

**EUROPEAN HISTORY: IN A SERIES
OF BIOGRAPHIES, FROM THE
BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN
ERA TILL THE PRESENT TIME**

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European History: In a Series of Biographies, from the Beginning of the Christian Era Till the Present Time by David Pryde

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DAVID PRYDE

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EUROPEAN HISTORY:

IN

A Series of Biographies,

FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN
ERA TILL THE PRESENT TIME.

BY

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OUTLINES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE," ETC.

EDINBURGH:

WILLIAM P. NIMMO.

1864.

PREFACE.

To teach the history of Europe has hitherto been almost an impossibility. The majority of school-books on that subject have been far too ambitious. Within the space of one small volume they have tried to compress all the events of all the countries in Europe, during many centuries. The result is, that they present little else than a dreary catalogue of kings, battles, dates, and scraps of information of every kind. Such books utterly fail to effect the great end of education—namely, the developing of the mind. Instead of drawing out the different faculties, they oppress them. The understanding becomes bewildered amid such a throng of details. The imagination can form no picture out of so many diverse fragments. The memory refuses to be burdened with such a heavy conglomeration of facts; and though it may be forced to take in some of them, it very soon throws them off.

In this book I have taken a simpler view of European history. I have looked upon Europe as one

community. Those events that have influenced the whole, or a great part of that community, I have regarded as emphatically *European events*; and to them I have given pre-eminence. Those events, on the other hand, whose influence has been confined to a particular country, I have looked upon as merely national events; and them I have generally omitted. So in writing a short history of England, the historian dwells upon those changes which affect the whole country, and passes over those changes which only affect a particular shire.

But the distinctive feature of this book is the plan of the narrative. The Christian era is divided into eight epochs. At the beginning of each of these divisions is an introductory chapter touching upon the general state of Europe. Then follow distinct and full biographies of the great men who have moulded the history of the period.

The advantages of this plan are obvious. While the introductory chapters will present a more general view of European history, the biographies will excite an especial interest. The reader will follow the career of the great men with the closest attention. Those events in which they played an important part, he will associate with their names. They will be the central figures, around which he will group the historical facts. And if, in after years, he should

happen to take up any extensive work upon European history, he will never lose himself. In any part of that wide field, he will always see some of these well-known figures standing forth conspicuously; and they will serve as landmarks to enable him to regulate his observations.

Since this plan was formed, I have been gratified to find that it agrees with the views of several eminent authors. Mr Carlyle, in his essay on *Biography*, says, "Of history, for example, the most honoured, if not honourable species of composition, is not the whole purport biographic?" The same opinion is expressed by Mr Hannay in his *Essays from the Quarterly Review*:—"Philosophers may see principles in history, but the multitude only see persons. To the Scotch peasant, Scottish history is the story of the lives of Wallace and Bruce, of Knox and the Covenanters, of Burns the poet. In England, if people talk of the late war, they embody it all in Nelson and Wellington." Still more explicit is the testimony of Professor Kingsley, in his series of lectures entitled "The Roman and the Teuton." He says, "If any of you should ask me how to study history, I should answer—Take, by all means biographies,—wheresoever possible, autobiographies,—and study them. Fill your minds with live human figures; men of like passions with yourselves; see

how each lived and worked in the time and place in which God put him."

A far greater number of biographies might have been introduced, and the book might have been made much larger; but so many different subjects are now taught, that it is absolutely necessary to make text-books short.

As the history of England is always studied by itself in the schools of this country, I have omitted the great Englishmen, with the exception of King Alfred and Richard the Lion-hearted.

EDINBURGH, *September 1864.*