

**THREE CENTURIES OF  
SCOTTISH LITERATURE.  
VOL. I. THE REFORMATION  
TO THE UNION**

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Three Centuries of Scottish Literature. Vol. I. The Reformation to the Union by Hugh Walker

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SCOTTISH LITERATURE

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VOL. I

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## PREFACE.

THE history of Scottish literature (under which term Gaelic literature is not here included) is divisible into two great periods. The first extends from the dawn of letters in Scotland to the time when the desire for religious reform began to affect literature vitally; the second starts then, and extends down almost to the present day. Practically, the name of Lindsay is the first in the second period. Though he lived and wrote before the formal triumph of the Reformation, his principal works were deeply influenced by the spirit of religious reform; and there is none of his predecessors of whom this can be said. The lower limit of the period is less easily fixed. It has been frequently said, and I think it is substantially true, that a really national literature can no longer exist on a great scale in Scotland. There have been indeed some very remarkable and most distinctively Scottish books published in recent years. It would be most ungrateful on the part of any Scotchman to ignore or to underrate such work as that of Mr. R. L. Stevenson in his *Kidnapped*, of "Hugh

Haliburton" in his *Horace in Homespun*, or of Mr. J. M. Barrie in his pictures of Thrums. But probably these writers would be among the first to acknowledge that certain changes which have passed over the country since the days of Scott have narrowed the range of such work. The cities and the upper classes have been largely Anglicised. The Scotland of Lord Cockburn's Memoirs, with its Scotch-speaking Judges of Session, and its ladies of rank, entirely Scotch both in language and habits, is gone. Well marked national peculiarities are now to be found principally in the remoter and quieter rural districts, and in the lower classes of society. On the whole, it seems best to regard Scott as the last great figure in the Scotland which was the outcome of the Reformation.

Of the two periods thus defined, I have tried to deal only with the second. The history of the earlier period has been written within recent years; and probably popular curiosity on the subject is satisfied. There is however no book which professes to do what I have here attempted for the second period. My object has been to trace the literary movement for the three centuries between Lindsay and Scott. In order to do so, I have not thought it necessary to criticise, or even to mention, all the writers who flourished in Scotland during the period in question. I have preferred to single out those writers or groups of writers who seemed best to illustrate different aspects of literature, or different stages of its progress. Some authors extremely interesting in themselves, as for example Alexander Montgomery and Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, are passed over because they were somewhat isolated, and were not individually great enough to exercise a marked

influence. A number of much smaller men are criticised, because they happen to be members of groups which are collectively important. I have omitted others again, like the historians of the eighteenth century, because it seems to me that they almost entirely denationalised themselves. It is not merely that they wrote in English: several of the chapters which follow are devoted to men who likewise wrote in English. But I think that in the Anglo-Scottish poets of the eighteenth century there may be detected a flavour of nationality, which is less easily perceived in Hume and Robertson; while their brethren of the previous century are interesting just because their imitation of English models shows what, but for the struggle between Presbytery and Episcopacy, the union under James would probably have made Scottish literature. There are others, like James Hogg, in whom the national characteristics are prominent, and who are nevertheless omitted, because there is very little in them which cannot be illustrated under the greater names of Scott and Burns. My aim in short has been, not to include every name, but rather to illustrate every considerable movement.

A word of explanation may be necessary as to the scope of this book in respect of language. I have stated above the reason which has induced me to examine many who wrote in English; but it may seem peculiar that I have devoted a whole chapter to a writer in Latin. The reason is that in a literature so limited, comparatively, as that of Scotland, Buchanan is too great a figure, both for his writings and for his personality, to be neglected. In the same way, in English literature, the Latin writings of