

WAVERLEY;

OR,

'TIS SIXTY YEARS SINCE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Under which King, Bezonian? speak, or die!
Henry IV. Part II.

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present day.* Upon these passions it is no doubt true that the state of manners and laws casts a necessary colouring; but the bearings, to use the language of heraldry, remain the same, though the tincture may be not only different, but opposed in strong contradistinction. The wrath of our ancestors, for example, was coloured *gules*; it broke forth in acts of open and sanguinary violence against the objects of its fury. Our malignant feelings, which must seek gratification through more indirect channels, and undermine the obstacles which they cannot openly bear down, may be rather said to be tinctured *sable*. But the deep-ruling impulse is the same in both cases; and the proud peer who can now only ruin his neighbour according to law, by protracted suits, is the genuine descendant of the baron who wrapped the castle of his competitor in flames, and knocked him on the head as he endeavoured to escape from the conflagration. It is from the great book of Nature, the same through a thousand editions, whether of black-letter, or wire-wove and hot-pressed, that I have venturously essayed to read a chapter to the public. Some favourable opportunities of contrast have been afforded me, by the state of society in the northern part of the island at the period of my history, and may serve at once to vary and to illustrate the moral lessons, which I would willingly consider as the most important part of my plan; although I am sensible how short these will fall of their aim, if I shall be found unable to mix them with amusement, — a task not quite so easy in this critical generation as it was 'Sixty Years since.'

* Alas! that attire, respectable and gentlemanlike in 1805, or thereabouts, is now as antiquated as the Author of Waverley has himself become since that period! The reader of fashion will please to fill up the costume with an embroidered waistcoat of purple velvet or silk, and a coat of whatever colour he pleases.

CHAPTER SECOND

WAVERLEY-HONOUR — A RETROSPECT

It is, then, sixty years since* Edward Waverley, the hero of the following pages, took leave of his family, to join the regiment of dragons in which he had lately obtained a commission. It was a melancholy day at Waverley-Honour when the young officer parted with Sir Everard, the affectionate old uncle to whose title and estate he was presumptive heir.

A difference in political opinions had early separated the Baronet from his younger brother Richard Waverley, the father of our hero. Sir Everard had inherited from his sires the whole train of Tory or High-Church predilections and prejudices, which had distinguished the house of Waverley since the Great Civil War. Richard, on the contrary, who was ten years younger, beheld himself born to the fortune of a second brother, and anticipated neither dignity nor entertainment in sustaining the character of Will Wimble.¹ He saw early, that, to succeed in the race of life, it was necessary he should carry as little weight as possible. Painters talk of the difficulty of expressing the existence of compound passions in the same features at the same moment: it would be no less difficult for the moralist to analyze the mixed motives which unite to form the impulse of our actions. Richard Waverley read and satisfied himself, from history and sound argument, that, in the words of the old song,

Passive obedience was a jest,
And pshaw! was non-resistance;²

yet reason would have probably been unable to combat and remove hereditary prejudice, could Richard have anticipated that his elder brother, Sir Everard, taking to heart an early disappointment, would have remained a bachelor at seventy-two. The prospect of succession, however remote, might in that case

* The precise date (1745) was withheld from the original edition, lest it should anticipate the nature of the tale by announcing so remarkable an era.

have led him to endure dragging through the greater part of his life as 'Master Richard at the Hall, the baronet's brother,' in the hope that ere its conclusion he should be distinguished as Sir Richard Waverley of Waverley-Honour, successor to a princely estate, and to extended political connections as head of the county interest in the shire where it lay. But this was a consumption of things not to be expected at Richard's outset, when Sir Everard was in the prime of life, and certain to be an acceptable suitor in almost any family, whether wealth or beauty should be the object of his pursuit, and when, indeed, his speedy marriage was a report which regularly amused the neighbourhood once-a-year. His younger brother saw no practicable road to independence save that of relying upon his own exertions, and adopting a political creed more consonant both to reason and his own interest than the hereditary faith of Sir Everard in High-Church and in the house of Stewart. He therefore read his recantation at the beginning of his career, and entered life as an avowed Whig, and friend of the Hanover succession.

The ministry of George the First's time were prudently anxious to diminish the phalanx of opposition. The Tory nobility, depending for their reflected lustre upon the sunshine of a court, had for some time been gradually reconciling themselves to the new dynasty. But the wealthy country gentlemen of England, a rank which retained, with much of ancient manners and primitive integrity, a great proportion of obstinate and unyielding prejudice, stood aloof in haughty and sullen opposition, and cast many a look of mingled regret and hope to Bois le Duc, Avignon, and Italy.* The accession of the near relation of one of those steady and inflexible opponents was considered as a means of bringing over more converts, and therefore Richard Waverley met with a share of ministerial favour, more than proportioned to his talents or his political importance. It was, however, discovered that he had respectable talents for public business, and the first admittance to the minister's levee being negotiated, his success became rapid.

* Where the Chevalier Saint George, or, as he was termed, the Old Pretender, held his exiled court, as his situation compelled him to shift his place of residence.

Sir Everard learned from the public News-Letter - first, that Richard Waverley, Esquire, was returned for the ministerial borough of Barterfaith; next, that Richard Waverley, Esquire, had taken a distinguished part in the debate upon the Excise bill in the support of government; and, lastly, that Richard Waverley, Esquire, had been honoured with a seat at one of those boards, where the pleasure of serving the country is combined with other important gratifications, which, to render them the more acceptable, occur regularly once a quarter.

Although these events followed each other so closely that the sagacity of the editor of a modern newspaper would have presaged the last two even while he announced the first, yet they came upon Sir Everard gradually, and drop by drop, as it were, distilled through the cool and procrastinating alembic of Dyer's Weekly Letter.* For it may be observed in passing, that instead of those mail-coaches, by means of which every mechanic at his sixpenny club may nightly learn from twenty contradictory channels the yesterday's news of the capital, a weekly post brought, in those days, to Waverley-Honour, a Weekly Intelligence, which, after it had gratified Sir Everard's curiosity, his sister's, and that of his aged butler, was regularly transferred from the Hall to the Rectory, from the Rectory to Squire Stubbs' at the Grange, from the Squire to the Baronet's steward at his neat white house on the heath, from the steward to the bailiff, and from him through a huge circle of honest dames and gaffers, by whose hard and horny hands it was generally worn to pieces in about a month after its arrival.

This slow succession of intelligence was of some advantage to Richard Waverley in the case before us; for, had the sum total of his enormities reached the ears of Sir Everard at once, there can be no doubt that the new commissioner would have had little reason to pique himself on the success of his politics.

* Long the oracle of the country gentlemen of the high Tory party. The ancient News-Letter was written in manuscript and copied by clerks, who addressed the copies to the subscribers. The politician by whom they were compiled picked up his intelligence at coffee-houses, and often pleaded for an additional gratuity, in consideration of the extra expense attached to frequenting such places of fashionable resort.