William Ewart Gladstone, prime minister of England, a political and literary biography

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WILLIAM EWART GLADSTONE

Prime Minister of England.

A POLITICAL AND LITERARY BIOGRAPHY.

BY

G. R. EMERSON,


"There can be no doubt that Mr. Gladstone, by his great eloquence, by his power of developing the most abstruse propositions, and embracing at once in his large capacity the most logical demonstrations with the most captivating and dazzling rhetoric, has made for himself a fame which, in the lapse of centuries, will suffer no eclipse."

Earl Russell, "Recollections and Suggestions."

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PREFACE.

The quotation on the title-page of this volume is a graceful and admiring recognition of Mr. Gladstone's great intellectual powers and oratorical gifts, by one of the most eminent of his contemporaries. No politician of the time had greater opportunities of observing his career than Lord John Russell, who for nearly forty years sat with him in the House of Commons, and who, when he retired from the labours of public life, found pleasure in recalling the memory of the great events in which both he and Mr. Gladstone had taken part. Earl Russell, in the peaceful retirement which his advanced years demanded, and which he had so well earned, was one of the few survivors of the distinguished band of statesmen and Parliamentary celebrities who, in the period between the passing of the Reform Act, which may be said to have reconstructed our representative system, and the great European war of 1870, either in office or in opposition, exercised so great an influence on the fortunes of our country. Grey, Brougham, Melbourne, Althorp, Durham, O'Connell, Shiel, Peel, Wellington, Aberdeen, Graham, Palmerston, Derby, Cobden, and many others who made their mark in the Parlia-
mentary history of our time, had passed away, and few indeed were left who had taken part in the momentous political struggles which made the middle part of the century so memorable in our history.

Among all the celebrities with whom Earl Russell had been associated in political life, or whom he remembered as ornaments of the Parliamentary arena, none appeared to him to have a greater claim on the admiration of his contemporaries, or to be more assured of the remembrance of posterity, of "a fame which in the lapse of centuries will suffer no eclipse," than William Ewart Gladstone, who nearly fifty years ago entered public life and at once gave promise of remarkable ability, who realized that promise more abundantly than even the most ardent admirers of the brilliant young Oxonian—and he had ardent admirers even then—could have hoped for, and who, step by step, has won his way, by an almost universality of talent, by indomitable energy, by practical ability, no less than by an almost unrivalled command of all the resources of eloquence, to the highest position which an English subject can attain.

There is no instance in political life of such an unfailing maintenance, such a continuous vigour, of mental power as that exhibited by Mr. Gladstone. Earl Russell recollected the gifted young man, modestly but self-reliantly bearing the highest honours Oxford could confer, who entered public life in the Reformed Parliament, and almost immediately stepped into the foremost rank of debaters, when in that foremost rank were men of brilliant gifts attained by long experience; and Earl Russell lived to see the promise of eminence fulfilled, and the "rising hope of the Tory party," the Oxford student in whom Southey perceived