

**STUDIES OF A
BIOGRAPHER. IN FOUR
VOLUMES. VOLUME II**

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Studies of a Biographer. In Four Volumes. Volume II by Sir Leslie Stephen

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STUDIES OF A BIOGRAPHER

The Story of Scott's Ruin

MR. ANDREW LANG, in his *Life of J. G. Lockhart*, has succeeded, in spite of the want of adequate materials, in drawing a most interesting portrait. Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, though it made all readers love the subject, did not persuade every one to love the author. The man, indeed, who could display such reverent and loyal affection was certainly lovable; and yet he contrived to keep his own fine qualities in the background. Lockhart, in truth, was one of the men who are predestined to be generally misunderstood. He was an intellectual aristocrat, fastidious and over-sensitive, with very fine perceptions, but endowed with rather too hearty a scorn of fools as well as of folly. Circumstances had tempted him in early youth to give free utterance to his contempt, and occasionally, moreover, to forget that courtesy is due even to vulgar antagonists. In later life, the shyness

due to a sensitive nature, was mistaken, as is so often the case, for supercilious pride, and the unwillingness to wear his heart on his sleeve for coldness and want of sympathy. Such men have to be content with scanty appreciation from outside, and Lockhart had to pass for an incarnation of the cynical variety of Toryism. Mr. Lang, it is to be hoped, has appealed successfully from the erroneous judgment hitherto too often passed. There is, however, one point upon which I am forced to think that he has been a little too lenient. It concerns Lockhart's controversy¹ in regard to the causes of Scott's financial difficulties. In the *Life of Scott* Lockhart had the very difficult task of accounting for his father-in-law's misfortunes, and it was of course to be expected that the other persons concerned should not be satisfied with the statement. If, indeed, he was not quite impartial, it is impossible to blame him severely for dealing a little too tenderly with the character which he so loved and honoured. Mr. Lang defends him, too, upon the ground that he had in his first edition told the story honestly, although, in the heat of controversy, he incautiously accepted a

¹*The Ballantyne Humbug Handled, etc.* (1839) is an answer to a "refutation" of Lockhart's statements in the *Life* by Ballantyne's trustees. They made a "reply," to which Lockhart gave no answer.

position attributed to him by his antagonists. Instead of replying, as he might have replied, "You are only repeating my own admissions," he tried to withdraw from the admissions which he had virtually made. There is, I think, much truth in this, though I cannot discuss the point. But I also think it impossible to read Lockhart's pamphlet without regret, not only because, as Mr. Lang of course agrees, its insolent tone betrays excessive irritation, but because it is really, if unintentionally, unjust to other persons concerned. The interest of the question consists chiefly in its bearing upon Scott's character, though Mr. Lang's main concern in the matter is of course with Lockhart. Having lately had occasion to go over the controversy with a view to an article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, I venture to say something of Scott's share in the matter. The shortest plan is to tell what seems to me to be the true story, from which it may incidentally appear how far it was slurred or softened in Lockhart's hands. That, however, is for me a matter of minor importance.

First, I must notice one difficulty. Mr. Lang observes that he is not an adept in financial matters, and is unable to unravel the mysteries of complex accounts dealing with elaborate commercial transactions. I am certainly not more