

**MODERN LEADERS: BEING
A SERIES OF
BIOGRAPHICAL
SKETCHES; PP. 1-241**

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Modern Leaders: Being a Series of Biographical Sketches; pp. 1-241 by Justin McCarthy

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JUSTIN MCCARTHY

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.

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CONTENTS.

QUEEN VICTORIA AND HER SUBJECTS.	7
THE REAL LOUIS NAPOLEON.	18
EUGENIE, EMPRESS OF THE FRENCH.	25
THE PRINCE OF WALES.	35
THE KING OF PRUSSIA.	45
VICTOR EMANUELL, KING OF ITALY.	55
LOUIS ADOLPH THIERS.	66
PRINCE NAPOLEON.	77
THE DUKE OF CAMBRIDGE.	85
BRIGHAM YOUNG.	96
THE LIBERAL TRIUMVIRATE OF ENGLAND.	106
ENGLISH POSITIVISTS.	116
ENGLISH TORYISM AND ITS LEADERS.	126
"GEORGE ELIOT" AND GEORGE LEWIS.	136
GEORGE SAND.	145
EDWARD BULWER AND LORD LYTTON.	156
"PAR NOBILE FRATRUM—THE TWO NEWMANS."	167
ARCHBISHOP MANNING.	175
JOHN RUSKIN.	183
CHARLES READE.	192
EXILE-WORLD OF LONDON.	202
THE REVEREND CHARLES KINGSLEY.	211
MR. JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE.	223
SCIENCE AND ORTHODOXY IN ENGLAND.	234

INTRODUCTION.

THE sketches which make up this volume are neither purely critical nor merely biographical. They endeavor to give the American reader a clear and just idea of each individual in his intellect, his character, his place in politics, letters, and society. In some instances I have written of friends whom I know personally and well; in others of men with whom I have but slight acquaintance; in others still of persons whom I have only seen. But in every instance those whom I describe are persons whom I have been able to study on the spot, whose character and doings I have heard commonly discussed by those who actually knew them. In no case whatever are the opinions I have given drawn merely from books and newspapers. This value, therefore, these essays may have to an American, that they are not such descriptions as any of us might be enabled to put into print by the mere help of study and reading; descriptions for example such as one might make of Henry VIII or Voltaire. They are in every instance, even when intimate and direct personal acquaintance least assist them, the result of close observation and that appreciation of the originals which comes from habitual intercourse with those who know them and submit them to constant criticism.

I have not made any alteration in the essays which were written some years ago. Let them stand as portraits bearing that date. If 1872 has in any instance changed the features and the fortunes of 1869 and 1870, it cannot make untrue what then was true. What I wrote in 1869 of the Prince of Wales, for example, will probably not wholly apply to the Prince of Wales to-day. We all believe that he has lately changed for the better. But what I wrote then I still believe was true then; and it is a fair contribution to history, which does not consent to rub out yesterday because of to-day. I wrote of a "Liberal Triumvirate" of England when the phrase was an accurate expression. It would hardly be accurate now. To-day Mr. Mill does not appear in political life and Mr. Bright has been an exile, owing to his health, for nearly two years from the scenes of parliamentary debate and triumph. But the portraits of the men do not on that account need any change. Even where some reason has been shown me for a modification of my own judgment I have still preferred to leave the written letter as it is. A distinguished Italian friend has impressed on me that King Victor Emanuel is personally a much more ambitious man than I have painted him. My friend has had far better opportunities of judging than I ever could have had; but I gave the best opinion I could, and still holding to it prefer to let it stand, to be taken for what it is worth.

I think I may fairly claim to have anticipated in some of the political sketches, that of Louis Napoleon, for instance, the judgment of events and history, and the real strength of certain characters and institutions.

Those sketches had a gratifying welcome from the American public as they appeared in the "Galaxy." I hope they may be thought worth reading over again and keeping in their collected form.

JUSTIN MCCARTHY.

QUEEN VICTORIA AND HER SUBJECTS.

“AND when you hear historians tell of thrones, and those who sat upon them, let it be as men now gaze upon the mammoth's bones, and wonder what old world such things could see.”

So sang Byron half a century ago, and great critics condemned his verse, and called him a “surly Democrat” because he ventured to put such sentiments and hopes into rhyme. The thrones of Europe have not diminished in number since Byron's day, although they have changed and rechanged their occupants; and the one only grand effort at the establishment of a new Republic—that of France in 1848—went down into dust and ashes. Naturally, therefore, the tendency in Europe is to regard the monarchical principle as having received a new lease and charter of life, and to talk of the republican principle as an exotic forced for a moment into a premature and morbid blossom upon European soil, but as completely unsuited to the climate and the people as the banyan or the cocoa tree.

I do not, for myself, quite agree in this view of the aspect of affairs. Of course, if one were inclined to discuss the question fairly, he must begin by asking what people mean when they talk of the republican principle. What is the republican principle? When you talk of a Republic, do you mean an aggressive, conquering, domineering State, ruled by faction and living on war, like the Commonwealth of Rome? or a Republic like that planned by Washington, which should repudiate all concern in foreign politics or foreign conquest? Do you mean a Federal Republic, like that of the United States, or one with a centralized power, like the French Republic of 1848? Do you mean a Republic like that of Florence, in which the people were omnipotent, or a Republic like that of Venice, in which the people had no power at all? Do you mean a Republic like that of Switzerland, in which the President is next to nobody, or a Republic like that of Poland, which was ornamented by a King? In truth, the phrase “republican principle” has no set meaning. It means just what the man who uses it wishes to express. If, however, we understand it to mean, in this instance, the principle of popular self-government, then it is obvious that Europe has made immense progress in that direction since Byron raged against the crimes of Kings. If it means the opposite to the principle of Divine Right or Legitimacy, or even personal loyalty—loyalty of the old-time, chivalric, enthusiastic fashion—then it must be owned that it shows all over Europe the mark of equal progress. The ancient, romantic, sentimental loyalty; the loyalty which revered the Sovereign and was proud to abase itself before him; the loyalty of the Cavaliers; the loyalty which went wild over “Oh, Richard! Oh, mon Roi!” is dead and gone—its relics a thing to be stared at, and wondered over, and preserved for a landmark in the progress of the world—just like the mammoth's bones.

The model Monarchy of Europe is, beyond dispute, that of Great Britain. In England there is an almost absolute self-government; the English people can have anything whatever which they may want by insisting on it and agitating a little for it. The Sovereign has long ceased to interfere in the progress of national affairs. I can only recollect one instance, during my observation, in which Queen Victoria put her veto on a bill passed by Parliament, and that was on an occasion when it was discovered, at the last moment, that the Lords and