristol, in which Sir Rauf is painted on his knees receiving from Henry & Edward different grants of Church Lands, on which the town of Clifton now stands, & which extend down to the Severn. It is too late now to get this engraved or printed for the Work. If it should come to a second edition we might then take the opportunity of giving a complete account of Sir Ralphs possessions, which it is now too late to give but in a very imperfect manner.

I have now to return you my most grateful thanks in my own name & in that of my eldest brother & of all our family for your great kindness in undertaking to illustrate this work & for the manner in which you have so ably executed it. Adorned by your name in the Title Page it will be a splendid an honourable & a valuable addition to my brothers Library.

If you & Mrs Scott should pass through Staffordshire on your return to Edinburgh my brother would be exceedingly happy to see you at Tixall which is four miles from Stafford, four from Woosley Bridge, & thirteen from Lichfield. It is a pretty place, & the magnificent seat & a most extensive Farm of Lord Anson, a mile from it is worthy the attention of every traveller.

I beg my compliments to Mrs Scott & am with the greatest regard,

Yours very truly
A Clifford.

Sadler, I, xxxv, prints Clifford's footnote about the condition of Standon. "This house is now in ruins. On the marriage of the first Lord Aston with the grand-daughter of Sir Ralph, it became the family seat of the Astons, and continued so for many generations, till the middle of the last century, when it was sold along with the manor and estate; and being deserted and neglected, it fell into decay, and is now almost completely demolished. A view of it in its entire state may be seen in Chauney's [sic] History of Hertfordshire."

See Sadler, I, p. xv. Scott, discussing the acquisition of church lands, incorporated into his text most of Clifford's account of the deed.

Sadler, not surprisingly, was torn apart by the Edinburgh Review, and no second edition was needed. Scott's biographical memoir, however, was reprinted with additional notes, in The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1834), IV, 71-136.
STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

Letter XIV

Arthur Clifford to Scott, Tixall, 16 August 1809

Tixall near Lichfield
16 Aug. 1809

Dear Sir / I was very much surprised & grieved I may say to hear from Mr Constable some time ago that the completion of the Sadler Papers, which I had thought had been quite ready for publication before I left Edinburgh, has been so long delayed that it is now impossible to publish the Work before November. I need not say that this has been a very great disappointment to me & my friends. I hope that if any thing is still wanting which it is in your power to supply that you will complete it as soon as possible.

I have lately met with some Anecdotes respecting Sir R. Sadleir [sic] which I think proper to mention to you.

In Heylin's History of Edw. 6. P. 47 Fol., is this passage. "And now 'tis high time to attend the Parliament, which took beginning on the fourth of November (1547); & was prorogued on the 24th of Decr following. In which the Cards were so well packed by Sir Ralph Sadleir, that there was no need of any other shuffling till the end of the Game: this very Parliament without any sensible alteration of the Members of it, being continued by Prorogation, from Session to Session, untill at last it ended by the Death of the King."

I think this passage of some importance, because there is a chasm in the History of Sir Ralph from the death of Henry 8. till the Accession of Elizabeth, & besides it shows very strongly how great his influence was in the State even at that early period.

My learned friend Dr Cox of Durham has informed me that he met with some anecdotes respecting Sir Ralph, in Errington's Nugae Antiquae, a Book with which I am totally unacquainted. Among other things it is said, that he left it as a maxim to his posterity, That he had succeeded in his great Fortune, by being a reed, & not an Oak. And that he made a witty remark on the

23 NLS. MS. 3878 ff 116, 117. Four pages, including address page, quarto.

address;—Walter Scott Esq

2 Castle St
Edinburgh

The last two lines of the address have been crossed out, and added in another hand is "ashiestel [sic] Selkirk." Endorsed by Scott;—Mr. Clifford / 16 August / 1809


then frequent changes of Religion, by saying, that the Clergy had been singing the Psalm which begins, Cantaba Domino Canticum novum all his life time—

I should be glad if you could still find means to make any use of these passages in the Life of Sir Ralph. Since I came here, I have been searching into some old trunks full of Papers, & have discovered some more relating to Sir. R. sadler, but have not yet had time to ascertain if they are of much value.

But I have found a very large Collection of what I think valuable Original Papers of the First Lord Aston who married Sir Ralphs grand daughter, & who was Ambassador in Spain during the latter part of the reign of James I. & the beginning of Charles. & had the management of his intended Marriage with the Infanta. They are as numerous I think as those of Sir R. Sadler [sic], & more likely I should imagine to excite the curiosity & interest of the Publick in general.29

I heard of you not long ago at Rokeby the Seat of Mr Morritt,30 which I went to see while I was on a visit to Mr Constable of Wycliffe, & I had the pleasure of contemplating the beautiful & romantic scenery there which Mr Morritt told me had given you great delight.

I do not expect at present to be in Edinburgh before November. I beg to be remembered to Mr Scott and remain

Yours sincerely
A Clifford

The tone of Clifford’s letter is barely polite, and it is no wonder that Scott never again collaborated with him. The final section of this article will reconstruct the printing history of Sadler, discuss Scott’s life of Sir Ralph, look at some of the silences in the book as to the nature of its copy-text, and consider the reception given to Sadler by the contemporary reviewers.

(To be continued)

University of Stirling

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29 These papers were published by Ballantyne as Tixall Letters, edited by Arthur Clifford (Edinburgh, 1815).

30 J. B. S. Morritt of Rokeby, Greets Bridge, Yorkshire (1772-1843), was a scholar and one of Scott’s closest friends. Scott had stayed two weeks with Morritt on his return from London in June 1809.