# SKETCHES OF BRITAIN

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Sketches of Britain by James Howie

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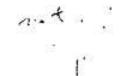
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## **JAMES HOWIE**

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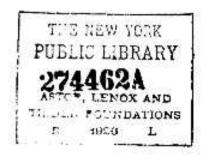
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## SKETCHES OF BRITAIN.

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### BOOK I.

BEFTAEN, my country ! all thy varied scenes-Thy northern mountains, and thy southern plains, In smiling sunshine seen, or gloomy shade, I sing, advent'rous; changing oft my theme, And mingling with it still my tears or joy. How often, breathless and bedewed with sweat, Have I, Ben-nevis, scaled thy frowning cliffs, And from thy summit, looking far abroad, Beheld in prospect grand, a vast array Of mountains and of hills, of every form And every height, lowly or tall, or round, Fantastic, or sublime, piercing the blue Of heaven's vast canopy, or sleeping calm Beneath the shadow of the sunny clouds; More stately far, and not less numerous, Than the assemblage vast of buildings seen By him who from St Paul's, on summer's morn, Colors down on London: for, as cities, spires, ×

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Domes, pinnacles, and steeples, rise sublime Above the abodes of men; so do the grand And rocky mountains of the north, ascend Above the lesser hills, that round about Encircle them in thousands! Who can tell Their number, or their height, as on this bright And sunny day they stand, in order dread, Around me and below me! Yet a few, A very few, of Scotia's hills are there. Go northward, climb Ben-wyvis, look abroad-Another group, far as the eye can reach, Dazzles our vision. Yet again descend, And, journeying southward, climb Benlomond's top-Another crowd display their noble forms In endless prospect. Caledonia! These are thy martial battlements !--- by these Guarded, thy hardy sons in days of old Laughed at the shaking of the Roman spear, And mocked the Dane and Saxon! Grampian heights! Bare, rugged, grey, who shall attempt to paint The changes ye exhibit, as the day Revolves, or weather shifts? At sunrise bright, The curling mists, in which the sombre night Had shrouded you, roll off in massy wreaths, Spangled with gold ; seen from the lofty height On which I take my stand, it seems a sea Swoln to convulsive size by recent storm, And tossing still between the peaceful calm; And ye seem monstrous tenants of the deep, Whose heads terrific, shoulders broad, and backs

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Shaggy and rough, the yawning waves disclose. But as the sun advances, the strange scene, So wild and visionary, changes quick; The wreaths of mist, fantastic, melting, soon Descend in dewy showers; the spiry cliffs And tall black rocks are now distinctly seen, Glitt'ring in sunlight; soon the erimson heath, Spangled with gems, emerges on the eye; And long ere noon ye show again your shapes, Diversified, huge, and magnificent. At brilliant sunset, too, I've cast an eye Of repture o'er you, as your giant forms Enlarged upon my sight ; for in the light, Gorgeous and dazzling, ye assume a mien Of higher majesty, until, the sun Sinking in glory, night again her robe Of soft grey mist flings o'er you, shrouding all; And from this height, rebellowing far below, I've heard the echoing thunder, seen the flash Of forked lightnings, as they spend their flight Terrific, o'er the massy pond'rous clouds That hid you from my vision. And when off -The thunder storm had rattled, I've looked down And marked a hundred foaming torrents leap O'er your rough sides impetuous-grander far Than Foyers, Cora, or the fierce Stonebyres; Downward they rush in thunder ; while beneath In the low valley, shaking with their din, The peasants gather, and, with wond'ring eyes, Gaze upwards. I have frequent too beheld.

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#### SECTORES OF BRITAIN.

From this high peak, the savage storm come down Upon you in his fury, grasping hard The rocky soil ; I've prostrate lain and eyed, Far down, the sweeping hurricane ; rent rocks In clatt'ring fragments leapt adown, and rolled In masses to the plains-it seemed as if Doomsday were comei-but ye outlived the blast That tore up oak trees by the roots, and laid Whole forests waste. Now let us down descend, And seek the margin of some beauteous lake, That sleeps among these mountains ; let us walk Where overhanging birch-trees shadow us, Fragrant and cool. On either side a range Of lofty mountains rise ; look up, and lo You see their barren summits capped with clouds, Silv'ry and white, or stretching tall and vast, Far up amidst the blue ; while birches sweet, Alders, and wild briers, clothe the enormous base, And fringe the lake with verdere : high above I hear the eagle and the falcon scream, While linnets, blackbirds, gentle thrushes, sing Their love-songs all around me. Beautiful Thy highland lake-scenes, Scotia! chiefly when The summer sun emerges from the east On early morn; or paints, on dewy eve, The fleecy clouds with crimson. Ask ye where The highland warrior gained the dauntless form, The iron muscle, and th' elastic bound, That terrified in battle? look above, And see how fearlessly yon band of youths

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Are elimbing heights enormous, scaling rocks And precipices, where the wild goats scarce Can venture or find footing; from their birth Danger was reckoned pastime, toil delight.... Storms, thunders, lightnings, were their chosen friends;....

On battle-plain why should the flash of steel Dazzle those eyes, accustomed to the gleam Of heaven's own meteors? or th' artillery's roar Shake their firm nerve, who, from the topmost cliff Of the high mountain, love to hear prolonged Among the shaggy rocks, the awful voice Of dread Jehovah, when he speaks to men In thunder? Men of gentler mould, born, reared, Nurtured on Britain's southern plains, are brave, And face the foe undaunted ;---but they need Training, ere yet with head and front erect, Fearless, they learn to close in deadly strife; Not so the mountaineer: danger he scents, And it allures him; you require to check Rather than cheer him on-the dire array Of battle never daunts him; o'er his head He waves his dread claymore; and, shouting loud "A Gordon!" or "a Grame!" he flings himself With all his heart and soul into the fight, And conquers then or falls! Or do ye ask What fans the flame of love and soft desire In the young highland bosom? 'tis such scenes As those I now survey: these beauteous scenes Soften, on summer eve, the dreary soul

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