

Book Review: Stories of Scotland

reviewed by Patch Blakey

Sir Walter Scott is a marvelous storyteller, especially of events relating to his native Scotland. In writing *From Bannockburn to Flodden*, he was being the dutiful grandfather inspiring his grandson, Hugh Littlejohn, Esquire, with stirring tales of the heroes of ancient Scotland. Scott wrote this book in 1828, four years before his death.

George Grant in his introduction to the current edition of the book, says of Scott, "...he had almost single-handedly revived Scottish pride—he recovered the Royal Honors of Crown in Edinburgh Castle in 1818, more than a century after they had been locked away after the union of Parliaments in 1707. And of course, his novels had fanned the flames of passion for the kilts, bagpipes, and the highland burr of the Scots. He has become the world's spokesman for all things Celtic."

The book is thrilling, informative, and gripping, just as are Scott's *Waverly Novels* or *Ivanhoe*, *The Talisman*, or any of his other popular writings, although the first chapter is dull as Scott himself attests. Indeed, I was surprised to learn that Macbeth, that infamous villain of Shakespeare's play by the same name, was an

actual king of Scotland (listed as ruling from 1033-1056). Although Scott's portrayal of Macbeth is as villainous as Shakespeare portrayed him, there seem to be some noted differences between Scott's account and that of other historians.

The book also includes a great deal of English history and the accounts of English kings, although they are not the focus of the book. It is an adjunct aspect of Scott's storytelling because the histories of Scotland and England are so closely interwoven through

and Robert the Bruce and the Battle of Bannockburn Brook, but he is just as engaging in his accounts of the Douglasses and the series of Scottish kings named James. Of interest was a brief account of James IV, who was much loved by his people and was free from vice as well as avarice. In addition to "being fond of martial exercises, James encouraged the arts and prosecuted science." The whimsical account of one of his misdirected experiments is both tragic and amusing. James wanted to know what "natural language"

a person would speak if raised independently of a normal means of communication. He sent two infant children to live on an isolated island with a deaf and dumb woman to see what language they would speak when they came of age. Scott records that some said they spoke "good Hebrew," but Scott personally believed that they more

than likely "scream[ed] like their dumb nurse, or bleat[ed] like the goats and sheep on the island."

As for the Battle of Flodden and the subsequent history, I will leave it to the reader to investigate further by reading Scott's stirring accounts in his book, *From Bannockburn to Flodden*.

From Bannockburn to Flodden: Wallace, Bruce, & the Heroes of Medieval Scotland

by Sir Walter Scott

Cumberland House, Nashville, TN, 2001,
pp 286, \$14.95

centuries of warfare interrupted by brief periods of peace. And as far as warfare goes, the Scots themselves were internally at war for much of the period when they were not striving with the English.

Of course, Scott includes all of the favorite heroes of which we are generally familiar, William Wallace