

**THE LADY OF THE LAKE; A  
POEM IN SIX CANTOS.  
FROM THE LATEST  
EDINBURGH EDITION**

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The Lady of the Lake; A Poem in Six Cantos. From the Latest Edinburgh Edition by Sir Walter Scott

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**SIR WALTER SCOTT**

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EDINBURGH EDITION**



THE  
LADY OF THE LAKE

A Poem in Six Cantos

BY  
SIR WALTER SCOTT, BART.

*WITH NOTES AND AN APPENDIX*

FROM THE LATEST EDINBURGH EDITION

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*TO THE MOST NOBLE*  
JOHN JAMES  
MARQUIS OF ABERCORN  
ETC., ETC., ETC.

THIS POEM IS INSCRIBED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR

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## INTRODUCTION

TO

## THE LADY OF THE LAKE.

Επιτιον 1830.

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AFTER the success of "Marmion," I felt inclined to exclaim with Ulysses in the "Odyssey"

Οὗτος μὲν δὴ θεσλος ἀάατος ἐκτερέλεσται.  
Nūn αὐτὲ σκοπὸν ἄλλον. ODYS. χ 5, 6.

"One venturous game my hand has won to-day —  
Another, gallants, yet remains to play."

The ancient manners, the habits and costumes of the aboriginal race by whom the Highlands of Scotland were inhabited, had always appeared to me peculiarly adapted to poetry. The change in their manners, too, had taken place almost within my own time, or at least I had learned many particulars concerning the ancient state of the Highlands from the old men of the last generation. I had always thought the old Scottish Gael highly adapted for poetical composition. The feuds and political dissensions, which half a century earlier would have rendered the richer and wealthier part of the kingdom indisposed to countenance a poem, the scene of which was laid



in the Highlands, were now sunk in the generous compassion which the English, more than any other nation, feel for the misfortunes of an honorable foe. The Poems of Ossian had, by their popularity, sufficiently shown that if writings on Highland subjects were qualified to interest the reader, mere national prejudices were in the present day very unlikely to interfere with their success.

I had also read a great deal, seen much, and heard more of that romantic country, where I was in the habit of spending some time every autumn; and the scenery of Loch Katrine was connected with the recollection of many a dear friend and merry expedition of former days. This poem, the action of which lay among scenes so beautiful, and so deeply imprinted on my recollections, was a labor of love; and it was no less so to recall the manners and incidents introduced. The frequent custom of James IV., and particularly of James V., to walk through their kingdom in disguise, afforded me the hint of an incident, which never fails to be interesting if managed with the slightest address or dexterity.

I may now confess, however, that the employment, though attended with great pleasure, was not without its doubts and anxieties. A lady, to whom I was nearly related, and with whom I lived, during her whole life, on the most brotherly terms of affection, was residing with me at the time when the work was in progress, and used to ask me what I could possibly do to rise so early in the morning (that happening to be the most convenient time to me for composition). At last I told her the subject of my meditations; and

I can never forget the anxiety and affection expressed in her reply. "Do not be so rash," she said, "my dearest cousin.<sup>1</sup> You are already popular — more so, perhaps, than you yourself will believe, or than even I, or other partial friends, can fairly allow to your merit. You stand high — do not rashly attempt to climb higher, and incur the risk of a fall; for, depend upon it, a favorite will not be permitted even to stumble with impunity." I replied to this affectionate expostulation in the words of Montrose —

"He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his deserts are small,  
Who dares not put it to the touch  
To gain or lose it all."

"If I fail," I said, for the dialogue is strong in my recollection, "it is a sign that I ought never to have succeeded, and I will write prose for life: you shall see no change in my temper, nor will I eat a single meal the worse. But if I succeed, —

"Up with the bonnie blue bonnet,  
The dirk, and the feather, and a'!"

Afterwards I showed my affectionate and anxious critic the first canto of the poem, which reconciled her to my imprudence. Nevertheless, although I

<sup>1</sup> The lady with whom Sir Walter Scott held this conversation, was, no doubt, his aunt, Miss Christian Rutherford; there was no other female relation *dead* when this Introduction was written, whom I can suppose him to have consulted on literary questions. Lady Capulet, on seeing the corpse of Tybalt, exclaims —

"Tybalt, my cousin! oh my brother's child!" — *Ed.*

answered thus confidently, with the obstinacy often said to be proper to those who bear my surname, I acknowledge that my confidence was considerably shaken by the warning of her excellent taste and unbiassed friendship. Nor was I much comforted by her retraction of the unfavorable judgment, when I recollected how likely a natural partiality was to effect that change of opinion. In such cases, affection rises like a light on the canvas, improves any favorable tints which it formerly exhibited, and throws its defects into the shade.

I remember that about the same time a friend started in to "heeze up my hope," like the "sportsman with his cutty-gun," in the old song. He was bred a farmer, but a man of powerful understanding, natural good taste, and warm poetical feeling, perfectly competent to supply the wants of an imperfect or irregular education. He was a passionate admirer of field-sports, which we often pursued together.

As this friend happened to dine with me at Ashes-teil one day, I took the opportunity of reading to him the first canto of "The Lady of the Lake," in order to ascertain the effect the poem was likely to produce upon a person who was but too favorable a representative of readers at large. It is, of course, to be supposed, that I determined rather to guide my opinion by what my friend might appear to feel than by what he might think fit to say. His reception of my recitation, or prelection, was rather singular. He placed his hand across his brow and listened with great attention through the whole account of the stag-hunt, till the dogs threw themselves into the