

**OUT OF THE PAST, SOME
BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS.
IN TWO VOLS. VOL.II**

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Out of the past, some biographical essays. In two vols. Vol.II by Sir Mountstuart E. Grant Duff

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SIR MOUNTSTUART E. GRANT DUFF

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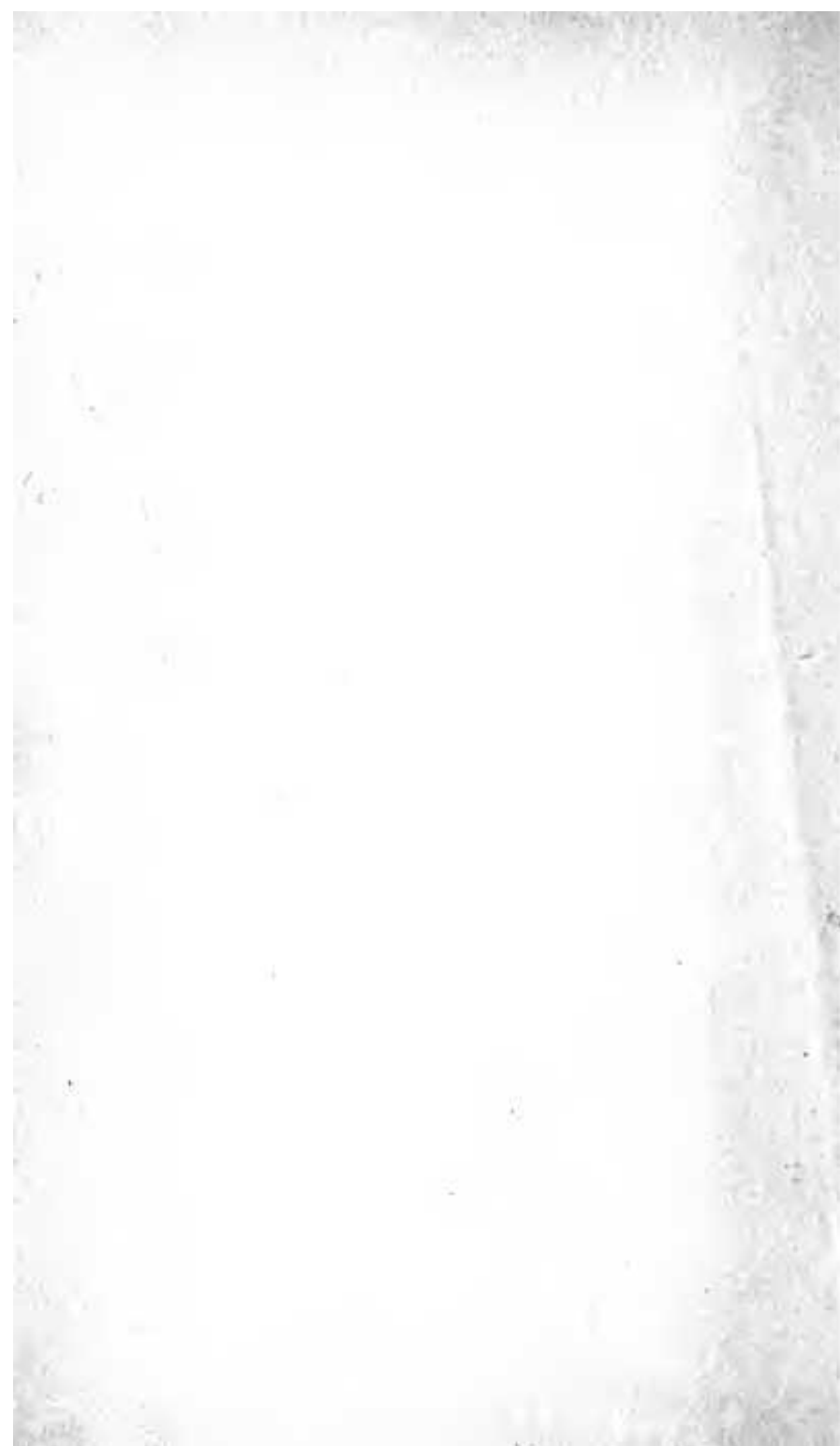
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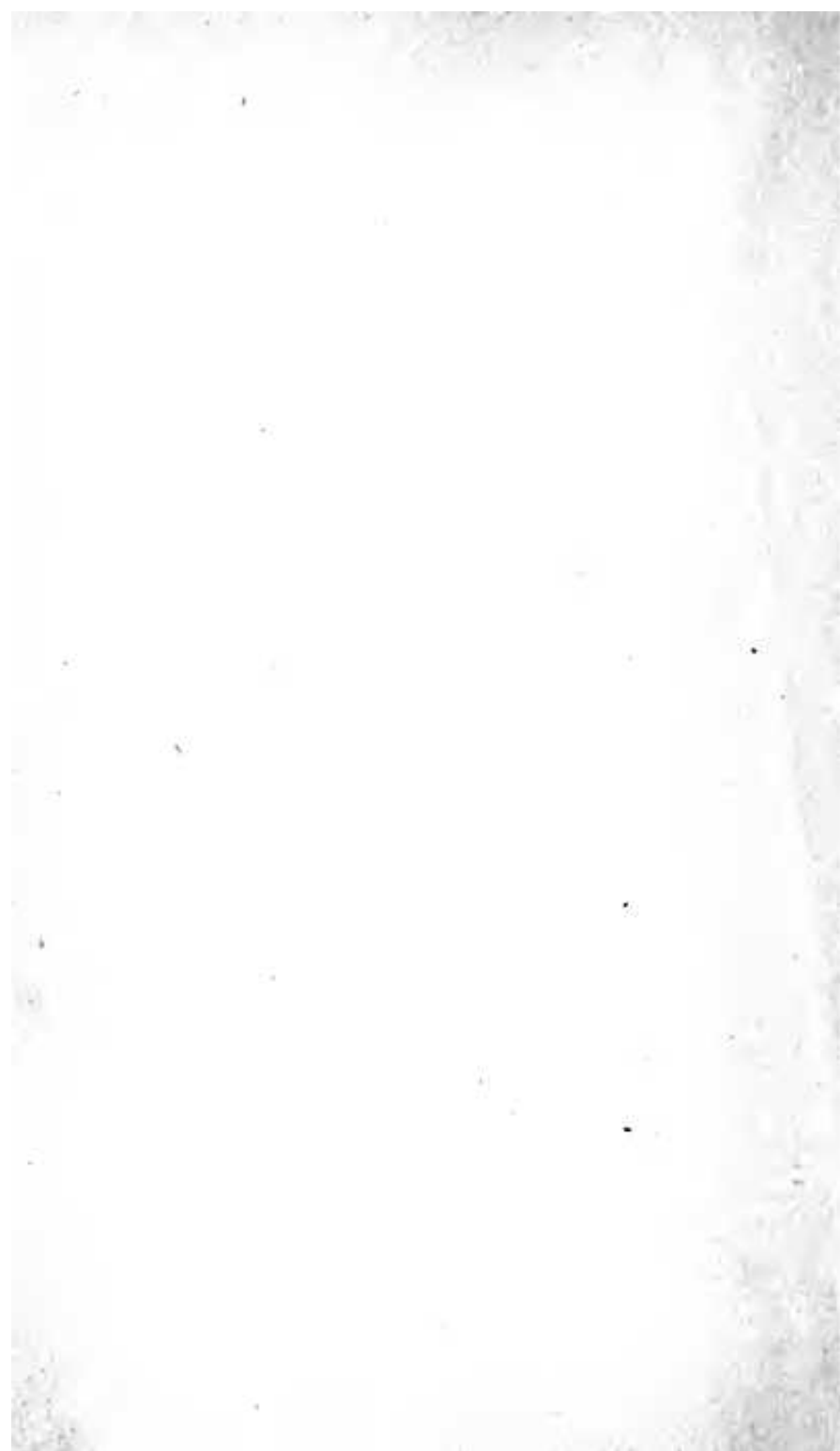
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OUT OF THE PAST

WALTER BAGEHOT: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

THE nineteenth century is passing away amidst a return current which bids fair to engulf not a few of the best gifts it won for humanity. That being so, I think we might do worse than look back to the lives of some of those who illustrated it while it was still strong and hopeful.

When you did me the honour to ask me to deliver this address, I thought of several such men—of Bastiat, of Cobden, and of Sir Louis Mallet. Finally, however, I settled upon Walter Bagehot, who died too early to allow him to become known to the majority of his countrymen; but who was loved and revered by many of the best minds in his generation. The best memorials of a man of letters are almost always his own books; and lengthy biographies of those, whose lives have been eventful only in the works they have produced, are not to be commended. It is, however, extremely useful that writers, in full possession of

the necessary information and in sympathy with the persons to be described, should range in order the main facts of their lives and give them to the world. Such biographies, if well done, are of infinite service to those who propose to read the books themselves, and in this case the necessary work has been quite admirably done by the late Richard Holt Hutton, one of the ablest essayists, as well as one of the best men, who has lived in our times, and who knew him of whom he wrote from his youth upwards.

Walter Bagehot was born on the 3rd of February 1826 at Langport, a little town in Somersetshire, and was the son of Mr. Thomas Watson Bagehot, for thirty years Managing Director and Vice-Chairman of Stuckey's Banking Company, then and now an institution of first-rate importance in Western England. His father being an Unitarian, he was not sent to Oxford, but to University College, London, where he and Hutton met when neither of them was over seventeen. They soon became intimate, and discussed with all the vehemence of gifted youth "the immensities and eternities" no less than the "problems that perplexed the land," problems which, as it was the hour of the beneficent movement inaugurated by Villiers and Cobden, turned the minds of both the fellow-students towards Political Economy.

Bagehot had naturally very high spirits and great capacity for enjoyment, as is easily seen by any one who

reads his works carefully. Bad health, however, very much tamed his spirits in later life, and those who only knew him when he had come to full maturity would not, without Mr. Hutton's testimony, have believed him to have been in his youth passionately fond of hunting. He distinguished himself very much at the University of London, taking the Mathematical Scholarship with his B.A. degree in 1846, and the gold medal for Intellectual and Moral Philosophy with his M.A. in 1848. For seven or eight years the Catholic Church had a great fascination for him; but it is improbable that he ever was at all near conversion. He was intimately acquainted with Newman's writings, and was especially attached to his University Sermons and to the poems in the *Lyra Apostolica*, hardly sufficiently known to the present day, though far more valuable than a great many of their author's more elaborate performances. His biographer cites in illustration of his Catholic velleities a rough but vigorous poem and an admirable bit of prose, dismissing the subject with the words:—

“It is obvious, I think, both from the poem, and from these reflections, that what attracted Bagehot in the Church of Rome was the historical prestige and social authority which she had accumulated in believing and uncritical ages for use in the unbelieving and critical age in which we live—while what he condemned and dreaded in her was her tendency to use her power over the multitude for purposes of a low ambition.”