

LANDOR

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Landor by Sidney Colvin

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SIDNEY COLVIN

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BY

SIDNEY COLVIN, M.A.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE,
AND SLADE PROFESSOR OF FINE ART, CAMBRIDGE.

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1881.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE standard and indispensable authority on the life of Landor is the work of the late Mr. John Forster, viz. :—

1. FORSTER, John: *Walter Savage Landor, a Biography*, London, Chapman and Hall; first edition in 2 vols., 1869; second edition, abridged, forming vol. i. of the collected "*Life and Works of Walter Savage Landor*" in 8 vols., 1876.

Mr. Forster was appointed by Landor himself as his literary executor; he had command of all the necessary materials for his task, and his book is written with knowledge, industry, affection, and loyalty of purpose. But it is cumbersome in comment, inconclusive in criticism, and vague on vital points, especially on points of bibliography, which in the case of Landor are frequently both interesting and obscure. The student of Landor must supplement the work of Mr. Forster from other sources, of which the principal are the following:—

2. HUNT, J. E. Leigh, *Lord Byron and his contemporaries*. London, 1827.
3. BLESSINGTON, Marguerite, Countess of, *The Idler in Italy*, 2 vols., London, 1839. Lady Blessington's first impressions of Landor are reported in vol. ii. of the above; her correspondence with him, and an *Imaginary Conversation* by Landor not elsewhere reprinted, will be found in
4. MADDEX, R. R., *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington*, 3 vols. London, 1855.
5. *The New Spirit of the Age*, edited by R. H. Horne. 2 vols. London, 1844. The article on Landor in vol. i. of the above is by Miss Barrett, afterwards Mrs. Browning, supplemented by the editor.

6. EMERSON, R. W., *English Traits*. London, 1856.
7. FIELD, Kate, *Last Days of Walter Savage Landor*, a series of three articles in the *Atlantic Monthly Magazine* for 1866.
8. ROBINSON, H. Crabbe, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of*, edited by Thomas Sadler, 3 vols. London, 1869.
9. DICKENS, Charles: A short article on Forster's "Biography" in *All the Year Round* for 1869, supplementing with some striking physiognomic touches the picture of Landor drawn by the same hand in "*Bleak House*" (see below, p. 178).
10. LINTON, Mrs. E. Lynn: *Reminiscences of Walter Savage Landor*, in *Fraser's Magazine* for July, 1870; by far the best account of the period of Landor's life to which it refers.
11. HOUGHTON, Lord: *Monographs*. London, 1873.

I forbear to enumerate the various articles on Landor and his works which I have consulted in reviews and magazines between the dates 1798 and 1870; several of the most important are mentioned in the text. In addition to the materials which exist in print, I have had the advantage of access to some unpublished. To Mr. Robert Browning in particular my thanks are due for his great kindness in allowing me to make use of the collection of books and manuscripts left him by Landor, including Landor's own annotated copies of some of his rarest writings, and a considerable body of his occasional jottings and correspondence. Mr. Augustus J. C. Hare was also good enough to put into my hands a number of letters written by Landor to his father and to himself. To Lord Houghton I am indebted for help of various kinds, and to Mr. Swinburne for his most friendly pains in looking through the sheets of my work, and for many valuable suggestions and corrections.

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LANDOR.

CHAPTER I.

6p
BIRTH AND PARENTAGE—SCHOOL—COLLEGE.
(1775.—1794.)

Few men have ever impressed their peers so much, or the general public so little, as WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR. Of all celebrated authors, he has hitherto been one of the least popular. Nevertheless he is among the most striking figures in the history of English literature; striking alike by his character and his powers. Personally, Landor exercised the spell of genius upon every one who came near him. His gifts, attainments, impetuosities, his originality, his force, his charm, were all of the same conspicuous and imposing kind. Not to know what is to be known of so remarkable a man is evidently to be a loser. Not to be familiar with the works of so noble a writer is to be much more of a loser still.

The place occupied by Landor among English men of letters is a place apart. He wrote on many subjects and in many forms, and was strong both in imagination and in criticism. He was equally master of Latin and English, and equally at home in prose and verse. He cannot

properly be associated with any given school, or indeed with any given epoch, of our literature, as epochs are usually counted, but stands alone, alike by the character of his mind and by the tenour and circumstances of his life. It is not easy to realize that a veteran who survived to receive the homage of Mr. Swinburne, can have been twenty-five years old at the death of Cowper, and forty-nine at the death of Byron. Such, however, was the case of Landor. It is less than seventeen years since he died, and less than eighteen since he published his last book; his first book had been published before Buonaparte was consul. His literary activity extended, to be precise, over a period of sixty-eight years (1795—1863). Neither was his career more remarkable for its duration than for its proud and consistent independence. It was Landor's strength as well as his weakness that he was all his life a law to himself, writing in conformity with no standards and in pursuit of no ideals but his own.

So strong, indeed, was this instinct of originality in Landor that he declines to fall in with the thoughts or to repeat the words of others even when to do so would be most natural. Though an insatiable and retentive reader, in his own writing he does not choose to deal in the friendly and commodious currency of quotation, allusion, and reminiscence. Everything he says must be his own and nothing but his own. On the other hand it is no part of Landor's originality to provoke attention, as many even of illustrious writers have done, by emphasis or singularity of style. Arbitrary and vehement beyond other men in many of his thoughts, in their utterance he is always sober and decorous. He delivers himself of whatever is in his mind with an air, to borrow an expression of his