

**SIR WILLIAM
HERSCHEL: HIS
LIFE AND WORKS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649705504

Sir William Herschel: His Life and Works by Edward S. Holden

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EDWARD S. HOLDEN

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SIR WILLIAM HERSCHEL

HIS LIFE AND WORKS

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BY *Simon Stevin*
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UNITED STATES NAVAL OBSERVATORY, WASHINGTON



NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
743 AND 745 BROADWAY
1881

PREFACE.

IN the following account of the life and works of Sir WILLIAM HERSCHEL, I have been obliged to depend strictly upon data already in print—the *Memoir* of his sister, his own scientific writings and the memoirs and diaries of his cotemporaries. The review of his published works will, I trust, be of use. It is based upon a careful study of all his papers in the *Philosophical Transactions* and elsewhere.

A life of HERSCHEL which shall be satisfactory in every particular can only be written after a full examination of the materials which are preserved at the family seat in England; but as two generations have passed since his death, and as no biography yet exists which approaches to completeness, no apology seems to me to be needed for a conscien-

tious attempt to make the best use of the scanty material which we do possess.

This study will, I trust, serve to exhibit so much of his life as belongs to the whole public. His private life belongs to his family, until the time is come to let the world know more of the greatest of practical astronomers and of the inner life of one of its most profound philosophers,—of a great and ardent mind, whose achievements are and will remain the glory of England.

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LIFE AND WORKS
OF
WILLIAM HERSCHEL.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY YEARS ; 1738-1772.

OF the great modern philosophers, that one of whom least is known, is WILLIAM HERSCHEL. We may appropriate the words which escaped him when the barren region of the sky near the body of *Scorpio* was passing slowly through the field of his great reflector, during one of his sweeps, to express our own sense of absence of light and knowledge : *Hier ist wahrhaftig ein Loch im Himmel.*

HERSCHEL prepared, about the year 1818, a biographical memorandum, which his sister CAROLINA placed among his papers.

This has never been made public. The only thoroughly authentic sources of information in possession of the world, are a letter written by HERSCHEL himself, in answer to a pressing request for a sketch of his life, and the *Memoir and Correspondence of CAROLINE HERSCHEL* (London, 1876), a precious memorial not only of his life, but of one which otherwise would have remained almost unknown, and one, too, which the world could ill afford to lose. The latter, which has been ably edited by Mrs. MARY CORNWALLIS HERSCHEL,* is the only source of knowledge in regard to the early years of the great astronomer, and together with the all too scanty materials to be gained from a diligent search through the biography of the time, affords the data for those personal details of his life, habits, and character, which seem to complete the distinct, though partial conception

* Wife of Major JOHN HERSCHEL, of the Royal Engineers, grandson of Sir WILLIAM.