

delight. I was intoxicated with the fiery narratives of the blind minstrel,—with his fierce breathings of hot, intolerant patriotism, and his stories of astonishing prowess; and, glorying in being a Scot, and the countryman of Wallace and the Graham, I longed for a war with the Southron, that the wrongs and sufferings of these noble heroes might yet be avenged. All I had previously heard and read of the marvels of foreign parts, or the glories of modern battles, seemed tame and commonplace compared with the incidents in the life of Wallace and I never after vexed my mother by wishing myself big enough to be a sailor. My Uncle Sandy, who had some taste for the refinements of poetry, would fain have led me on from the exploits of Wallace to the “Life of the Bruce,” which, in the form of a not very vigorous imitation of Dryden’s “Virgil,” by one Harvey, was bound up in the same volume, and which my uncle deemed the better-written life of the two. And so far as the mere amenities of style were concerned, he was, I dare say, right. But I could not agree with him. Harvey was by much too fine and too learned for me; and it was not until some years after, when I was fortunate enough to pick up one of the later editions of Barbour’s “Bruce,” that the Hero-King of Scotland assumed his right place in my mind beside its Hero-Guardian. There are stages of development in the immature youth of individuals, that seem to correspond with stages of development in the immature youth of nations; and the recollections of this early time enable me, in some measure, to understand how it was that, for hundreds of years, Blind Harry’s “Wallace,” with its rude and naked narrative, and its exaggerated incident, should have been, according to Lord Hailes, the Bible of the Scotch people.

I quitted the dame’s school at the end of the first twelve-month, after mastering that grand acquirement of my life,—the art of holding converse with books; and was transferred straightforth to the grammar school of the parish, at which there attended at the time about a hundred and twenty boys, with a class of about thirty individuals more, much looked down upon by the others, and not deemed greatly worth the