

## PEN-PICTURES OF FAMOUS PEOPLE.

[Justin McCarthy's charming reminiscences of a long and useful career— anecdotes of the Duke of Wellington, Thackeray, Lowell, Longfellow, Holmes and Beecher.]

In two volumes of some eight hundred pages, entitled "Reminiscences," Justin McCarthy, M. P., the great Irish nationalist, author of "A History of Our Own Times," presents, with his usual crisp humor and kindly spirit, his recollections of almost all the famous men and women of the Victorian era. Among his intimate acquaintances he numbered all the great statesmen, poets, churchmen, artists, actors, and novelists of the last half century, and he has succeeded admirably in bringing them most vividly before the reader. The scope of the work is so great that we shall make no attempt to cover it, but simply quote a few of the most characteristic passages and amusing anecdotes.

Mr. McCarthy begins his reminiscences with the day in 1852 that he, as a boy, came to London, determined to enter a literary career. One of his first experiences in London was a visit to the house of lords, where he enjoyed the privilege of hearing the Duke of Wellington, the hero of Waterloo, speak. He writes:

"I heard him make a speech, and, although it was but a short speech and not remarkable for eloquence, it astonished and impressed me more at the time than the greatest oration the greatest parliamentary orator could have done. The duke, as I gathered from the speech of another peer—a law lord, I think it was—had already been offering to the house his opinion on the measure under consideration, and the noble and learned lord was now criticising his remarks. In the course of his criticism the noble and learned personage ventured on the observation that he feared 'the illustrious duke' had not quite understood the measure now before the house. This drew the illustrious duke. The Duke of Wellington sprang to his feet to reply, and he struck the table with indignant gesture. 'My lords,' he said, 'the noble and learned lord has said that I don't understand this bill. Well, my lords, all I can say is that I read the bill once, that I read it twice, that I read it three times, and, if after that I don't understand the bill, why, then, my lords, all I have to say is that I must be a damned stupid fellow.' Then the duke resumed his seat, and that was the only speech I ever heard him deliver."

In his chapter on "The Princes of Literature," he says of Dickens:

"I had many opportunities of meeting Dickens; but I should say that my acquaintance with him was slight and superficial. I used to feel very proud

when he shook hands with me, and remembered my name, and asked me how I was getting on, or some question of that sort; but I never could pretend to have been ranked even in the outermost circle of his friends. I was not merely a young man, but a totally obscure young man, and had nothing whatever to recommend me to Dickens' notice except the fact that I belonged to the staff of a daily newspaper. To say the truth, Dickens rather frightened me; I felt uneasy when he spoke to me, and did not quite see what business I had to be speaking to such a man. His manner was full of energy; there was something physically overpowering about it, as it then seemed to me; the very vehemence of his cheery good humor rather bore one down. From the first he appeared to be a man with whom I could not venture to differ on any subject. Then again, as was but natural, he was generally surrounded by a crowd of young men who sincerely worshiped him, and to whom, indeed, he seemed to represent all literature. I know how kind and friendly and encouraging he was to many men as young as I was, and whose very first efforts in literature received his helping hand—I knew many such young men, and they were never tired of telling me how kind he was, and how gentle, how 'quick to encourage and slow to disparage,' if I may adopt certain words which I think were used by himself when speaking of another leader of literature. But I am only putting down my impressions just for what they are worth, as the phrase goes, and, indeed, they are worth nothing at all except as impressions, and I can only say that Dickens somehow or other always made me feel rather afraid."

Another great man, then not quite recognized, who had the same effect upon him was Thomas Carlyle. But that was in quite a different way:

"Carlyle had a fashion of expressing his opinions which was likely enough to make any modest young beginner in the literary craft think twice before he ventured on the expression of any views of his own in the presence of such a master. Perhaps I ought to explain here that when I spoke of the literary triumvirate who then ruled over England, I was not forgetting the rule of Thomas Carlyle. Such a forgetfulness would be impossible; but I felt that his was not by any means a purely literary force, but something quite different—something like that of a philosopher with his school. To return, however, to my immediate subject, I should say that the dread I felt of Dickens was not at all like the dread I felt of Carlyle. In the case of Carlyle, I did not like to run the risk of being snubbed; in Dickens' case, I knew there was no such risk—I knew that he was far too sweet

and kindly in nature to snub me, but the very exuberance of his good humor bore me down and kept me in my modest place."

On the contrary, he never felt the same kind of awe or awkwardness in the presence of Thackeray:

"One might have thought that Thackeray's presence would have been more inspiring of awe to a young and thoroughly obscure man. Thackeray was much taller than Dickens. His form, indeed, approached to the gigantic in its proportions. He looked far older, although the two men were much about the same age. His immense head, his broad forehead, and his prematurely white hair gave him an appearance of authority and even of severity which one might have thought would prove intimidating to a stranger. Yet I at least never felt it so. He seemed to me to be less self-assertive, less conscious of his superiority, than Dickens appeared to be. I never had the good fortune of approaching to intimacy with Thackeray. The chance that at one time opened upon me was reduced to nothing by the fates, and its memory has left an indelible impression on my mind.

"I had met Thackeray in a casual way several times, but I never was a pushing sort of person, and indeed I idolized Thackeray and Dickens far too much to think of pushing myself on either of them. A literary controversy on some question which has now lost all its importance sprang up in 1863, and I wrote something anonymously in *The Morning Star* which had the good luck to please the author of *Vanity Fair*. Thackeray asked a friend of mine and of his to find out who the writer was, and the friend had no difficulty in accomplishing this task. For myself, I was almost in a humor to think I had lived long enough, since I had lived to write anything which was worthy of Thackeray's favorable notice. I may say here in passing that during my experience in literature I have over and over again been struck with the readiness of really great authors to take account of young beginners who seem to have any promise in them and to lend them a kindly helping hand."

One day he received through the friend just mentioned an invitation from Thackeray to dine at his house in an informal kind of way and meet two or three other literary men:

"Need I say that I accepted the invitation with pride and delight? No favor that any sovereign could bestow upon me, had any sovereign been in the least likely to single me out for any mark of favor, could have filled me with such rapture as I received from that token of Thackeray's good will. I am afraid that for some days after I made myself rather a nuisance to my