

Scott's letter to Gilford, the intended editor, was full of excellent advice. It was dated "Edinburgh, October 25, 1808." We quote from it several important passages:

"John Murray, of Fleet Street," says Scott, "a young bookseller of capital and enterprise, and with more good sense and propriety of sentiment than fall to the share of most of the trade, made me a visit at Ashestiel a few weeks ago; and as I found he had had some communication with you upon the subject, I did not hesitate to communicate my sentiments to him on this and some other points of the plan, and I thought his ideas were most liberal and satisfactory.

"The office of Editor is of such importance, that had you not been pleased to undertake it, I fear the plan would have fallen wholly to the ground. The full power of control must, of course, be vested in the editor for selecting, curtailing, and correcting the contributions to the Review. But this is not all; for, as he is the person immediately responsible to the bookseller that the work (amounting to a certain number of pages, more or less) shall be before the public at a certain time, it will be the editor's duty to consider in due turn the articles of which each number ought to consist, and to take measures for procuring them from the persons best qualified to write upon such and such subjects. But this is sometimes so troublesome, that I foresee with pleasure you will soon be obliged to abandon your resolution of writing nothing yourself. At the same time, if you will accept of my services as a sort of jackal or lion's provider, I will do all in my power to assist in this troublesome department of editorial duty.

"But there is still something behind, and that of the last consequence. One great resource to which the Edinburgh editor turns himself, and by which he gives popularity even to the duller articles of his Review, is accepting contributions from persons of inferior powers of writing, provided they understand the books to which their criticisms relate; and as such are often of stupefying mediocrity, he renders them palatable by throwing in a handful of spice, namely, any lively paragraph or entertaining illustration that occurs to him in reading them over. By this sort of veneering he converts, without loss of time or hindrance to business, articles, which in their original state might hang in the market, into such goods as are not likely to disgrace those among which they are placed. This seems to be a point in which an editor's assistance is of the last consequence, for those who possess the knowledge necessary to review books of research or abstruse disquisitions, are very often unable to put the criticisms into a readable, much more a pleasant and captivating form; and as their science cannot be attained 'for the nonce,' the only remedy is to supply their deficiencies, and give their lucubrations a more popular turn.

"There is one opportunity possessed by you in a particular degree--that of access to the best sources of political information. It would not, certainly, be advisable that the work should assume, especially at the outset, a professed political character. On the contrary, the articles on science and miscellaneous literature ought to be of such a quality as might fairly challenge competition with the best of our contemporaries. But as the real reason of instituting the publication is the disgusting and deleterious doctrine with which the most popular of our Reviews disgraces its pages, it is essential to consider how this warfare should be managed. On this ground, I hope it is not too much to expect from those who have the power of assisting us, that they should on topics of great national interest furnish the reviewers, through the medium of their editor, with accurate views of points of fact, so far as they are fit to be made public. This is the most delicate and yet most essential part of our scheme.

"On the one hand, it is certainly not to be understood that we are to be held down to advocate upon all occasions the cause of administration. Such a dereliction of independence would render us entirely useless for the purpose we mean to serve. On the other hand, nothing will render the work more interesting than the public learning, not from any vaunt of ours, but from their own observation, that we have access to early and accurate information on points of fact. The Edinburgh Review has profited much by the pains which the Opposition party have taken to possess the writers of all the information they could give them on public matters. Let me repeat that you, my dear sir, from enjoying the confidence of Mr. Canning, and other persons in power, may easily obtain the confidential information necessary to give credit to the work, and communicate it to such as you may think proper to employ in laying it before the public."

Mr. Scott further proceeded, in his letter to Mr. Gifford, to discuss the mode and time of publication, the choice of subjects, the persons to be employed as contributors, and the name of the proposed Review, thus thoroughly identifying himself with it.

"Let our forces," he said, "for a number or two, consist of volunteers or amateurs, and when we have acquired some reputation, we shall soon levy and discipline our forces of the line. After all, the matter is become very serious--eight or nine thousand copies of the Edinburgh Review are regularly distributed, merely because there is no other respectable and independent publication of the kind. In this city (Edinburgh), where there is not one Whig out of twenty men who read the work, many hundreds are sold; and how long the generality of readers will continue to dislike politics, so artfully mingled with information

and amusement, is worthy of deep consideration. But it is not yet too late to stand in the breach; the first number ought, if possible, to be out in January, and if it can burst among them like a bomb, without previous notice, the effect will be more striking.

"Of those who might be intrusted in the first instance you are a much better judge than I am. I think I can command the assistance of a friend or two here, particularly William Erskine, the Lord Advocate's brother-in-law and my most intimate friend. In London, you have Malthus, George Ellis, the Roses, *_cum pluribus aliis_*. Richard Heber was with me when Murray came to my farm, and, knowing his zeal for the good cause, I let him into our counsels. In Mr. Frere we have the hopes of a potent ally. The Rev. Reginald Heber would be an excellent coadjutor, and when I come to town I will sound Matthias. As strict secrecy would of course be observed, the diffidence of many might be overcome. For scholars you can be at no loss while Oxford stands where it did; and I think there will be no deficiency in the scientific articles."