

ESSAYS

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Essays by Henry Thomas Buckle

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HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE

ESSAYS

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BY

HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE,

AUTHOR OF

"A HISTORY OF CIVILIZATION IN ENGLAND."

WITH A

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR.

ILLUSTRATED WITH A PHOTOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF
HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE.

Jas. Lockie

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE.

IN the year 1485 there appeared in Florence a young man who, from his illustrious birth and his natural endowments, would have attracted notice in any city, but whom that city of academies and home of the learned welcomed with instant wonder and applause. He was the most various, if not the most profound, scholar of his time. At the age of sixteen he ranked among the foremost canonists of Bologna. In the next six years he had ranged through all the circles of ancient and scholastic philosophy, and had explored the recesses of Jewish Cabbalism. His Latin compositions reflected the image of the Augustan age; his Italian verses delighted at once the Court of the Medici and the people in the streets. In his twenty-third year he propounded at Rome

nine hundred theses or questions, upon every one of which he offered to dispute with any opponent. In these questions he embraced every department of knowledge, as knowledge then was—metaphysics and ethics, theology and law, magic and mathematics. Of this challenge the issue is imperfectly recorded, but it at least alarmed the Church, since two Popes were constrained to protect the challenger with their sacerdotal purple. His projects were even more vast than his performances. He aimed at reconciling with one another all the systems of philosophy, from the days of the Athenian Sophists to those of the medieval doctors. He aspired to defend Christianity against every class of heretics and infidels—against the Greek Church on the one hand, and the colleges of Cordova and Bagdad on the other. He meditated an allegorical commentary on the Scriptures, and even with greater hardihood a scheme that by the force of mere syllogisms should compel all men to be of one mind in religion. Of labours so unintermitted, an early death was almost the inevitable result, and Giovanni Pico di Mirandola—‘the phoenix of his age,’ as he was called by his con-

temporaries—was cut off by a fever in his thirty-first year.

With this universal student we are about to contrast a modern writer who, within the last few years, has achieved as sudden and nearly as extraordinary a reputation. The difference of the times in which they wrote is reflected in the different character of their works. The objects to which the Italian devoted himself comprised the learning and science of his time, and with that time they have for the most part passed away. The studies of the Englishman, embracing as wide a circle, have in them the seeds of greater permanence, inasmuch as they relate to the perpetual interests and not to the transient theories and opinions of mankind. In these respects these accomplished men resembled each other. Both of them had conceived the idea of a vast, perhaps an impracticable work; and each had scarcely passed its portal when he was summoned to rest from his labours.

HENRY THOMAS BUCKLE expired at Damascus on the last day of May in the present year. That they have been born and have died, is record enough for the greater portion of