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Alice Mary Doane

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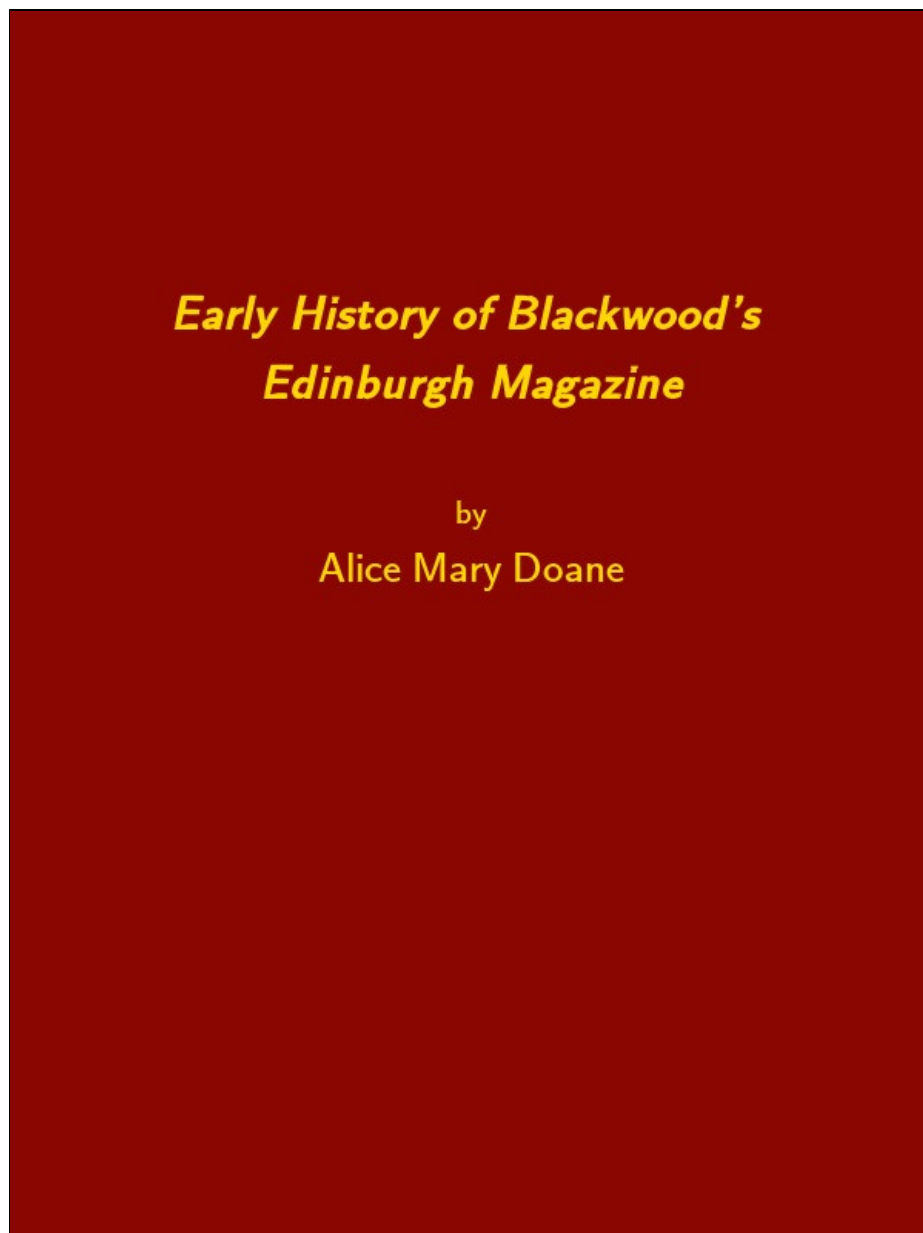
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EDINBURGH MAGAZINE ***



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EARLY HISTORY OF BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE

BY

ALICE MARY DOANE

A. B. Earlham College, 1914

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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OF THE

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ii

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THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

June 1 1917

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION
BY **Mary Alice Doane**
ENTITLED **Early History of Blackwood's Magazine**

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF **Master of Arts in English**

Jacob Zeitlin
In Charge of Thesis

Frank W Scott
Head of Department

Recommendation concurred in:¹

----- } Committee
----- } on
----- } Final Examination¹

¹ Required for doctor's degree but not for master's.

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EARLY HISTORY OF BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE

I *Introduction*²

² The information in this chapter is taken from the following: Oliver Elton: *A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830* (Arnold, London, 1912) V. i, ch. 13
Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge, 1916) V. xii, ch. 6
John Gibson Lockhart: *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk* (Edinburgh, 1819) V. i, ii

People love to be shocked! That explains the present circulation of *Life*. It explains, too, the clamor with which Edinburgh received the October number of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1817. For the first time in periodical history, the reading public was actually thrilled and completely shocked! Edinburgh held up its hands in horror, looked pious, wagged its head—and bought up every number! It is a strange parallel, perhaps, *Life* and *Blackwood's*,—yet not so strange. It is hard at first glance to understand how those yellow, musty old pages could have been so shocking which now seem to have lost all savor for the man in the street. But before we can appreciate just how shocking *Blackwood's Magazine* was, or why, it will be necessary first to remember the Edinburgh of those days, and the men who thought and fought in those pages, and the then state of periodical literature.

When we call *Blackwood's* the first *real* magazine it is by virtue of worth, not fact. There were numerous periodicals preceding and contemporary with it. Most of them have never been heard of by the average citizen, and no doubt oblivion is the kindest shroud to fold them in. The *Monthly Review*, founded in 1749, was the oldest. It ran till 1845 and is remembered chiefly for the fact that it had decided Whiggish leanings with a touch of the Nonconformist. *The Critical Review*, a Tory organ, ran from 1756 to 1817, the natal year of "Maga", as *Blackwood's* was fondly dubbed. *The British Critic*, 1793-1843, was a mouthpiece for High Church opinion; and *The Christian Observer*, 1802-1857, served the same purpose for the evangelicals. *The Anti-Jacobin*, 1797-98, was almost the only journal of the time where talent or wit appeared often enough not to be accidental, and it ran only eight months. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 1731-1868, has come in for a small share of immortality, but could never aspire to be considered a "moulder of opinion". It published good prose and verse, and articles of antiquarian and literary tone; its scholarship was fair. When this is said, all is said.

The Edinburgh Review and *The Quarterly* are the only two besides *Blackwood's* which come down to the Twentieth Century with any degree of lasting fame. In 1755 had appeared the first *Edinburgh Review* "to be published every six months". It survived only two numbers, being too radical and self-sufficient in certain philosophical and religious views for that day of orthodoxy. In October 1802 the first number of the *Edinburgh Review and Critical Journal*, a quarterly, appeared, which according to the advertisement in the first number was to be "distinguished for the selection rather than for the number of its articles".³ Its aim was to enlighten and guide the public mind in the paths of literature, art, science, politics,—with perhaps a bit of emphasis on the words *guide* and *politics*. Francis Jeffrey, of whom Lockhart, later one of the leading lights of *Blackwood's*, says, "It is impossible to conceive the existence of a more fertile, teeming intellect",⁴ was the first editor and remained so until 1829. In the first number, October 1802, there were twenty-nine articles, contributed by Sydney Smith, Jeffrey, Francis Horner, Brougham, and Thomson, Murray and Hamilton. During its first three years the *Review* distinguished itself by adding such names to its list as Walter Scott, Playfair, John Allen, George Ellis, and Henry Hallam. With such pens supporting it, it would have been strange if it had not been readable. There was indeed an air of vitality and energy throughout, which distinguished it from any of its forerunners; it spoke as one having authority; and men turned as instinctively to

Francis Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review* for final verdicts, as it never entered their heads to seriously consider the *Gentleman's Magazine* or even the *Quarterly*.

3 *Cambridge History of English Literature*, V. xii, ch. 6, p. 157

4 J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 61

This first number, October 1802, is as representative as any. Jeffrey wrote the first article, reviewing a book on the causes of the revolution by Mounier, late president of the French National Assembly. There was an article by Francis Horner on "The Paper Credit of Great Britain"; one by Brougham on "The Crisis in the Sugar Colonies". Another by Jeffrey, a criticism of Southey's "Thalaba", indicates the young editor's intention to live up to the motto of the *Review*:—"Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur"—The Judge is damned when the offender is freed". With Jeffrey anything new in the world of letters was taboo, and Southey he considered "a champion and apostle" of a school of poetry which was nothing if not new. Quoting him: "Southey is the first of these brought before us for judgment, and we cannot discharge our inquisitorial office conscientiously without pronouncing a few words upon the nature and tendency of the tenets he has helped to propagate"⁵ Notice that Jeffrey uses the term "inquisitorial office", therein pleading guilty to the very attitude of which Lockhart accused him, and in opposition to which in *Blackwood's Magazine* he later took such a decided stand, offending how similarly, we are later to discover.

5 *Cambridge History of English Literature*, V. xii, ch. 6, p. 159

Lockhart admired Jeffrey and praised his talents; it was the use to which he put those talents that Lockhart assailed. The following words of Lockhart's own, even though tinged with that exaggerated vindictiveness so characteristic of him, give a pretty fair idea of the attitude he and all the Blackwood group took against Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review*; and shows the spirit underlying the rivalry that took root before ever *Blackwood's Magazine* existed and prevailed for ever after. "Endowed by nature with a keen talent for sarcasm (Jeffrey, that is) nothing could be more easy for him than to fasten, with the destructive effect of nonchalance upon a work which had perhaps been composed with much earnestness of thought on the part of the author.... The object of the critic, however, is by no means to assist those who read his critical lucubrations, to enter with more facility, or with better preparation into the thoughts or feelings or truths which his author endeavors to inculcate or illustrate. His object is merely to make the author look foolish; and he prostitutes his own fine talents, to enable the common herd"⁶—to look down upon the deluded author who is victim of the *Review*. This is what Lockhart considered Jeffrey to be doing, and he was not alone in his opinion. It is to be remembered, however, that Lockhart's attitude was always more tense, keener, and a little more bitter than others', yet his words better than any one else's sound the keynote of the deadly opposition to the *Review* which "Maga" assumed from the first. Quoting him again, "*The Edinburgh Review* cared very little for what might be done, or might be hoped to be done, provided it could exercise a despotic authority in deciding on the merits of what was done. Nobody could ever regard this work as a great fostering-mother of the infant manifestations of intellectual and imaginative power. It was always sufficiently plain, that in all things its chief object was to support the credit of its own appearance. It praised only where praise was extorted—and it never praised even the highest efforts of contemporary genius in the spirit of true and genuine earnestness which might have been becoming".⁷ Lockhart never quite forgave Jeffrey for failing instantly to recognize the genius of Wordsworth. He continues, of the Reviewers: "They never spoke out of the fulness of the heart in praising any one of our great living poets, the majesty of whose genius would have been quite enough to take away all ideas except those of prostrate respect".⁸ Taking all of Lockhart's impetuosity with a pinch of salt, the fact remains undeniably true that the *Edinburgh* assumed the patronizing air of bestowing rather than recognizing honor when it praised.

6 J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 130

7 J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 207

8 *Ibid*, V. ii, p. 208

Among the builders of the *Edinburgh* Henry Brougham stands one of the foremost. In five years he contributed as many as eighty articles, an average of four each number, and it is said that he once wrote an entire number. He was capable of it! Brougham was a powerful politician, but unfortunately did not limit his contributions to political subjects. He wrote scientific, legal and literary papers as well, with the air of one whose mandates go undisputed. Undisputed they did go, too. In fact Brougham just escaped being a genius! He made a big splash in his own little world and age, but his fame has not outlived him. Another prominent contributor was Sydney Smith, a man of no small reputation as a humorist. He earnestly applied his talents to the forwarding of serious causes, and talents undoubtedly he had; but the wit of his style, according to the Hon. Arthur R. D. Elliot, erstwhile editor of the *Review*, its cleverness and jollity, prevented many from recognizing the genuine sincerity of his character.

By the end of 1806, Sir Walter Scott had contributed twelve articles in all, among them papers on Ellis's "Early English Poets", on Godwin's "Life of Chaucer", on Chatterton's "Works", on Froissart's "Chronicles". After 1806, he withdrew from the *Review*, and politics became the more prominent feature. No account of the *Edinburgh Review* has ever been given, written or told

without including a remark of Jeffrey's to Sir Walter Scott in a letter about this time. It would never do to omit it here! The remark is this: "The *Review*, in short, has but two legs to stand on. Literature, no doubt, is one of them: but its *Right Leg* is Politics."⁹ Scott's ideal was to keep it literary; and his break was on account of its excessive Whiggism. In Jeffrey's mind, however, *The Edinburgh Review* was destined to save the nation! He championed the causes of Catholic emancipation, of popular education, prison reform, even some small degree of justice in Ireland, et cetera, all flavored, of course, with the saving grace of Whiggism.

9 Elton: *A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*. V. i, p. 387

Modern critics more than once have characterized Jeffrey as that "once-noted despot of letters". But it is not fair only to be told that Jeffrey once said of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, "This will never do!" That he considered the end of *The Ode to Duty* "utterly without meaning"; and that the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* was "unintelligible"; that he ignored Shelley, and committed other like unpardonable sins. Those things are true and known and by them is he judged, but they are not *all* by which he should be judged by any means! There is no doubt in the world but what Jeffrey's mind was cast in a superior mould. Lockhart himself has already testified there could not be "a more fertile, teeming intellect". He was seldom, if ever, profound, we admit; but even the most grudging critic must grant him that large, speculative understanding and shrewd scrutiny so prominent in his compositions. Imagination, fancy, wit, sarcasm were his own, but not the warm and saving quality of humor. He was a great man and a brilliant criticiser, though hardly a great critic. The great critic is the true prophet and Jeffrey was no prophet. As late as 1829 in an article on Mrs. Hemans in the *Edinburgh Review*, he wrote: "Since the beginning of our critical career we have seen a vast deal of beautiful poetry pass into oblivion in spite of our feeble efforts to recall or retain it in remembrance. The tuneful quartos of Southey are already little better than lumber:—and the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley,—and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth,—and the plebeian pathos of Crabbe,—are melting fast from the field of our vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry. Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness, except where they have been married to immortal music; and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride."¹⁰ Herein he only redeems himself from his early condemnation of Wordsworth and Shelley and Southey, to damn himself irrevocably in our eyes again with his amazing lack of foresight! No! Jeffrey was no prophet. He had not the range of vision of the true critic, and "where there is no vision the people perish". This was indeed an epitaph written a century ago for a grave not even yet in view. It must not be hastily concluded from this, however, that all the criticism in the *Edinburgh Review* was poor stuff. A vast amount of it was splendid work; the best output of the best minds of the time; and it was the one and only authentic and readable journal for years. This is corroborated by a statement of Sir Walter Scott's in a letter to George Ellis: "No genteel family can pretend to be without the *Edinburgh Review*; because, independent of its politics, it gives the only valuable literary criticisms that can be met with."¹¹

10 Elton: *A Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, V. i, p. 390

11 *Cambridge History of English Literature*, V. xii, p. 164

But it was high time for a new periodical of opposite politics and fresh outlook; and in 1809 Gifford was established as editor of *The Quarterly Review*. Its four pillars were politics, literature, scholarship, and science; but its main purpose was to oppose the *Edinburgh* and create an intellectual nucleus for the rallying of the Tories. In October 1808 after plans were well on foot, Scott wrote to Gifford, prospective editor: "The real reason for instituting the new publication is the disgusting and deleterious doctrines with which the most popular of our Reviews disgraces its pages."¹² This of course was a reference to the political policies of the *Edinburgh*, yet the tone of the *Quarterly* was not to be one of political opposition only. Scott was eager for the success of the first number and wrote nearly a third of it himself. Later he busied himself to enlist the services of Southey and Rogers and Moore and Kirkpatrick Sharpe as contributors. Southey wrote altogether about one hundred articles on subjects varying from Lord Nelson to the Poor Laws. Scott himself contributed about thirty with his usual versatility of subject matter, all the way from fly fishing to Pepys' Diary. In the issue for January 1817 he even reviewed "Tales of my Landlord" and "ventured to attribute them to the author of *Waverley* and *Guy Mannering*."! John Wilson Croker, satirist, was another prominent contributor, narrow of mind and heart, intolerant of soul. He was an accurate and able "argu-fier" however, and one of the ruling genii in the politics of the *Quarterly*. In forty-five years he contributed something like two hundred and fifty-eight articles. Sir John Barrow, traveller and South African statesman, contributed much and copiously, multitudinous reviews and voyages, all in his unvarying "solid food" style and tone. Hallam and Sharon Turner wrote historical papers; Ugo Foscolo wrote on Italian classics. Such was the tone of the *Quarterly*. It took itself seriously, and was evidently always taken seriously. But no modern would consider those dim old pages of criticism as a criterion to the literature of that age. It was too heavy to be sensitive to new excellencies, too intent on upholding failing causes to recognize new ones. In truth, it was a periodical strangely unresponsive to artistic or literary excellence or attainment. By 1818 and 1819 its circulation was almost 14,000—practically the same as the *Edinburgh Review*; but the *Quarterly* never made the stir the *Edinburgh* did. Ellis spoke truth when he pronounced it, "Though profound, notoriously and unequivocally dull."¹³ Gifford remained editor until 1824; then John Taylor Coleridge ascended the throne for two years, and after that, Lockhart.

12 *Cambridge History of English Literature*, V. xii, p. 165

Concerning the *Scots Magazine* which seemed to be dying a natural death about the time of the initial impulse of "Maga", Lockhart writes: "It seems as if nothing could be more dull, trite and heavy than the bulk of this ancient work."¹⁴ An occasional contribution by Hazlitt or Reynolds enlivened it a bit, but only served to emphasize in contrast the duller parts.

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14 J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 227

The name of Leigh Hunt can scarcely be omitted from this panorama, though here it is the journalist rather than the journal which attracts attention. At various times he edited various publications, ten in all, and all of them more or less short-lived and unsuccessful. Among them was the *Reflector* (1810-11), a quarterly which is remembered mainly because Hunt was its editor and Charles Lamb one of its contributors. Most noteworthy of his periodical projects was the *Examiner*, a newspaper which he began to edit (1808) for his brother, and continued to do so for the space of some thirteen years. It professed no political allegiance, but was enough outspoken in its radical views to land both Leigh Hunt and his brother in prison, after printing an article on the Prince Regent. Among other things of interest, it started a department of theatrical criticism; and on the whole, with men like Hazlitt and Lamb contributing, it could not escape being interesting. The Blackwood group later reacted to it and its editor as a bull does to a red rag, testifying at least that it was far from nondescript.

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The *London Magazine* did not start until two years after *Blackwood's*, and we will dismiss it with only a few words. It was a periodical fashioned after the sprightlier manner which *Blackwood's*, too, strove to maintain. They were bitter rivals from the first; and as to which was the more bitter, the more stinging in its personalities, it would be hard to judge. At one time matters even reached such a pitch that John Scott, the *London's* first editor, and Lockhart found it necessary to "meet on the sod". The *London* put forth many fine things. In September 1821 it gave to the public "Confessions of an Opium Eater" by a certain Thomas De Quincey. A year later it offered "A Dissertation on Roast Pig" by an author then not so well known as now. A poem or two of one John Keats appeared in its pages; and when all is said, there is no doubt that the *London Magazine* did at times splendidly illumine the poetry of the age. It ran from 1820 to 1829.

Thus in brief was the periodical world. The quarterly reviews were avowedly pretentious, never amusing, not creative. Contents were limited to political articles, to pompous dissertations and reviews. There were no stories, no verse, nothing unbending, never a touch of fantasy. Their political flavor was the least of their sins. A touch of the Radical, the Whig or the Tory is a real contribution to the history of literature, wherein it inevitably involves great historic divisions of the thought of a nation concerning life and art. No. Our quarrel, like *Blackwood's*, is on the ground of their rigidity. It is well to hold fast that which is good; but it is not well to insistently oppose and blind oneself and others to the changing order and the forward march of men and letters.

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Knowing what we do of Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review* it is easy to comprehend what prompted Lockhart's pen to say: "It is, indeed, a very deplorable thing to observe in what an absurd state of ignorance the majority of educated people in Scotland have been persuaded to keep themselves, concerning much of the best and truest literature of their own age, as well as of the ages that have gone by."¹⁵... His quarrel is ours for the nonce, and to comprehend the spirit of "Maga" it is first necessary to comprehend the spirit which prompted much for which it is so rigorously criticised. Lockhart speaks of the "facetious and rejoicing ignorance" of the Reviewers. "I do not on my conscience believe", says he in *Peter's Letters*, "that there is one Whig in Edinburgh to whom the name of my friend Charles Lamb would convey any distinct or definite idea.... They do not know even the names of some of the finest poems our age has produced. They never heard of *Ruth* or *Michael*, or *The Brothers* or *Hartleap Well*, or the *Recollections of Infancy* or the *Sonnets to Buonaparte*. They do not know that there is such a thing as the description of a churchyard in *The Excursion*. Alas! how severely is their ignorance punished in itself!"¹⁶ Perhaps we can forgive the egotistic note in the following words, also from *Peter's Letters*: "There is no work which has done so much to weaken the authority of the *Edinburgh Review* in such matters as *Blackwood's Magazine*."¹⁷ *Blackwood's* is at least still readable which is more than can be said of most of its contemporaries. Though it did not, like the *London*, discover a Charles Lamb or a De Quincey, it did and does still overflow with the forging energy and ardent enthusiasms of youth. Besides the famous "Noctes Ambrosianae" for the most part attributed to John Wilson, it published good short stories, good papers by James Hogg, John Galt, and others, good verse, much generous as well as much vindictive criticism. It opened up new fields of interest: German, Italian and Norse letters, all hitherto but slightly touched upon. But we anticipate,—and must needs begin at the beginning.

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15 J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 141

16 J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 142, 143

17 *Ibid.* V. ii, p. 144

II *Genesis*

We are told that William Blackwood grew impatient of “humdrum bookselling”, and considering the spirited character of the man, it is easy to believe. That hardly explains the whole truth concerning the origin of “Maga”, however. The history of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* might almost be considered the history of the struggle between two rival booksellers, Mr. Constable and William Blackwood. The personality of the man William Blackwood is no less interesting than the personality of his magazine, and indeed, his was the spirit which colored the periodical from start to finish. His energy and acumen were of the sort which leave their mark on all they touch. To know William Blackwood means to see his vigorous, unwearying figure through and behind every page. Lockhart knew him as well as any, and it is his able portraiture that follows: “He is a nimble active-looking man of middle-age, and moves about from one corner to another with great alacrity, and apparently under the influence of high animal spirits. His complexion is very sanguineous, but nothing can be more intelligent, keen and sagacious than the expression of the whole physiognomy, above all, the grey eyes and eyebrows as full of locomotion as those of Catalini. The remarks he makes are in general extremely acute.... The shrewdness and decision of the man can, however, stand in need of no testimony beyond what his own conduct has afforded—above all, in the establishment of his Magazine,—(the conception of which I am convinced was entirely his own), and the subsequent energy with which he has supported it through every variety of good and evil fortune.”¹⁸ Lockhart was in a position to know the true character of the man, for these words were written two years after his own first connection with William Blackwood and his periodical. Again, he describes the publisher as “a man of strong talents, and though without anything that could be called learning, of very respectable information, ... acute, earnest, eminently zealous in whatever he put his hand to; upright, honest, sincere and courageous”.¹⁹ This was William Blackwood, and it is small wonder such a man should grow weary of “humdrum bookselling”.

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¹⁸ J. G. Lockhart: *Peter’s Letters*, V. ii, p. 188

¹⁹ A. Lang: *Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, V. i, p. 121

Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine was the result of more stringent stimuli, however, than the restlessness of its founder. It was necessary that the sentiments of those opposed to Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review* should have a medium of expression. Blackwood considered the *Quarterly* “too ponderous, too sober, dignified and middle-aged”²⁰ to frustrate the influence of the *Edinburgh*. It was not stimulating, in other words, and the present day agrees with him. His ideal was a magazine “more nimble, more frequent, more familiar”. But not least among the many stirrings of mind and brain which gave rise to “Maga” was Blackwood’s disappointment over the loss of the Waverley series. The honesty and courage of the man need no other evidence than the fact that he criticised “The Black Dwarf” and even suggested a different ending. Scott, of course, would have none of his meddling, and transferred his future dealings to Constable, publisher of the despised *Edinburgh Review*, and the *Scots Magazine*, which was at that moment more or less insignificant. It is evident that Blackwood did not take pains to seek out any specious circumlocution in his criticism, and the idea that any man should criticise the Great Wizard of the North brings a catch to the breath and a tingling down one’s spinal column!

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²⁰ Mrs. Oliphant: *Annals of a Publishing House*, V. i, p. 97

There is no doubt that the politics, the conceit, the unappreciative and at times irreligious tone of the *Edinburgh Review* were the main reasons for the bitter hatred of the *Blackwood* writers; but there is less doubt that thus to lose the Waverley series was a last incendiary straw to William Blackwood. He immediately set about putting in action the plans which had been smouldering so long.

In April 1817 appeared the first number of *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*. There seems to be a general understanding among bibliographers that the first numbers were known as the “Edinburgh Monthly Magazine”. According to the old volumes themselves, however, only the second number, the issue for May 1817, went by this title, the initial number and all the rest bearing the heading, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*.²¹ Messrs. Pringle and Cleghorn were the first joint editors, it was probably through James Hogg, known to us as the Ettrick Shepherd, that Blackwood first met these two men. If either of them could boast any literary pretensions, it was the younger, Thomas Pringle. He was from Hogg’s country, and Blackwood thought he divined in him the making of just such another “rustic genius” as Hogg. Cleghorn, former editor of the *Farmers’ Magazine*, was evidently a stick! It is difficult to conceive how William Blackwood, with his gift of insight, could give over the conduct of his pet plans into the hands of such a pair. But if he made a mistake, he soon made amends. Of the business arrangements between Blackwood and the two editors little of definite nature is known, except that the three were to be co-partners. Blackwood sustained the expense of publishing and printing; Pringle and Cleghorn supplied the material;—and the profits were to be divided! The editors expected £50 apiece per month, which seems unusual, considering that the circulation never exceeded 2500. It looks suspiciously probable that the early numbers were maintained at real financial loss to the publisher. There is no mention of paying contributors till later years. Very likely at that time

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writers were still *above* remuneration! The *Edinburgh Review* had done much to remedy this attitude, but a complete cure was not effected for some years to come.

21 See *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, V. i

The Prospectus of the infant journal is interesting. It was to be "A Repository of whatever may be supposed to be most interesting to general readers".²² One strong point was to be an antiquarian repository; too, it was to criticise articles in other periodicals; it was to contain a "Register" of domestic and foreign events. Among other aims, one was entertainment. It was to be a miscellany of the original works of authors and poets; and what endears it to modern hearts above all things else, it was to be an open door for struggling young writers. By virtue of the anonymous nature of its contributions, this was made possible with no lessening of authority. The signatures in the early numbers were intended to be perplexing, and perplexing they remain to this day. But probably struggling young writers met with less encouragement at the hands of Pringle and Cleghorn than was William Blackwood's original intention. Those two never went out of the way to drum up new material, while William Blackwood was a man alert and ever on the watch for another Walter Scott.

22 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, V. i, p. 2

Several numbers passed along peacefully enough. As Mr. Lang puts it, "Nothing could be more blameless". That was the trouble—it was *too* blameless! Blackwood might have forgiven a flagrant crime, but this negative and inoffensive monthly fell with a dull thud in comparison with his mounting expectations! He knew, none better, that a periodical of any appreciable merit must necessarily bring upon itself as much genuine censure as applause. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for April 1817 brought neither. The great day came for the first issue, evening followed, and Edinburgh went to bed unmoved. With his overwhelming desire and ambition to rival the *Edinburgh Review* and electrify Edinburgh city with a stimulating diet, it is not likely that he would observe with much composure the advent of this cherished scheme of his into the world, containing for its first long article²³ six pages of "Memoirs of the Late Francis Horner, Esq., M. P.", one of Jeffrey's own right hand men!—or in finding in the department of "Periodical Works",²⁴ a statistical and more or less pleasant refreshment of the contents of the last *Reviews*. Francis Horner had ever been one of the mainstays of the *Edinburgh*; and though it was altogether fitting and proper that the death of an illustrious statesman should be commemorated, it is not likely that William Blackwood welcomed as the first article in the first number of his new magazine, a wholly unmitigated extolling of one whose past influence he hoped to erase. Though the publisher's generous mind would be the last to begrudge him the due honor of such phrases as "highly gifted individual", "eminent statesman", and the like, it cannot be imagined that he rejoiced over the words "original and enlightened views", "correct and elegant taste", when it was his ardent purpose to prove the *Edinburgh* and its builders the opposite of enlightened, and the embodiment of poor taste and incompetent judgment!

23 *Ibid.*, V. i, p. 3

24 *Ibid.*, V. i, p. 81

This same first number contains seven pages of discourse on "The Sculpture of the Greeks"²⁵, and the relation of Greek art to the environment in which it grew up,—all very learned and interesting, to be sure. There is a brief article on the "Present State of the City of Venice"²⁶, condensed and unromantic enough to grace a Travellers' Guide. If Messrs. Pringle and Cleghorn had been anyone else but Messrs. Pringle and Cleghorn, they might have indulged the public with a thrill or two on such a subject as the city of Venice; but never a thrill do we get from cover to cover! The article which follows is "on the Constitution and Moral Effects of Banks for the Savings of Industry"²⁷; and there are others of similar tone: "Observations on the Culture of the Sugar Cane in the United States"²⁸, "The Craniological Controversy"²⁹, "The Proposed Establishment of a Foundling Hospital in Edinburgh"³⁰, and the like. One short article, "An Account of the American Steam Frigate"³¹, is still of genuine interest, attributing the conception of the invention to a "most ingenious and enterprising citizen", Robert Fulton, Esq. It describes with naive emphasis the successful trip "to the ocean, eastward of Sandy Hook, and back again, a distance of fifty-three miles, in eight hours and twenty minutes. A part of this time she had the tide against her, and had no assistance whatever from the sails."³² It is known that the signature Zeta was used in the early numbers, by more than one person; but "Remarks on Greek Tragedy"³³, a criticism of Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, signed Zeta, Mr. Lang attributes without hesitation to Lockhart. "Tales and Anecdotes of Pastoral Life"³⁴ and "Notices Concerning the Scottish Gypsies"³⁵ were also among the "Original Communications", as the first division of the magazine was called. The former is perhaps the one attempt in the whole number at that sprightly nimble manner which was Blackwood's aim. The second is a long article of some sixteen pages, delving back into the early history of the Egyptian pilgrims, quoting copiously from "Guy Mannering", and referring familiarly to Walter Scott, and Mr. Fairburn and James Hogg. Both of these articles were continued in several subsequent numbers.

25 *Ibid.*, V. i, p. 9

26 *Ibid.*, V. i, p. 16

27 *Ibid.*, V. i, p. 17

28 Ibid., V. i, p. 25

29 Ibid., V. i, p. 35

30 Ibid., V. i, p. 38

31 Ibid., V. i, p. 30

32 Ibid., V. i, p. 32

33 Ibid., V. i, p. 39

34 Ibid., V. i, p. 22

35 Ibid., V. i, p. 43

In another department of the contents, entitled "Select Extracts", there are two articles: an "Account of Colonel Beaufoy's Journey to the Summit of Mount Blanc"³⁶ and the "Account of the Remarkable Case of Margaret Lyall, Who continued in a State of Sleep nearly Six Weeks"³⁷, both very readable, which is a good deal when all is said. The Antiquarian Reportory contained six articles as antiquated as one could wish, all the way from a "Grant of the Lands of Kyrkenes by Macbeth, son of Finlach"³⁸ to a "Mock Poem upon the Expedition of the Highland Host"³⁹. The Original Poetry department contained three poems, none of them startling. The third one, the shortest, is by far the best, bearing the title "Verses"⁴⁰. They were written in honor of the entry of the Allies into Paris, 1814; and bear the unmistakable brand and seal of James Hogg, with his ardent song for "Auld Scotland!—land o' hearts the wale!" ...

24

"Land hae I bragged o' thine an' thee,
Even when thy back was at the wa';
An' thou my proudest sang sall be,
As lang as I hae breath to draw."

36 Ibid., V. i, p. 59

37 Ibid., V. i, p. 61

38 Ibid., V. i, p. 65

39 Ibid., V. i, p. 69

40 Ibid., V. i, p. 72

Next comes the "Review of New Publications", devoting three pages to Dr. Thomas Chalmers' "Discourses on the Christian Revelation"⁴¹, concluding with the words: "If a few great and original minds, like that of Dr. Chalmers, should arise to advocate the cause of Christianity, it would no longer be the fashion to exalt the triumphs of reason and of science."⁴² The other reviews were of "Harold, the Dauntless; a Poem. By the Author of "The Bridal of Triermain""⁴³, of "Armota, a Fragment"⁴⁴, and "Stories for Children, selected from the History of England"⁴⁵. Of what came under the heading, Periodical Works, we have already spoken. Then followed "Literary and Scientific Intelligence"⁴⁶, notices of works preparing for publication in Edinburgh and London, and the monthly list of new publications in the same two cities. There is a page of French books, published since January 1817. After that the Monthly Register of foreign intelligence, proceedings of Parliament, the British Chronicle, commercial and agricultural reports for the month, a meteorological table, and two pages of births, marriages and deaths, complete the number for April 1817.

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41 Ibid., V. i, p. 73

42 Ibid., V. i, p. 75

43 Ibid., V. i, p. 76

44 Ibid., V. i, p. 78

45 Ibid., V. i, p. 79

46 Ibid., V. i, P. 85

Mr. Lang was right when he called it "blameless"; and it is not surprising that Blackwood made some suggestions in regard to the second number. We know that his suggestions were not cordially received by Messrs. Pringle and Cleghorn, and it appears equally probable that they were not acted upon. The second issue, May 1817, is no more resilient and has gained no more momentum than its predecessor. The contents are cast in the same mould: an "Account of Mr. Ruthven's Printing Press"⁴⁷, another on the "Method of Engraving on Stone"⁴⁸, and "Anecdotes of Antiquaries"⁴⁹, and the like.

47 Ibid., V. i, p. 125

48 Ibid., V. i, p. 128

49 Ibid., V. i, p. 136

If Blackwood was disappointed over the first number, he was irritated at the second; but when a third of no more vital aspect appeared, his patience gave way, and Pringle and Cleghorn had to go! It is easy to imagine that the man who did not hesitate to criticise the "Black Dwarf" would not be overawed by the two mild gentlemen in charge of his pet scheme. William Blackwood's ideal had indeed been to startle the world with a periodical which in modern terms we would call a "live wire". And now with the magazine actually under way, it is not likely that a man of his stamp would sit by unperturbed, and watch one insignificant number after another greet an unresponsive public. After the appearance of the third number, he gave three months' notice to Messrs. Pringle and Cleghorn, which somewhat excited those gentlemen, but was none the less final. They had done all they could to evade Blackwood's "interest in the literary part of his business", and intended to keep the publisher "in his place". William Blackwood was not made that way, however.

26

He himself illuminates the situation in a letter to his London agents, Baldwin, Craddock and Company, dated July 23, 1817⁵⁰.

50 Mrs. Oliphant: *Annals of a Publishing House*, V. i, p. 104

"I am sorry to inform you that I have been obliged to resolve upon stopping the Magazine with No. 6. I have been much disappointed in my editors, who have done little in the way of writing or procuring contributions. Ever since the work began I have had myself almost the whole burden of procuring contributions, which by great exertions I got from my own friends, while at the same time I had it not in my power to pay for them, as by our agreement the editors were to furnish me with the whole of the material, for which and their editorial labors they were to receive half of the profits of the work. I found this would never do, and that the work would soon sink, as I could not permit my friends (who have in fact made the work what it is) to go on in this way for any length of time.... I gave a notice, according to our agreement, that the work would close at the period specified in it—three months. Instead, however, of Pringle acting in the friendly way he professed, he joined Cleghorn, and without giving any explanation, they concluded a bargain with Constable and Company, by which I understand they take charge of their (Constable's) 'Scot's Magazine' as soon as mine stops."

27

"It is not of the least consequence to me losing them, as they were quite unfit for what they undertook.... I have, however, made an arrangement with a gentleman of first-rate talents by which I will begin a new work of very superior kind. I mention this to you, however, in the strictest confidence, as I am not at liberty yet to say anything more particularly about it.... My editors have very dishonestly made it known to a number of people that we stop at the sixth number. This will interfere a little with our sale here, but I hope not with you."

The editors wrangled at great length, but Blackwood's mind was made up, and as we see by the foregoing letter, already launching new plans and busy with them. A letter to Pringle and Cleghorn, gives us the first hint of John Wilson's connection with the magazine (other than mere contributor), and shows the tone of finality with which Blackwood could treat what was to him a settled subject:

28

"As you have now an interest directly opposite to mine, I hope you will not think it unreasonable that I should be made acquainted with the materials which you intend for this number. It occurs to me it would save all unpleasant discussion if you were inclined to send the different articles to Mr. John Wilson, who has all along taken so deep an interest in the magazine. I do not wish to offer my opinion with regard to the fitness or unfitness of any article, but I should expect that you would be inclined to listen to anything which Mr. Wilson might suggest. He had promised me the following articles: Account of Marlowe's Edward II, Argument in the Case of the Dumb Woman lately before the Court, Vindication of Wordsworth, Reviews of Lament of Tasso, Poetical Epistles and Spencer's Tour. His furnishing these or even other articles will, however, depend upon the articles you have got and intend to insert."

"I beg to assure you that it is my most anxious wish to have the whole business settled speedily and as amicably as possible."⁵¹

51 Ibid., V. i, p. 106

Here exit the prologue; and the real show begins with *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for October 1817. To attract attention was Blackwood's first aim; interest once aroused, he did not worry over maintaining it. Of that he felt assured. Respectability, mediocrity were taboo! By respectability is inferred that prudent, cautious, dead-alive respectability whose backbone (such as it has) is fear of public censure!

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III *Dramatis Personae*

One of Blackwood's aims in life was to make 17 Princes Street a literary rendez-vous; and indeed the background and atmosphere of "Maga", and the men who gathered round it, are perhaps as fascinating and absorbing as the magazine itself!

Blackwood's shop is described by Lockhart as "the only great lounging shop in the new Town of Edinburgh"⁵². A glimpse of the soil and lights and shades which nourished "Maga" cannot help but bring a warmer, more familiar comprehension of its character and the words it spake. Just as Park Street and the Shaw Memorial and the grave portraits of its departed builders color our own *Atlantic Monthly*, just so did 17 Princes Street tinge and permeate the magazine which grew up in its precincts. "The length of vista presented to one on entering the shop", says Lockhart, "has a very imposing effect; for it is carried back, room after room, through various gradations of light and shadow, till the eye cannot trace distinctly the outline of any object in the furthest distance. First, there is as usual, a spacious place set apart for retail-business, and a numerous detachment of young clerks and apprentices, to whose management that important department of the concern is intrusted. Then you have an elegant oval saloon, lighted from the roof, where various groupes of loungers and literary dilettanti are engaged in looking at, or criticising among themselves, the publications just arrived by that day's coach from town. In such critical colloquies the voice of the bookseller himself may ever and anon be heard mingling the broad and unadulterated notes of its Auld Reekie music; for unless occupied in the recesses of the premises with some other business, it is here that he has his station."⁵³

⁵² J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 186

⁵³ *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 187

From this it is evident Blackwood's ideal shop was realized, and that there did gather in his presence both those who wielded the pen and those who wished to, those who were critics and those who aspired to be. At these assemblies might often be found two young men, who, says Mrs. Oliphant, "would have been remarkable anywhere if only for their appearance and talk, had nothing more remarkable ever been developed in them".⁵⁴ These two, of course, were John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart. She continues: "Both of them were only too keen to see the ludicrous aspect of everything, and the age gave them an extraordinary licence in exposing it."⁵⁵ This is an important note, the "extraordinary licence" of the age,—a straw eagerly grasped at!—corroborated, too, by Lord Cockburn⁵⁶ who testifies: "There was a natural demand for libel at this period." It explains much that we would fain explain in the subsequent literary pranks of these same two youths. They were ready for anything; and more,—enthusiastically ready for anything. John Wilson was a giant, intellectually and physically, "a genial giant but not a mild one"⁵⁷. Lockhart had already made some small reputation for himself as a caricaturist. Perhaps it was insight into their capacities which strengthened Blackwood's disgust with the two mild gents in charge of his to-be-epoch-making organ! At any rate, it was to these two, Wilson especially, that he turned for the resuscitation of his dream.

⁵⁴ Mrs. Oliphant: *Annals of a Publishing House*, V. i, p. 101

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, V. i, p. 103

⁵⁶ Henry Thomas Cockburn, a Scottish judge

⁵⁷ Mrs. Oliphant: *Annals of a Publishing House*, V. i, p. 101

John Wilson is the one name most commonly associated with *Blackwood's*, and with the exception of William Blackwood himself, perhaps the most important figure in its reconstruction. The name Christopher North was used in the earlier years by various contributors, but was soon appropriated by Wilson and is now almost exclusively associated with him. In the latter part of 1817 he became Blackwood's right hand man. He has often been considered editor of "Maga", but strictly speaking, no one but Blackwood ever was. After the experience with Pringle and Cleghorn, William Blackwood would naturally be wary of ever again entrusting full authority to anyone. He himself was always the guiding and ruling spirit, though never admittedly, or technically, editor.

It was "Maga" that gave John Wilson his first real literary opportunity. His gifts were critical rather than creative, and his most famous work is the collected "Noctes Ambrosianae" which began to run in the March number (1822) of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. He was one of the very first to praise Wordsworth; and though in general, far too superlative both in praise and blame to be considered dependable, a very great deal of his criticism holds good to the present hour. Along in the first days of Wordsworth's career, Wilson proclaimed him, with Scott and Byron, "one of the three great master spirits of our day in the poetical world". Lockhart, long his close friend and associate, writes thus: "He is a very warm, enthusiastic man, with most charming conversational talents, full of fiery imaginations, irresistible in eloquence, exquisite in humor when he talks ...; he is a most fascinating fellow, and a most kind-hearted, generous friend; but his fault is a sad one, a total inconsistency in his opinions concerning both men and

things.... I ... believe him incapable of doing anything dishonorable either in literature or in any other way."⁵⁸

58 A. Lang: *Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, V. i, p. 93

It was the pen of John Gibson Lockhart, however, almost as wholly as Wilson's which insured the success of the magazine; and Blackwood was as eager to enlist Lockhart into his services as Wilson. Like Wilson, too, "Maga" was Lockhart's opportunity! He had given early promise as a future critic. Elton says he wrote "sprightly verse and foaming prose". From 1817 to 1830 he was not only one of the invaluable supporters of "Maga", but one of its rare *lights*! In announcing the marriage of his daughter to Lockhart, Sir Walter Scott said: "To a young man of uncommon talents, indeed of as promising a character as I know".⁵⁹ His gift for caricature colored his writings. His was a mind and eye and genius for the comic. His satire was that keen and bitter piercing satire which all are ready to recognize as talent, but few are ready to forgive if once subjected to it. But there was little malice behind it ever. Much of what he wrote has been condemned for its bitter, and often personal, import. But Lockhart was only twenty-three at the time of his first connection with the magazine—and what is more, "constitutionally a mocker". All is well with his serious work, but according to Mr. Lang, the "Imp of the Perverse" was his ruling genius! Others say, "as a practitioner in the gentle art of making enemies, Lockhart excelled",⁶⁰ and that he possessed the "native gift of insolence"⁶¹. They are strong words, not wholly without cause, and illustrate the attitude of many minds towards his work; yet perhaps they only go to prove that he began to write responsible articles too young, and was allowed entirely too free a swing.

34

59 *Ibid.*, V. i, p. 230

60 J. H. Millar: *A Literary History of Scotland*, p. 517

61 Same

The story of James Hogg is by far the most fascinating of those connected with *Blackwood's*; and in a later series of articles in that magazine on these first three stars, the writer says: "Hogg was undoubtedly the most remarkable. For his was an untaught and self-educated genius, which shone with rare though fitful lustre in spite of all disadvantages, and surmounted obstacles that were seemingly insuperable."⁶² It is difficult to ascertain his exact relations with the magazine. One thing at least is certain,—he contributed much. Wilson and Lockhart found great joy in "drawing" him, and Hogg was kept wavering between vexation and pride "at occupying so much space in the most popular periodical of the day".⁶³ As Saintsbury puts it, he was at once the "inspiration, model, and butt of *Blackwood's Magazine*"⁶⁴. But indeed the shepherd drawn so cleverly in the *Noctes* "was not", his daughter testifies, "the Shepherd of Ettrick, or the man James Hogg". And in all justice to him, there can be no doubt that he is totally misrepresented therein.

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62 *Memorials of James Hogg*, p. 11

63 J. H. Millar: *A Literary History of Scotland*, p. 530

64 Saintsbury: *Essays in English Literature, 1780-1860*, p. 37

His poetry is his only claim upon the world. It was the one thing dearest to his own heart, and the one thing for which he claimed or craved distinction or recognition of any kind. The heart warms to this youth with his dreams and aspirations, brain teeming with poems years before he learned to write. As might be expected from a man whose own grandfather had conversed with fairies, in Hogg's poetry the supernatural is close to the natural world. He is reported once to have said to his friend Sir Walter Scott: "Dear Sir Walter! Ye can never suppose that I belong to your School o' Chivalry! Ye are the king o' that school, but I'm the king o' the Mountain and Fairy School, which is a far higher ane nor yours."⁶⁵ This "sublime egotism" is not displeasing in one whose heart and soul was wrapt up in an earnest belief in and reverence for his art. It is the egotism of a deep nature which scorns to hide its talents in the earth. James Hogg spoke to the heart of Scotland, and was proud and content in so doing.

36

65 *Memorials of James Hogg*, p. x

To all appearances Blackwood was now the centre of a group after his own heart! With these three as a nucleus, others of considerable talent joined the circle. Talent, wit, keen and zealous minds were theirs, with enough fervor and intrepidity of spirit to guarantee that "Maga" would never again pass unnoticed. Henceforth there was sensation enough to satisfy even the heart of a William Blackwood! Whatever accusations were afterwards levelled at "Maga" (and they were many) no one could again accuse it of being either dull or uninteresting—the one unpardonable sin of book or magazine! The last thing that "Maga" wished to be was neutral! Better to offend than be only "inoffensive"; better to raise a rumpus than grow respectable! And from October 1817 on, "respectable" is the last word anyone thought of applying to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*!

37

IV *First Years of "Maga"*

With its new grip on life in October 1817, the editorial notice of Blackwood's omitted any profession of a new prospectus. It reads: "In place of a formal Prospectus, we now lay before our Readers the titles of some of the articles which we have either already received, or which are in preparation by our numerous correspondents." Follows some two pages or more of titles alluring and otherwise, whereupon the notice continues: "The Public will observe, from the above list of articles, that we intend our Magazine to be a Depository of Miscellaneous Information and Discussion. We shall admit every Communication of Merit, whatever may be the opinion of the writer, on Literature, Poetry, Philosophy, Statistics, Politics, Manners, and Human Life.... We invite all intelligent persons ... to lay their ideas before the world in our Publication; and we only reserve to ourselves the right of commenting upon what we do not approve."⁶⁶ That right was always reserved, and there was never any hesitancy on the part of any of them in acting thereon, as the magazine itself testifies.

⁶⁶ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, V. ii, p. 2

A short paragraph of "Notices to Correspondents"⁶⁷ following the editorial notice, is of more than casual interest. Its flavor is shown by the following:—

"The communication of Lupus is not admissible. D. B.'s Archaeological Notices are rather heavy. We are obliged to our worthy Correspondent M. for his History of 'Bowed David', but all the anecdotes of that personage are incredibly stupid, so let his bones rest in peace.... We have received an interesting Note enclosing a beautiful little Poem, from Mr. Hector Macneil ... and need not say how highly we value his communication.... Duck-lane, a Town Eclogue, by Leigh Hunt—and the Innocent Incest by the same gentleman, are under consideration; their gross indecency must however be washed out. If we have been imposed upon by some wit, these compositions will not be inserted. Mr. James Thomson, private secretary for the charities of the Dukes of York and Kent, is, we are afraid, a very bad Poet, nor can the Critical Opinions of the Princes of the Blood Royal be allowed to influence ours.... Reason has been given for our declining to notice various other communications." Many of the contributors, probably most of them, received personal letters; in fact, this paragraph does not appear in every number.

⁶⁷ Same

This number, *The number of Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the startling and blood-curdling number of October 1817, contained among other sensations, the Chaldee Manuscript, supposedly from the "Bibliotheque Royale" (Salle 2, No. 53, B. A. M. M.)—in reality a clever and scathing piece of satire couched in Biblical language, which spared no one of note in the whole town of Edinburgh, and written by heaven knows whom! Its interest was strictly local, dealing with Edinburgh and Edinburgh personalities, written with the Edinburgh public in view; but its fame spread like wild fire! Like Byron, *Blackwood's Magazine* woke up one morning to find itself grown famous over night! As Mrs. Oliphant puts it: "Edinburgh woke up with a roar of laughter, with a shout of delight, with convulsions of rage and offense". Its fame involved, however, not only the clamor of Edinburgh, but instant recognition throughout the kingdom. Result? Libel actions, challenges to duels, lawsuits, and—the suppression of the Chaldee Manuscript. Its fame has come down to the present day, but one peep at it involves carfare to the British Museum!

This amazing piece of literature seems innocent enough at first glance; and in truth it was what people read *into* it rather than what they read *in* it that made all the trouble. Quoting from it:

"I looked, and behold a man clothed in plain apparel stood in the door of his house: and I saw his name ... and his name was as it had been the color of ebony, and his number was as the number of a maiden—(17 Princes Street, of course)....

"And I turned my eyes, and behold two beasts came from the lands of the borders of the South; and when I saw them I wondered with great admiration.... And they came unto the man ... and they said unto him, Give us of thy wealth, that we may eat and live ... and they proffered him a Book; and they said unto him, Take Thou this and give us a sum of money, ... and we will put words into the Book that will astonish the children of thy people.... And the man hearkened unto their voice, and he took the Book and gave them a piece of money, and they went away rejoicing in their hearts.... But after many days they put no words in the Book; and the man was astonished and waxed wroth, and he said unto them, What is this that ye have done unto me, and how shall I answer those to whom I am engaged? And they said, what is that to us? See thou to that."⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Mrs. Oliphant: *Annals of a Publishing House*, V. i, p. 119-20

All this seems innocent tomfoolery enough—pure parody on our friend Ebony, and the two beasts Pringle and Cleghorn who "put no words in the Book". But that was not all, Constable and the *Edinburgh Review* figured prominently; and Sir Walter Scott who, we are told, "almost choked with laughter", and Wilson and Lockhart and Hogg.

"There lived also a man that was *crafty* in council ... and he had a notable horn in his forehead

with which he ruled the nations. And I saw the horn that it had eyes, and a mouth speaking great things, and it magnified itself ... and it cast down the truth to the ground and it practised and prospered.”⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Ibid., V. i, p. 121

Constable never outlived this name of the Crafty and the reputation of the *Edinburgh Review* for “magnifying itself” lives to the present day. “The beautiful leopard from the valley of the palm-trees” (meaning Wilson) “called from a far country the Scorpion which delighted to sting the faces of men”, (Lockhart, of course) “that he might sting sorely the countenance of the man that is crafty, and of the two beasts.

“And he brought down the great wild boar from the forest of Lebanon and he roused up his spirits and I saw him whittling his dreadful tusks for the battle.”⁷⁰ This last is James Hogg. There were others. Walter Scott was the “great Magician which has his dwelling in the old fastness hard by the river Jordan, which is by the Border”⁷¹ to whom Constable, the Crafty, appealed for advice. Francis Jeffrey was “a familiar spirit unto whom he (the Crafty) had sold himself”.⁷² The attack on the Rev. Prof. Playfair, later so sincerely deplored in *Peter’s Letters*, reads in part thus: “He also is of the seed of the prophets, and ministered in the temple while he was yet young; but he went out and became one of the scoffers”⁷³—in other words, one of the Edinburgh Reviewers! The spirit of prophecy seems indeed to have been upon the writer of the Chaldee, for it ends—appropriately, thus: “I fled into an inner chamber to hide myself, and I heard a great tumult, but I wist not what it was.”⁷⁴ The great tumult was heard, to be sure, and the authors fled to be safe.

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⁷⁰ Ibid., V. i, p. 123

⁷¹ Ibid., V. i, p. 122

⁷² A. Lang: *Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, V. i, p. 161

⁷³ Same

⁷⁴ Same

Just who wrote the Chaldee will never be known; but all indications are that the idea and first draft were James Hogg’s, and that it was touched up and completed by Wilson and Lockhart, with the aid, or rather with the suggestions and approval of William Blackwood.

The number for August 1821 contains the first of a series of “Familiar Epistles to Christopher North, From an Old Friend with a New Face.”⁷⁵ Letter I deals with Hogg’s Memoirs. This is anticipating a bit, anticipating some four years, in fact, but is nevertheless apropos of our discussion of the Chaldee. Just who the Old Friend with a New Face was would be hard to judge. Mr. Lang has surmised him to be either Lockhart or De Quincey. It is a lively bit of work, worthy the wit of either, but the sentences do not feel like Lockhart’s. That both these men were friends of Hogg, encourages one to hope that the biting sarcasm of the thing was its own excuse for being, and came not from the heart. Such was ever the tone of “Maga”, however; and none can deny that once begun the article *must* be read! Excerpts follow: “Of all speculations in the way of printed paper, I should have thought the most hopeless to have been ‘a Life of James Hogg, by himself’. Pray who wishes to know anything about his life? ...

43

“It is no doubt undeniable that the political state of Europe is not so interesting as it was some years ago. But still I maintain that there was no demand for the Life of James Hogg.... At all events, it ought not to have appeared before the Life of Buonaparte.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, V. x, p. 43

⁷⁶ Same

But to come again to our Chaldee Manuscript, the correspondent says concerning Hogg’s claim to its authorship: “There is a bouncer!—The Chaldee Manuscript!—Why, no more did he write the Chaldee Manuscript than the five books of Moses.... I presume that Mr. Hogg is also the author of Waverley.—He may say so if he chooses.... It must be a delightful thing to have such fancies as these in one’s noodle;—but on the subject of the Chaldee Manuscript, let me now speak the truth. You yourself, Kit ... and myself, Blackwood and a reverend gentleman of this city alone know the perpetrator. It was the same person who murdered Begbie!”—Begbie, by the way, was a bank porter, whose murder was one of the never solved mysteries of Edinburgh. “It was a disease with him to excite ‘public emotion’. With respect to his murdering Begbie ... all at once it entered his brain, that, by putting him to death in a sharp and clever and mysterious manner ... the city of Edinburgh would be thrown into a ferment of consternation, and there would be no end of ‘public emotion’.... The scheme succeeded to a miracle.... Mr. — wrote the Chaldee Manuscript precisely on the same principle.... It was the last work of the kind of which I have been speaking, that he lived to finish. He confessed it and the murder the day before he died, to the gentleman specified, and was sufficiently penitent....

44

“After this plain statement, Hogg must look extremely foolish. We shall next have him claiming the murder, likewise, I suppose; but he is totally incapable of either.”⁷⁷

It is altogether probable that Hogg's frank avowal dismayed the men who had studied to keep its authorship secret for so many years, fearing lest the confession implicate his colleagues. At any rate, such vehement protestations as the above are to be eyed askance in the light of saner evidences. "Maga" was prone to go off on excursions of this kind; and William Blackwood had at last realized his dreamed-of Sensation! No doubt he knew the risk he took in publishing the Chaldee; but in the tumult which followed, he stood equal to every occasion. Hogg was not then in Edinburgh, and Wilson and Lockhart too thought it wise to leave town. The letters of the two latter to Blackwood during the days of the libel suits remind one of the tragic notes of boys of twelve a la penny dreadful! But Blackwood was firm and undisturbed through it all, disclaiming all responsibility himself, never disclosing a single name. The secret was safe and the success of "Maga" sure. In the November number, however, he saw fit to insert such statements as the following: "The Publisher is aware that every effort has been used to represent the admission into his Magazine of an article entitled "A Translation of a Chaldee Manuscript" as an offence worthy of being visited with a punishment that would involve in it his ruin as a Bookseller and Publisher. He is confident, however, that his conduct will not be thought by the Public to merit such a punishment, and to them he accordingly appeals."⁷⁸—And again, on a page by itself in the same November number appears the following statement: "The Editor has learned with regret that an Article in the First Edition of last Number, which was intended merely as a *jeu d'esprit*, has been construed so as to give offence to Individuals justly entitled to respect and regard; he has on that account withdrawn it in the Second Edition, and can only add, that if what has happened could have been anticipated, the Article in question certainly never would have appeared."⁷⁹

45

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 1 of the introductory pages

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 129

Aside from the Chaldee, there were two other distinct and decided Sensations in this memorable number, both too well known to demand detailed attention. They were Wilson's attack on Coleridge, "Observations on Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*",⁸⁰ the leading article and a long one; and Lockhart's paper "On the Cockney School of Poetry"⁸¹. The former is an inexcusable, ranting thing which concludes that Mr. Coleridge's Literary Life strengthens every argument against the composition of such Memoirs⁸², ... that it exhibits "many mournful sacrifices of personal dignity, after which it seems impossible that Mr. Coleridge can be greatly respected either by the Public or himself."⁸³ Such words were strong enough in their own day, but seem doubly presumptuous in the light of our present hero-worship,—especially as the article continues with verdicts like the following: "Considered merely in a literary point of view, the work is most execrable.... His admiration of Nature or of man,—we had almost said his religious feelings toward his God,—are all narrowed, weakened, and corrupted and poisoned by inveterate and diseased egotism."⁸⁴

46

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 3

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 38

⁸² *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 5

⁸³ Same

⁸⁴ Same

This was a sin for which "Maga" later atoned by repeated tributes to his genius, to his poetry and its beauty in many subsequent numbers of the periodical. Lockhart two years afterwards spoke of it as "a total departure from the principles of the Magazine"⁸⁵—"a specimen of the very worst kind of spirit which the Magazine professed to be fighting in the *Edinburgh Review*."⁸⁶ "This is indeed the only one of the various sins of this Magazine for which I am at a loss to discover—not an apology—but a motive. If there be any man of grand and original genius alive at this moment in Europe, such a man is Mr. Coleridge."⁸⁷ And two months after this paper, in the issue for December 1817 appeared a "Letter to the Reviewer of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*", beginning with the words: "To be blind to our failings and alive to our prejudices, is the fault of almost every one of us.... It is the same with me, the same with Mr. Coleridge, and it is, I regret to state it, the same with his reviewer!"⁸⁸... And this writer, who signs, himself J. S., sums up his valiant defense, declaring "it is from a love I have for generous and fair criticism, and a hate to everything which appears personal and levelled against the man and not his subject—and your writing is glaringly so—that I venture to draw daggers with a reviewer. You have indeed imitated, with not a little of its power and ability, the worst manner of the *Edinburgh Review* critics. Forgetting ... that freedom of remark does not exclude the kind and courteous style, you have entirely sunk the courtesousness in the virulency of it."⁸⁹ Thus "Maga" redeemed itself and Coleridge was avenged.

47

⁸⁵ J. G. Lockhart: *Peter's Letters*, V. ii, p. 218

⁸⁶ Same

⁸⁷ Same

As for the third of the three articles which best illustrate the whoopla-spirit of this new venture, Lockhart's paper "On the Cockney School of Poetry", all is said when we say it was the first of a series of corrosive and scurrilous articles directed against Leigh Hunt in particular, and Hazlitt and Webbe, and in general, the "younger and less important members" of that school, "The Shelley's and the Keatses"! Modern critics! Beware how you cast stones at our Percy Smith's and Reggie Brown's! Says our young friend Lockhart in this article that Leigh Hunt is "a man of little education. He knows absolutely nothing of Greek, almost nothing of Latin"⁹⁰ ... and so forth and so on. He cannot "utter a dedication, or even a note, without betraying the *Shibboleth* of low birth and low habits. He is the ideal of a Cockney poet.... He has never seen any mountain higher than Highgate-hill, nor reclined by any streams more pastoral than the Serpentine River. But he is determined to be a poet eminently rural, and he rings the changes—till one is sick of him, on the beauties of the different 'high views' which he has taken of God and nature, in the course of some Sunday dinner parties at which he has assisted in the neighborhood of London.... As a vulgar man is perpetually laboring to be genteel—in like manner the poetry of this man is always on the stretch to be grand."⁹¹

90 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 3891 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 39

This is just a taste of what is in reality very clever stuff. The subject of approbation or disapprobation had best be omitted. At any rate "Maga" "started something", for the term "Cockney School" was taken up by the major and minor Reviews and nearly every daily paper of England and Scotland. What Wilson said later (1832) in a review of Tennyson's poems, characterizes the *Blackwood* attitude toward the Cockneys from the first: "Were the Cockneys to be to church, we should be strongly tempted to break the Sabbath."⁹² Whatever our evaluation of this sort of criticism, the admission perhaps saves the reputation of Lockhart and other *Blackwood* critics! Their opposition was more a matter of principle than of judgment.

92 J. H. Millar: *A Literary History of Scotland*, p. 506

The rest of the contents of the October 1817 number are interesting and lively, though it must be admitted scarcely so startling as this famous triad. A discussion of the "Curious Meteorological Phenomena Observed in Argyleshire"⁹³ reads interestingly and rapidly, and is of sufficient weight to save the magazine from flying away altogether! "Analytical Essays on the Early English Dramatists, No. II., Marlowe's Edward II"⁹⁴ is the work of John Wilson, and bears the stamp of his outpouring of appreciation and enthusiasm. Another article, "On the Optical Properties of Mother-of-Pearl, etc."⁹⁵ seems to be a purely scientific offering, and so far as the writer can judge, presumably accurate and just as it should be. Page 47 bears side by side, a tender little "Elegy" of James Hogg's and a poem in honor of the Ettrick Shepherd and his songs by John Wilson. "Strictures on the Edinburgh Review"⁹⁶ and "Remarks on the Quarterly Review"⁹⁷ are two articles one would scarcely go to sleep over.

93 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, V. ii, p. 1894 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 2195 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 3396 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 4197 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 57

There are other papers in this same issue which time will not allow even brief mention. It is easy to picture the great publisher when the new copies first arrived, crisp and new with the smell of printers' ink upon them. There was no despair, no disappointment this time, but the eager palpitation and anxiety of the parent, solicitous but equally certain of the success of his child! A letter penned in haste to John Wilson before ever "Maga" was seen by public eye betrays better than any polite effusion could have done, the genuine emotion of the man.

"John Wilson, Esq.
Queen Street

October 20, 1817

My dear Sir,—As in duty bound I send you the first complete copy I have got of the Magazine. I also beg you will do me the favor to accept of the enclosed. It is unnecessary for me to say how much and how deeply I am indebted to you, and I shall only add that by the success of the Magazine (for which I shall be wholly indebted to you) I hope to be able to offer you something more worthy of your acceptance.—I am, dear Sir,

Yours very truly,
W. Blackwood"⁹⁸

98 Mrs. Oliphant: *Annals of a Publishing House*, V. i, p. 127

Mrs. Oliphant draws a pretty picture, which reveals better perhaps than some more erudite account, the mental state of William Blackwood the night before "Maga" was offered to the world. "He went into his house, where all the children ... rushed out with clamor and glee to meet their father, who, for once in his excitement, took no notice of them, but walked straight to the drawing room, where his wife, not excitable, sat in her household place, busy no doubt for her fine family; and coming into the warm glow of the light, threw down the precious Magazine at her feet. 'There is that that will give you what is your due—what I always wished you to have', he said, with the half-sobbing laugh of the great crisis. She gave him a characteristic word, half-satirical, as was her way, not outwardly moved.... Sometimes he called her a wet blanket when she thus damped his ardor,—but not, I think, that night."⁹⁹

99 Same

It might easily be guessed that after the sudden bursting into glory of the October number, the same high level would be difficult to sustain. But although subsequent numbers boast no Chaldee to convulse or enrage the town, the popularity of "Maga" seems never again to lag. The November number begins properly enough. The afore-mentioned apology and explanation of the Chaldee introduced it to the watchful waiters, impatient to ascertain what a second issue would bring forth. The first long article, nine and a half pages, "On the Pulpit Eloquence of Scotland"¹⁰⁰, very thoughtful, very serious, very earnest, in tone, thanks God that Scotland has been blessed with the heavenly visitation of her well loved preacher, Dr. Chalmers, and extols and praises and appreciates the man, "like an angel in a dream". The second article continues the learned discussion "On the Optical Properties of Mother-of-Pearl"¹⁰¹. The third is John Wilson's famous review of Byron's "Lament of Tasso"¹⁰², wherein says he "There is one Poem in which he (Byron) has almost wholly laid aside all remembrance of the darker and stormier passions; in which the tone of his spirit and his voice at once is changed, and where he who seemed to care only for agonies, and remorse, and despair, and death, and insanity, in all their most appalling forms, shews that he has a heart that can feed on the purest sympathies of our nature, and deliver itself up to the sorrows, the sadness and the melancholy of humbler souls."¹⁰³

100 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, V. ii, p. 131

101 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 140

102 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 142

103 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 143

The lighter tone again asserts itself in "Letters of An Old Bachelor, No. 1."¹⁰⁴, who waxes indignant over French opinion concerning English ladies! He quotes a certain French writer who represents "the dress of the English ladies" as mere imitation of the French, only "all ridicule and exaggeration. 'Does a French lady, for instance, put a flower in her hair—the heads of the English ladies are immediately covered with the whole shop of a bouquetière. Does a French lady put on a feather ... in this country—nothing but feathers is to be seen!' This, of course", says the old bachelor in all earnestness, "is all a vile slander"¹⁰⁵,—although he must admit having seen heads covered with flowers, and "ladies wearing *quite as many* feathers as were becoming."¹⁰⁶ He resents too that a French priest should accuse English ladies of having bad teeth. "Is he ignorant", he would know, "that young ladies by applying to Mr. Scott, the dentist, may be supplied with a single tooth for the small sum of two guineas, while dowagers may be accommodated with a complete set of the *most beautiful* teeth, made from the tusks of the hippopotamus ... for a very trifling consideration? In fact, it is quite astonishing, to see the fine teeth of all our female acquaintances;... And yet this abominable priest has the impudence to talk of bad teeth!"¹⁰⁷ Besides, "what ladies of any nation", says he, "play so charmingly the pianoforte?"¹⁰⁸

104 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 192

105 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 193

106 Same

107 Same

108 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 194

This little skit is followed by the second installment "On the Cockney School of Poetry"¹⁰⁹,—this time that well known and scandalous handling of Hunt's "Story of Rimini",—Lockhart's again, of course. This was the article whose turbulent discussion of the moral depravity of Leigh Hunt threw Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, then Blackwood's London agents, into such a state of pious horror. They evidently feared getting mixed up in anything livelier than antiquarian projects, and threatened to withdraw their name. The articles on the Cockney School went merrily on, however; and so did Baldwin and Cradock even until July 1818. No doubt they found it a paying proposition!

109 Same

Sir Walter Scott tried to wean both Wilson and Lockhart away from "that mother of

mischievous¹¹⁰ as he termed the magazine. According to Mr. Lang, he “disapproved (though he chuckled over it) the reckless extravagance of juvenile satire”. But it is easy to comprehend how “a chuckle” from Sir Walter would be the last incentive to curb their literary abandon. Blackwood worked long for the support of Scott, knowing well what it would mean to “Maga”. A semblance of support, at least, he secured through his patronage of Scott’s favorite, William Laidlaw, whose agricultural chronicles ran for a time as one of the regular features. Scott even contributed an occasional article himself from time to time, which, though anonymous, could not escape recognition. Probably he never attained a very cordial affection for the publisher, and it is well known that he disapproved of much that “Maga” said and did, yet outwardly he professed neutrality between *Constable’s* and *Blackwood’s*; and in a letter to William Laidlaw, February 1818, while “Maga” was still in its youth, his verdict is not vindictive. “Blackwood is rather in a bad pickle just now—sent to Coventry by the trade, as the booksellers call themselves and all about the parody of the two beasts. Surely these gentlemen think themselves rather formed of porcelain clay than of common potters’ ware. Dealing in satire against all others, their own dignity suffers so cruelly from an ill-imagined joke! If B. had good books to sell, he might set them all at defiance. His Magazine does well and beats Constable’s; but we will talk of this when we meet.”¹¹¹

55

110 A. Lang: *Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, V. i, p. 193

111 J. G. Lockhart: *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, V. v, p. 268

Continuing the panorama, the issue for February 1818 contains three pages of notes “To Correspondents”, of which several deserve mention: “We have no objection to insert Z.’s Remarks on Mr. Hazlitt’s Lectures, after our present Correspondent’s Notices are completed. If Mr. Hazlitt uttered personalities against the Poets of the Lake School, he reviled those who taught him all he knows about poetry.” This same issue was then starting a series of articles entitled “Notices of a Course of Lectures on English Poetry, by W. Hazlitt”.¹¹² With no personal comment, they give the gist of Hazlitt’s lectures at the Surrey Institution in London. The first article covers the lectures on “Poetry in General”¹¹³, “On Chaucer and Spenser”¹¹⁴, and “On Shakespeare and Milton”¹¹⁵. These papers ran for several months, and the promised Remarks of Z. do not appear in any recognizable form unless the paper “Hazlitt Cross-Questioned”¹¹⁶ in the August issue (1818) is the awaited article. It is presented in the form of eight questions, the first: “Did you, or did you not, in the course of your late Lectures on Poetry, infamously vituperate and sneer at the character of Mr. Wordsworth—I mean his personal character; his genius even you dare not deny?”¹¹⁷ Again—“Do you know the difference between Milton’s Latin and Milton’s Greek?”¹¹⁸ and—“Did you not insinuate in an essay on Shakespeare ... that Desdemona was a lewd woman, and after that dare to publish a book on Shakespeare?”¹¹⁹ The eighth question closes the article: “Do you know the Latin for a goose?”¹²⁰

56

112 *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, V. ii, p. 556

113 Same

114 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 558

115 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 560

116 *Ibid.*, V. iii, p. 550

117 Same

118 *Ibid.*, V. iii, p. 551

119 Same

120 *Ibid.*, V. iii, p. 552

But to return to our notes “To Correspondents” in February 1818, there remains one or two others of especial interest as illustrating the attitude these notes assumed. For instance: “Can C. C. believe it possible to pass off on us for an original composition, an extract from so popular a work as Mrs. Grant’s Essay on the Superstitions of the Highlands? May his plagiarisms, however, always be from works equally excellent.” Another: “The foolish parody which has been sent us is inadmissible for two reasons; first, because it is malevolent; and secondly, because it is dull.” We are inclined to think the latter was the decisive reason.

57

This same issue includes the first contribution of a man who was henceforth to wield an important pen in the make-up of the magazine—one William Maginn. He was a brilliant writer, and a reckless, and contributed copiously. Some one has characterized him as “a perfectly ideal magazinist”. The article, “Some Account of the Life and Writings of Ensign and Adjutant Odoherty, Late of the 99th Regiment”¹²¹, well reveals the serio-comic tone of his work which was so popular. Ensign Odoherty was destined to fill many a future page. In fact, Maginn was “a find”!

121 *Ibid.*, V. ii, p. 562

Quoting from this article: “One evening ... I had the misfortune, from some circumstances here

unnecessary to mention, to be conveyed for a night's lodging to the watch-house in Dublin. I had there the good fortune to meet Mr. Odoherly, who was likewise a prisoner. He was seated on a wooden stool, before a table garnished with a great number of empty pots of porter.... With all that urbanity of manner by which he was distinguished, he asked me 'to take a sneaker of his swipes'.¹²² This is the Ensign Odoherly of whom it is said "Never was there a man more imbued with the very soul and spirit of poetry.... Cut off in the bloom of his years, ere the fair and lovely blossoms of his youth had time to ripen into the golden fruit by which the autumn of his days would have been beautified and adorned,"¹²³—etc.—"His wine ... was never lost on him, and, towards the conclusion of the third bottle he was always excessively amusing."¹²⁴ The writer offers one or two specimens of Odoherly's poetry, among them verses to a lady to whom he never declared himself. "This moving expression of passion", we are told, "appears to have produced no effect on the obdurate fair one, who was then fifty-four years of age, with nine children, and a large jointure, which would certainly have made a very convenient addition to the income of Mr. Odoherly."¹²⁵ On being appointed to an ensigncy in the West Indies, he sailed for Jamaica with a certain Captain Godolphin, and has left a charming poetical record of the trip, of which the following will sufficiently impress the reader:

"The captain's wife, she sailed with him, this circumstance I heard of her,
Her brimstone breath, 'twas almost death to come within a yard of her;
With fiery nose, as red as rose, to tell no lies I'll stoop,
She looked just like an admiral with a lantern at his poop."¹²⁶

The whole poem is not quoted, but the latter part of it gives an account "of how Mrs. Godolphin was killed by a cannon ball lodging in her stomach"¹²⁷, as well as other pathetic and moving events. In describing the rest of the stanzas, however, Maginn assures us, "It is sufficient to say they are fully equal to the preceding, and are distinguished by the same quaintness of imagination."¹²⁸

122 Ibid., V. ii, p. 563

123 Ibid., V. ii, p. 562

124 Ibid., V. ii, p. 564

125 Ibid., V. ii, p. 566

126 Same

127 Same

128 Same

This article is followed by "Notices of the Acted Drama in London"¹²⁹, the second of a series of sixteen articles which ran regularly, January 1818 to June 1820.¹³⁰ These are decidedly interesting,—even thrilling, if such a term may be employed,—in that they approach with contemporary assurance names which dramatic legend bids the present day revere:—Mr. Kean, Mrs. Siddons, Miss O'Neil, Mr. C. Kemble, and others. The first of these articles (January 1818) states: "our fixed opinions are few;" ... but continues further that one of these fixed opinions is that "it would be better for all the world if he (Shakespeare) could be thought of as a poet only—not as a writer of acting dramas. If it had not been for Mr. Kean, we should never have desired to see a play of Shakespeare's acted again."¹³¹ As for Desdemona,

"The gentle lady married to the Moor!—

"If we had been left to ourselves we could have fancied her anything or anybody we liked, and have changed the fancy at our will. But, as it is, she is nothing to us but a slim young lady, in white satin, walking about on the boards of a Theatre."¹³² The writer of this article furthermore reminds the public: "we shall ... always have more to say on five minutes of genius, than on five hours of dulness."¹³³ And—"It would also be desirable for both parties, if our Edinburgh readers would not forget that we write from London, and our London ones that we write for Edinburgh."¹³⁴ The second installment, February 1818, of these dramatic notices, comes down to more specific criticisms.—"Perhaps we were more disgusted by this revived play, the Point of Honour, than we should otherwise have been, from being obliged to sit, and see, and hear Miss O'Neil's delightful voice and looks cast away upon it.—Though they have chosen to call it a play, it is one of that herd of Gallo-Germanic monsters which have visited us of late years, under the name of Melo-Dramas;... It makes the ladies in the galleries and dress-boxes shed those maudlin tears that always flow when weak nerves are over-excited."¹³⁵

129 Ibid., V. ii, p. 567

130 Ibid., V. ii-vii

131 Ibid., V. ii, p. 428

132 Same

133 Ibid., V. ii, p. 429

134 Same

135 Ibid., V. ii, p. 567

Needless to say, the whole tone of the magazine was not of this light and popular kind. Much that it published was heavy, some of it dry. All the preceding gives in general the atmosphere of what ensured the success of the budding "Maga". It continued in this manner, but ever mingling the steady, the serious, the grave, with the lively and the scandalous. For instance in the number for April 1818 we find an article "On the Poor Laws of England; and Answers to Queries Transmitted by a Member of Parliament, with a View to Ascertaining the Scottish System"¹³⁶,—some four pages or more of serious discussion. In the same number appears "Letters on the Present State of Germany, Letter I"¹³⁷, earnestly setting forth the causes of discontent in Germany, acknowledging into the bargain, that "the triumph of human intellect over the sway of despotism was never made more manifest than it has been within the last fifty years among the Germans"¹³⁸, and concluding with a paragraph from our modern point of view more than interesting: "If the Germans have a Revolution, it will, I hope and trust, be calm and rational, when compared with that of the French. Its precursors have not been, as in France, ridicule, raillery, derision, impiety; but sober reflection, Christian confidence, and manly resolutions, gathered and confirmed by the experience of many sorrowful years. The sentiment is so universally diffused—so seriously established—so irresistible in its unity,—that I confess I should be greatly delighted, but not very much astonished, to hear of the mighty work being accomplished almost without resistance, and entirely without outrage."¹³⁹ This number likewise includes an article discussing the "Effect of Farm Overseers on the Morals of Farm Servants"¹⁴⁰, another called "Dialogues on Natural Religion"¹⁴¹, and a "Hospital Scene in Portugal. (Extracted from the Journal of a British Officer, in a series of Letters to a Friend)"¹⁴², a graphic description which spares no horrible detail or opportunity for the pathetic.

136 Ibid., V. iii, p. 9

137 Ibid., V. iii, p. 24

138 Ibid., V. iii, p. 25

139 Ibid., V. iii, p. 29

140 Ibid., V. iii, p. 83

141 Ibid., V. iii, p. 90

142 Ibid., V. iii, p. 87

The first article in the number for May 1818 is a brief but strictly specific "Description of the Patent Kaleidoscope, Invented by Dr. Brewster"¹⁴³. This issue too presented the first of a series entitled "The Craniologists Review"¹⁴⁴, No. I being a description of Napoleon's head, supposedly by "a learned German", a Doctor Ulric Sternstare, who may or may not have been a *bona fide* personage. One is apt to suspect, however, that these articles are by our young friend Lockhart. "Maga" owed many a *nomme de plume* to Lockhart's German travels; the subject matter, craniology, is one of his own hobbies, as later revealed in *Peter's Letters*; and the last sentence is more reminiscent of the young scamp than any "learned German"! The article concludes: "I think him a more amiable character than that vile toad Frederick of Prussia, who had no moral faculties on the top of his head; and he will stand a comparison with every conqueror, except Julius Caesar, who perhaps deserved better to be loved than any other person guilty of an equal proportion of mischief."¹⁴⁵

143 Ibid., V. iii, p. 121

144 Ibid., V. iii, p. 146

145 Ibid., V. iii, p. 148

There is a gem of an article in *Blackwood's* for July 1818, the fourth of a series of "Letters of Timothy Tickler to Eminent Literary Characters. Letter IV—To the Editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*".¹⁴⁶ Timothy Tickler was an uncle of John Wilson's, a Mr. Robert Sym; but it is doubtful whether Robert Sym was the author of many, if any, of the compositions laid at the door of the venerable Timothy. This Letter IV is professedly in answer to one from the editor of *Blackwood's*. Obviously it is only another device, and a clever one, to discuss the merits of "Maga", and make a stab at the Whigs and the *Edinburgh Review*. Old Timothy says, "You wish to have my free and candid opinion of your work in general, and I will now try to answer your queries in a satisfactory way. Your Magazine is far indeed from being a 'faultless monster, which the world ne'er saw'; for it is full of faults, and most part of the world has seen it.... Just go on, gradually improving Number after Number, and you will make a fortune."¹⁴⁷ Seeming criticism, then a sudden tooting of the Blackwood horn, seeming praise of Constable, then a flash and a dig, characterize the article throughout. He continues: "You go on to ask me what I think of Constable's Magazine? Oh! my dear Editor, you are fishing for a compliment from old Timothy again!—I have seen nothing at all comparable to it during the last three score and ten years. Thank you, *en passant*,

for the Numbers of it you have sent me. Almost anything does for our minister to read.”¹⁴⁸ He concludes thus: “I shall have an opportunity of writing you again soon ... when I hope to amuse you with certain old-fashioned whimsies of mine about the Whigs of Scotland, whom I see you like no more than myself.”¹⁴⁹

146 Ibid., V. iii, p. 461

147 Same

148 Ibid., V. iii, p. 461-2

This is followed by a very brief sketch of the “Important Discovery of Extensive Veins and Rocks of Chromate of Iron in the Shetland Islands”¹⁴⁹; and this in turn by a “Notice of the Operations Undertaken to Determine the Figure of the Earth, by M. Biot, of the Academy of Sciences, Paris, 1818”,¹⁵⁰ eleven pages in length, and though decidedly statistical, discursive and meditative enough in tone to interest more than the merely scientific reader.

149 Ibid., V. iii, p. 463

150 Same

The less said about the poetry in *Blackwood’s Magazine* the better. Most of it is pretty poor stuff. It is strange, with men like Wordsworth and Coleridge and Byron living, that “Maga” should print such feeble verse—all the more strange when those responsible for the periodical were such venerated of intellectual power and so ably appreciative. The Wordsworthian influence is largely reflected in much of the *Blackwood* verse, in fact the Wordsworthian love for the simple and the commonplace is reflected to such an extent that it assumes the aspect of the commonplace run to seed. Of course, opposition to the Cockney School was pure principle on the part of the magazine; and no matter what fine poetry “the Shelley’s and the Keatses” produced, “Maga” must per necessity say nay! With the exception of some of the verse of James Hogg, and occasional bits like the anonymous “To My Dog”¹⁵¹ in the issue for January 1818, there is practically nothing to hold one spellbound. There is a good deal of satiric verse on the order of that by “Ensign Odoherly”, already sampled. The first twelve volumes of the magazine contain much lengthy and serious verse bearing the signature Δ, whom we know to have been David M. Moir, “The amiable Delta” of the Blackwood group. His poetry takes no hold upon us of the present hour, but strangely enough, men like Tennyson, Jeffrey, Lockhart, found it praiseworthy, and even Wordsworth. It must be of some value if Wordsworth praised it who was not often known to show interest in any poetry but his own.

151 Ibid., V. ii, p. 378

The number for March 1822 began the “Noctes Ambrosianae”¹⁵², which continued till February 1835¹⁵³. These papers are too well known to demand much mention here. Suffice it to say that during their career, they were the most popular and eagerly read feature of all periodical literature of the time.

152 Ibid., V. xi, p. 369

153 Ibid., V. xi-xxxvii

In July 1820, Lockhart reviewed Washington Irving’s “Knickerbocker’s History of New York”¹⁵⁴. All mention of such papers as “Extracts from Mr. Wastle’s Diary”, which made its first appearance in March 1820¹⁵⁵, can scarcely be omitted. It is the Mr. Wastle of *Peter’s Letters* whom Lockhart makes responsible for this series, which, like the compositions of Timothy Tickler, is but another device for merry making over local events and persons.

154 Ibid., V. vii, p. 360

155 Ibid., V. vi, p. 688

Interesting reviews of now famous books, wholesale massacre of now worshipped men, sweeping conclusions historical and political, among them at times such momentous verdicts as appeared in May 1819, that “no great man can have a small nose”¹⁵⁶—such marked the progress and reputation of the magazine. Whether we feel we can exalt wholly and unreservedly *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, we can at least heartily agree with Lockhart when he says: “I think the valuable part of The Materials is so great as to furnish no inconsiderable apology for the mixture of baser things.”¹⁵⁷ Moreover, it did more to counteract the influence of the *Edinburgh Review* than any other periodical living or dead.¹⁵⁸

156 Ibid., V. v, p. 159

157 J. G. Lockhart: *Peter’s Letters*, V. ii, p. 225

158 This discussion makes no pretense at finality. Treatment herein has been cursory and suggestive, not exhaustive. A vast and fruitful field remains untouched.

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