

**LIFE OF VICTOR
EMMANUEL II, FIRST
KING OF ITALY. IN
TWO VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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Life of Victor Emmanuel II, First King of Italy. In Two Volumes. Vol. I by G. S. Godkin

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G. S. GODKIN

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VICTOR EMMANUEL II.

FIRST VOLUME

Godkin

1877

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FIRST KING OF ITALY

BY

G. S. GODKIN

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London

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1879

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PREFACE.

MANY MEMOIRS have been written of Victor Emmanuel since his death, but none of them would answer for the purpose of translating into our language. The best work on the subject is one lately issued from the press, entitled '*La Vita ed il Regno di Vittorio Emanuele,*' by Signor Massari, and to it I am much indebted in the composition of this work. It is full of reliable information, and ably written; but too comprehensive and diffuse for English readers, who cannot be supposed to take the same interest in all the particulars of contemporary events in Italy as the natives of the country.

Ghiron's brief Memoir is charming as far as it goes, but it does not pretend to be a regular biography. And the author is a true hero-worshipper; he is on his knees at the opening sentence, and never rises from that reverential attitude to the close of the book.

But it is hardly reasonable to expect at the present

moment an impartial work on the subject from an Italian, any more than it would be to look for an impartial biography from a son of a loved father whom he had just laid in the grave. While the heart of the nation was still vibrating with a sorrowful emotion, some writers felt impelled to vent their excited feelings in eulogistic Memoirs of the deceased; and at the same time the Papal party let loose a flood of foul invective—not so much in the press, for fear of popular indignation, as by private means and verbal reports, sent floating through society—particularly foreign society—in Italy.

I confess that I have been partly induced to undertake a *Life of the Honest King*, in whose career England has always taken a warm interest, by observing how English and American travellers, who do not read Italian books, and who see only the surface of things, receive as undoubted facts every false report set on foot by the malignity of a party whose defeat naturally renders them bitter.

Victor Emmanuel, from the day he succeeded his father on the field of Novara, distinguished himself by a rectitude of purpose, so strikingly at variance with the conduct of the other Italian princes, that his subjects

dubbed him *Rè Galantuomo*—a title soon endorsed by the rest of Europe.

How did the Honest King *par excellence*, who would have resigned every foot of ground he possessed rather than break his word to his people, ever merit the title—equally widespread in the Catholic world—of Robber King? There may be difference of opinion with regard to a man's appearance, manners, or abilities; but surely there ought to be but one with regard to his honesty. Can black ever be white, or white black? Can a man be an honest, a remarkably honest man, and a robber, a very great robber? He can, and is so, in the sincere opinion of those who so designate him. It all depends on the sort of spectacles through which he is regarded. I have tried to look through both spectacles with as fair an eye as possible. If I have seen unreal distorted visions through one, which vanish or change their character on investigation, I may be pardoned for preferring the glass which in the main is true, though given overmuch to beautify the object under consideration.

I believe that a perfectly impartial biography is an extremely difficult, almost impossible, thing to find. The sympathy which a writer naturally feels, and ought to feel, for his subject, is apt to increase as he studies his life in