

**MODERN LEADERS: BEING
A SERIES OF
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES**

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Modern leaders: being a series of biographical sketches by Justin McCarthy

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JUSTIN MCCARTHY

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By JUSTIN McCARTHY,

Author of "Lady Judith: A Tale of Two Continents," etc.

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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 EMANUEL, 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
ENGLAND—WORLD OF LONDON.	202
THE REVEREND CHARLES KINGSLEY.	211
MR. JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE.	223
SCIENCE AND ORTHODOXY IN ENGLAND.	234

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INTRODUCTION.

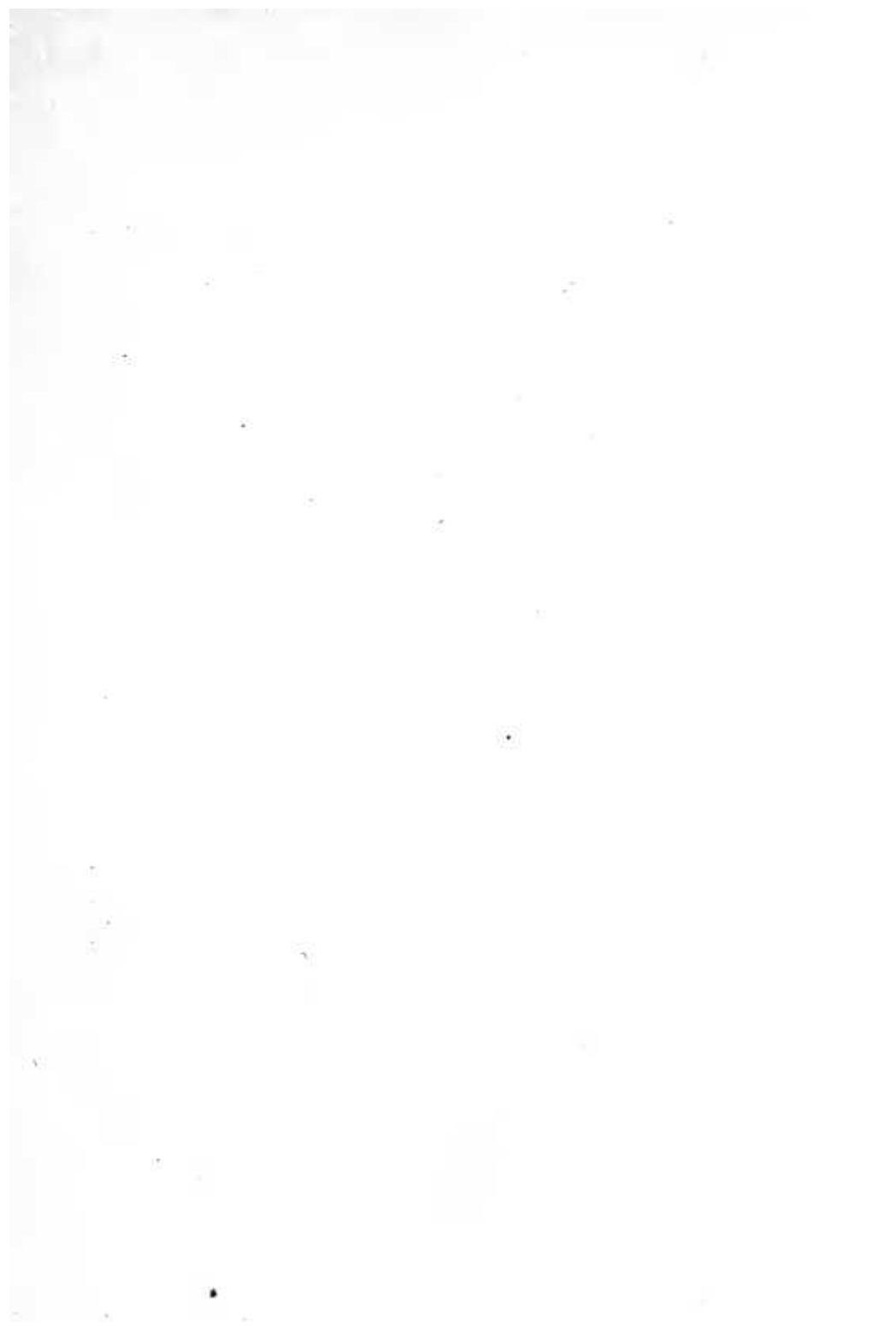
THE sketches which make up this volume are neither purely critical nor merely biographical. They endeavor to give the American reader a clear and just idea of each individual in his intellect, his character, his place in politics, letters, and society. In some instances I have written of friends whom 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.

These 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 “surlly 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

Commons had passed a bill which had a dreadful technical blunder in it, and the only way out of the difficulty was to beg of the Queen to refuse it her sanction, which her Majesty did accordingly, and the blunder was set right in the following session. If a Prime Minister were to announce to the House of Commons, to-morrow, that the Queen had boxed his ears, it would not create a whit more amazement than if he were to say, no matter in what graceful and diplomatic periphrasis, that her Majesty was unwilling to agree to some measure which her faithful Commons desired to see passed into law.

Nothing did Mr. Disraeli more harm, nothing brought greater contempt on him than his silly attempts last session to induce the Commons to believe, by vague insinuations and covert allusions, that the Queen had a personal leaning toward his policy and himself. So long ago as the time of the free trade struggle, the Tories, for all their hereditary loyalty, complained of and protested against the silent presence of Prince Albert in the Peers' gallery of the House of Commons, on the ground that it was an attempt to influence the Parliament improperly, and to interfere with the freedom of debate. No one has anything to say against the Queen which carries any weight or is worth listening to. She is undoubtedly a woman of virtue and good sense. So good a woman, I venture to think, never before reigned over any people, and that she is not a great woman, an Elizabeth, a Catherine of Russia, or even an Isabella of Castile, is surely rather to the advantage than otherwise of the monarchical institution in its present stage of existence. Here, then, one might think, if anywhere and ever, the principle of personal loyalty has a fair chance and a full justification. A man might vindicate his loyalty to Queen Victoria in the name of liberty itself; nay, he might justify it by an appeal to the very principle of democracy. Yet one must be blind, who, living in England and willing to observe, does not see that the old, devoted spirit of personal loyalty is dead and buried. It is gone! it is a memory! You may sing a poetic lament for it if you will, as Schiller did for the gods of Hellas; you may break into passionate rhetoric, if you can, over its extinction, as Burke did for the death of the age of Chivalry. It is gone, and I firmly believe it can never be revived or restored.

I do not mean to say that there are many persons in England who feel any strong objection to the Monarchy, or warmly desire to see a Republic substituted for it. I know in England several theoretical republicans—they are to be met with in almost any company. I have never met with any one Englishman living in England, who showed any anxious, active interest in the abolition of the Monarchy. I do not know any one who objects to drink the usual loyal toasts at a public dinner, or betrays any conscientious reluctance to listen to the unmeaning eulogy which it is the stereotyped fashion for the chairman of every such banquet to heap on "Her Majesty and the rest of the Royal Family." But this sort of thing, if it ever had any practical meaning, has now none. It has reached that stage at which profession and practice are always understood to be quite different things. Every one says at church that he is a miserable sinner; no one is supposed really to believe anything of the sort. Every one has some time or other likened women to angels, but we are not therefore supposed seriously to ignore the fact that women wear flannel petticoats, and have their faults, and are mortal. So of loyal professions in England now. They are understood to be phrases, like "Your obedient servant," at the bottom of a letter. They do not suggest hypocrisy or pretence of any kind. There is apparently no more inconsistency now in a man's loyally drinking the health of the Queen, and proceeding immediately after (in private conversation) to abuse or ridicule

her and her family, than there would be in the same man beginning with "Dear Sir," a missive to one whom he notoriously dislikes. Every one who has been lately in London must have heard an immense amount of scandal, or at all events of flippant joking at the expense of the Queen herself; and of more serious complaint and distrust as regards the Prince of Wales. Yet the virtues of the Queen, and the noble qualities of the Prince of Wales are panegyricized and toasted, and hurrah'd at every public dinner where Englishmen gather together.

The very virtues of Queen Victoria have contributed materially toward the extinction of the old-fashioned sentiment of living, active loyalty. The English people had from the time at least of Anne to our own day a succession of bad princes. Only a race patient as Issachar could have endured such a line of sovereigns as George II., George III., and George IV. Then came William IV., who being a little less stupidly obstinate than George III., and not so grossly corrupt as George IV., was hailed for a while as the Patriot King by a people who were only too anxious not to lose all their hereditary and traditional veneration. Do what they would, however, the English nation could not get into any sincere transports of admiration about the Patriot King; and they soon found that any popular reform worth having was to be got rather in spite of the Patriot King, than by virtue of any wisdom or patriotism in the monarch. Great popular demonstrations and tumults, and threats of marching on London; and O'Connell meetings at Charing Cross, with significant allusion by the great demagogue to the King who lost his head at Whitehall hard by; the hanging out of the black flag at Manchester, and a general movement of brickbats everywhere—these seem to have been justly regarded as the persuasive influences which converted a Sovereign into the Patriot King and a Reformer. Loyalty did not gain much by the reforms of that reign. Then followed the young Victoria; and enthusiasm for a while wakened up fresh and genuine over the ascension of the comely and simple-hearted girl, who was so frank and winning; who ran down stairs in her night-dress, rather than keep her venerable councillors waiting when they sought her out at midnight; who openly acknowledged her true love for her cousin, and offered him her hand; who was at once queenly and maidenly, innocent and fearless.

But this sort of thing did not last very long. Prince Albert was never popular. He was cold; people said he was stingy; his very virtues, and they were genuine, were not such as anybody, except his wife and family, warmly admires in a man; he was indeed misunderstood, or at all events misprized in England, up to the close of his life. Then the gates of the convent, so to speak, closed over the Queen, and royalty ceased to be an animating presence in England.

The young men and women of to-day—persons who have not passed the age of twenty-one—can hardly remember to have ever seen the Sovereign. She is to them what the Mikado is to his people. Seven years of absolute seclusion on the part of a monarch must in any case be a sad trial to personal loyalty, at least in the royal capital. A considerable and an influential section of Queen Victoria's subjects in the metropolis have long been very angry with their Sovereign. The tailors, the milliners, the dressmakers, the jewellers, the perfumers, all the shopkeepers of the West End who make profit out of court dinners and balls and presentations, are furious at the royal seclusion which they believe has injured their business. So, too, are the aristocratic residents of the West End, who do not care much about a court which no longer contributes to their season's gayety. So, too, are all the flunkey class generally. Now, I am