



MR. S. R. CROCKETT.

S. R. Crockett at Home.

BY ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD.

WHERE the river Esk, coming across the moors from the mountains, passes Bank House it is a stream altogether unsullied, clear, fresh, and sweet. But beyond Penicuick, that is to say after it has passed the great paper mills which are the wealth of that Midlothian burgh, it is a tainted stream, as though unclean hands had been laid upon it, and any one who, in the train from Edinburgh, observes it as he passes by, regrets to see so fair a thing so muddily befouled.

This is a circumstance of which one thinks, who, after having seen the talent of S. R. Crockett, as it may appear after its passage through those great paper-mills which are the newspapers of London, soiled with criticism, befouled with slander, muddy with the suggestion of wilful plagiarism, sees it at Bank House also, hard by the silvery and unsoiled Esk, at its very fountain-head.

It is at Bank House, in Penicuick, a house set in trees, on one bank of the Esk, hurrying to an ignoble use from God's own mountains, and facing, on the other bank, a landscape of larches and pines, over which almost at all times there hangs a meagre mist, there lives amidst serene surroundings the author of *The Raiders*.

From the walk which leads up to the house may be seen on a height hard by the station an old Scotch block-house, now dismantled, where in former times the inhabitants of this burgh took refuge at the first alarm or menace of a raid. Elsewhere huge factories, workmen's cottages, tall chimneys. So may Romance and Industry be seen here in a strange and striking unison, under a meagre grey mist, against a background of pines and larches.

It is a comfortable, prosperous house, and, from the very moment that the threshold is crossed, it shows itself a bookman's house. Books in the hall, in serried ranks, and under the shelves are many portraits of familiar bookmen.

As for the study, which may be directly entered from the hall, it is all books. Books from the floor to the ceiling, with space only for a door, a fireplace, and the windows. Against the smaller window which overlooks Penicuick, with its towering chimneys, is set Crockett's writing-table. In the bow of the larger window, from which one sees the Esk and its timbered

yonside, is a table. But here also there is invasion of books. The drawer of the table is full of maps, old and elaborate maps of Scotland, whilst underneath it stand in large folio volumes the records of State Trials of Scotland. Away in a corner is a small type-writing machine.

It is, perhaps, in this setting, that Samuel Rutherford Crockett is seen at his best, at least in so far as he is to be considered a bookman and producer of books. And no one more different from the bookman of your opinion or of mine than this splendid



BANK HOUSE.

(From a photograph by Moffat, of Edinburgh.)

athlete, a broad-shouldered giant of six-foot four, with blood tingling in his cheeks, and a mercurial activity and exuberance in every fibre of him.

He is thirty-four years of age, and was born at Little Duchrae (Black Crag), in Galloway.

“ My people were small farmers, who rented their land and worked it for their maintenance. At home, at Duchrae, there was my grandfather, my grandmother, my mother, and my three

uncles. My father I never knew. He died soon after I was born, and I have no recollection of him. With the exception of my mother, who was very delicate, we all worked on that farm. When I was a boy of five, I already took part in the common labours. I remember that at that age I made the bands for a whole field of sheaves of wheat, all through a long harvest. I remember that I worked hard with my little hands, not because coerced, but because I felt that I had to work ; it came naturally to me."

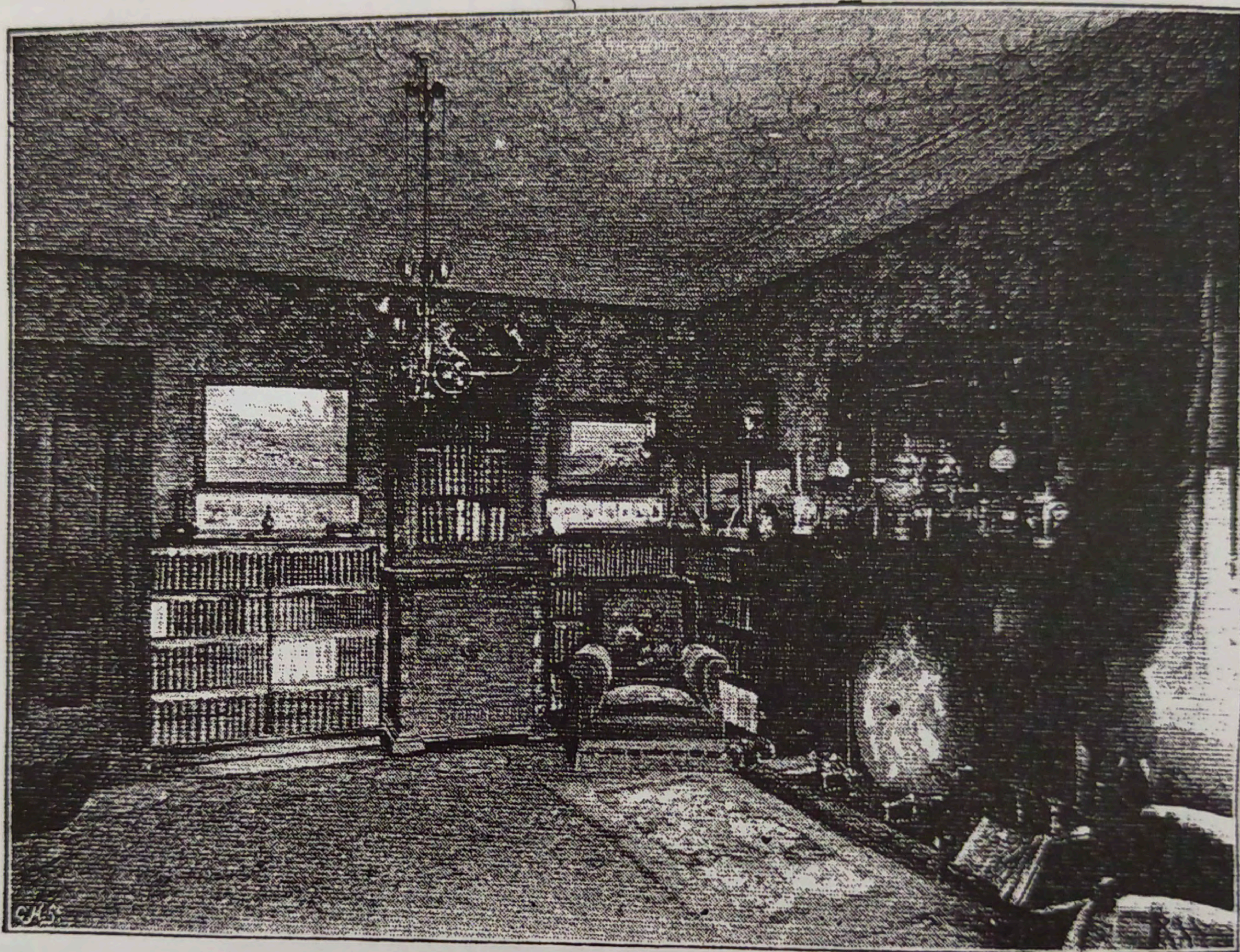


MR. CROCKETT'S STUDY.

Of his first impressions of childhood, Crockett may be brought to speak as follows :

"What I best remember about my very early childhood is that behind our house was a wild part of moor, horrid with bristling crags, and that from the first days on which I could walk I loved to be off and away from my home into this rocky wilderness, and to lose myself amongst the crags, often for a whole long summer's day. But what, perhaps, most vividly impressed me was the hand-to-hand fight of all the people on the farm

against the Dee, which ran hard by. The Dee Bridge, which is described in *The Raiders*, was close behind Duchrae, and part of our farm-land was a long meadow, a mile of meadow, on which our principal crop, our crop of hay, was grown. Well, at Lammastide, that is to say just when our hay was ready to be stacked, the Dee used to overflow, and these Lammas floods were the terror of all the Dee-side farmers. And though I was only a very little boy at the time, I can remember how often I was startled from my bed with a wild cry, in Scots, that the Dee



DRAWING ROOM IN BANK HOUSE.

was out and about; a wild cry to arms against disaster and ruin. How we all tumbled from our beds, and in the hastiest attire we rushed out into the night, under the light of the stars, or by flickering torches, the old men, the women, the males, and even such children as I was, each to wrest from the waters some portion of their spoils; for our hay meant the rent of the farm, the bread for the winter, the daily loaf-mass for many days to come. And into the water we went and snatched all the hay that could be saved, and plunged and groaned and struggled in

our fight for our bread against the disastrous waters. I can still see my uncles, breast-high in the black flood, holding armfuls of rescued hay above the water, whilst my old grandfather, standing in the doorway of the farm-house, pointed with his stick into the night and guarded the salvage, in shrill Scots. And so we plunged, and struggled, and saved, till after long hours of work we withdrew, dripping and triumphant, whilst the defeated Dee rolled on placidly, under the pale light of the stars."

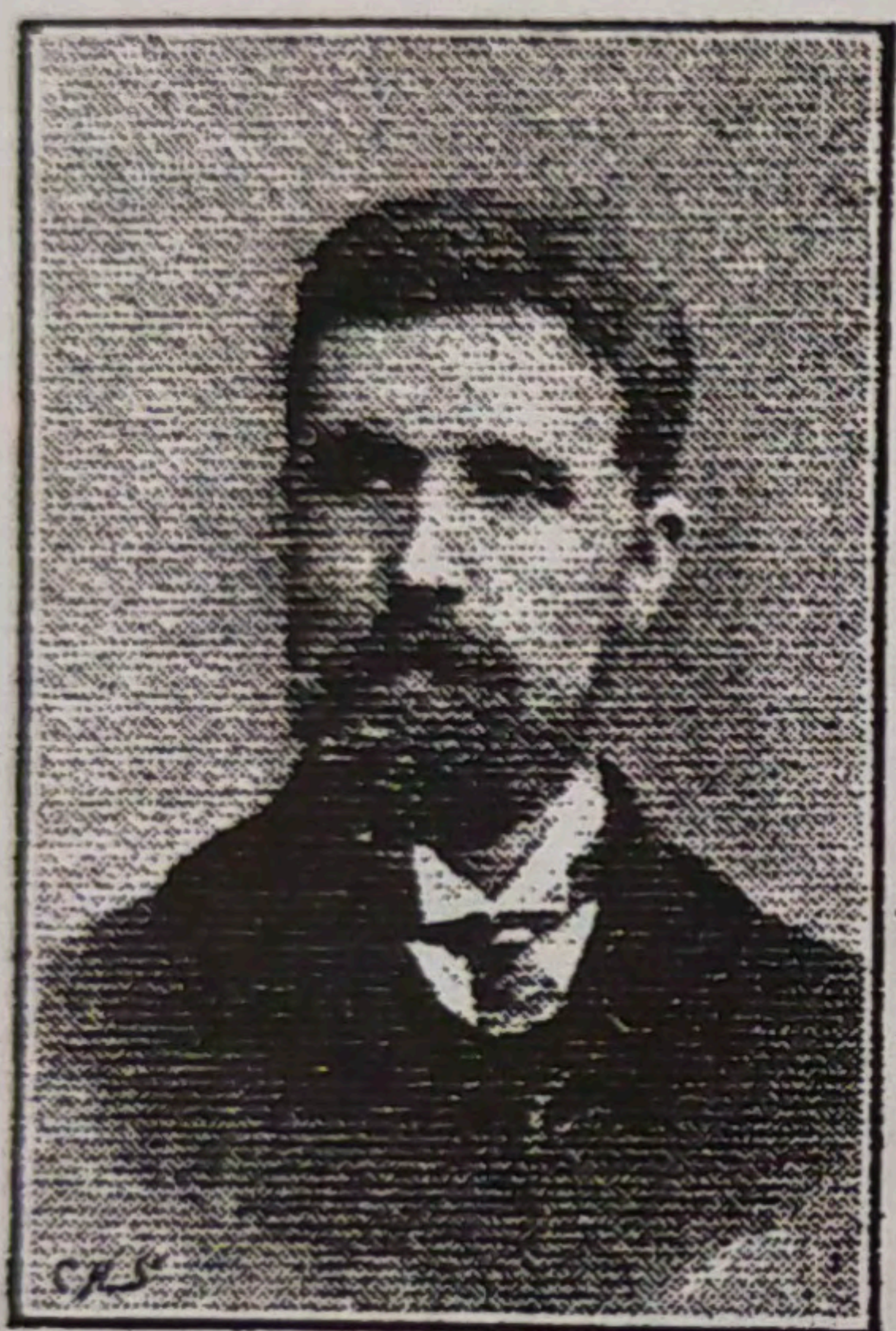


LITTLE DUCHRAE, THE BIRTHPLACE OF MR. CROCKETT.

Crockett has sung his youth in a volume of poems: *Dulce Cor.*

"I cannot remember the time when I could not read. But, of course, there were not many books about the farm. Our people were strict Cameronians, Covenanters, and I was brought up in the faith. Most books are forbidden to the Cameronians—novels, the poets—even Shakespeare. I may say that I have a great loyalty to, and no inconsiderable piety for, the faith of my fathers, and that my forthcoming novel, *The Men of the Moss-Hags*, is written from a Covenanter's standpoint as fairly as Scott's *Old Mortality* was written from the other standpoint.

"Books were rare in Duchrae Farm, and such books as there were, were books about the Covenant—Simpson's *Gleanings among the Mountains*, for instance. I have used this in the *Men of the Moss-Hags*; no doubt, when that book is published, some blatant, braying ass will accuse me of plagiarism. Then there was Woodrow's *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, a charming collection of tales, stories of martyrs, and refugees amongst the mountains. It was this book which prompted me to hide in the crags and play a passion play all to myself, up in the rocks. I was a hunted Covenanter, and hid myself—a quaking little lad of five—whilst any stirring thing, a black bull, or a pine shaken by the wind, or a mere shadow on the brae was Claverhouse. And so on, in a self-suggested



MR. S. R. CROCKETT.
(From a photo. by Vandyk.)

frenzy of fear, till my uncles or the farm-servant came and rescued me. I always took my dog, Royal, with me, and he played important parts in my little solitary passion plays, but he was always a rescuer—an ally.

"I was a lonely child, and all my play was with myself, all alone in the crags, with my dog, Royal, or with Roland, my pet black lamb. I remember that I had an especial pleasure in standing on a rock, holding my hand over my eyes and looking to the sea, whilst Roland manœuvred in the background. And suddenly, as indeed I expected and hoped, Roland would spring forward and butt me, so that I fell over the precipice. The precipice, I should tell you, was, as measured by me last summer, two feet in depth. I had thought it fathomless, as a child. And so it is in youth and in manhood. The things which, as children, we think will be great when we grow up, show very small; and the things which, as men, we think were great in our childhood, dwindle amazingly when we come to look on them again. Roland was a splendid and a pugnacious lamb—most unlamblike in his proceedings. He would fight with the cows, and for the most part was triumphant. At times, however, a cousin of mine used to come over to play with me. He joined in my comedies. He was an ambitious lad, and when we played at *Pilgrim's Progress*—another favourite book of my early days—he always wanted the principal part—the part of Christian. I used to play

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Apollyon, and stood on a crag and shot darts at Christian, and defeated him invariably, so that he ran away howling ; and our version of the *Pilgrim's Progress* had an altogether different ending from the one conceived by Bunyan.

"Newspapers came to the farm, but, frankly, I never took interest in the gazettes. I hankered after romance. I remember that the first novel that I ever read was a book called *The Young Marooners*. I remember the first chapters, in which there was a description of how a boat was seized upon and dragged away by



MR. CROCKETT'S CHILDREN.
(From a photograph by Moffat, of Edinburgh.)

a devil-fish ; and I remember that I used to go and lie in a boat on the loch near our house, and pray God that a devil-fish might come and drag my boat away, so that I also might have the adventures of a young—a very young—marooner.

"But all the charm of my childhood centres round the stepping-stones which crossed the river behind our house. I can remember the time when I was so small that I had to be carried over these stones. Later, not a day passed but I crossed them, for on the other side lived an old lady in a cottage, and

her cottage was crammed with books, wonderful books, chap-books, such as have always fascinated me. It was there also that I read Hogg's *Ettrick Shepherd*, and made my first acquaintance with Chambers' *Information for the People*, and a paper called *The Cheap Magazine*, which was the first newspaper I ever read."

Crockett had no English in those days. "At home we all spoke Scots. My old grandmother, I remember, spoke the beautiful Scots which now, except in Carrick and in the rural districts of North Galloway, is almost a dead tongue. We



LAURISTON VILLAGE, WHERE MR. CROCKETT WENT TO SCHOOL.

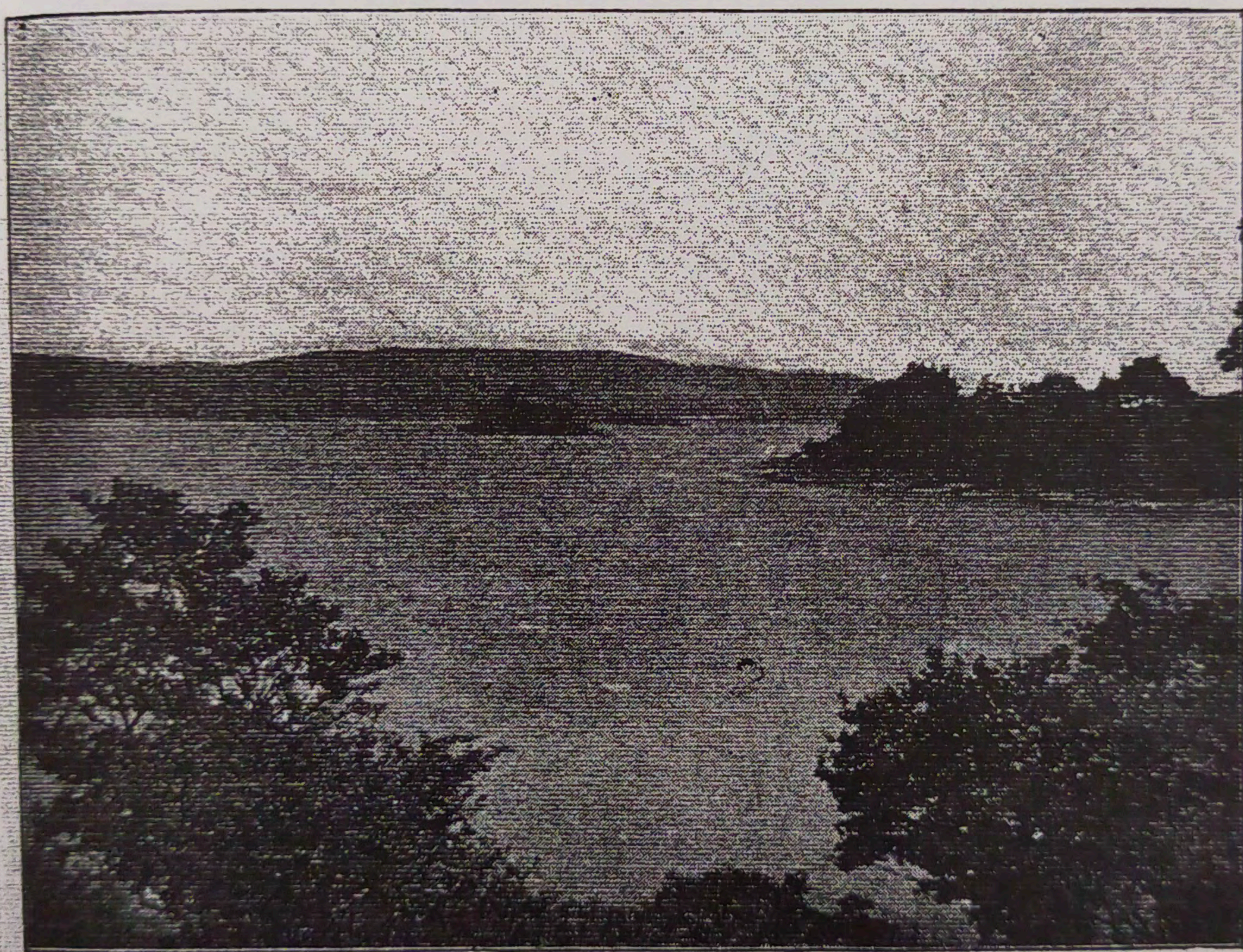
spoke exactly the words of Burns, who was an Ayrshire man, and in our daily speech his most recondite words were used. 'The wee burnie seeps frae the wauchy wall e'e.' All the words in that line were familiar household words to me."

Crockett went to school at the age of five, walking three and a-half miles to reach the small village school at Lauriston.

"My dog, Royal, always accompanied me, and a beautiful walk it was over the moors and then along the lake. About half-way was a promontory which ran out into the water. It was studded with hazel bushes, and many days I would stop

here and play truant in Royal's company, throwing stones into the lake. Lauriston is a beautiful village, and perhaps the only village in Scotland where one sees Lombardy poplars. The abundance of wild flowers in that country is astonishing. Last summer, my little daughter Maisie brought us in thirty-eight different kinds of wild flowers.

"I was advanced for my age, and began my first day 'in the tenpenny book.' In the Scotch village schools the classes are designated by the price of the book used. The lowest class



LOCH KEN, WHERE THE LOVERS PARTED IN "THE LILAC SUNBONNET."

is 'the twopenny,' and so on. 'The tenpenny book' is a high class, and, as I was so young a child, the other boys were jealous and angry, and when I came out a boy said to me, 'Ye hae nae business in the tenpenny. Can ye fecht?' I did not know how to fight, so I answered, 'I dinna ken.' Then the other boys put up a champion, and said, 'Here is the boy that will fecht ye.' I had never seen any fighting except between dogs, and so I went at him like a dog, tooth and nail.

"I think back with pleasure on our Scotch Sabbaths. A great deal of nonsense is spoken in England about the Scotch

Sabbath. I enjoyed my Sabbaths immensely. It is true that I was born to it. We used to drive over to the Cameronian Kirk, at Castle Douglas (that 'Kirk on the Hill,' of which I have written in my little book, *The Play-Actress*—a book written to amuse myself, whilst I was writing *The Raiders*), a distance of nine miles, in a red farm-cart, which had no springs, because springs were taxed, and we were not rich. On the journey back, I used to go on foot, roaming about, taking short cuts to meet the cart. It was a characteristic scene—the red cart, and in it my old grandfather, solemnly severe, wrapped in meditation over the sermon which we had heard, and behind him my grandmother, in her silk apron and cap. Now, as I roamed about I used to pick wild flowers; but this was against my grandfather's principles, for he held it wrong to pick flowers on a Sunday, and so grandmother and I were made accomplices in the evasion of the law. I used to steal behind the cart, and secretly hand up the flowers which I had picked, and the old lady would swiftly hide them under her apron.

"When I was nine years of age, my people left Duchrae, and I went to live in a cottage, which belonged to my father, in Castle Douglas. There was an excellent school here, a school of about three hundred boys, and we were taught by a most excellent master, John Cowper, the best type of a Scotch teacher. I owe all my knowledge of the Classics to his instructions. Whilst working at my lessons, I used to read omnivorously. I used to get my books from the Mechanics' Institute, and was always careful to take two books at a time. One was a biography or a history, and that was to show at home. The other was a novel, and that was smuggled into the house, under my waistcoat. It was mostly Marryat at that time, though I never stopped reading Scott. The cheap edition of Scott was appearing at that time, and I used to buy them all, and hide them under my bed. My mother knew of it, but said nothing."

He made few friends at school. "I was not a boy to make many friends, for I grew so fast that I soon became the biggest boy in the school, and so held myself aloof, wrapped in dignity."

The story-telling instinct was strong upon him, even in these early days.

"As a boy, I always wanted to write books, and I used to tell stories to my schoolfellows, but most usually to myself. Only a few days ago, I found an old picture-book—*The Babes*

in the Wood—which I had had in 1866, and at the end was scrawled, in my writing, that I was dissatisfied with the ending of the tale, the death of the babes, and that the true story was that they recovered and escaped and married happily. I did not like my lessons, and only worked because I was forced to. I really only cared for reading. Whilst I was a school-boy at Castle Douglas, I used often to go over to the house of a second cousin of mine, a farmer at a place called Drumbeck. He had been in Canada, and was a great reader and collector of



DEE BRIDGE (BLACKWATER), WHERE THE CATTLE CROSSED IN "THE RAIDERS."

books. He used to make me read Shakespeare, and learn scenes by heart; and it was he who taught me to love Milton. He was a great lover of books, and used to buy all the books he could afford out of his small income. He had all the original editions of Carlyle. His character is the character of the *Stickit Minister*. He used to lend me Shakespeare and Milton, which I smuggled into my bedroom under my clothes, and it was he who presented me with my first copy of Shakespeare."

Successfully coached by the admirable John Cowper, S. R. Crockett was able to pass from Castle Douglas School to the University of Edinburgh with a Bursary of £20 a year for four years. He was then fifteen years old. This Bursary constituted the entire amount of his resources from the outside. "During my first three years I lived on about nine shillings a week. In the first year I added to my income by coaching, and it was imperatively necessary that I should do so, as, out of my revenue of £20, I had to pay £11 in fees. In the second and following years I did journalistic work, my first contributions,

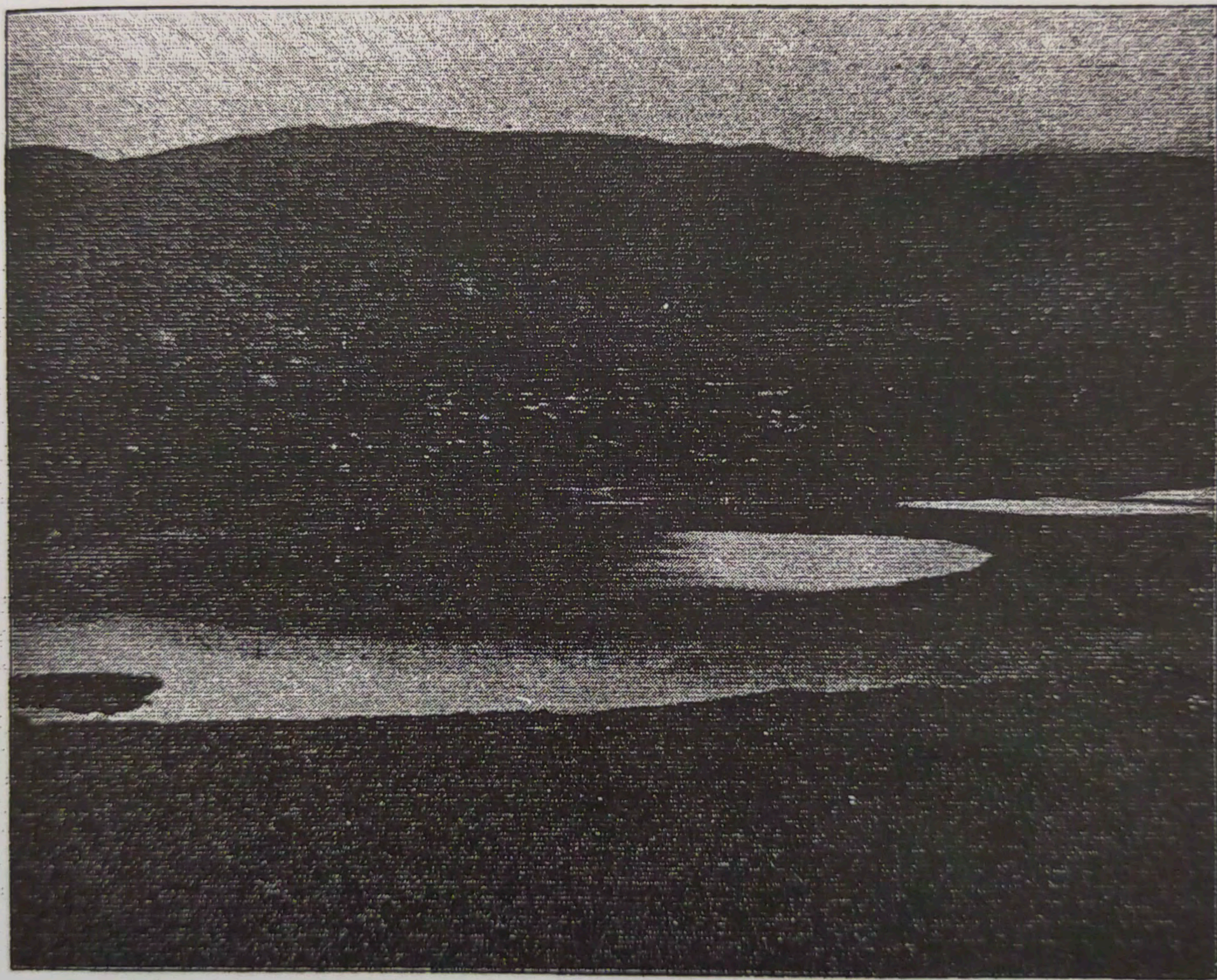


MR. CROCKETT AT WORK.
(From a photograph by Moffat, of Edinburgh.)

paragraphic reports, soon being printed in *The Edinburgh Daily Review*. But my earnings were not considerable, and I do not think that during my student life in Edinburgh, I ever spent more than nine shillings a week. I shared a garret in an old house, which looked on the Park and Arthur's seat, with my cousin, and afterwards with Macgeorge the artist, and we each paid three shillings and sixpence a week for rent, including coal and gas. For breakfast and supper we used to have oatmeal porridge; our dinner never exceeded sixpence each. When I was saving up to buy a book, I would content myself with a

penny roll and a glass of milk. I did not work very hard at my studies but read vastly, reading anything and everything; a constant visitor to the University Library. I do not think that there ever was so omnivorous a reader. I read ravenously, but without judgment."

Apart from his room-mates and Mr. James, the well-known bookseller, in Edinburgh, Crockett did not make many friends while at the University. "I was so busy, forced as I was



THE "MURDER HOLE" (SEE "THE RAIDERS").

to work very hard at journalism, writing on anything and everything, and sending articles everywhere. At that time I contributed with some regularity to *Lloyd's* and *The Daily Chronicle*. I was also writing verse in those days, contributing to the magazines and to the local papers."

His vacations were principally spent at Drumbeck. "Here I used to read and write omnivorously. I sketched out plays and wrote a *Marie Stuart*—every Scotch fellow does that. My idea was that Darnley was really a woman. My favourite

author at this time was Dumas, and I was constantly reading him in translation.

"I remained at the University till I was nineteen, going through the regular Arts Course, and passing all my examinations for a degree. I, however, was never capped—that is to say, I never actually took my degree—chiefly because in the year in which I should have been capped I obtained, through the influence of Doctor Jowett, of Balliol, a travelling tutorship, and went abroad. My young pupil was an American, of Chicago,

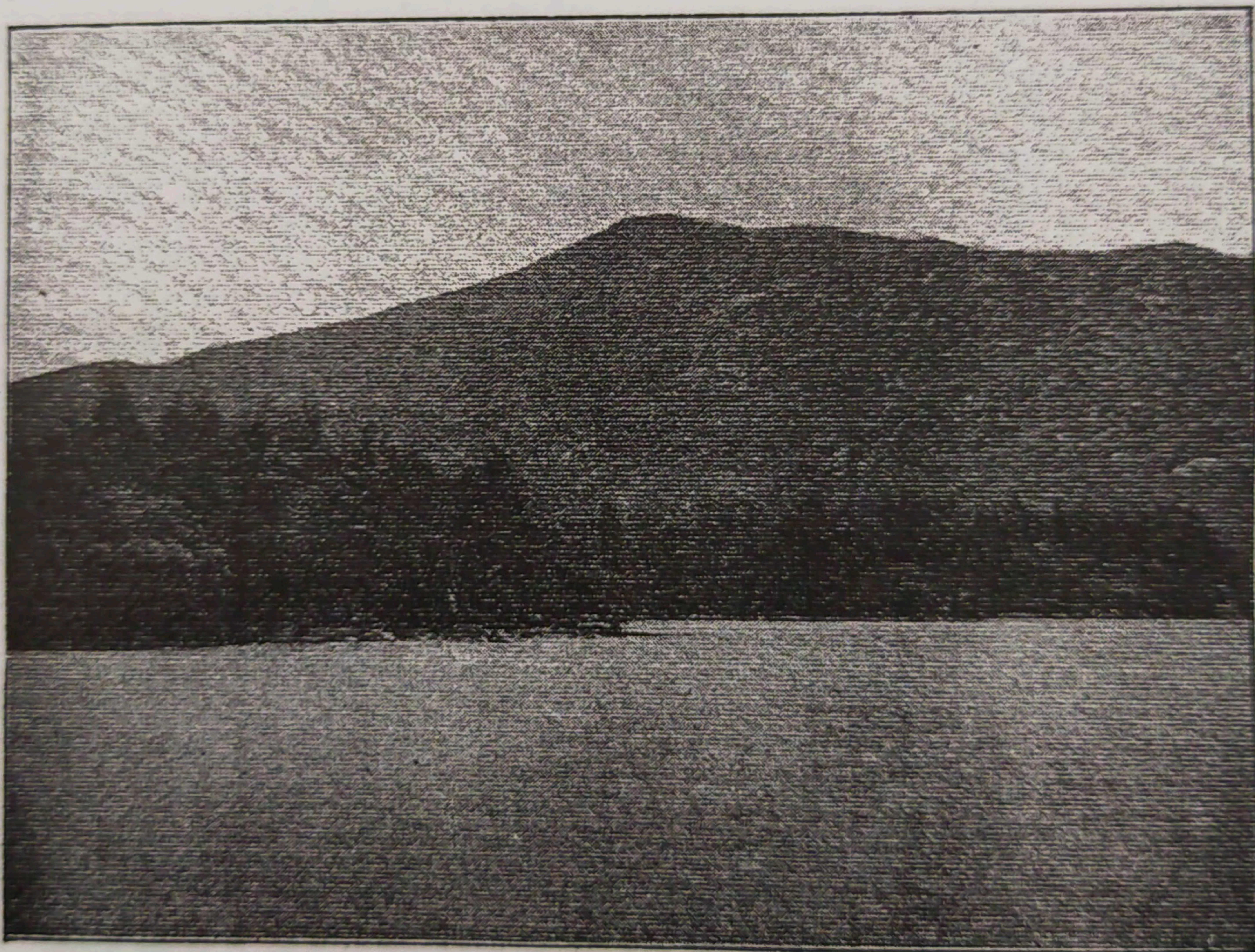


THE LAKE DOWN WHICH PATRICK HERON, OF "THE RAIDERS," SKATED. CIRCULAR POOL TO THE RIGHT IS THE "MURDER HOLE."

and, provided as he was with letters of introduction to almost all the Courts in Europe from J. R. Lowell, we saw a good deal of swelldom. We travelled all over Europe, and, knapsack on back, tramped a long way in Northern Italy. We were travelling for nearly two years—visited Siberia, and sailed from Archangel to Novaia Zembla. Whilst so travelling I wrote poetry, but chiefly, and most copiously, notes and descriptions which I intend to use in a book, which is already partly written. Shortly after my return to England I obtained another tutorship,

and this time went to Switzerland, and afterwards to Heidelberg. Altogether, we were abroad for a year, and during that year I wrote many verses. Perhaps one third of my book of poems, *Dulce Cor*, was written during that year. The *Ford Bereton* poem was written at the foot of the Matterhorn."

On his return to Edinburgh, Crockett began attending science classes, studying geology, working in Professor Tait's laboratory, and assisting in the arrangement of the Edinburgh New College Museum.



LOCH TROOL, ON THE VERGE OF "THE RAIDERS" COUNTRY.

"My intention, at that time, was to try for my B.S.C. degree, but I eventually drifted back into writing. It was an aimless two years, spent in reading, teaching, writing, and, in the summer time, in wandering about Galloway. And I always continued my journalism, more for amusement, as I made plenty of money by tuition. I cannot say that I ever saved money. On the contrary, I used to spend it as fast as I made it, mainly on expensive books. I may remark, that the 'bang-went-saxpence' Scotchman of the Englishman's imagination, is

a very rare type indeed. As a rule, the Scotch are inclined rather to extravagance."

Between the age of twenty-three and twenty-five Crockett studied theology at the New Theological College, in Edinburgh.

"As a Cameronian, I was interested in theology, and, having a desire to work among the poor in the slums of Edinburgh, wished for a *locus standi*. During this period, I kept myself by journalism, reviewing for *The Manchester Guardian*, and contri-



"THE WOLF'S STOCK" IN "THE RAIDERS."

buting on all subjects to *The Daily Review*. My evenings were spent in the slums. In 1885 I was ordained a minister, and, after working for two months at Dunfermline, came to Penicuik, as Free Church Minister, and have lived here ever since. Six months after my arrival, I married my wife."

The volume of poems, *Dulce Cor*, had been published the year before. As a minister, Crockett continued to contribute to the newspapers, and added considerably to his income thereby.

"At the same time I wrote sketches and stories which I

thought might come to something, and kept these lying by me. It was in this way that the first half of *The Lilac Sunbonnet* was written. At that time I was also writing editorials on theological subjects for religious periodicals, and one day the editor of *The Christian Leader* wrote to me and asked me to send him an editorial which was wanted at once. I had no time to write one, and I told him so, but at the same time I sent him one of the sketches which I had in my drawer, and asked him if he could use that instead. It was the story called *A Day in the Life of*



SILVER SANDS OF LOCH ENOCH, FROM WHICH THE CHARACTER, JOHNNIE FAA, KNOWN AS "SILVER SANDS," IN "THE RAIDERS," TAKES HIS NAME.

the Reverend James Pitbye, which is in *The Stickit Minister*. I didn't think that the editor would use it. However, he wrote me: 'Never send me anything else.' So I continued sending him these sketches, and they met with a great deal of appreciation, and were widely copied into the papers, especially in Canada and Australia. Almost all the tales in *The Stickit Minister*, appeared in this way in *The Christian Leader*. I used to get as much as a guinea apiece for them. I did not think of republishing them in a collected form till I was strongly urged to do so by Doctor

Nichol. So I submitted them to Unwin, and that is how *The Stickit Minister* came to be. It was successful almost from the very first.

"Before the publication of this book, *The Lilac Sunbonnet*, the best expression of my youth, was well in hand. It should have been my third book, but its publication was delayed, and in the meanwhile *The Raiders* was written. This story was begun in January, 1893, and was finished in February, 1894. The actual writing of it only took me two months, the rest of the time was spent in reading up my subject, in taking elaborate notes, and in poring over my maps."

On the absurd charge of plagiarism which has been brought against him in connection with this book, Crockett is most emphatic.

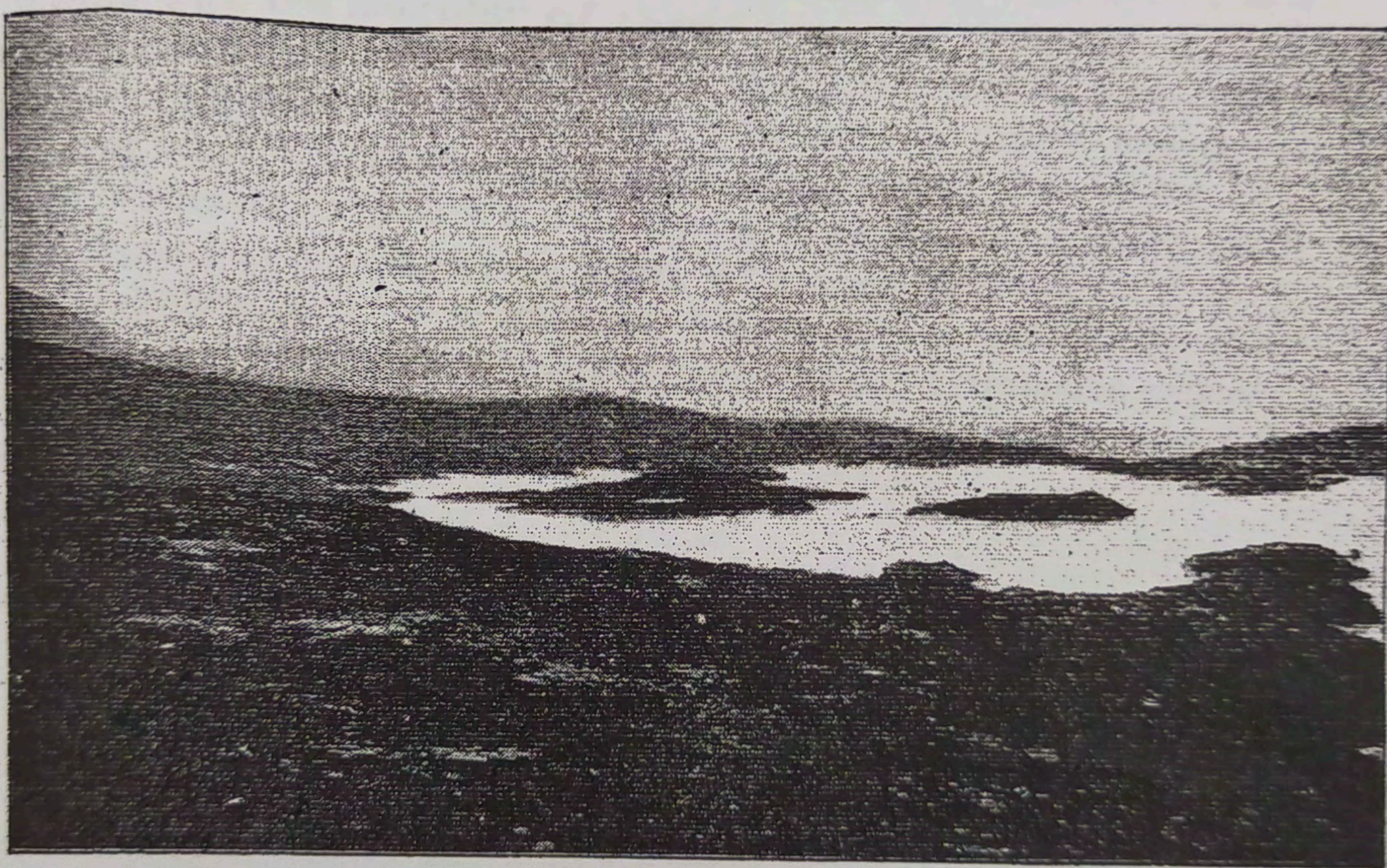
"I have always stated, and in supplying *The Bookman* with biographical notes I expressly asked the editor to state, that the true Quellen of *The Raiders* were Nicholson's *Historical and Traditional Tales*. Nicholson, by-the-way, is a very old friend of mine, and is actually engaged by me to search up the records of Galloway.

The story of how *Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills* came to be written may be quoted for the information of those who deny that inspiration is a factor in literary production.

"I was lying in bed one night," relates Crockett, "in a state of semi-consciousness, when I saw, as in a dream, a poor, dishevelled, naked, shivering old man sitting on a rock on a barren and desolate hillside. His hair was wild, his nails were like claws, and his feet, curled up against the stone on which he was sitting, were cracked with frost. It was a weird sight, and impressed me so strongly that, as I started up in bed, I cried out, 'Poor devil!' I rose at once, dressed, and came downstairs, and at once began to write about this poor old man whom I had seen in so strange a manner. I wrote under the whip of the vision, and eventually finished it in thirty-six hours. It was refused by numerous editors, who all said that it was the most lunatical thing they had ever read. But Low, of the *St. James's Gazette*, took it, and afterwards brought it out in book form by Unwin on the back of *The Raiders*. It was eagerly purchased by the public."

Crockett's work is done in the morning. "I always like to see the sun rise, and for many years, summer and winter

alike, I have seen it." He is usually downstairs and at work by five o'clock, and works on steadily till nine. "I like to have my day to myself," says Crockett, "and I never touch my literary work after nine in the morning. I write very quickly, and always use a type-writing machine, which I take with me when I am travelling and use in the train. Before starting on a book I make the most copious notes possible, and, when my book is written, I write it all over again. I am at present engaged upon a tale to be called *The Grey Man*, which will be



"LOCH-IN-LOCH! I SEE THEE, LITTLE LOCH." ISLAND TO LEFT FIGURES IN "THE RAIDERS." HERE THEY WERE MADE AN END OF.

the story of John Muir, of Auchindrae, who really lived, and was a famous cut-throat. A very curious type, who, after reading the prayers in the morning, would say to his son: 'Well, John, whom shall we go and kill to-day?' At the same time I am planning out a story into which I shall introduce my Siberian experiences." Speaking about his books with singular modesty, Crockett may be heard to say, "I think that if anything is good in my books it is the exactness of the natural history allusions."

He has a large collection of most valuable books on natural

THE IDLER.

history, and is himself an ardent student of nature. "My idea of a holiday," he says, "is to take a powerful pair of field glasses and to go out into the woods or on to the moors and lie down, and for hours together to watch the birds and all the living things that pass."

He is a great reader. "When I am writing about a period, I like, as far as possible, to read every book I can find published during that period."

He is a great buyer of books, and his collection, which fills



GARDEN OF BANK HOUSE.
(From a photograph by Moffat, of Edinburgh.)

every room in Bank House, many thousands of volumes in all, contains many rare and most valuable works. It includes a great number of chap-books of celebrated trials, the very rare first edition of Johnson's *History of Highwaymen*, the valuable eight volumes on *The Birds of Europe*, Purchas: *His Pilgrims*, and twelve volumes of collected portraits. "I think," he says, "that portraits suggest things which people did." And, so saying, this Cameronian takes down a book and opens it, without a word of comment, at the picture of John Graham,

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Viscount of Dundee, who, in his day, martyred the Covenanters.

"I do not analyse. My characters appear to me simply, and I get to know them, and they talk to me—good talk it is, too ; but not all talk that can be used for a book, and so I have to select."

Of Crockett's home life it would be indiscreet to write, much as its conditions may tempt the pen. It will be sufficient to say that in his beautiful house, overflowing with books, now ringing with the laughter of three bonny children, now perhaps melodious as his wife and little daughter, Maisie, sing Scotch songs at the piano, with the woods and the moors above and around, and the silver and yet untarnished Esk at his feet, S. R. Crockett lives in a serenity of happiness from which excellent work may be expected, and will surely proceed.

And long after Bank House has been left behind, one does not know which it is that more persistently haunts the memory, the cynical curl of Claverhouse's lip, or the adorable sweetness of little Maisie Crockett's smile.