

**FURTHER ESSAYS
ON
BORDER BALLADS**

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Further essays on border ballads by Fitzwilliam Elliot

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BY

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PREFACE

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In writing the following essays my object has been to determine on the genuineness, or otherwise, of four well-known Border ballads. Three of these, namely, the so-called Scottish version of the ballad of the 'Battle of Otterburn,' 'Auld Maitland,' and 'Kinmont Willie,' were published for the first time by Sir Walter Scott in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*; the fourth was known to but not published by Sir Walter, who for some reason preferred to place in his work what was clearly a later version.

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'Auld Maitland' and the 'Battle of Otterburn' have frequently been quoted by our great writers as extremely interesting instances of traditions of historic incidents having been handed down orally, in the shape of verse, through very many generations, and so also has 'Kinmont Willie,' though, of course, the interest therein is of less degree, since it relates to comparatively modern times.

The fourth ballad, namely, 'Jamie Telfer i' the Fair Dodhead,' was not made known to the public until Professor Child published his great collection of ballads between 1882 and 1898, and I do not think any writer—myself excepted—has done more than merely note its existence; they have preferred to dilate on the beauty of certain stanzas in the later version, which is but a perversion of the original. And yet, the ballad, if genuine, is of more than usual interest, partly on account of the vividness with which it describes an insignificant Border foray—and the interest remains, even though the incident were, as one authority on the subject avers, imaginary; partly, because the narrative fits perfectly the topographical requirements of the district; partly, because the persons named in it truly flourished at the time, and were frequently engaged in scenes similar to those depicted; and partly, because the main incidents appear to be based on facts recorded in official documents.

No one will deny that these ballads, if genuine, are of extreme interest, and well deserve being recorded in the literary history of the periods to which they severally relate; on the other hand, if not genuine,

they should be placed in the literature of the period at which they were composed.

The first essay relates to the Scottish version of the 'Battle of Otterburn,' which I endeavour to show is a compilation, partly of stanzas of modern fabrication, and partly of stanzas belonging to earlier versions, all of which have been composed, or altered, in such a way as to give to the whole the appearance of being an original narrative, consonant with Scottish sentiment, tradition, or history. It has, in my opinion, no claim to the title it bears.

In the second chapter, the old English ballads of 'Chevy-Chase' and 'Otterburn' are subjected to close analysis, with the intention of showing that they contain many stanzas of Scottish origin, and that these, or at all events such as clearly relate to the battle of Otterburn, if grouped together, constitute a Scottish, and a well-connected, intelligible ballad. I suggest the possibility that this reconstructed version may bear a not very remote resemblance in essentials to the old, original ballad, which, there can be but little doubt, truly existed in old days and was composed at a time when the incidents referred to were still fresh in the minds of the