

**THE INTIMATE LIFE
OF SIR
WALTER SCOTT**

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The intimate life of Sir Walter Scott by Archibald Stalker

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NOTE

THE chapter on Sir Walter's Father and Mother has appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine*; that on Tom Purdie has been published in *Chambers's Journal*, and that on Sir Walter's First Love in *The Scots Pictorial*.

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A. S.

EDINBURGH,

1st January 1921.

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CHAPTER I

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

THERE have been many Lives of Scott, though there is only one *Life*, which is Lockhart's; and considering the number of those Lives and the fact that it is nearly a hundred years since Sir Walter died, the natural inquiry of the twentieth centurion is, "What is there new to say about Scott? Is there anything new?"

There is, indeed, a great deal that has never been interpreted before, and there is still more that has never yet received the emphasis it deserves; but there is another consideration. Readers of books are yet alive who remember the time when it was still considered ridiculous to take Sir Walter's own estimate of his literary value. Year by year the world has been coming round to his way of thinking, and those who go to gaze now on the bright landscape he created on Tweed can join with him in his profound estimate of the tasks he did—"My oaks will outlast my laurels."

But just because his long poems are uninspired, and because people after a hundred years have admitted the truth of his opinion that what he called his "big bow-wow" method of writing prose was apt to become intolerable, there is room for a new estimate of Sir Walter. After all, let the literary say what they please, books are a small affair, and this was Sir Walter's opinion as well as mine. Architecture, sculpture, music, have profundities and sublimities that . . . At any rate, life is more than books, and, though Sir Walter's have

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lost a good deal of their freshness, his joyous personal life, which has never before been told as a consecutive narrative, has lost not a shade of its brightness. That is the justification of this book.

For this presentation of Sir Walter is new. It is not the picture of him that is given in the books of last century, and it may be unsatisfactory in the eyes of 2020, but it is a twentieth-century portrait that contains lights and shadows obscure or absent in previous representations. This is the first time, too, that his first love has been discussed with common sense, and that anyone has taken the trouble to master the details of Scott's involved connection with the business firms and with their failure.

It cannot be emphasised too much or too often that Sir Walter thought a great deal more of his daily life, of his friends, sports, plantings and jokes than of books, his own or anybody's else. Accordingly it is not surprising that his books should not have the stuff of endurance in them, nor, on the other hand, is it wonderful that his daily life has provided his most satisfying story. Lockhart, when he wrote the *Life of Scott*, called himself "the compiler of these pages," and substantially he spoke truly. The book is chiefly composed of Scott's letters and journal, though some of Lockhart's own reminiscences are lifelike and poignant.

There is no other biography in our language to touch it except the surpassing *Diary of Samuel Pepys*. Boswell's *Johnson*, if one omits some too meagre details of our dearest Oliver, has always seemed to me rather verbiage for the book-worm than the substance of life, though a masterpiece of presentation. *The Life of Scott* is Scott's best book. He lived it and he wrote it, a story that I can hardly imagine England or Scotland growing weary of.

I have repeated few of the best-known stories told by or about Scott, but some of these ancient favourites have been essential to the presentation of his intimate life. Much material has been found in footnotes, asides, and stray places that reveal by accident the spirit and substance of the household, while all the mental energy of the writer is concentrated on the elaboration of matters of gravity and unimportance.