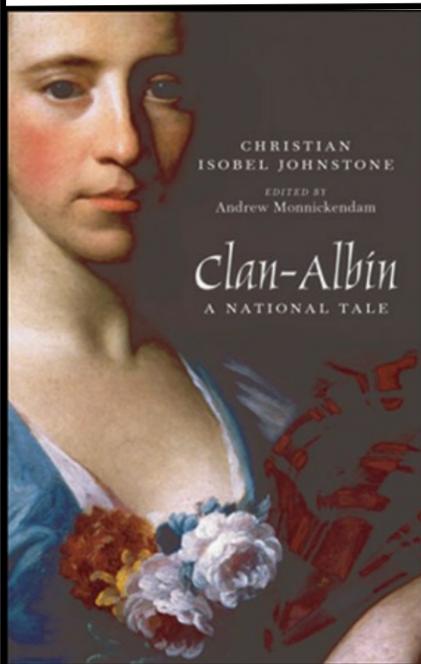


# Christian Isobel Johnstone 1781-1857

## Journalist, editor and author

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2003 edition of Johnstone's popular 1815 work

At the base of this obelisk, you will see the words, “A memorial of literary excellence and private worth”. That sums up **Christian Isobel Johnstone**, story-teller, novelist, journalist and editor.

Christian was born in Edinburgh in June 1781 to James Todd, a medical student, and his wife, Jean Campbell, who had married that May. In 1797, at the age of 16, Christian married Thomas McCleish, a printer, with her father now stated to be a grocer. Christian and Thomas separated in 1805 and divorced in 1814. In 1815, she married Dunfermline-born John Johnstone (1779-1857), a schoolmaster at that time but also involved in the printing trade. They moved to Inverness in 1817 where John ran and edited the *Inverness Courier*. His wife's literary talents greatly enhanced the quality and reputation of the weekly paper.

In 1824, the Johnstones moved to Edinburgh when John took over editorship of the *Edinburgh Chronicle* and had a printing office. Over the years, Christian and her husband were involved in various periodicals, some short-lived and most with Christian as the main contributor, culminating in *Johnstone's Edinburgh Magazine* being combined with *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1834. Christian was appointed editor of the new monthly *Tait's Magazine* - “the first woman to serve as paid editor of a major Victorian periodical”, according to publisher William Tait. The cover price was kept low to attract a wide audience but the literary quality was high. She remained the magazine's editor and writer until the title was sold in 1846.

Christian wrote both fiction and non-fiction works, most published anonymously or as ‘Margaret Dods’ or ‘Aunt Jane’. Her most popular work of fiction was *Clan-Albin: A National Tale*, published in 1815. Regarded as part of the vogue started by *Waverley* the year before, Christian was more critical of English domination than Scott. Her most popular non-fiction work, that gave her a steady income, was *The Cook and Housewife's Manual* (1826), written by ‘Margaret Dods’, a character from Walter Scott's *St Ronan's Well*. Also popular was the three-volume *The Edinburgh Tales* (1846), a compilation of stories, penned by her and others, mainly women, for magazines.

Christian and her husband both retired from work in 1846 with no further writing from Christian. Described as amiable, modest, ready to encourage young authors and of a retiring nature, Christian died of heart disease and bronchitis in 1857. John died a few months later.