

# SCOTLAND IN LITERATURE

THE KINGDOM OF SCOTLAND was born about 843, when the Scot Kenneth MacAlpin, who ruled the kingdom of Dalriada in the west of Scotland, acquired the throne of the Picts and united Dalriada and Pictland (which comprised much of northern Scotland) under his own rule. The MacAlpin kings expanded eastward and southward to the Lowlands, which had been controlled by Angles from Northumbria since the seventh century. Late in the tenth century they captured Edinburgh, and by 1034, under King Duncan, Scotland's boundaries were pretty much what they are today, with the Scottish-English border running from the Solway on the west to the Tweed on the east.

Scotland was and is geographically divided by what is known as the Highland line, a great geological fault running from southwest to northeast in a roughly diagonal line across the country. The range of hills that mark this fault is punctuated by individual mountains over three thousand feet, Ben Ledi, Ben Vorlich (both part of the scenery of the opening of Scott's narrative poem *The Lady of the Lake*) and Ben Lomond, which rises from the eastern side of the loch of the same name, with its famous bonny banks. Communications between Highlands and Lowlands were for centuries a real problem for those who were trying to govern Scotland as a single unified country. This can be seen at once if you look down from the castle rock at Stirling, which commands the bridge over the Forth which for centuries was the most effective way of getting from the Lowlands to the Highlands. It is no accident that the decisive battle of Scottish history was fought below Stirling Castle, at Bannockburn in 1314, for possession of this vital fortress. The Scottish victory over the English King Edward II and his army at Bannockburn effectively frustrated the English Crown's long continued attempts to establish English overlordship in Scotland and was remembered by later generations of Scots as a great national triumph. John Barbour's fourteenth-century narrative poem *The Bruce* is an account of the exploits of Robert Bruce, the victor of Bannockburn; its praise of freedom ("A! fredome is a noble thing!") and its account of the battle are two of its high points. Four centuries later Robert Burns wrote, to a traditional air, his "Scots wha hae" as Bruce's address to his troops before Bannockburn.

North of the Highland line at its eastern end there are low-lying parts, including substantial parts of Aberdeenshire and Morayshire, and these parts, notably Aberdeen, produced individual contributions to Scottish culture. And the Lowlands were far from being all flat: there are Lowland hills too, the Lammermuirs (scene of those parts of R. L. Stevenson's *Weir of*

Erraid, off Mull, as a young man, and he used the same memories to provide the vivid setting for his short story "The Merry Men". In his story "The Pavilion on the Links" he made dramatic use of the atmosphere of the Scottish east coast. In the masterpiece which he left unfinished at his death, *Weir of Hermiston*, he makes effective use of the difference in atmosphere between late eighteenth-century Edinburgh and the Pentland Hills to the south, relating it to different rhythms of life, different psychological patterns and the conflict between generations.

## Edinburgh

THE EDINBURGH that David Balfour saw was still essentially the old medieval city, built on the ridge that runs from the Castle to the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The old High Street ran eastward along this ridge as far as the Nether Bow, where the Netherbow Port marked the eastern entrance through the wall erected in 1513 after the defeat at Flodden. East of that lay the Canongate and the sloping road to Holyrood. The herringbone pattern, with narrow "wynds" and "closes" going off from the wide main street, remained the basic shape of the city for centuries. Parallel to the High Street to the south was the Cowgate, with the wide Grassmarket at its western end. The city could not expand to the north, until the North Loch that lay where Princes Street Gardens now are was drained and its valley bridged, and this did not happen until the second half of the eighteenth century. Shortly before this there had been some expansion southward, but in the age of the Scottish Enlightenment the town council was more interested in planning an elegant New Town to the north, after it had been made accessible by draining and bridging.

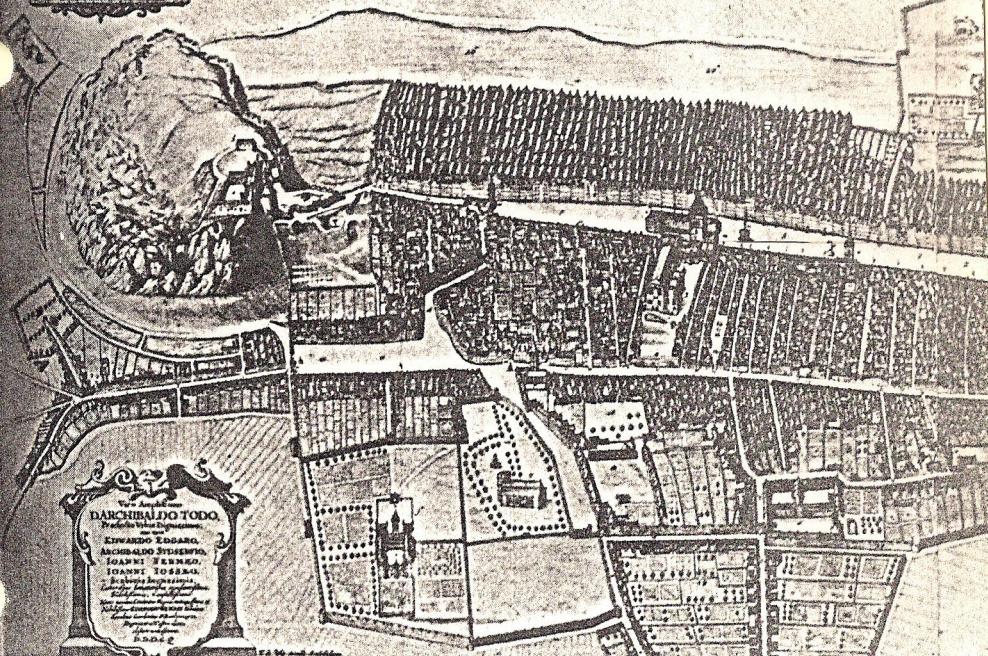
The late eighteenth-century New Town stood for order and elegance, while the Old Town stood for picturesqueness, violence, and unsanitary habits (such as the nightly pitching of refuse out of the windows, with the cry of "Gardyloo" to warn passers-by to take evasive action). The Old Town was distinguished for its tall "lands", multi-storeyed dwelling houses divided into flats, for, with expansion limited by geographical factors, there was nowhere to go but up. The fifteenth-century Edinburgh so colourfully abused by the Middle Scots poet William Dunbar was essentially the same Edinburgh as the city so boisterously described by Robert Fergusson (1750-1744), who died aged twenty-four in the public Bedlam of the city and, while living long enough to see the beginning of the elegantly planned New Town, lived and worked and drank and sang in the Old. Dunbar and Fergusson were essentially Edinburgh poets, the latter

*Hermiston* that are not set in Edinburgh), the Moorfoots, and the picturesque and rugged Border country including Tweeddale and Ettrick Forest and such famous rivers as the Ettrick and the Yarrow, which figure prominently in the famous Border Ballads and haunted the imagination of Wordsworth among others. Scott, though born in Edinburgh, was essentially a man of the Borders, where his ancestors had lived and where he spent much of his childhood. As a young man he made annual "raids" into Liddesdale exploring the countryside, thrilling to ruined towers and collecting much of the material he was to use in his ballad collection, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. For centuries the Borders had a culture of their own: the way of life of the Border leaders consisted largely of making and resisting forays into and from England. Their fortified "peels", whose ruins so delighted Scott, testify to the life of raiding, cattle lifting and constant attack and defence that is reflected in the Border Ballads. The battle of Otterburn, remembered in more than one ballad, was the result of a Scottish raid into the English side of the Border in 1385.

Edinburgh gradually emerged as Scotland's capital in the fifteenth century. Dunfermline, Linlithgow and Stirling were also royal residences and important centres in medieval Lowland Scotland. Edinburgh began as a fortress on a hill, and is first referred to in the poem *Y Gododdin* by the sixth-century Welsh poet Aneirin as Dineidin, "fortress of the hill-slope", the Welsh equivalent of the Scots Gaelic Dunedin. The Gaelic word *dun* (fortress, castle) translates into Old English *burh*: hence when the Northumbrians occupied much of the Lowlands Dunedin became Edinburgh, a name which stuck.

The trouble with having Edinburgh as a capital was its accessibility to English invaders. Anyone who crosses the Border today at Carter Bar and proceeds north by Jedburgh through Lauderdale to Soutra Hill and then looks down on Edinburgh will be able to see at once how invaders were able to march on the city, so much nearer the Scottish-English Border than the distant English capital. When the Scots marched into England they rarely got very far south. When James IV marched south against England in 1513 in support of his French ally he boasted that he would soon reach York, but in fact he and his army were destroyed at Flodden, just south of the Border. This defeat, where Scotland lost her king and the flower of her nobility, long stayed in the Scottish imagination as the greatest national disaster the country had ever experienced, and an old lament for Flodden, "The Flowers o' the forest are a' wede awa'", was rewritten twice by Scottish literary ladies in the eighteenth century. It is known today as a moving pipe tune, played on memorial occasions. The battle itself is vividly described in Scott's *Marmion*.

On two occasions Jacobite armies from Scotland, supporting the exiled Stewart line against the reigning Hanoverians, penetrated some distance into England, but in neither case with any ultimate success. The first



Detail of James Gordon's bird's-eye view of Edinburgh, 1647.

noisy, smelly city with its broad High Street running along the ridge from the Castle on the west towards Holyrood in the east, flanked by narrow closes and wynds. He reproaches Edinburgh merchants for their dirty habits, their quarrelling, and their lack of concern for the good name of the city:

Quhy will ye, merchantis of renoun,  
Lat Edinburgh, your nobill toun,  
For laik of reformatioun  
The commone proffeitt tyne and fame?<sup>1</sup>

Think ye not schame,  
That onie uther regioune  
Sall with dishonour hurt your name!

May nane pas throw your principall gaitis  
For stink of haddockis and of scattis,  
For cryis of carlingis<sup>2</sup> and debaitis,  
For fensum flyttingis<sup>3</sup> of defame:

Think ye not schame,  
Befoir stranjeris of all estaitis  
That sic<sup>4</sup> dishonour hurt your name!