



THE LATE ANDREW LANG

“A gentleman among *canaille*,” was the way in which Andrew Lang referred to Edgar Allan Poe in one of his *Letters to Dead Authors*. He was always rather proud of the characterisation and believed honestly in its truth. There is an old story to the effect that once, in a London literary club, Mr. Lang was expressing himself vigorously to the late Henry Cuyler Bunner on the subject of American letters and men of letters. Bunner was not the man to take these remarks placidly. He had developed symptoms of a rabid Anglophobic nature, and the Englishmen he met seemed to be stepping on every sensitive nerve in his system. Having a pretty caustic tongue of his own he gave quite as good as was sent. Finally Lang, surprised and ruffled by the sturdy counter-attack, asked: “Well, Bunner, are there no Englishmen whom you like?” “Oh, yes,” was the reply, “there are three large classes. Those born in Scotland,

those born in Ireland, and those who stay permanently in Westminster Abbey.”

Not exactly new, but always worth while retelling, is the story of Rebecca Gratz, from whom Scott drew the portrait of that Rebecca who is possibly the most enduring of all his women characters. W. S. Crockett narrates it in *The Scott Originals*, a book which has just been issued in this country by Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons. In one way, the origin of Rebecca is an exception to the general rule, for Sir Walter seldom went far afield for his characters. To confine oneself to *Ivanhoe*, the name Ivanhoe was suggested by an old rhyme: the tragic death of the Templar was founded on a death which took place in Scott's presence in the Edinburgh Parliament House. The name of Front-de-Bœuf was borrowed from a roll of Norman warriors occur-



REBECCA GRATZ

ring in the Auchinleck Manuscript. But Rebecca's *alter ego* belongs to America, a land seldom mentioned in the Waverley novels, and the story of that *alter ego* was told to Scott by the first great literary ambassador of the new world to the old, Washington Irving.

Irving went to Abbotsford in the autumn of 1817, and there spent several of the most delightful days of his life, rambling about the hills and streams, and listening to old tales told as no one but Scott could tell them. Scott was then forty-six, and in the brilliancy of his early fame; Irving was thirty-four, and just rising in his literary reputation by the favourable reception of his *Salmagundi* and the *Knickerbocker History of New York*. To the speedily ripening friendship between the two is owed the character of Rebecca. During one of their many talks on personal matters Irving

confided to Scott an account of the great tragedy of his life—the death of his fiancée, Matilda Hoffman, and the beautiful devotion of her friend, Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia. Matilda Hoffman was seized with consumption, and faded away in a single winter, dying in 1809 at the age of eighteen. Irving was then twenty-six. He lived forty-four years longer, treasuring her memory, sleeping with her Bible and Prayer Book beneath his pillow. After his death there was found in his home at Sunnyside a little repository of which no one but himself knew the secret. It was opened; a memorandum told the story of his sorrow, and there lay the picture of his betrothed; a braid of her golden hair, and a slip of paper, on which he had written “Matilda Hoffman.”

Matilda Hoffman's closest friend, the ministering angel at her sick bed, was Rebecca Gratz. She was the daughter of Michael Gratz, a native of Upper Silesia, who had emigrated to America when a mere youth, and engaged in the business of supplying Indian traders with merchandise. Michael Gratz grew wealthy, married Miriam Symons, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and of his eleven children Rebecca was born on March 4, 1781, and lived to complete



THE GRAVE OF REBECCA GRATZ IN THE JEWISH BURIAL GROUND IN PHILADELPHIA