

**THE SCOTT  
LIBRARY; ESSAYS  
BY SAINTE-BEUVE**

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The Scott Library; Essays by Sainte-Beuve by Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve & Elizabeth Lee

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**CHARLES AUGUSTIN SAINTE-BEUVE & ELIZABETH LEE**

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THE SCOTT LIBRARY.

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE personality of men like Dante, Milton, Shelley, Charles Lamb, Heine, is in many ways even greater than their work; our interest in the man equals our delight in the productions of his art. Others again, either because we know very little of their personal history, or because what we do know is not attractive, we prefer to study only in their work. Sainte-Beuve's personality is not very distinct; his inconsistencies help to obscure his individuality, and are not in themselves of a kind to interest us deeply. Directly or even before the grave had closed over him men began to quarrel and dispute about his reputation both as an individual and a man of letters; every French newspaper and journal published many columns of biography and criticism; journalists took the opportunity of revenging themselves for real or supposed injuries, or sang hymns of praise in gratitude for benefits. Each one of them had his own peculiar method of judging the man and his work. We have no intention here of entering into the controversy, and shall only set down the facts of his life because they help us to appreciate at its right value his powerful and original mind. We seek him in the work he has produced, work which stamps him as the greatest literary critic of the age, maybe of all time. In amount and variety it is enormous; sixty volumes scarcely suffice to contain it, and he was by turns poet, novelist, historian, critic, and philosopher, knowing almost all there was to know of literature, politics, history, religion, art, and science.

Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve was born at Boulogne-sur-Mer, December 23, 1804. His father was a native of Picardy, and his mother, Augustine Coilliot, was of English descent. She was forty years old at the time of her marriage, and a few months afterwards her husband died. Sainte-Beuve was thus a posthumous child, inheriting from his half-English mother his red hair and robust frame, and perhaps his love and admiration of English literature. But contrary to what has generally been proved the rule in regard to the mothers of great men, Madame Sainte-Beuve seems to have had no intellectual tastes, and to have been unable to recognise her son's talent until he was elected a member of the French Academy. From his father then must Sainte-Beuve have inherited his love of books and his intellectual power. The comments and notes made by the elder Sainte-Beuve in the margins of his books prove him to have been a man of considerable learning and literary taste. Sainte-Beuve greatly revered this father whom he never knew. "I was born in a time of mourning; my cradle rested on a coffin. . . . My father left me his soul, mind, and taste written on every margin," he tells us in the *Consolations*. Brought up partly by his mother, and partly by an old aunt, his father's sister, his childhood was peaceful and studious. At his first school he made a lasting friendship with Eustache Barbe, afterwards Abbé Barbe, and his letters to him, comparatively few as they are in number, extend over almost the whole of his life. They are sympathetic and true, and form the most delightful part of his large correspondence; in them is seen the best side of the man.

At the age of fourteen he went to Paris to continue his studies, and won prizes at college for history and Latin verse. On leaving college he studied medicine for three years (1824-27). His resources were small, and he had to