

EIGHT FRIENDS OF THE GREAT

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Eight friends of the great by William Prideaux Courtney

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WILLIAM PRIDEAUX COURTNEY

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G. M. S.

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BY
WILLIAM PRIDEAUX COURTNEY

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PREFACE

THE desire for information on the lives of our fellow-countrymen has grown apace during recent years. The announcement in the daily papers of the death of a contemporary known in any circle of life is at once followed by a much longer description of his career than would have been the case fifty years since. Famous Englishmen in all ages are chronicled in the pages of Sir George Murray Smith's costly *Dictionary of national biography*, and Mr. Frederic Boase in his noble volumes of *Modern English biography* has summarised, with patient and protracted labour, the lives of everyone of any importance who passed away in the half-century beginning with 1850. But even after this vast increase in the biographical literature of our country many persons conspicuous in their time still want a chronicler.

Biographical details of such men as David Garrick can be found in a score of separate memoirs and in the general dictionaries of the literature or the biography of our kingdom, but information on the career of the poetaster whose lines were engraved on Garrick's monument in Westminster Abbey can be looked for with certainty in one authority only. It is in the memoirs of the more obscure of our countrymen that the value of our great biographical dictionary lies, and even within its ample folds five out of the eight lives described in these pages are not to be found.

The three lives which are described in the pages of that Dictionary are those of bishop Rundle, Dr. Warner and John Taylor. In a work of such magnitude the memoirs are necessarily of limited compass and to each of them I have

been able to add many additional details of interest. This will be apparent by a reference to the memoir of Dr. Warner. Though his career has been set out, both in the dictionary and in several other publications, by writers of exceptional skill, it has been reserved for me to make the first mention of many, and not the least important, circumstances in his life. His translation of a novel from the Spanish, the various descriptions of his style of preaching, his appointment to the vicarage of Scrivelsby, his acts of charity with Penneck and others, his friendship with Miss Seward, Dr. Gem, and William Huskisson, the dinner at Mont Rouge with Mercier, the quarrel with T. J. Mathias, the names of the scholars who appreciated his *Metronariston*, his communications with George Cumberland, his gifts to John Horne Tooke and friendship with the leading Reformers, the cause of his death, his adoption of a youth afterwards a K.C., these are some of the points which have been reserved for my narration.

The omissions in our great dictionary are Philip Metcalfe, Scrope Davies, lord Webb Seymour, Lydia White, and lord John Townshend. The reader, after a perusal of the succeeding narratives, will not hesitate, I hope, to corroborate my assertion that each of these eight memoirs contains many incidents of general interest and that all of these neglected persons lived lives which are worthy of description in detail.

Rundle was the central figure of a theological contest which raged as fiercely as the battle fought a century later over the appointment of Doctor Hampden to an English bishopric and the energies of Pope and Swift were enlisted on his behalf. Metcalfe was the companion of Johnson in his rambles at home and of Sir Joshua Reynolds in his art-travels through the Low-countries. He took a leading part in the differences which broke out over the erection of

Johnson's monument and as the executor of Reynolds, was one of those responsible for his funeral at St. Paul's and for the sale of his pictures. Dr. Warner was for many years associated with the pleasures as well as with the serious business of George Selwyn and he endeavoured after his friend's death to remove from the public mind the belief that the wit took an inordinate pleasure in witnessing the executions of conspicuous criminals. He was the first to start and the chief person to carry into effect, the proposal, that a statue of Howard, the philanthropist, should be placed in London's cathedral.

The mention of Scrope Davies recalls the life of Byron. They were friends in college days and in the fashionable life of their early manhood. Byron borrowed from him large sums of money, and showed the warmth of his friendship by the efforts which he made to repay them, as well as by the public dedication to Davies of one of his chief poems. Like many another conspicuous gambler during the Regency, the declining days of the life of Davies were passed in banishment from England. "Jack" Taylor knew everyone. With Sheridan and the theatrical circle which surrounded him he was closely intimate. He was the companion of Boswell in his hours of gaiety in the city when his song, repeated over and over again, threw the stiff form of Pitt into convulsions of laughter. In the busy haunt of Fleet Street and amid the jostling of the crowd which thronged that thoroughfare, Boswell submitted to him the proof sheets of the title-page of his immortal volumes and adopted the word which his critical friend suggested. Taylor corresponded with Byron and one of the poet's letters is for the first time given to the world in its entirety in these pages.

Scrope Davies was a student in classical literature until he had earned, when barely out of his teens, the wages sufficient to keep him in idleness for the rest of his existence.