

**ENGLISH MEN OF
LETTERS. SIR
WALTER SCOTT**

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English Men of Letters. Sir Walter Scott by Richard H. Hutton & John Morley

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RICHARD H. HUTTON & JOHN MORLEY

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EDITED BY JOHN MORLEY

SIR WALTER SCOTT



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BY

RICHARD H. HUTTON.

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1878

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PREFATORY NOTE.

It will be observed that the greater part of this little book has been taken in one form or other from Lockhart's *Life of Sir Walter Scott*, in ten volumes. No introduction to Scott would be worth much in which that course was not followed. Indeed, excepting Sir Walter's own writings, there is hardly any other great source of information about him; and that is so full, that hardly anything needful to illustrate the subject of Scott's life remains untouched. As regards the only matters of controversy,—Scott's relations to the Ballantynes, I have taken care to check Mr. Lockhart's statements by reading those of the representatives of the Ballantyne brothers; but with this exception, Sir Walter's own works and Lockhart's life of him are the great authorities concerning his character and his story.

Just ten years ago Mr. Gladstone, in expressing to the late Mr. Hope Scott the great delight which the perusal of Lockhart's life of Sir Walter had given him, wrote, "I may be wrong, but I am vaguely under the impression that it has never had a really wide circulation. If so, it is the saddest pity, and I should greatly like (without any censure on its present length) to see published an abbreviation of it." Mr. Gladstone did not then know that as long ago as 1848 Mr. Lockhart did

himself prepare such an abbreviation, in which the original eighty-four chapters were compressed into eighteen, —though the abbreviation contained additions as well as compressions. But even this abridgment is itself a bulky volume of 800 pages, containing, I should think, considerably more than a third of the reading in the original ten volumes, and is not, therefore, very likely to be preferred to the completer work. In some respects I hope that this introduction may supply, better than that bulky abbreviation, what Mr. Gladstone probably meant to suggest,—some slight miniature taken from the great picture with care enough to tempt on those who look on it to the study of the fuller life, as well as of that image of Sir Walter which is impressed by his own hand upon his works.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.	
	PAGE
ANCESTRY, PARENTAGE, AND CHILDHOOD	1
CHAPTER II.	
YOUTH—CHOICE OF A PROFESSION	18
CHAPTER III.	
LOVE AND MARRIAGE	30
CHAPTER IV.	
EARLIEST POETRY AND BORDER MINSTRELSY	86
CHAPTER V.	
SCOTT'S MATURER POEMS	44
CHAPTER VI.	
COMPANIONS AND FRIENDS	60
CHAPTER VII.	
FIRST COUNTRY HOMES	69
CHAPTER VIII.	
REMOVAL TO ABBOTSFORD, AND LIFE THERE	75

	PAGE
CHAPTER IX.	
SCOTT'S PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE BALLANTYNES	84
CHAPTER X.	
THE WAVERLEY NOVELS	94
CHAPTER XI.	
SCOTT'S MORALITY AND RELIGION	122
CHAPTER XII.	
DISTRACTIONS AND AMUSEMENTS AT ABBOTSFORD	128
CHAPTER XIII.	
SCOTT AND GEORGE IV.	134
CHAPTER XIV.	
SCOTT AS A POLITICIAN	139
CHAPTER XV.	
SCOTT IN ADVERSITY	148
CHAPTER XVI.	
THE LAST YEAR	162
CHAPTER XVII.	
THE END OF THE STRUGGLE	173

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

CHAPTER I.

ANCESTRY, PARENTAGE, AND CHILDHOOD.

SIR WALTER SCOTT was the first literary man of a great riding, sporting, and fighting clan. Indeed, his father—a Writer to the Signet, or Edinburgh solicitor—was the first of his race to adopt a town life and a sedentary profession. Sir Walter was the lineal descendant—six generations removed—of that Walter Scott commemorated in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, who is known in Border history and legend as Auld Wat of Harden. Auld Wat's son William, captured by Sir Gideon Murray, of Elibank, during a raid of the Scotts on Sir Gideon's lands, was, as tradition says, given his choice between being hanged on Sir Gideon's private gallows, and marrying the ugliest of Sir Gideon's three ugly daughters, Meikle-mouthed Meg, reputed as carrying off the prize of ugliness among the women of four counties. Sir William was a handsome man. He took three days to consider the alternative proposed to him, but chose life with the large-mouthed lady in the end; and found her, according to the tradition which the poet, her descendant, has transmitted, an excel-