

Marmion: A Tale of Flodden Field in Six Cantos (Forgotten Books)

Sir Walter Keith Scott



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Scott started writing Marmion, his second major work, in November 1806. When Archibald Constable, the publisher, learnt of this he offered a thousand guineas for the copyright unseen. William Miller and John Murray each agreed to take a 25% share in the project. Murray observed: "We both view it as honourable, profitable, and glorious to be concerned in the publication of a new poem by Walter Scott." Scott later said that he thoroughly enjoyed writing the work. He told his son-in-law, Lockhart, "Oh, man, I had many a grand gallop among these bracs when I was thinking of Marmion."

While Scott practised manoeuvres with the Light Horse Volunteers, formed to defend an invasion from France, in 1807 he polished his description of Flodden. Marmion was finished on January 22 and published on February 22 1808 in a quarto first edition of two thousand copies. This edition priced one and a half guineas sold out in a month. It was followed by twelve octavo editions between 1808 and 1825.

The poem tells how Lord Marmion, a favourite of Henry VIII of England, lusts for Clara de Clare, a rich woman. He and his mistress, Constance De Beverley, forge a letter implicating Clara's fiancé, Sir Ralph De Wilton, in treason. Constance, a dishonest nun, hopes that her aid will restore her to favour with Marmion. When De Wilton loses the duel he claims to defend his honour against Marmion, he is obliged to go into exile. Clara retires to a convent rather than risk Marmion's attentions. Constance's hopes of a reconciliation with Marmion are dashed when he abandons her; she ends up being walled up alive in the Lindisfarne convent for breaking her vows. She takes her revenge by giving the Abbess who is one of her three judges documents t

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