

1835

The Romance of Real Life

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Repository Citation

Tucker, N. Beverley, "The Romance of Real Life" (1835). *Faculty Publications*. Paper 1288.
<http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/1288>

THE ROMANCE OF REAL LIFE.

"I'll make thee famous with my pen,
And glorious with my sword."

It is said, and truly said, that "Truth is often more incredible than fiction." It is natural too, that we should take a deeper interest in the fortunes of creatures of flesh and blood, who have actually lived and suffered, than in the imaginary sorrows of beings that are themselves but figments of the writer's brain.

Why then do we so rarely meet with any narrative of facts which engages our feelings so deeply as a well wrought fiction? May it not be that in all histories of a romantic character there is, from the very nature of the thing, a degree of mystery which we cannot penetrate; and that the innumerable little incidents, which adorn the pages of a romance, and so aptly illustrate the characters of the parties, are hidden by the veil of domestic privacy? It might be allowable to supply these; but the attempt to do so, is always offensive to the reader. We are disgusted at seeing truth alloyed by fiction, and the fiction always betrays itself. Let a characteristic chit-chat be detailed, and we find ourselves wondering who it was that took notes of the conversation. We read the scene between Ravenswood and Miss Ashton at the haunted fountain, and never ask, whether she rose from her grave, or he emerged from the Kelpie's flow, to describe it to the writer. But such a narrative concerning real persons, would inevitably disgust us; and no writer of any tact would ever attempt it. None above the grade of Parson Weems ever did. There is no wilder romance than his life of Marion. But who reads it? We feel that it profanes the truth of history with fiction, and we throw it away with disgust. Yet it comes nearer to Schiller's masterpiece, "The Robbers," than any thing else. Is it less interesting because the prompting impulse of the hero is virtuous, not criminal? No; but there is just truth enough to keep us always mindful of the falsehood.

The great art, and the great charm of Walter Scott, is that he never describes his characters. He brings us into their society, and makes us know them. But how shall I make known the persons of whom I wish to speak? I can say that he was generous and brave, sincere, and kind, and true, and that she was fair and gentle, and pure and tender. These are but words, and have been repeated till they have lost their meaning. I can say that both loved; but how can I show the passion flashing in the eye, and glowing in the cheek—and how can I give it breath in their own burning words? I heard them not. None heard them. I can say that the hand of destiny was upon them, and tore them asunder, to meet no more. I can even use the words of one whose strains he loved, to tell

"That neither ever found another
To free the hollow heart from paining;"

but how can I develop the mysterious means by which this destiny was accomplished? How could I speak, but in their own words, uttered only to the midnight solitude, the deep yearnings of their hearts—and the noble enthusiasm which made it the task of his life to render glorious the name of him she had honored with her love? Could these details be given truly, what a romance of real life would they form! Let the reader judge from the following lines found among his papers,

when the damps of the grave had at last cooled the fever of his brain.

'Tis sweet, when night is hushed in deep repose;
And hides the Minstrel's form from every eye;
To breathe the thoughts that speech can ne'er disclose,
In all the eloquence of harmony.
The mellow strain pervades the silent air,
And mingles with the sleeper's blissful dream:
The Lover hears the song of maiden fair;
The humble saint, an Angel's holy hymn.
Then sweet to know that she, for whom alone,
Pours the wild stream of plaintive melody,
Recalls the voice of Love in every tone;
Approves its truth, and owns its purity.
Borne on the breeze that cools her glowing cheek,
But fans the ardor of her fevered breast;
Lifts the loose lock that floats upon her neck,
Sports round her couch, and hovers o'er her rest:
Borne on that breeze, it greets her listening ear
With tales of raptured bliss and tender wo;
And tells of Joy and Grief, of Hope, Despair,
And all that love, and Love alone can know.
Her fair companions hear the soothing sound,
But mute to them the voice that speaks to her;
Burns the warm blush, unmarked of all around,
And darkling falls, unseen, the silent tear.
But not unseen of all; for to his eye,
By Fancy's magic light she stands revealed;
Her bosom struggling with the half-breathed sigh,
By the strong pressure of her hand repelled.
The Tear that in the moon-beam sparkles bright;
The pensive look; the outstretched neck of snow;
The Blush, contending with the silver light,
Whose cold pale gleam would quench its fervid glow;
He sees and hears it all. The music's stream
Extends a viewless chord of sympathy,
Thought answers thought; and, lost in Fancy's dream,
Each breast responsive swells with sigh for sigh.
Then O how sweet! warmed by the sacred flame,
Of mutual—true,—but fruitless—hopeless love,
To run the high career of deathless fame,
And mid the world's admiring gaze to move
Reckless of all but her. By midnight lamp,
To turn, with heedful eye, the learned page;
To shake the Senate, or to rule the Camp;
To brave the tempest's blast, or battle's rage!
What is the thought that prompts his studious zeal?
That mans his breast in danger's fearful path?
That nerves his arm to grasp the gory steel,
Despising toil and hardship, wounds and death?
It is that she the impassioned strain will love,
That gives her charms in deathless verse to shine;
Her favoring smile his steadfast faith approve;
Her raptured tears bedew each glowing line.
It is that she will cherish the renown
Of noble deeds achieved her name to grace;
And prize the heart that beat for her alone,
In glory's triumph, and in death's embrace.
'Tis that a grateful nation's loud acclaim
May pour his praises on her favoring ear;
'Tis that the twilight splendor of his name
The widowed darkness of her heart may cheer.

O! ever lovely, loving and beloved ;
 Constant in absence ; constant in despair!
By time unwearied, by caprice unmoved ;
 Thy lover's faith and fame thine only care !
Tho' known to none but thee thy minstrel's name,
 Or who the fair that caused his tender pain ;
All undistinguished by the voice of fame,
 The bard who sung ; the maid that waked the strain.
Yet may'st thou catch the unconscious sympathy
 Of some soft nymph, who, from her lover's tongue,
Hears, with averted look and blush and sigh,
 Her heart's fond secret in this artless song.
But were I skilled to weave the immortal verse,
 Which after ages with applause would read ;
Thy praise in fitting accents I'd rehearse,
 And with unfading bay would crown thy head.
Then should my Laura's charms survive the tomb,
 In strains like that the fairy bulbul sings,
When all unscen he wakes the midnight gloom,
 Hovering o'er beauty's grave on viewless wings.